

Indian Cinema: A Bridge of Identity for Indian Diaspora with Special Reference to Bollywood Movie *Pardes*

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Abstract:

Films have always been a common source of education, entertainment, and information across the world. Here Beard states “films are among the most common artifacts of modern popular culture that generate and reflect diverse cultures and the traditional values of a society. Consequently films have become a major part of modern society, through which people are becoming aware of different cultures from all over the world”. The paper aims to study the cultural studies and seeks to explore the role of Bollywood movies especially with special reference to movie *Pardes* (1997), directed by Subash Ghai. These kinds of movies played an important role in identity construction of Indian diaspora across the world. Diaspora may use media products as a form of cultural maintenance for their roots. The interesting fact is that though sociological factors such as friends, family and peer groups always play an important role in making the Indian identity. Bollywood movies not only act as a bridge between home, homeland and diaspora but they also help them to transmit the values, culture and traditions. All these together play a significant role in maintaining their ‘Indianness’, in Abroad.

Keywords: Diaspora, Movies, Identity, Nostalgia

Introduction:

Indian citizens started migrating to U.S. after the Immigration and Nationality Act was revoked in 1965. The majority of Indians who migrated to United States are white-collar professionals such as engineers, writers, doctors, lawyers or businessman (Bhat, 2006).

In this age of new communication technologies like television, Internet, mobile phones etc. diaspora feels more connected with their home and homeland. As Bhat (2006) and Singh (2003) states, “while the notion of “Indianness” becomes significant in India only when it is challenged, it is a part of the Indian diaspora that comes out every time they involve and interact with other ethnic groups”.

Cultural Identity can simply be defined and understand as an individual’s way of identifying herself/himself with the culture whether it is a home culture or host culture for the migrated one. According to Jung and Lee (2004)

“cultural identity as a “socially and historically constructed outcome of locating the self in relation to interactions with others as well as to socially and culturally conditioned communicative structures within a given society” (p.147).

Social interaction with others helps to construct and maintain the identity of an individual, either through personal as well as with media. Here Moorti (2003) claims that “these social interactions play a significant role in constructing and maintaining one’s identity and this holds true particularly with diasporic communities”.

Contribution of Bollywood

In the past years Indian film industry has given some of the most popular films such as *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* (2000), *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), *Dil Chahta Hi* (2003), *Swades* (2004), *Black* (2004), *Dhoom* (2004) *Rang De Basanti* (2005) *Don* (2006) etc. These films achieved success both in the domestic and overseas market too. The interesting fact is that all these films featured on westernized themes, picturised on foreign locations, and considerable use of English language in their dialogues. These techniques are demonstrated a trend to approach global audience. Yet they have become a connection between their homeland and work land.

Reflection of diasporic sensibility

Pardes (1997) is also a fantastic love triangle movie directed by Subash Ghai under the roof of Mukta Arts. The narrative begins with the beautiful landscapes and mesmerizing scenery of an Indian Village. The character of Kusum Ganga, the heroine (played by Mahima Chaudhary in the movie) is a beautiful reflection of Indian Culture and values. The Film portrays a picture of happy joint Indian village family whose head is Suraj Dev. The best friend of Suraj Dev (Alok Nath), Father of Kusum Ganga, Mr. Kishori Lal (Amrish Puri) resides in America, comes to India to visit his native village. Kishori Lal wanted an Indian bride for his NRI son Rajiv (Aparna Agnihotri). But the family of Suraj Dev and Ganga herself is worried for the modern culture and life of America. Therefore Kishori Lal proposes Suraj Dev to bring Ganga to America with him so that she would be able to understand and will try to fit in the westernized culture. Ganga goes with Kishori Lal after getting engaged to Rajiv his son.

There is a continuous effort and fight from the Indian diaspora to maintain their cultural identity in abroad through their activities that are distinctly Indian. Thus it is worth exploring the cultural identity construction process among second-generation Indian Americans and the role of Indian cinema in maintaining these identities. The movie explores all these aspects. The second half of the movie mostly picturised in America, The portion shows the life and culture of the country. Going through all the circumstances and realities about her NRI fiancé, Ganga very soon realizes that she would not be able to fit in this culture. Gradually she falls in love with Kishori Lal’s foster son Arjun (Shah Rukh Khan). In a function at America when Kishori Lal asks her to sing a song which praises his native country India and has fragrance, beauty, life, customs, rituals and landscapes of India. The song clearly reflects her affection to her country along with the dilemma to adjust in the modern culture of a western country. In the words of Kusum Ganga ;

“Jis desh mein mere piya
Uss desh me mera jiya

Kitna mushkil hai dil ka lagana
Pardes aana, pardes ana”

The every element of the movie including music, dialogues, love, affection, etc. defines the Indianess. The character of Kusum Ganga is a beautiful portrayal of Indian beauty, attire and civics. She falls in love with Arjun, who is very much Indian by heart. The character of Kishori Lal is very interesting in this sense as he is still connected to his roots. Kishori Lal wants to transfer these feelings into his NRI son too that is why he wanted an Indian bride for his son. He tried to maintain the culture, love and connection towards his native land while residing in America. In the words of Kishori Lal-

“London dekha, Paris dekha aur dekha Japan
Michael dekha, Elvis dekha
Sab dekha meri jaan
Sare jag me kahin nahi hai doosra Hindustaan”. (<https://www.lyricsoff.com>)

Music plays a significant role to express affection and helps to evoke the feelings of attachment towards India. There is a beautiful song we should mention:

“Ye duniya ek dulhan,
ye duniya ek dulhan,
dulhan ke maathe ki bindiya
Ye mera India, ye mera India
I love my India, I love my India”
(<https://www.lyricsoff.com>)

Role as a bridge between home and homeland

According to Bandyopadhyay, in today’s world of global movement and cultural hybridity our personal identities are in constant flux. So, ‘What is my true “identity”?’ has become a fundamental and yet significant question in one’s life. In recent times, a great deal has been studied in the area of “cultural identity” and on the concept “home” with some of the most important contributions towards this research study coming from cultural studies area. In the film the character of Kishori Lal is a true representation of the dilemma of cultural identity and identity crisis. Who belongs to an Indian village, migrates to abroad for the betterment of his life and to live a lavish life. On the same hand he is still connected to his roots and carries his cultural baggage to America.

But like every time the question rises in front of every diaspora how to save his legacy Culture and values. Basu defines, “in this globalized world, preserving and maintaining one’s own culture and identity has become a serious challenge”. In this context Kishori Lal wants an Indian cultured bride for his NRI son.

In the present time the technological advancements makes a bridge for diasporic communities to stay connected with their homeland, home and maintain their self-identity. Electronic media have been the essential tools for the diaspora in re-rooting their identities (Appadurai, 1996). While commenting on the influence and the importance of electronic media for diasporea community, Appadurai states-

“because of its sheer multiplicity in which they appear (films, TV, internet and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move through daily life, electronic media provide

diapsoric communities with resources for self-imagining that help maintain the identity” (Appadurai, 1990, p.4).

Indian cinema has been one of the most dominant and distinguishing features of the subcontinent’s popular culture for the past sixty years. According to (Dwyer, 2006)

”The Indian cinema industry, most commonly known as Bollywood (although Bollywood represents Hindi film industry alone), is the world’s largest film industry in terms of the number of films produced, though not for its financial returns (Dwyer, 2006). Here Rao (2008), argues that mass media, electronic media in particular, frequently enables the notion of “Indianness” through its various programs, films, etc Rao (2008).

Conclusion

The role of media in creating identity of one’s, is much effective than print media and radio because they seemed very limited due to many barriers such as language, lack of visuals and reach. On the other hand visual medium becomes more influential and effective in this respect. More Interestingly among the different mediums, Bollywood film industry and entertainment programs took a significant role in their crucial time of identity crisis especially in the case of second generation Indian Americans. They help them to be aware about Indian traditions and values. The growth of the Bollywood film industry in foreign markets also provided an opportunity to explore issues related to the creation and maintenance of cultural identity.

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