

Films as the Ambassadors of Culture: A Discourse with Reference to *Baghban*

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Abstract: In the contemporary world, when media has become a part and parcel of everyone's life, the importance of films cannot be overlooked. Films as the most popular form of media not only entertain the masses but play a much larger role in educating and training them. The greatest lessons of life can be imbibed in the kids through films. To quote the words of D. Bhoopathy, "cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected. Films are a best platform to acquire familiarity with the social political or cultural milieu of a country. Most importantly, they aim at a wider target audience than that of most novels and plays. Cinema in India too as a form of mass visual entertainment, reflects socio-cultural attitudes in a specific and vivid manner. The huge popularity of Bollywood movies is largely due to their cultural contribution in bringing people closer to this valuable treasure of India's cultural wealth and values. The present paper is an endeavour to explore the ways bollywood cinema has been impacting our cultural treasure with reference to the blockbuster movie *Baghban*. The attempt to is to look at and highlight the culturally rich message that this movie brings to the fore and rekindles a sense of pride in the dimming luster of our values.

Keywords: *Baghban*, Bollywood, Cinema, Culture, Films, Values

INTRODUCTION

Cinema in India as a form of mass visual entertainment, reflects socio-cultural attitudes in a specific and vivid manner. Since its inception, Indian cinema has been contributing towards presenting a picture of Indian life and culture and strengthening the cultural ties among the people living in the different corners of the world [1]. The huge popularity of Bollywood movies is largely due to their cultural contribution in bringing people closer to this valuable treasure of India's cultural wealth and values. On one hand we have movies like *Rang de Basanti* and *Lagaan* depicting the impact of colonized India and the sentiments of Indians emerging out of the shackles of oppression and on the other we have movies like *Baghban* replete with the values of Indian culture. Such movies not only present to the world a kaleidoscopic view of India but also play an important role in strengthening the cultural bonds among the Indians.

DISCUSSION

The diverse culture of India is providing a generous dose of ethnicity to Bollywood these days. Filmmakers are representing different communities, merging cultures and painting an interesting picture on the silver screen. *Baghban* is a 2003 Bollywood drama film directed by Ravi Chopra, featuring Amitabh

Bachchan and Hema Malini in lead roles. The movie tells the story of Raj Malhotra played by Amitabh Bachchan, his wife Pooja played by Hema Malini and their four sons Ajay, Sanjay, Rohit and Karan. Like a typical middle class couple they provide the best of the upbringing to their sons often sacrificing their own requirements to fulfil the demands of their family. The setting is truly Indian clearly reflecting the beauty of the Indian culture and its age-long prevailing tradition of the joint family system under which even extended members of a family like one's parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring, etc. live together. There are instances in the film to further communicate the message of the importance of the elder-most, usually the male member as the head in the joint Indian family system who makes all important decisions and rules, whereas other family members abide by it dutifully with full respect. This gets well articulated in a scene where at the dining table the most prominent position is offered to Raj, the father by the family members as a token of their respect to his being the elder most member of the family.

Nelson writes, "Classically, the cultures of Western Europe and North America with their complex, stratified societies, where independence and differences are emphasized, are said to be individualistic, whereas

in Asia, Africa, parts of Europe and Latin America where agreeing on social norms is important and jobs are interdependent, collectivism is thought to be preponderant. The Indian culture encourages focus on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity at expense of individuality, freedom of choice, privacy and personal space, as aptly reflected in the movie.” [2] We see interdependence of the family members on each other for their happy and secure existence, another exquisite feature of the Indian culture.

In the Indian Family system it is the parents who look after their children till they grow up to be mature and independent with an expectation that in their old age this love and care will be well reciprocated. This aspect of the Indian culture is projected through the character of Alok, played by Salman Khan, the adopted son of Raj Malhotra. Alok was an orphan and Raj had provided him with money and education, bringing him up as his own son. Now a successful man, Alok worships Raj because of all his help and thinks him as his own father which he never had. After retirement, both Raj and Pooja get mistreated by their real sons who no longer want their parents to stay with them, thinking that looking after their parents will be a hassle. This inversion in the traditional family system very powerfully brings out the consequence of disintegration of the joint family system through the loss of values among the children of the family who start showing aggressiveness, dissocial behavior and delinquency.

The instance is presented through the episode between Pooja and her granddaughter who wishes to go to a party in the late hours and is cautioned against it. An obstinate and insolent girl, lacking any moral values, she insults her grandmother and invites trouble for herself by going out with an unscrupulous boyfriend of hers to a party. Due to timely intervention by the grandmother she is rescued and saved. This incident is an attempt by the filmmaker to show how in a family where elders are disrespected and morals are flouted, even children grow up to be discourteous and disrespectful. In Indian culture that is why staying together in a family with the blessings of elders always to guide the youngsters is considered vital to the righteous upbringing of the children.

Another reflection of culture is suggested by way of celebration of festivals like *Holi* and *Karvachauth*. In any culture, festivals are a means for all to get together and rejoice. In the movie too they have been exploited well to depict Indian culture. The importance of *Karvachauth* in the lives of Indian women across the world has been highlighted in Bollywood movies of yester years and present days too. “India may have reached the moon, but Indian women still worship the moon from earth on the night of *Karvachauth* and pray for their husbands’ longevity,

health as well as happiness. Even today’s educated, working women, both at home and abroad, keep hold of Indian values and go by tradition when *Karvachauth* celebration comes.” [3] Moreover, *Karvachauth* is one festival of India, where through a custom, the hierarchical pattern of Indian families is also emphasized. In the Indian social set up men are considered to be the head of the family and their presence is considered integral for the healthy and happy existence of the family. As such, wives fast on that particular day to wish for the long life of the husband. It also is a means to reflect the bond of love shared by the husband and wife, beautifully captured in the movie.

Similarly, the close camaraderie between Bollywood and Holi has been portrayed in its celebration of the festival since cinema’s oldest memories. By showcasing our most popular Indian festivals, our filmmakers attempt to re ignite the bonding of love shared in the Indian families. In the movie *Baghban* too, Holi is a festival celebrating the unity of the family. We see all of the family members coming together on this festival to be with each other and spread joy and smiles. One can easily relate here to the Indian culture where festivals are more than a ritual but an occasion for the families to be together.

Bollywood movies focusing on Indian culture have always enjoyed popularity in India and even abroad. They act as a carrier of our rich cultural treasure and thus facilitate bonding among the people living all across the globe. Plus Channel’s Amit Khanna remarked that ‘Indian movies are feel-good, all-happy-in-the-end, tender love stories with lots of songs and dances...That’s what attracts non-Indian audiences across the world.’ and to this we could add ‘family values’ and their palpable, if not entirely self-evident, investment in ‘our culture’. (as qtd. in *Newsweek International*) [4] The movie *Baghban* too performs this role of being an ambassador of the Indian culture by bringing in the colorful facets of Indian culture through a story that is as gripping as the values being projected in it.

CONCLUSION

The present paper is an endeavour to explore the ways bollywood cinema has been impacting our cultural treasure with reference to the blockbuster movie *Baghban*. The attempt to is to look at and highlight the culturally rich message that this movie brings to the fore and rekindles a sense of pride in the dimming luster of our values.

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