

Understanding Indian Psyche and Philosophical Health through Indian Cinema

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Abstract

Indian philosophy has a ubiquitous presence in all walks of our lives. From the Vedic age to the digital era, the footprints of Indian philosophy can be traced and perceived as one of the most deep-rooted characteristics of our cultures and traditions. Cornelissen, Misra, & Varma (2014) defined “Indian psychology as an approach to psychology based on ideas and practices that developed over thousands of years within the Indian sub-continent.” Philosophical notions in the country might vary in their approaches and ideologies but comprehensively indicate the same goal to make this world a better place to live in and to improve human life. The most captivating aspect of our Indian philosophy has been its subtle and unbridled transmission and its adaptation through generations, which speaks volumes about its relevance and significance in India. Hindi cinema has contributed to portraying Indian philosophical notions more poignantly and responsibly for a long time. It continues to disseminate information, knowledge, and awareness and revive philosophical concepts and practices worldwide. This research paper will attempt to study films based on Indian philosophical underpinnings, the portrayal of themes, and their narration on the silver screen. It further addresses specific aspects, themes, or questions related to portraying and exploring philosophical themes within the narratives, characters, and motifs of Hindi cinema.

Keywords: *Indian Philosophy, Indian Psyche, Hindi Cinema, Films, Themes, Audience.*

Introduction

Literally speaking, philosophy* involves two Greek words – Philo, meaning love and Sophia, meaning knowledge. Thus, literally speaking, philosophy means love of wisdom. This definition of philosophy differs from how the word Darshan has been taken in India. The literal meaning of philosophy shows that the philosopher is constantly and everywhere engaged in the search for truth. He does not bother so much to arrive at conclusions and continues searching for truth throughout his life. His aim is the pursuit of truth rather than its possession. Those who enjoy journeys do not care so much about the destination, nor are they perturbed when the destination is lost in sight despite a continued long journey. Films are the medium that captures people's instincts and tries to understand human psychology working at different levels in different social spheres. Films are one of the best mediums of mass communication for determining the prevailing dominant psyche and public opinion. Hindi films

also project the nation that is taking shape into the popular imagination. They discuss contemporary society's political, social, cultural, and psychological issues and issues regarding sex, gender, class distinction, and so on. It is a well-known fact that if one wants to know any nation, one must study history, literature, the education system and common modes of communication like television and newspapers. Now, in recent times, films should also be included in the list as films enable their audience to have an idea about prevailing mindsets, notions and practices in society. Films not only guide us into the future but reflect our past too in terms of the portrayal of history, traditional social practices, theories and knowledge in such a powerful way that its audience can connect to its roots and culture easily and accurately. This paper will attempt to highlight the films that made the effort to tie philosophical theories with cinematic art.

Review of Literature

1. For a novice in film study, Bose (2008) in *Bollywood: A History* gives a detailed history of the arrival of films in India with Lumière brothers, its development as a new medium of communication and its progress into the recent form. The book is an excellent guide that shows the different phases through which films passed and reached their present mature form. It mentions the contributions of not-so-talked people who were responsible for being pioneers in the development of this visual form, as well as those directors, artists, actors, actresses, and producers who shaped the film industry as of today.
2. Viridi (2003), in *Cinematic Imagination Indian Popular Films as Social History*, has tried to advocate and establish Hindi cinema as an important mode for cultural study like history, education and literature. She reads popular Hindi films as a narration of the nation's social history. According to her, films represent the anxieties and threats to the nation through the characters of villains, vamps and anti-heroes. She has discussed how antiheroes of *Shri 420* speak of Nehruvian disillusionment, of C.I.D. - the corruption and crime of *Zanjeer*- frustration and angst of its time. In her Essay "The Sexed Body", she explains the transformation of female characters who have been victimised by the patriarchal society into vigilantes when they are humiliated by a rape.
3. *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema*, ed. Joshi Lalit Mohan (2001) is a compilation of essays by renowned filmmaker Shyam Benegal, Lyricist Gulzar and film critics like Maithili Rao and Deepa Gahlot. It is a pictorial history of 100 years of cinema illustrated by rare images from film archives. It contains an in-depth review of classic and blockbuster movies, their star cast, music, themes and iconic actors and actresses. Elements like screenplay, songs, music and dance that make an unflinching impact on the audience have been considered for the discussion.
4. *Understanding Cinema: A Psychological Theory of Moving Imagery* by Per Persson analyses film from psychological perspectives. The author explains with illustrations from famous Hollywood films how cinematic techniques help the spectator to "perceive, think, apply knowledge, infer, interpret, feel and make use of knowledge, assumptions, expectations and prejudices" while viewing films.
5. *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* is a collection of essays compiled by Ravi S. Vasudevan that discusses politics as represented through films. In his essay "Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities", Vasudevan shows his discontent with the kind of melodramatic films made here; he wants movies to be more serious and reality-based. He disapproves of the tradition of inserting songs and dance sequences. He also expresses his opinion that the audience should be educated to interpret films for such a serious film.
6. *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* ed. by Gulzar, Govind Nihalani and Saibal Chatterjee (2003), a collection of 34 essays penned by experts of the craft of filmmaking, provides an insight into various aspects of a film: songs and dance, special effects, stunts and action, lyrics and sound etc. It is a high-quality reference book that is informative and entertaining. It also comments on the commercial potency of this industry and its business.

Research Methodology

The present research paper interestingly traces the philosophical underpinnings of Hindi cinema. Since the subject is huge, the researcher has adopted a thematic analysis of films based on themes of philosophy, narrating their takeaways and messages films delivered. Due to the presence of so many films, selected films have been chosen to demonstrate their philosophical roots in Hindi cinema.

Discussion

Films are primarily based on the themes and genres that guide their storyline and narration.

Still, some films here have been selected to illuminate their philosophical underpinnings, which inspires its audiences through their traditional takeaways that are even much more relevant and need of the time than they could have been. In the context of Hindi cinema, philosophical themes and insights are frequently intertwined with the films' narratives, characters, and motifs. Here's an exploration of philosophical health in Hindi films:

Journey of Self-Discovery: Many Hindi films revolve around characters embarking on journeys of self-discovery, seeking answers to existential questions, and striving for personal growth. Films like "Wake Up Sid" and "Dear Zindagi" touch upon self-realisation, inner peace, and finding one's purpose in life.

Moral and Ethical Dilemmas: Hindi films often present characters grappling with moral and ethical dilemmas, emphasising the importance of values, integrity, and righteousness. Movies like "Rang De Basanti" and "A Wednesday" confront societal issues, ethical choices, and the responsibilities of individuals towards society.

Spiritual Awakening: Spiritual themes and the quest for enlightenment are recurrent motifs in Hindi cinema. Films such as "P.K." and "Oh My God!" explore the intersections of faith, religion, and spirituality, challenging conventional beliefs and promoting a more inclusive understanding of spirituality.

Interpersonal Relationships and Human Connections: The importance of relationships, human connections, and empathy is a recurring theme in Hindi films. Movies like "Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna" and "Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara" emphasise understanding, compassion, and emotional well-being in fostering meaningful relationships and personal happiness.

Societal Reflection and Critique: Many Hindi films offer critiques of societal norms, conventions, and prejudices, highlighting the need for societal change, progress, and inclusivity. Films such as "Article 15" and "Dil Se.." address societal issues, systemic inequalities, and the complexities of human relationships within the broader societal context.

Philosophical Musings and Dialogues: Hindi films often incorporate philosophical musings, profound dialogues, and reflective narratives that encourage audiences to contemplate more profound existential questions, ethical dilemmas, and the complexities of human nature. Filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Guru Dutt and contemporary directors like Anurag Kashyap and Imtiaz Ali have explored philosophical themes in their works.

In summary, philosophical health in Hindi films encompasses a broad spectrum of themes, ranging from self-discovery and personal growth to moral dilemmas, spiritual awakening, and societal reflection. These films engage audiences in introspective journeys, fostering discussions and reflections on philosophical insights and existential questions. To arrive at the meaning of philosophy, we will have to discuss its problems, attitude, method, process, conclusions, and results. In brief, philosophy is a philosophical process of solving some characteristic problems through characteristic methods, from a characteristic attitude and arriving at characteristic conclusions and results

Stoicism

“You can dance in the rain or sulk in the rain. It will rain regardless.” A philosophy that is very much in vogue today, Stoicism represents a possible answer to one’s search for structure and meaning in life. Rather than change the world, however, it seeks to alter one’s reaction to life's random and haphazard events to attain true tranquillity. According to the philosophy, there is no point in getting worked up about things that you cannot control or burden your soul with such matters. The philosophy the present generation has been watching for a long time, and even in songs, the stoicism echoes loudly.

The song that captures this theory says, “Man re tu kahe na dheer dhare” from the movie “Chitrlekha” (Chitrlekha is the name of a courtesan in the period drama released in 1964. It is set in the Mauryan empire of roughly 300 BCE), lyrics by Sahir Ludhianvi.

Man re, tu kahe na dheer dhare

Wo nirmohi, moh na jaane, jinka moh kare

Is jeevan ki chadthi dhalti, dhoop ko kisne
baandha

Rang pe kisne pehre dalle, roop ko kisne
baandha

Kahe ye jatan kare

If there is one Hindi song that could be considered a prominent stoic song, it would be “Main Zindagi ka saath nibhata chala gaya” from the movie “Hum Dono” Written by Sahir Ludhianvi The song was filmed by Dev Anand.

Main zindagi ka saath nibhaata chala gaya

Har fikr ko dhueno main udata chala gaya

Barbadiyon ka sog manaana fazul tha

Barbadiyon ka jashn manata chala gaya

Suppose we turn back to “Dilwale Dilgir hua kya from the movie “Yatrik”, 1952 lyrics penned by Pt Bhushan. Another feather in the hat of stoicism is added by Shailendra’s “Kisi ki muskuraton pe ho nisar” from “Anari” 1959, which captures the spirit of generosity and justice beautifully. It goes like

Kisi ki muskurahaton pe ho nisar

Kisi ka dard mil sake to le udhaar

Kisi ke waaste ho tere dil mein pyaar

Jeena isi ka naam hai

It’s not that we get stoicism in the earlier films only, but films of the new age media also witnessed the movies on stoicism and will continue to do so due to its deep-rooted nature of Indian philosophy and thoughts.

Bhaag Milkha Bhag movie, released in 2013, is based on the real-life of the ‘Flying Sikh’, the late Milkha Singh, starring Farhan Akhtar. Rakesh Om Prakash Mehra directed the film; the film is all about dedication, discipline and hard work and gives us an important message to never give up against the odd circumstances; one should also strive to achieve their goal irrespective of the fact what society thinks about them, they should become indifferent towards the community and concentrate on one’s goal.

Existentialism- A philosophy that took root in the 1940s and 50s, existentialism is more or less summed up in the quote, “Existence

precedes essence.” This means that the purpose and meaning of one’s life are not something that one is born with or given by God (i.e. one’s essence) but what one’s deliberate actions lead one to create. Existentialism makes you the captain of your voyage, dispensing with superfluous external forces.

Existentialism was a radical departure from the notion of cosmic forces paving the path for individuals to follow, making the individuals responsible for the actions that they take and follow. Paan Singh Tomar is the story of a real-life athlete, Paan Singh Tomar, a gold medalist who became a dacoit after the world around him refused to acknowledge him for his accomplishments and kept pushing him down. The movie's strength lies in the stirring tragedy of Paan Singh Tomar’s life, which drives him to seek revenge from the system for his lost career and life. This one is history in motion. Here, Paan Singh Tomar took charge of his life and decided to be a dacoit to take revenge, so existentialism says an individual is responsible for his actions and destiny.

Udaan's movie tracks the journey of Rohan, who returns to his home after eight years of boarding school, only to be welcomed by a disciplinarian father and a half-brother. The beauty of *Udaan* lies in the way Rohan fights and aims for his dreams rather than being tied down by his father. The movie sends a strong message that we can become whatever we want; we only need to give our dreams a little flight. Rohan works hard to register his existence in the world.

Today’s youth fashioned existentialism in achieving their dreams. The film Gully Boy received massive applause from youths which is directed by Zoya Akhtar and stars Ranveer Singh, Alia Bhatt and Siddhant Chaturvedi; the film revolves around Murad (Ranveer Singh), who lives in the Mumbai slums and dreams of becoming a rapper. The film gives a strong message of how people are not allowed to dream because of society and its stereotyped mindset, but a little courage helps you fly. Existentialism can be seen reflected in one of its popular songs, “Apna Time Ayega.”

Empiricism

Empiricism is a philosophical theory that claims knowledge is based solely on what one's senses can experience and confirm. The approach indicates a pragmatic approach towards life. A film like *A Wednesday* tells about the importance of a wake-up call to our government to act towards the safety of its citizens. *A Wednesday* is a stirring message to all common men not to play vulnerable all the time and to come together and ask our system to be accountable to us.

Another popular movie translating empiricism on the silver screen is *Manjhi: The Mountain Man*, a biographical drama about a man who carves a path through a mountain to connect his village to the nearest town. This movie inspires its audience to think outside the box, take initiative, and work towards the betterment of the community.

Dangal is a film that wrestles with stereotyped societal notions and conveys that society can witness change for betterment with the will to break these notions. The film establishes that girls can be wrestlers, and no profession can be restricted by gender. *Iqbal* is a sports drama about a deaf and mute boy who dreams of becoming a cricketer and overcomes social and personal challenges to achieve his goal. This movie teaches students to pursue their passion despite their limitations and to stand as achievers. Directed by Gauri Shinde and starring the talented Sridevi, *English Vinglish* talks about where she meets a bunch of people just like her, and they make her realise that she must value herself and not think about the narrow perspective created by society. This film gave a great message about valuing yourself before anything else, and that's what touched the audience and gained so much love.

Rationalism

Rationalism is a philosophy that relies on reason as the primary source of knowledge. It claims that truth does not come from the evidence of one's senses but instead is deductive. Combined with empiricism, these thought processes produced rapid scientific, mathematical, and political growth. In its most extreme form, rationalism is too theoretical and bound by the knowledge of its time, too much of an armchair

philosophy with few practical outlets. Rationalism is a vital philosophy which has attracted many filmmakers to make films on this subject for a long time.

Mother India in 1957, a legendary film in Hindi cinema by Mehboob Khan, tells the story of a poor village woman, Radha, who raises her sons on her own when her husband leaves his family and village as he's unable to pay his debts. This film is about woman empowerment and its depiction with cinematic excellence. The film talks about logic and philosophy of life guided by rationalism and speaks volumes about the Indian psyche and contemporary dominating public perception. *Peepli Live* in 2010, produced by Aamir Khan and directed by Anusha Rizvi, is a satire on farmer suicide. It talks in a very pertinent way that could make a strong impact on the audience. Another movie, *3 Idiots*, hits the chord of rationalism, which strongly gives a message to bring a change within yourselves before seeking a change in the system. We study to learn and not to understand, which needs to change. In the queue, another beautiful film is *Dear Zindagi*, which superfluously conveys that you should not let the past blackmail your present into ruining your future and leave the past in the past. Very boldly, the film advocates that it is ok to seek counselling in times of need.

Confucianism

Confucianism is about correct behaviour, obedience to hierarchy, and ethics. It prioritised family over individualism and made merit and intelligence of paramount importance to the officials in positions of power over family name and wealth. It formed the bedrock of what many East Asian cultures and practices are derived from today. Most of Suraj Barjatiya's movies are classic examples of this philosophical notion, where films give messages like family comes first, stay together, stay happy, sacrifices for the family members as one of the pious rituals and obedience and respect for the elders. Films like *Maine Pyar Kiya*, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Vivah*, and *Hum Saath Saath Hain* remind us of family values combined with modern values. Songs like *Yeh Toh Sach hai ki bhagwan hai, hai*

magar phir bhi anjaan hai dharti pe roop maa baap ka usmein data ki pehchan hai.

All these films give a clear message about how to deal with family problems, control ego, and develop let-go feelings within family members. A film like *Tu Jhuthi Main Makkar*, in which the protagonists Mickey and Tinni's parents agree to their marriage, but Tinni finds that Mickey's family is quite possessive about him. Tinni feels that she won't be able to adjust to his family as she wants her own space, and the film very poignantly narrates the value and importance of family when they are perceived as unwanted.

Objectivism Objectivism was Coined by Ayn Rand, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. Objectivism is a philosophy that envisions man as a heroic being, with his moral purpose being his happiness, reason at his core, and productive achievement as his highest form of expression.

Being aimless in life and careless about a career is a phase everyone goes through. Having a quarter-life crisis is not so bad, either. However, the magic lies in waking up at the right time. Forget everyone else; the real deal is to surprise yourself with your capabilities and do something you never expected. After all, this is what the film *Lakshya* taught us. Movie *Panga* is remembered for its famous dialogue: 'I am a mother, and the mother has no dreams.' This dialogue from the film indeed describes the life of every woman who forgets her dreams to take care of her family and kids. The story is based on the life of a national-level Kabbadi player who gives up her career to raise her family but decides to go back to living her dream with the help of her family. Directed by Zoya Akhtar and starring Abhay Deol, Farhan Akhtar, Hrithik Roshan, Kalki, and Katrina Kaif, the film *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* gives us the most important message to live life to the fullest without any regrets. Hritik Roshan (Arjun) realises that the most important thing he misses is to live every moment and be thankful for everything you have. The movie *Thappad* is a classic example of objectivism; it's a film that beautifully narrates a female's desire to seek

happiness and respect and her struggle to achieve them in her married life.

Utilitarianism

Part of the Ethics doctrine of philosophy, utilitarianism is a theory that professes that the morally right action in a situation is the action that causes the most pleasure and happiness as opposed to the one that causes the most pain. Before this can be accused of being too selfish and hedonistic a mindset, utilitarianism regards the pleasure and happiness of others as equivalent to one's own and advocates trying to produce the greatest good for the greatest number. *Taare Zameen Par* breaks the stigma attached to differently-abled children and leads us to give them a fair chance. *Munna Bhai MBBS* portrays Sanjay Dutt in the lead role, telling the principles of Gandhiji for the betterment of society and disseminating the message nothing is more precious than love and forgiveness in life.

Rang De Basanti tries to create an environment of increased activism on matters of public interest and throws open a debate: do we want to take matters into our own hands or keep crying foul about the inefficiencies of the society, echoing the dialogue "Koi bhi desh perfect nahi hota use banana hota hai", making deep imprints in audience heart and soul.

Padman film tells us about Laxmikant (Akshay Kumar) and his journey of making pads for his wife, who uses unhygienic cloth during her periods. After that, he makes a machine which can make affordable sanitary pads and how he raises awareness about the same. The film did a great job of raising awareness of such an important and sensitive issue for the good of society. *Chhapaak* is a biographical drama about a young woman who becomes an acid attack survivor and fights for justice and awareness. This movie motivates students to fight against injustice, support survivors, and stand up for their rights. It is, again, an excellent example of utilitarianism.

Conclusion

Philosophy has been present in every walk of life; hence, in Hindi cinema, the philosophical

underpinnings have been deep-rooted. The relevance and significance of philosophical notions in Indian culture have dominated Hindi cinema. In the context of Hindi movies, "philosophical health" can be understood as the portrayal and exploration of philosophical themes, insights, and reflections within the films' narratives, characters, and motifs. Indeed, it won't be an exaggeration that these

philosophical notions and theories inspire filmmakers to disseminate various subjects of public interest on philosophical bedrock, which not only serves to rejuvenate and revive our traditional knowledge system and heritage but acquaints us to the real meanings and manifestations of life

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