

WHAT IS WRONG WITH INDIAN FILMS

Satyajit Ray

SATYAJIT RAY, born on May 2, 1921, was a wellknown film director of India. He earned international recognition for his talent in film-making and direction. Best known for his 'Pather Panchali', 'Aparajito', 'Charulata' and 'Shatranj Ke Khilari', he won awards at international film festivals in Venice, Cannes and Berlin. Ray used to compose music for his own films. He was also a story writer, illustrator and book designer. Oxford University conferred on him an honorary doctorate degree, an honour which very few people have received. In the present essay, taken from his book **Our Films, Their Films**, he examines the nature of our films and points out their defects. He is extremely critical of the quality of our film-making, direction as well as content.



A. Work in small groups and discuss the following:

1. Have you seen any film recently?
2. Tell the name of any film which you like most. Point out its salient features.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH INDIAN FILMS

One of the most significant phenomena of our time has been the development of the cinema from a turn-of-the-century mechanical toy into the century's most potent and versatile art form.

Today, the cinema commands the respect accorded to any other form of creative expression. It combines in various measures the functions of poetry, music, painting, drama, architecture and a host of other arts, major and minor. It also combines the cold logic of science.

India took up film production surprisingly early. The first short film was produced in 1907 and the first feature in 1913. By the twenties it had reached the status of big business.

It is easy to tell the world that film production in India is quantitatively second only to Hollywood; for that is a statistical fact. But can the same be said of its quality? Why are our films not shown abroad? Is it solely because India offers a potential market for her own products? Or, are we just plain ashamed of our films?

To anyone familiar with the relative standards of the best foreign and Indian films, the answers must come easily. Let us face the truth. There has yet been no Indian film, which could be acclaimed on all counts. Where other countries have achieved, we have only attempted and that too not always with honesty.

No doubt this lack of maturity can be attributed to several factors. The producers will tell you about that mysterious entity 'the mass', which goes in for this sort of 'thing', the technicians will blame the tools and the director will have much to say about the wonderful things he had in mind but could not achieve because of 'the conditions'.

In India it would seem that the fundamental concept of a coherent dramatic pattern existing in time was generally misunderstood.

Often by a queer process of reasoning, movement was equated with action and action with melodrama. The analogy with music failed in our case because Indian music is largely improvisational.

B.1.1. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statement:

1. The Cinema commands the respect accorded to any other form of creative expression.
2. The Cinema doesn't combine the cold logic of science.
3. Film production in India is quantitatively second only to Hollywood.
4. India has achieved what other countries have achieved.
5. Indian music is largely improvisational.

B.1.2. Study the lesson carefully and complete the following sentences on the basis of your reading:

1. By the twenties it had reachedof big business.
2. Why were our film not shown
3. The technicians will the tools.
4. The first feature was shot in
5. The with music failed in our case.

B.1.3. Answer the following questions very briefly:

1. Who has written this essay?
2. Which is the most potent and versatile art form?

3. Were Indian films shown abroad a few decades ago?

4. When was the first short film produced?

Almost every passing phase of the American cinema has had its repercussion on the Indian films. Stories have been written based on Hollywood successes and the cliches preserved with care. Even where the story has been a genuinely Indian one, the background music has revealed an irrepressible penchant for the jazz idiom.

It should be realised that the average American film is a bad model, if only because it depicts a way of life so utterly at variance with our own. Moreover, the high technical polish, which is the hallmark of the standard Hollywood product, would be impossible to achieve under existing Indian conditions. What the Indian cinema needs today is not more gloss, but more imagination, more integrity, and a more intelligent appreciation of the limitations of the medium.

After all we do possess the primary tools of filmmaking. The complaint of the technicians notwithstanding, mechanical devices such as the crane shot and the process shot are useful, but by no means indispensable. What our cinema needs above everything else is a style, an idiom, a sort of iconography of cinema, which would be uniquely and recognisably Indian.

The majority of our films are replete with such 'visual dissonances'. But the truly Indian film should steer clear of such inconsistencies and look for its material in the more basic aspects of Indian life, where habit and speech, dress and manners, background and foreground, blend into a harmonious whole.

It is only in a drastic simplification of style and content that hope for the Indian cinema resides. At present, it would appear that nearly all the prevailing practices go against such a simplification.

Starting a production without adequate planning, sometimes even without a shooting script, penchant for convolutions of plot and counter plot rather than the strong, simple unidirectional narrative: the practice of sandwiching musical numbers in the most unlyrical situations, the habit of shooting indoors in a country which is all landscape, and at a time when all other countries are turning to the documentary for inspiration – all these stand in the way of the evolution of a distinctive style.

There have been rare glimpses of an enlightened approach in a handful of recent films. IPTA's 'Dharti-ke-Lal' is an instance of a strong simple theme put over with style, honesty and technical competence. Shankar's 'Kalpana', an inimitable and highly individual experiment shows a grasp of filmic movement, and a respect for tradition.

The raw material of the cinema is life itself. It is incredible that a country which has inspired so much painting, music and poetry should fail to move the filmmakers. He has only to keep his eyes open, and his ears. Let him do so.

B.2.1. Complete the following sentences on the basis of the unit you have studied:

1. Stories have been written on Hollywood success.
2. It should be realised that the average American film is a bad.....
3. After all, we do..... the primary tools of film making.
4. The of our films are replete with 'visual dissonances'.



5. But the truly Indian film should..... clear of such inconsistencies.
6. There rare glimpses of an enlightened approach in a handful of recent films.

B.2.2. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. Have average American films been a bad model? Give one reason.
2. Mention one thing/ feature which Indian films need?
3. Do Indian film makers possess the primary tools of film making?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

phenomena(n): (plural of phenomenon): happenings

potent (adj): powerful

versatile (adj): command over many qualities

architecture (n) : art and science of building

statistical (adj) : collection of information

potential (adj) : inner ability

acclaimed (v) : approved, applauded

maturity (adj) : to come to full development

mysterious (adj) : impossible to understand

melodrama (n) : emotional drama

improvisational (adj) : composing music with a play

repercussion (n) : consequence of an event

hall mark (n) : mark used for marking the standard

cliches (n) : phrase or idea used so often that has become stale

irrepressible (adj) : uncontrollable

gloss (n) : bright appearance(fig:sometimes deceptive)

indispensable (adj) : Not dispensable, absolutely necessary

IPTA (abbre): Indian People's Theatre Association

replete (adj) : holding much, filled with

dissonances (n) : combination of notes, not in harmony

inconsistencies (n) : contradictions

convolutions (n) : coil, twist

landscape (n) : inland scenery

evolution (n) : process of developing



C.1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. "What our cinema needs above everything else is a style, an idiom, a sort of iconography of cinema, which would be uniquely and recognisably Indian." How far this applies to the Indian cinema today? Discuss.
2. Should cinema be looked upon as a form of creative expression? Give reasons.
3. Do you think that Indian films have certain basic weaknesses? Illustrate your answer, citing examples from the films you have seen.
4. What is the most dominant influence on the Indian films?
5. What aspects of the American films do our films imitate? Is it justified in our context?

C.2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following topics in groups or pairs:

1. "Television programmes do a lot of harm to students".
2. The rising incidents of crime are the offshoot of violent scenes on Indian celluloid.



C.3. COMPOSITION

1. Write a letter to the Director of Doordarshan requesting him to give you an opportunity to participate in the weekly T.V. Programme

which interests you very much. Mention why you find yourself suitable for such a programme.

2. Write your impression of a Hindi film which you have seen recently.

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

varsetile, inavetable, potencial, repelite, phinonomena.

Ex. 2. Frame your own sentences using the following words:

creation potential solely queer

gloss adequate incredible

D.2

Ex. 1. Match the words or phrases in Column A with the meanings given in Column B.

A	B
conferred	art of painting
architecture	given (degree etc.)
indispensable	process of developing
evolution	essential
gloss	art and science of building
inconography	smooth bright surface

D.3

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out five sentences in which phrases have been used. Now use those phrases in sentences of your own.

E. GRAMMAR (Adverb Clause of Condition)

Ex. 1. Look at the following sentences:-

If you get late, you will miss the train.

You will not succeed unless you work hard.

In the examples given above “If you get late” and “unless you work hard” are conditions. So, this clause is called Adverb Clause of Condition.

Now study the examples given below :- Clauses of Condition are underlined.

- (i) If you make a promise, you must keep it.
- (ii) In case it rains, I shall not go out. Adverb clause of condition begins with if, unless, in case, so long as, provided, provided that etc.

Ex.1.1 Make five sentences using unless, provided , in case, so long as,

Ex.1.2 Fill in the blanks with “should” or “Ought to”

1. We help our neighbours.
2. He speak the truth.
3. Everybody trust his friends.
4. She read this novel.
5. You work for the welfare of the country.

Ex.1. 3. Read the following sentences carefully:

1. *You ought to go immediately.*
2. *She ought to apologise for her behaviour.*

3. Do you think I should go?
4. *You should write a letter and find out when he is coming.*

'Should' and 'ought to' have some moral connotations, 'ought to' is stronger and indicates moral obligation whereas 'should' indicates a recommendation. It is used in giving or asking for advice.

Now make five sentences each with 'ought to' and 'should'.

Ex.1.4. Read the following sentences carefully:

Read the lines of the text from 6 to 15 and frame as many questions as you can, using 'wh' words or auxiliaries. One example has been done for you.

Which was the first short film produced?

F. ACTIVITIES

1. Prepare a list of such actors who have been given 'Dada Saheb Phalke' award.
2. Prepare a list of such Indian films which give lessons of integrity, patriotism and examples of human rights.

G. TRANSLATION

Translate the following sentences into Hindi/your mother tongue.

1. India took up film production surprisingly early.
2. Why were our films not shown abroad ?
3. Let us face the truth.
4. The technician will blame the tools.

5. It should be realised that the average American film is a bad model.
6. What does our cinema need?
7. Let him do so.
8. He has only to keep his eyes open.

