

Effect of reality based movies on viewers - A focus group study on Madhur Bhandarkar's movies

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ABSTRACT

For more than 100 years Bollywood Cinema has been serving as mirror reflecting to the Indian society - the social values, group behavior, philosophies of different walks of life and culture, and all of the above it always tries to show the real life in reel. Films on Historical subjects, Mythology, contemporary culture provides us knowledge in more interesting and acceptable way.

Siegfried Kracauer believes that in a majority of contemporary films, “things are pretty unrealistic”, but he also asserts that unreal cinema is “daydreams of society in which the true reality comes to the fore and it's otherwise repressed wishes take on a form”. This very saying proves that people directly or indirectly make their perception about real world from films.

In Bollywood there are film makers who are known for their work on real issues. Madhur Bhandarkar is one of them. He is perceived as a film maker who tries to remain close to the real issues and problems pertaining in society, through his films. His films such as Chandni Bar, Jail, Page 3, Fashion, Satta, Heroine, Traffic Signal, Corporate are based on issues pertaining in different walks of our society. Here it is necessary to find out, what do people think about his films? How much do they find themselves close to the reality after seeing Madhur Bhandarkar's movies.

So to dig out this truth, A Focus Group study has been planned. Focus group consisted of young educated people who have knowledge on cinema and who have watched majority of Madhur Bhandarkar's movies if not all.

Keywords: Realistic Cinema, Main stream cinema, Contemporary, Unconventional themes, Aspirations.

INTRODUCTION

“Films are direct call to the viewers.”

Indian cinema is as old as cinema itself. The Lumiere Brothers came to Bombay (now Mumbai) just after six months of their Paris debut in 1895. Here they displayed their new invention, and Indian took to cine photography like fish to water. As **The Times of India** advertised these early exhibitions as “the marvel of the, country the wonder of the world. For more than 100 years Bollywood cinema has been serving a mirror reflecting to the Indian society - the social values, group behavior, philosophies of different walks of life and culture and all of the above it always tries to show the real life in reel. Films on historical subjects Mythology, Contemporary culture provides us knowledge in more interesting and acceptable way. All over the world, Cinema has been proving its existence and need for society for more than 100 years. The Italian film critic **R. canudo** called films the **Seventh Art** besides the six other arts Architecture, Dance, Music, Painting, Poetry, and Sculpture.

Cinema does not only entertain us but many times it tries to present a real picture of society to its viewers. Film directors try to present reality on screen in an artistic form. It is called realistic cinema which tries to address various issues pertaining to our society. **Satyajit Ray** is known as the father of the Realist Movement in Indian Cinema. There are other directors like Bimal Roy, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Basu Chatterji, M.S. Sathyu, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Ketan Mehta, who kept on making movies related to social issues. But the commercialization of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) resulted in gradual decline of this realistic cinema. But from the beginning of 21st century, we are again witnessing the resurgence of this realistic cinema. A number of new directors/talents are

experimenting with new subjects and concepts. On every Friday, viewers do buy tickets to see these small budget, experimental films on the subjects, which are rarely touched in main stream cinema.

A known film and theater director **Feroz Abbas Khan** says, "The mainstream cinema does a very fine job of sharing its fantasies, but there is a cinema that needs to share its concerns of what is happening in the society. There seems to be some very important issues that the country actually is grappling with and those issues are not being discuss, or that conversation is not taking place in the film."

But as **Deepa Mehta** puts it, "The good news is that Serious Indian cinema is now starting to thrive." One major reason behind this revival is economic liberalization. There are more multiplex to show and there are more audiences who are ready to spend more money on movies. According to **FICCI –KPMG repot 2014 – THE STAGE IS SET --** The Indian film industry has been witnessing significant growth on the back of differentiated content, wider release across digital screens and aggressive promotions by production houses. The film industry is heavily dependent on domestic theatricals which contribute more than 75% to the industry's revenues. Factors such as rapid urbanization, penetration of multiplex in tier II and tier III cities, increasing sophistication to differentiated content are together expected to help the industry sustain its growth over the next few years and be worth INR 219.8 billion by 2018.

So there are directors who are exploiting the situation and experimenting on new and unconventional themes and subject. They are addressing social issues problems and trying to depict these issues in their films and trying to be socially responsible. By addressing social issues, problems, film-makers can play a big positive role in our country's development, through their films. As **Film Writers' Association** gave a statement in its 3rd conference held on February 2013, "FWA believe that it's time for some soul –searching! Screen writers as the original architects of narratives that engage the popular imagination, must get discuss and reflection such issue, collectively introspect on the question of social responsibility of our protection."

At present, there are various directors who are trying their hands in real cinema – Prakash Jha , Shyam Benegal , Deepa Mehta, Meera Nair , Anand Gandhi and Madhur Bhandarkar . Madhur Bhandarkar is one of the contemporary directors who are associated with realism in Indian Cinema. He has filmed real time issues and has got lot of appreciation for the same. His films have dealt with unconventional themes like exploitation of women, police, corruption, journalism, celebrity culture, politics, dirty games of corporate houses. Madhur Bhandarkar has won National award for best films on other social issues for his film -Chandni Bar, National Film award for best director – Traffic Signal and National Award for best feature film for – Page -3. He directed 11 films from the period 1999-2012.

Madhur Bhandarkar made his directorial debut with the movie **Trishkti** (1999) . It starred Arshad Warsi, Sharad Kapoor, Milind Gunaji and Radhika . the movie was based on gang wars and police taking advantage of these gang wars.

In 2001 the movie **Chandani Bar** was released. Lead roles were played by Tabbu and Atul Kulkarni. This film established Madhur Bhandarkar as a known director. The movie won four National Awards. Chandani Bar threw light on horrified lives of bar girls behind those glitzy dance bars.

Satta (2003) an another very touchy movie by Madhur Bhandarkar, tells the story of a women ,Anuradha sehgal (Raveena Tandan) who accidentally entered in the tricky world of politics and impute of having no experience of politics and fearing strongly opposition from her own family and how did she manage to sail through the tough waters of politics?

Aan men at work (2004) an action film, directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, featured Akshay Kumar, Sunil Shetty, Shatrughan Sinha and Paresh Rawal in the leading roles, while Jackie Shroff, Raveena Tandon, Lara Dutta and Irrfan Khan played supporting roles. It portrayed the tough life of a police officer, who kept on fighting against crime inspite of all odds and oppositions.

In 2005 Madhur Bhandarkar showed us the face behind page 3 culture in the film **Page 3**. In this film Madhur Bhandarkar captured the shabby lifestyle of celebrities and their friendship with media through his camera. The film took its viewers to the world where people lead dual lives with a mask on their faces all the time.

Corporate is the finest creation of Madhur Bhandarkar. In this film Bhandarkar reveals the fact that in corporate world, for fame and fortune, everyone has to pay a price that too in a very sophisticated manner. Corporate world is very mean to everyone working in it. This is what Madhur Bhandarkar revealed through this movie. Key players of this movie were Bipasha Basu, Kay Kay Menon, Rajat Kapoor, Raj Babbar, Sammir Dattani and Minisha Lamba.

Traffic Signal (2007) starring Kunal Khemu, Neetu Chandra, Ranvir Shorey and Konkona Sen Sharma in the lead role. For this movie Madhur Bhandarkar won National Film Award for best director. Traffic signal peeped into the world of

the apparently downtrodden people, the Beggars, who have turned traffic signals into their “office.” The film showed the nexus between so called traffic signal (real) operators and their higher- ups.

Fashion film released in 2008, directed and co-produced by Madhur Bhandarkar. The film featured Priyanka Chopra in the lead role as Meghna Mathur, an aspiring fashion model. The film also starred Kangna Ranaut, Mugdha Godse, Arjan Bajwa and Arbaaz Khan in supporting roles. This film revealed the darker side of glittering Fashion industry. It explored the female power in Indian fashion industry. The film won 17 awards.

Jail released in 2009, directed by Madhur Bhandarkar and starring Neil Nitin Mukesh, Arya Babbar, Mugdha Godse and Manoj Bajpai, depicted life of a common man, whose life turned into a nightmare after a series of unfortunate events and he found himself behind the bars. The film tried to showcase the realities faced by a prison in jail.

Dil Toh Baccha Hai Ji- It is a romantic comedy film directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, starring Ajay Devgn, Emraan Hashmi, Omi Vaidya, Shazahn Padamsee, Shruti Haasan and Shraddha Das in the lead roles. It released in year 2011. The story revolves around three men in search of true love.

Heroin released in year 2012, the film featured Kareena Kapoor as the protagonist along with actors Arjun Rampal, Randeep Hooda and Rakesh Bapat. Shahana Goswami, Divya Dutta, Helen, Shillpi Sharma, Mugdha Godse and Lillite Dubey in supporting roles. The movie revealed the darker side of the glittery Indian film industry. It showcases the insecurities of a declining actress, her weaknesses and strengths.

In this paper, there has been an attempt to examine the relationship between real life issues and their depiction in reel by Madhur Bhandarkar. His films are based on issues pertaining to different walks of our society. So here it is necessary to find out, what do people think about his film? How much do they find themselves close to reality after seeing Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies? So to dig out the truth a focus group study has been done.

OBJECTIVES

Realistic cinema in India, has always been trying to raise social issues, to make people more and more aware. Madhur Bhandarkar tries to raise a social issue through his films and tries to be close to reality. So the objectives of this study are:-

- To find out the reality element in his movies according to viewers.
- To know the level of awareness created by Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies.
- To study how much change in thought is there after seeing the Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies.
- To examine how many times, the viewer have translated their thoughts into action after seeing Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on focus group discussion. The focus group consisted of young educated people, who had good knowledge on cinema and who had watched majority of Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies if not all. There were 6 participants, who took part in discussion. Notes of the focus group discussion were taken by the researchers and the discussion was also recorded on video camera.

Participants discussed each and every movie on the line of following questions. Researchers asked open-ended questions to stimulate discussion among member of the group. The questions were as follows:

- Best movie of Madhur Bhandarkar.
- Worst movie of Madhur Bhandarkar.
- Issues you came to know only after seeing his movie
- Level of awareness
- Impact on thought process
- Change in thought process
- According to you how much reality is there in his movies?
- How many times have you translates your thought into action after seeing his movie.
- How do you assess Madhur Bhandarkar as a person after seeing his movies?
- Specialty of his movies.
- Suggestion about his movies.
- Reason behind watching Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies

DATA ANALYSIS

Almost all the movies were seen by the focus group participants. Unseen movies by the participants were shown to them by the researchers one week prior to the discussion.

In answers to the questions like –

Name the best movie of Madhur Bhandarkar, they had seen

3 of the respondents said **Page -3** and remaining 3 respondents gave their vote to **Satta, Jail** and **Chandani Bar**.

Name the worst movie of Madhur Bhandarkar

Unanimous vote went for – **Dil Toh Baccha Hai Ji** and reason behind it, that it did not justify the Madhur Bhandarkar's stamp on it.

Reason behind watching Madhur Bhandarkar's movies

When a question "Reason behind watching Madhur Bhandarkar's movies" was asked from the participants, 4 out of 6 respondents said that they watch Madhur Bhandarkar's movies on priority basis. As when they see the name of Madhur Bhandarkar was associated with a movie, their expectations raised. "We watch Madhur Bhandarkar's movies like any other movie", this is what the other two respondents replied.

Almost all the movies of Madhur Bhandarkar were discussed by the focus group participants. Here is the analysis of the discussion on the movies –

Chandani Bar (2001)

In the response to the question "Were they aware about the issue raised in Chandani Bar?"

All the respondents reacted in the same way that they had a little knowledge about the issue raised in this film, but life of bar girls could be so tough and horrified was entirely an unknown fact for them. Only after seeing the movie they came to know the reality. All the participants were agreed on the fact that the film was very much close to reality. The film made them sensitized on the issue. Out of 6 respondents, 1 respondent said that after seeing the movie her attitude changed towards her maid as her maid went through the same experience. When respondents were asked about the suggestion only 1 respondent came out with the suggestion that Madhur Bhandarkar should have depicted the positive use of bar dancers' talent that is dance, and he should have come up with suggestions for their revival.

Satta (2003)

All the 6 respondents were very much impressed by the movie Satta, as it motivated them. According to the respondents, character depiction was very strong. Respondents were aware of this ugly face of politics and they agreed that it was rightly shown in the movie. Answer to the question like change or impact on their thought process after seeing the movie, was in **NO** as all of them said they were well aware of the issue.

Aan –Men at work (2004)

"It was passing, casual movie. It does not justify Madhur Bhandarkar's stamp." This was the verdict come out of the discussion on the movie "Aan". Not a single respondent had a positive note on this movie.

Page 3 (2005)

All the participants were agreed upon one fact that the movie Page 3 took them into an entirely unknown world of journalism. As one of the respondents said that biases exist in journalism, was an addition in her knowledge about journalism, after seeing this movie.

Another participant responded that she was not aware of the fact that news can be managed too. "The movie was an eye opener for me." This is the way; one participant reacted on the movie.

All the respondents believed that the movie was very much close to reality. When the question about change in their thought process was raised then one of the respondent said that after seeing the movie Page 3, credibility for page 3 of any newspaper has completely vanished. One another respondent said that "my perception about journalists have completely changed since I have watched this movie". He said that journalist is merely a sandwich between editor and owner and "*jo dikhta hai wahi bikta hai*" nothing else.

When asked about their suggestion about the movie, 3 of the respondents said that Madhur Bhandarkar should have shown the positive aspect of journalism, which exists in our society.

Traffic Signal (2007)

Like the earlier discussed movies, all the participants had the same view that it is close to reality. All the participants unanimously said that the movie was an eye opener for them. As they were not at all aware of the fact that Begging could be such a big and organized industry. All the respondents agreed upon the fact that “The movie is research based.” After seeing the movie, all the participants said that they have stopped giving money to beggars. One of the participants was so much moved by this movie that he himself made a documentary on child beggars. He also suggested that Madhur Bhandarkar should have shown the Government efforts and participation also.

Fashion (2008)

5 out of 6 respondents said that the movie was close to reality. One respondent was of the view that there was more fiction than reality in the movie and Madhur Bhandarkar has not justified the level of reality in this movie. Majority of the respondents said that the movie showed them the reality behind the glamorous world of fashion industry. Out of 6, 2 respondents said that the positive point of the movie is the inner strength of the lead character, which has been rightly projected, and it gives us motivation to be strong and optimistic in our life.

While answering to the question that how did they translate their thought into action- 2 of the respondents revealed that, earlier they were very much impressed by this glitzy industry. But after watching the movie, they have developed a fear for fashion industry.

Jail (2009)

4 out of 6 respondents said that the movie was close to reality. Two respondents raised question on the reality element of this movie. One of them said that Madhur Bhandarkar was not able to present reality and he was far away from facts. Another one said that I am not sure of the reality factor but if Madhur Bhandarkar is showing something it must be true. Concept and facts presented in this movie was totally new to 5 out of 6 respondents.

Dil Toh Baccha Hai Ji (2011)

For all the respondents the movie was time pass and it did not live up to their expectations from Madhur Bhandarkar.

Heroine (2012)

All the respondents were of the view that the movie was close to reality. The movie depicted the helplessness of a celebrity in its true sense. How PR strategies are being used by stars – was a completely new thing for one participant. All the other respondents were of the view that the issues and problems shown in the movie were not new for them. They were well aware of those facts and it didn't change their thought in any way.

Reason behind depiction of Women's character

All the respondents were asked a question about **Reason behind depiction of Women's character in Madhur Bhandarkar's movies**. All the respondents reacted in the same way and gave the following reasons –

- Exploitation of Women is more
- Women are more sensitive
- Gender Bias exists with the director

Speciality of Madhur Bhandarkar's movies

Researcher asked the participant about the speciality of Madhur Bhandarkar's movies and got the answers like –

- His movies are research based
- Madhur Bhandarkar's movies are issue based and focused towards problems
- His movies are not beyond reality
- His movies sensitize us towards a problem or issue exist in society

How do you access Madhur Bhandarkar as a Person after seeing his movies?

Respondents answered this question in various ways like –

- He is a good human being as he is sensitizing our society towards different issues and problems.
- He is very sensitive towards women issues and he respects women.
- He is a researcher and very close to society, that is why we always expect something new from him.
- He is a risk taker.

CONCLUSION

“Literature is a mirror of society. “ But cinema is no where behind the literature in this manner. Cinema has always been an important medium used by historians to upgrade their knowledge level about contemporary society. If we go to the history of cinema and closely analyze the films of different decades, then we can see that reality of that time were depicted in the films and at the same time aspiration of the society were also depicted. At present there are lots of directors who are trying to depict various social issues and problems through their films. In a try to know the viewer reactions about the realistic cinema presented by Madhur Bhandarkar through a focus group study it was revealed that, all the participants were unanimously agreed upon the fact that majority of his movies were close to reality. His movies, made the respondents aware about the issues, they were completely unknown of. Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies have changed their views about a particular issue and some of them even translated their thoughts into action after watching his movies. One of the respondents got sensitized for her maid after watching chandani Bar and another respondent made a documentary himself on child begging after watching the movie Traffic Signal. All of the respondents said that Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies are issue based, close to reality and he treats his subject more sensitively. Madhur Bhandarkar’s movies have established him as a good person, researcher, risk-taker, and a sensitive person.

So here it can be concluded that movies affect us .They make us more aware and sensitize toward an issue or problem only if they are research based and closer to reality. People do want movies which pertain to the real problem and issues exist around them.

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