Content Evolution in South Indian Cinema Mediated by Digital Technologies of 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

In spite of other media industries such as Radio, Print and Television adapted to using digital technologies, the cinema industry stuck in celluloid medium itself until second decade of 21st century until the computational power got increased exponentially. Though the digital use started in 1990s it took three decades for the Industry to completely adapt to digital medium. The celluloid medium acted as barrier for experimenting different content due to its nature that demands heavy expenses, complicated workflow and man power. Digital technologies opened up the barriers laid by celluloid technology thus expanded the horizons for creative experiments and an invitation for new entrants due to its user friendly simplicity in nature. Twenty first century fosters the Indie film movement where many young minds are encouraged to get into movie making with cheaper digital tools that are available. The blockbuster success and critically acclaimed six Telugu debut talents movies that were released in the year 2019 cite an example of how the film industry is getting changed towards ease and lighter way. Many indie movies started coming out with fresh approaches in the content and structure. A sneak preview of OTT platforms like Amazon Prime, Netflix, YouTube Channels, and a host of other online video platforms is a standing testimony for democratization of creativity in the field of cinema. Entry of corporate firms and the new promising technologies the industry is getting more opportunities to their wings on different app based viewing platforms. The new opportunities also throw challenges in quality contents of cinema. Since the technology is easily available at less cost people with narrow filthy ideas can enter the industry and easily disseminate their irrelevant bad contents. There are threats on spoiling narrative context of film without an inherent perils of the story. This study aims at exploring the unconventional cinema content that are experimented by new entrants in the cinema industry. The two variables, Celluloid and Digital have been taken for analysis.

KEYWORDS: *Indian Cinema, Contemporary Cinema, Mobile Film, Unsane, Durga, Pawan, Film Finance*

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is a creative media where imagination flows unprecedentedly with the support of technology. Ricciotto Canudo termed cinema as 'Seventh Art ((Fern, 2013)' taking into account (FC, 2018) of aesthetics realm of entertainment. At the same time Walter Benjamin (1936) rejected cinema for being a mass medium devoid of the artistic aura which according to him, was forever lost in the process of mechanical reproduction (Echeverria, 2018)[i].

Cinema has been facing many such appreciation or criticism in its century-old travel changing its form and content, adapting to its physical and technical changes now and then. We have been witnessing creative clutches in cinema right from the beginning of its evolution. Creative work starts right from the scripting stage of a movie-making process that follows certain funda-mental concepts of structuring the script. All stories use plots with conflicts among the characters, without which the story will become a mundane series of events that will not make viewers stay involved with the movie. The Movie follows a structure with Act 1, Act 2 and Act 3 that propels the plot forward with a premise idea of what the screenplay is all about dealing conflict among characters using a variety of polarities in screen stories. During silent era movies have to be driven only by a visual medium which created demand for visual storytelling that holds an audience for more than an hour in theatres. Hence more experiments of storytelling through editing pattern emerged.

Even before editing technique was discovered and practiced, Edison made a movie titled Execution of Mary (1895) in which big knife chops off a woman's head. With the then existed limited technology, he experimented by stopping the camera at the right point and replaced the real character with a life-size replica of the lady and cranked the camera. When it is seen on the screen continuously, it appeared as though the guy chops-off the head. Even today, this camera technique is applied in the name of a stop-block shot. George Melies, a magician, inspired by Edison's stop block technique, produced a dozen films using this stop block technique. Lev Kule-shov; Juxtapose concept, Eisenstein; Montage theories, and many other directors like Hitchcock

and others contributed several ideas of presenting the story in a compelling visual narration style. Following the invention of the talkie films in the year 1927, dialogues complemented the function of visual that lessened the burden of conveying the audience with what they intended to say. Talkie films had an overarching function of relieving the audiences through humorous dialogues in addition to the portrayal of life like characters.

Content Evolution in Celluloid Cinema

Filmmaking always comprises of a unique blend of creativity and application of technology. This synergy creates a new realm of a creative transformation. This creative transformation always goes to the next level, whenever new instances of media technology occur. When the talkie films ar-rived, it transformed the cinema in its native form and its original narrative structure. Hitchcock contributed creative editing techniques. The introduction of surround sound brought a three-dimensional, realistic experience of space in cinema theaters. Now the new media technology developments bring mixed genre approach towards cinema not only in content but also in its form.

At the early stage of new media technologies, a group of informal filmmakers from Den-mark proclaimed the term DOGME-The Vow of Chastity: a manifesto meant for informal filmmaking (Gyenge, 2009), with a specific set of rules. Gradually, this manifesto started finding followers in Europe and other countries. Some amateur filmmakers in western countries started exploring new media technologies by substituting video cameras as a low-budget alternative for the celluloid film cameras. Later, the distinctive visual qualities of videos were explored for aesthetic storytelling aspects. Though the narrative language of a movie remains the same, the video texture helped in building up a distinct cultural resonance that uses its juxtaposition of casual and manipulated contrast genre and style. The advent of digital technologies along with exponential growth of internet facilities and broadband connectivity has unimaginable impact on creative com-munity especially in their behavior of consumption of entertainment contents.

The simultaneous growth of new media technologies and the creative community of informal filmmakers resulted in shifting away from conventional filmmaking practices. The first effect is the freedom of experimenting at no cost in the digital platform. The second effect is, since the digital platform is readily available, inexperienced people started making movies with little knowledge they have. The third effect is, digital filmmaking gives scope for the new filmmakers to make errors and mistakes. At times these mistakes were accepted as a new trend in creativity. The movie "Requiem for a dream" is one such example for breaking the conventional filmmaking concepts. In editing simultaneous close-up of two characters are used in split-screen, following a converging line of action in real time. The use of multiple-image effect in recent films experimenting non-narrative story structure and sometimes exploring visual textures has become a trend.

Content Evolution in 21st Century Fostered by Technology Inventions

The new media era enables the imagination wings of a contemporary scriptwriter to reach any destination that he wishes, by altering the whole gamut of conventional storytelling methods. Also, the new media technologies have brought in some essential modern tools for scriptwriters like this draft screenwriting software, has a "collabo" function that allows screenwriters in different locations to co-write screenplays. Such new media technologies have the potential to open up new dimensions in the scriptwriting process and make moviemaking easier and more mobiles at all levels. Digital technologies embolden the scriptwriters to experiment by varying the presentation of a protagonist and antagonist with different confrontation and resolution levels. An ultimate change in conventional storytelling has been confronted in recent years by the young new directors. The movie "Vikram Vetha" directed by young couples; Pushkar and Gayatri confronted both pro-tagonist and antagonist changing from one to another by way of bringing who decides who is right and wrong. In reality, all human being makes mistakes, and no one is perfect. This concept is reflected in the movie with an open ending to be decided by the audience on who is right.

India's recently released big-budget blockbuster movies like "Enthiran" "Bajirao Mastani" and "Bahubali" had set the trends for the ultimate use of graphics. A list of shoestring budget movies to high budget movies, which strive to engage an audience equally witnesses the new me-dia technologies era ushers in yet another new wave in the cinema industry. KenDancyger states that there is going to be three significant forms of cinema in the digital age (Dancyger, 2007).

"High-end features that push the technologies and budget to create, smoothly ren-dered fantasies. These features will allow the making of even more constructed worlds at the content level, although the visual styles that communicate these worlds will remain conservative.

Mainstream features that depend on standardized high-end, digital production technology and ultimately widespread digital projection. These video films will replace features as we know them, but there is little that can be done creatively in this style that cannot be done on film, and for such productions, the savings that digital video might bring are a minimal element in the budget.

Independent features made in the digital video. These independent features can be divided into those that might have been shot on film, but for financial reasons are not, and those that are conceived from the ground up as digital features, and whose writing and design are constructed around the particular aesthetic of digital video".

It is very well evident that the entire world produces these three primary forms of a film. When analyzing movies released in recent years, one could draw the link to what Ken Dancyger states in his book Alternative Scriptwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules. High-end technologies push the creativity to an unimaginable level of fantasy. The Indian film industry is also no exception to Ken Dancyger's theory. Enthiran (2010) Ra One (2011), Bahubali (2015), 24 (2016) are a few examples of such high-end technology driven movies influenced by the new media digital platform. The second form of cinema, Main Stream features that continues with the usual type of storytelling but use the new media technologies for widespread digital projection to maximize

revenues for instance, Kabali (2016) which was released in 5,000 theatres simultaneously, recorded a massive collection of several hundred crores, within short span of 10 days of its release worldwide. The last category of independent small budget films that are conceived and structured around a particular aesthetic form supported by the digital platform. For example, Vazhakku En 18/9 (2012), Lucia (2013), Aruvi (2016) are some examples of content-oriented films that were supported by digital technology within the financial limitations of filmmakers.

Though budget wise movies differ, genre-wise Indian movies follow a mixed pattern to attract all sectors of audiences. Some audiences enjoy a particular genre. For example, teens tend to slide on for gunfights, deployment of weaponry, expertise in horsemanship, and survival skill in what is necessarily a primitive wilderness in the case of older people, melodrama where rela-tionships, their evolution, and their outcome play central attraction. Hence movies are made with multiple mixes of a genre considering all sectors of audiences to keep them engaged in the plot so that they stay relaxed and entertained. The ease of access enabled by the new media technologies for movies to reach different parts of the world demands resurgence in a genre and presentation style against civilization rather than material goals. The digital cinema is taking an international dimension in which the stakes of human drama grow increasingly dangerous. The digital era has taken non-linear interconnected story approach with less conventional plot and with the intensity of the individual scene rather than from the organization of a progressive scene. The digital me-dium has not changed the stories but has just moved to another frontier.

It is an interesting scenario, how the new media technologies influenced the creative deci-sions and approach of a filmmaker towards filmmaking by a comparative study of two contempo-rary filmmakers hailing from a same demographic area and industry; the two Stevens of Holly-wood who is revolutionizing the form of cinema from their perspective. Steven Spielberg, who is fantasizing the cinema by using a high-end computer, generated images to narrate his story. Steven Soderbergh, who is simplifying the form of cinema through his simple yet catchier films. The contrasting impulse of these two directors and their approach to narrative strategies have opened up two distinct digital cinema genres. Steven Soderbergh released the movie titled Unsane on 23rd March 2018, till then it was secretly kept under wraps until he announced its release at Sundance film festival. He stated in an interview at Sundance Film Festival on 26th Jan 2018 that he shot this movie entirely using i-phone with no conventional kind of filmmaking equipment (Brody, 2018). Soderbergh attempted the model of Fingerprint Release, a self-financed movie Logan Lucky (2017) screened in over 3,000 screens, moving beyond studio arena and emerging as a new chapter in filmmaking aspect. For debut directors, the new media digital technologies give immense op-portunities to try low-budget scripts with more confidence and thereby showcase their work to the audiences easily than it was during the celluloid period. The hype, the glamour, the star attraction is getting reduced in recent times. One such movie that hit the silver screen breaking the conven-tional form of cinema and breaking the barriers of opinion leaders is the mega-hit movie titled 'Aruvi (2017)' directed by Arun Prabu Purushothaman as his debut film. While sharing his expe-rience, he said, none of the producers came forward to produce the movie. The digital technology has made the movie possible; within the limited resources he could manage to complete the movie. The movie was made in an entirely new form in an unprecedented fashion. Every nook and corner of Tamilnadu talks about this movie, and it is the audience who had taken up the movie to the height of success. This movie is an excellent example for audience expectation of social content themes and not just fantasy hip hops by well-known heroes. While sharing the experience, the director recalls how difficult is the movie market scenario for debut films that have no established names in its credits. He explains how he managed to release the movie taking the festival route for familiarizing the movie to the specific audience. Then it took almost a year to get it released in commercial movie theaters (Chakraborthy, 2017).
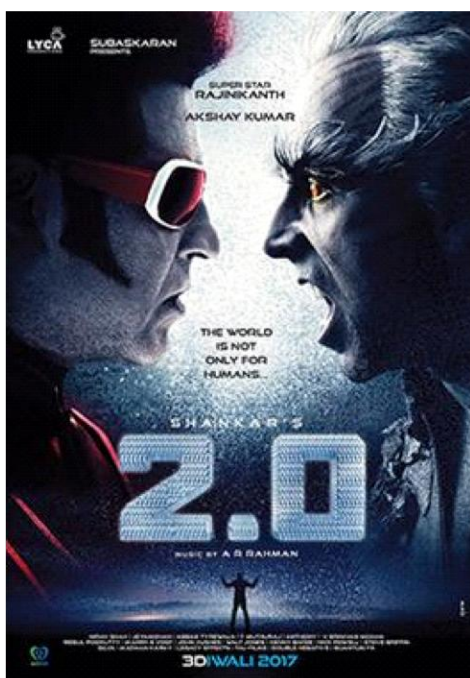

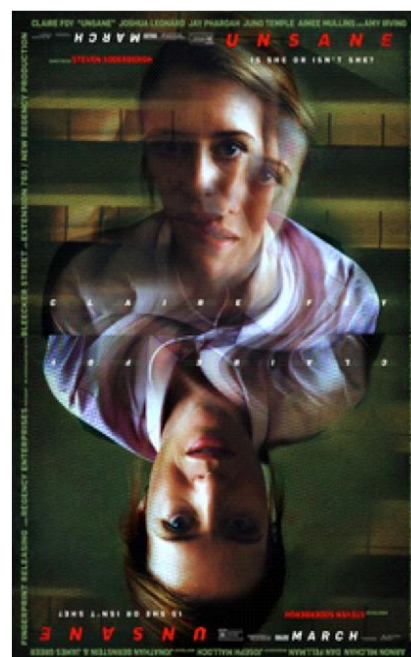**Figure8. 2.0 Movie Poster, Source: Timesnow**

Figure 9. Unsane Movie Poster Source: IMDB Website

Figure10. Aruvi Movie Poster, Source: Indian Express News

Kannada film director Pawan Kumar produced Lucia (2013). Without popular character or plot development, the sensual acts linking urban and rural environments, the graphics quality of the present and dream world he is in, are the most tangible elements of this movie. The narrative elements did not emerge in isolation but are instead storytelling tropes traced back to a highly varied modernist legacy and, these intertext complex assemblages are more befitting the label 'postmodern digital cinema' (Service, 2019). Lucia is a critically acclaimed movie for its radical approach in storytelling and touched a milestone in theater collection (Bhumika, 2013). The PVR 'Director's-Rare' banner released the movie. Because of digital technology he was able to make such brilliant movie narrated in a non-linear manner with the parallel editing of reality and hallucination shots in black and white.

On sharing his experience, He insists that the way digital technology used for making movies and the way it is used for other purposes are entirely different. Filmmakers must learn the nuances of using digital technology for filmmaking so that they achieve the quality of a celluloid cinema. He feels that the digital technology suppressed the quality of storytelling and authenticity of cinema as art due to readily available tools to budding filmmakers who start making movies with their superficial knowledge. He feels that with the digital technology, filmmakers often have no respect for what they are doing, just because the technology is easily available they end up re-shooting again and again. He feels that the celluloid film demanded certain discipline in the entire process of filmmaking. Whereas, the digital technology opened the way for leniency, which affects the complete perspective of filmmaking. Pawan concludes that young filmmakers should look the digital medium for making a good movie and not take it for granted because it is readily available (Chaudhury, 2013).

Sanal Kumar Sasidharan who is seen as a ray of hope for the indie film makers. After the successful accomplishment in Malayalam film industry with five feature films, he strongly be-lieves in constant adaptation to new forms of cinema that's wary from conventional three-act struc-ture

(Srivatsan, 2020). He mainly focuses on bridging the gap between real and screen form. One of his film S Durga, has faced many obstacles for getting released in the theater mainly due to the content of the movie. In spite of its recognize in festival circuits, he could not make it to get screened in theaters due to resistance by religious people towards the content of the movie. Finally with the help of promotional campaign kicked off by veteran film maker Adoor Gopalakrishnan, through street plays and mobile cinema vehicle, the film got released in few theaters under audience demand (FC, 2018).

Conclusion

It is very well evident from the digital era filmmakers like Arun Purushothaman and Pawan Kumar that the new filmmakers stand at the intersection of the lure and blur where we could see the outlines of new art forms with the shattered grammar of cinema a tenuous and elu-sive century-old language. Though the distinctive, conflicting content ushered by young film makers faces resistance and disinclination of acceptance by few members of the society, the con-stant efforts by these young filmmakers pushes the boundaries of cinema to next level. Thus the twenty first century cinema satisfies the expectation of the new millennium audience by enhancing the undefined stylistic and narrative techniques in filmmaking. There is no doubt that the new media digital technology has transformed the mode of perception and awareness of the new generation filmmakers.

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