

Should Bollywood Be Mixed With History?

India is an endless source of amazing stories, but this repertoire has rarely been tapped by its filmmakers -- at least the conventional ones. The whole world knows extensive details about the prominent people and history of the very young nation of the U.S., through its splendid films, but outstanding stories of one of the oldest cultures on Earth have never artfully reached an international (or for that matter national) audience. Part of the blame lies with mainstream, popular filmmakers and actors who want to 'play it safe'.

We know much more about American individuals who have little significance in the Indian context (*The Wolf of Wall Street, Cast Away*), than we know of exemplary Indians. History and biography are two significant genres which mainstream Indian cinema (Bollywood).

Healthy analysis and discussion of history make people less prejudiced. If a deep-rooted, vibrant and impactful medium like cinema cannot do justice to the history and people of its exceptional country, that perhaps doesn't augur well for society.

A movie helps to widen our field of vision. Perhaps an important event or its lesser-known aspects have all but faded from public memory, and a movie catapults them back into limelight (*Gandhi My Father, Madras Cafe*).

Though, some very fine films dabbling with historical events and biography do exist, they haven't reached the eyes and minds of larger audiences (like some of the ones mentioned above, or like *Nandita Das's Firaq & the Kay Kay Menon-starrer Bhopal Express*).

When a powerful medium like cinema tackles history and its players, it has a sensational impact on the society. It's not that a film about history 'teaches facts' - far from it - but it does something more significant: it stimulates discussion, rediscovery, reassessment. All of which lead to what can be called 'enlightenment'.

Some of the historical Bollywood movies are as follows-

1. ***Jodhaa Akbar*** - A sixteenth century love story about a marriage of alliance that gave birth to true love between a great Mughal emperor, Akbar, and a Rajput princess, Jodha.
2. ***Black Friday*** - Black Friday is a film about the investigations following the 1993 serial Bombay bomb blasts, told through the different stories of the people involved --police, conspirators, victims, middlemen.
3. ***Sardar***- An account of Vallabhbhai Patel's political life while India was taking first steps as an independent country.
4. ***The Legend of Bhagat Singh***- The story of a young revolutionary who raised an armed resistance against the British rule in India, etc.

All of us are aware of the recent '*Padmavati*' row. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's '*Padmavati*', starring Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh and Shahid Kapoor was in the eye of a raging storm these past months, with certain fringe groups pushing to ban the film. While Deepika and Bhansali reiterated that the film did not "distort" any facts, the leading men were reportedly asked to refrain from commenting on the situation.

Many writers and publishers also take risks to champion socially important issues. Fortunately, Vishal Bharadwaj (*Haider*) and Rajkumar Hirani (*PK*) set the tone by tackling issues which are highly important but make some Indians very uncomfortable. Now more than ever, when the country is still one but the nation divided, the powerful medium of cinema needs to rise to the occasion.

We perhaps need countless more movies on the horrors of Partition and communal riots. There's truly no end to ideas, and it will certainly be a great loss for India if its filmmakers fail to tap the remarkable historical episodes that this vast nation carries in its bosom. Filmmakers surely need to take more risks; they cannot excuse themselves by saying they'll be unfairly targeted.

For cinema-buffs like me, it is indeed a delectable mental exercise to wistfully reflect on our favourite historical incidents being brought to life on the big screen; for example, the making of India's Constitution. Three hundred-odd

people of crazily diverse backgrounds, in a newly-formed, extremely poor nation, toiled for two whole years to create that impeccable and historic document. Not that it went smoothly -- there were numerous ideological clashes.

It is high time we encouraged such movies and our filmmakers chucked the standard fare to serve such more interesting cuisines. With movies like *Manjhi* and *Bajirao Mastani* that did quite well, Bollywood perhaps is making history.

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Batch – 2016-18