

Positive Takeaway on Child Psychology from Indian Cinema

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Abstract

Children learn in part from what they see and hear, whether they imitate the actions of parents or peers, read books, or watch movies. Indian cinema has played a significant role in the entertainment of the masses in India for decades. Thus, it can be argued that Indian cinema has had, and continues to have, a great influence on the psyche of the people, and can therefore serve as a promising area in future for the study of human psychology. However, while movies are considered effective, there are limited resources for parents on how to use this powerful tool with their children and teenagers. The power of narration stimulates emotions, and these emotional reactions shape learning and behavior. Immersion into a character in a film increases empathy, which helps the viewer to live the character's experiences without having to experience the real-life consequences. The following paper will discuss: movies as positive media, the rationale for how movies influence positive character development in children and the advantages of creating children's' cinema which is positive in India. Positive aspects of each children's' film will be discussed, accompanied by discussion points and potential positive learning.

Keywords: *positive psychology, positive media, Indian children's' movies, positive learning*

Introduction

Movies are a versatile tool that serves many purposes. Movies engage the audience by acting, music and filmmaking. Besides providing entertainment, films also act as a great tool for disseminating awareness or for

highlighting certain social issues. At times, films represent society and at times project the image of an ideal society. Often audiences perceive pictures, characters and stories as having a deeper meaning beyond

the film itself; they interpret them symbolically as offering insights into human nature and society (Young, 2012). Apart from providing an aesthetic appeal and appealing to one's baser senses, film often activates one's grey matter and stimulates one's intellect. Thus, movies can provide a very potent region of research for psychologists.

Movie-watching is seen in both pedagogical and clinical settings. Cinema education is a term coined by Alexander, Hall, and Pettice (1994), which refers to the use of film in educational settings (Niemic & Wedding, 2008). Indian cinema has played a significant role in the entertainment of the Indian masses for decades. Undoubtedly, this is the most common form of entertainment in the country. The Indian film industry has always had a significant influence on Indian society, including children.

Childrens' Cinema

Children's' films should be made essentially targeting children as their audience. Critics and scholars have suggested that childrens' films require special attention, treatment and care, notably when we know that childrens' films most often deal with adventure stories, social conditions and aspirations of children. A film influences children more profoundly

than adults, possibly because young minds do not have social filters in place. One can easily recall film scenes and dialogues seen in childhood. In children's' films, there needs to be a strong social message, particularly keeping the target audience in mind, to make them understand their immediate social background and also about the vulnerable, oppressed sections of their young age.

Positive Indian Cinema for Children

Talking about Indian movies is indeed a challenging and contentious topic. Indian film is expected to bear many pressures on languages, cultures, traditions and social structures. However, the word Indian Film 'is a debated field and lacks unity.' The slogan - unity in diversity represents the living conditions and communities in which many languages are spoken. According to the 2001 census there are more than 10,000 raw mother tongues in India. However, only the larger language groups figure in the arena of regional film production. These are mainly Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Odia, Assamese and Kashmiri. Interestingly, the forerunners are the language sectors in which childrens' films and theatre is predominantly produced.

Alegalu (2012)*Language: Kannada*

At the age of nine, life looks unkind to Basu and Putta — two school-going boys living in a small fishing village on the coast of Karnataka. So they plan to go to the island to find the fabled spirit, who may have the solution to their problems.

In the endearing and uncomplicated world of childhood, failing a test, facing a teacher's wrath, or confessing a lie to parents, are considered high-stakes crises. Children, always dreading the wrath of adults, concoct fake excuses or resort to crazy antics to avoid being confronted with music. Alegalu explores the apprehensions and insecurities of children with their wonderful moments of life and conveys many positive messages in the most subtle ways. Suffice it to say, this lovely little movie is going to uplift your mood.

Halo (1996)*Language: Hindi*

It tells the story of Sasha, a seven-year - old girl without a mother, who's going to stop at nothing to find her missing puppy, Halo. During her quest on the streets of Mumbai, she encounters diverse people.

Halo is made up of many beautiful moments and memories. It is a heartwarming story about human-animal companionship. Halo is

also an ode to the city of Mumbai and its pluralism. It does use the typical childrens' movie conventions and sentimentality, followed by a bittersweet ending, Though, it is essentially an coming- of - age story, it is a fine example of what should a childrens' film comprise of — entertaining, empathetic, and educational without being a preachy.

Paari (2000)*Language: Manipuri / Meitei*

When young Sanathoi plays the role of a Sangai fawn in a dance drama, he discovers the world of this rare, endemic species of deer in Manipur.

Paari, talks about the heart-warming guilelessness of a young boy to make a heartfelt appeal against man's intrusion in nature's balance. Since Sanathoi assumes that the Sangai he plays in the drama is the same wounded fawn that was separated from his parents, he sets out for an audience with the Sangai King in the jungle. The film beautifully

Captures the interplay of imagination and consciousness in a child's mind. How folklore and bedtime stories encourage young people to become empathized with other beings. For example, when Sanathoi hears the storey of the ancient connection between Sangai and KeibulLamjao, the

gravity of their habitat displacement hits him more strongly.

Aw, Awkare, Aa/ A, B, C (2003)

Language: Odia

This is a story about a school teacher, Mini. Her efforts to change the traditional paradigm of education are creating obstacles in her own career. Without being able to compromise, she is transferred from one school to another. Her only consolation is her childhood memory, which surfaces over and over again. At the end of the day, Mini does not comply with the current school system, resigns and begins her own school where there are no four-walls and no regimentation.

Aw AakareAa is a genuine effort that challenges the drudgery of teaching the classroom and stresses the need to harbour unorthodox ideas in the process of learning. This film represents the reform in the existing education system and envisions another very important issue — the drudgery and defeatism in the new education system.

PatherPanchali (1955)

Language: Bangla

The tale appears to be superficially insubstantial. A small boy, Apu, lives with his poor Brahmin family in rural West Bengal. His father, a priest who's lost in his dreams of writing plays and poetry, is so

feeble that he won't even ask his employer to pay back. His mother is mired in everyday activities, looking after Apu and his sister Durga, coping with the demands of her elderly father-in-law and her ageing sister-in-law and her impractical husband.

It's a film that blindsides the viewer by showing a child's perspective on the world: it's Apu and Durga's perspective on the passing train, their discovery of their aunt's body, or their joy at the sound of the sweet-seller's bells that captivate us jaded adults. It deals with the innocence of the mind of a child and his loyalty to his kin!

KakkaMuthai (2014)

Language: Tamil

Attracted by the launch of a new pizza shop in their neighbourhood, two young brothers from the slum are eager to taste a slice of pizza. They plan to go and get a pizza, but they get shooed away by the watchman.

It is an allegory for the huge class disparities that exist in India, showing how people are trying to benefit off from a structure that leaves no room for advancement. The film turns into a reflection on the class divide in our society and how it is manipulated by clever politicians, an allegory of the consequences of globalisation, and even a satire on the media's obsession with sensationalism. KaakkaMuttai is sure to

make you at least a slightly better person than you were before, because of the reflective power of the film.

Lilkee (2006)

Language: Hindi

In Lilkee, we have a heart-warming tale about a poor immigrant domestic worker with the subject of class discrimination at its core. The main character is a bright young girl living in Nainital with her mother and younger sister. Like several children who are forced to enter the domestic workforce due to their poor backgrounds, Lilkee's academic pursuit is short-lived and packed to Mumbai to babysit for a working couple's infant son.

Lilkee's greatest victory is the study of social inequality and peer pressure through childrens' eyes. Some of the preconceptions in which young minds grow up are rooted — adopted from the kind of world in which they grow up. So the casual remark from an adult like a servant is filthy, low-witted and should not be socialised with, it becomes a message to the child and clouds his judgement. The reality of class division and the resultant inequality is the painful truth of Indian society in its face which is reflected through the story.

Anjali (1989)

Language: Tamil

A heartwarming story about a two-year-old mentally handicapped girl who was kept away from her mother. She's on the verge of dying, and it's hard to see how her family copes with this unexpected trauma. Brought by the dear father who had hidden the child from birth, even from the mother, the child is obviously not usual and finds it difficult to find acceptance, as feared by the father. She winches when she's touched by her mother who longs for her affection, but she's happy to slap her.

Dr R Sathianathan, former director of the Institute of Mental Health, points out that film has an immense power to convey change.

"People with disabilities do not seek help or sympathy, and they just want compassion. Movies can effectively make a difference of attitudes and change them, without making the disabled people look pitiful," he says.

Stanley KaDabba (2011)

Language: Hindi

It's about Stanley, a popular class 4 student at an English-medium school in Mumbai, who never carries his tiffin on some pretext or the other. He comes into contact with the Hindi teacher who pressures other teachers and students, to share their food with him. One day, he corners Stanley about why the

boy doesn't get his own food and threatens him with dire consequences.

A tear-jerk, this one is going to teach children sensitivity without you having to utter a word. It sheds light on the day-to-day life of a school boy. The narrator, Stanley, clings to your heartstrings with his indomitable spirit, while warding off the hostile universe that he is surrounded by at all times, everywhere. The film reveals how this child-soldier rises above his choking real life situation, on the way setting a template for all whiners to learn from, even emulate.

The Blue Umbrella (2007)

Language: Hindi

The Blue Umbrella is based on Ruskin Bond's Indian novel by the same name. Set in an idyllic village in Himachal Pradesh with a population so sparse that everyone here knows everyone else, the plot is based around a beautiful blue umbrella that a little girl in the village, Biniya has acquired, much to the envy of everyone around her.

The story unfolds masterfully, at a languid pace, with plot revelations that serve to raise issues of ostracism, loss, longing, and alienation, without ever being too intense. The result is a powerful film, a fairy tale where the umbrella is the ultimate metaphor and can symbolise anything to anyone. The

umbrella stands for ambition and status, affection and greed. It wields a magic wand, creating a profound, simple tale of humanity and emotion. This film would certainly teach a kid that even a villain does not deserve brutality or judgment in life.

Dhanak (2015)

Language: Hindi

Dhanak tells the story of a brother and sister, eight and ten years old, who traverse across Rajasthan to fulfil a promise made by the elder sister to her younger brother. The film is about a young girl heading out in search of a superstar, Shah Rukh Khan, with her younger brother, who's blind.

We all need a little sparkle and a rainbow in our lives. It's a beautiful movie about sibling-love. Reminds us of the little joys of life and teaches us a lesson in coping with our sorrows. It's a simple, unpretentious tale about how to "see the world not with your eyes, but with your heart." It also speaks of how anything is possible if you have faith.

Nil BatteySannata (2015)

Language: Hindi

This is the story of a mother and daughter living in Agra, India. The only hope in Chanda's life is to see her daughter Apu shine. She's a maid who dreams a lot for her child. But Apu is an immature teenager who cannot fathom the sacrifices of her mother.

She 's glad to be lackadaisical. Chanda gets herself enrolled in the Apu class, and in no time is everyone's favourite.

Nil BatteySannata narrates one such story which is a reflection of similar stories in real life. As kids, we are so brainwashed to assume that if the father/mother is an accountant, it's only a matter of time for the child to follow suit. But, when the child tries to do something different, he genuinely feels bad for not following in his parent's footsteps. It is a story of never giving up on your dreams, always working hard and normalizing failure as a part of life.

Conclusion

Children learn in part from what they see, whether they model the actions of parents or peers, reading books or watching movies. Parents and their children share the same and often unspoken goal — to live a "normal life"—in a state of well-being. The power of narration triggers emotions, and these emotional reactions affect learning and behaviour. Immersion of a character in a film increases empathy and helps the children to witness the character's struggles without having to encounter the real-life consequences.

Indian films have made a conscious effort to re-establish their lost heritage by reinforcing their ideals and traditions. It has also acted

as a powerful and emphatic tool to depict the social, economic and political realities of Indian society at different times. Films had a profound influence on the psyche of a typical Indian who always associated himself/herself with the central character of the film, whether he/she was a male or a female protagonist. Cinema is an important part of Indian life. As ShyamBenegal pointed out, Indian audiences are most comfortable and totally accustomed to the cinematic form. He cites Indian psychoanalyst SudhirKakar's opinion that Indian Hindi Cinema is a collective imagination or community daydream, comprising the unconscious content and latent desires of a large number of people.

Films can be an excellent source of moral and social lessons, particularly with regard to children. Every form of life is valuable and deserves respect and such important messages are expressed without preaching or condescension. In one major meta-analysis of cinema viewing, exposures to prosocial content had positive effects at least as high as the negative effects of exposures to violent-scene shows (Mares & Woodard, 2005). Mares and Woodard continue to assert that the pro-social effects of audiovisual media content could be much more important than the negative effects of

exposure to violent content, since current societal norms support pro-social behaviour. In other words, children are likely to obtain more supportive rewards for imitating prosocial or altruistic actions, such as congratulations or smiles (Grusec, 1991).

about change — both social and behavioural. Also based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977; 1986), E-E is most useful to instill health prevention behaviors and increased self-efficacy (or self-control) in children.

In addition to the use of films for educational purposes, films can be used for psychotherapy or cinematherapy (Berg-Cross, Jennings & Baruch, 1990). A child's favourite film can offer clues about his/her conflict (Greenberg, 2009). Prescribing films may provide the child with a fictitious distance to externalise either problems or solutions so that the child can achieve non-threatening behavioural changes (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000). Three phases are proposed: assessment, then implementation, followed by debriefing. When using movies therapeutically, it remains important to determine strengths and match children to movies that are good fit. Reactions subsequently necessitate discussions to better analyze the desired outcomes.

Entertainment-Education (E-E) is yet another form of film-promoted education that refers to the placement of educational messages in entertainment media (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). This approach uses film as a means of disseminating ideas that can bring In this manner childrens' cinema in India can be evolved to better suit the needs of the current generation keeping in mind the present social, psychological, cultural and emotional scenario.

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