



COURSE CODE: MAMCD 401

COURSE NAME: UNDERSTANDING
CINEMA

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**MASS COMMUNICATION
AND JOURNALISM**

BLOCK II



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MMC-401: UNDERSTANDING CINEMA

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Joya Chakraborty	Associate Professor & Head, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University
Dr. P. Anbarasan	Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University
Dr. Uttam Kumar Pegu	Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University
Ms. Madhusmita Boruah	Assistant Professor, Mass Communication, Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University

CONTRIBUTOR

Module III & IV	Dr. Sayanika Dutta, Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Media Studies, Cotton University
	Dr. Bharati Bharali, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Journalism, Gauhati University

EDITOR

Dr. P. Anbarasan	Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University
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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Films as a medium of communication play pivotal role in shaping the society through developing worldviews of the audience. Although films are commonly considered as piece of entertainment, yet it is beyond such common notion of the mass as films can bring changes in the society through representing the reality to us.

Film Studies as a significant course under the postgraduate programme in Mass Communication gives a holistic approach of understanding films from both theoretical as well as conceptual framework. The **Module I** of the course deals with the growth and development of Cinema, **Module II** is about cinematic story telling , **Module III** explains Film Genre and Theories and **Module IV** is based on technology and film appreciation. The Module I and II comes under Block I and Module III and IV comes under Block II. The Module I discusses meaning of cinema under Unit 1 which includes topics such as importance of film studies, National and International perspectives on cinema, cinema and society. Unit 2 discusses origin and evolution of film technology perceptual constancy, development of instrument and also it mentions the role of pioneers such as Lumiere Brothers, Thomas Alva Edison, George Melies, etc. in film making. Unit 3, 4 and 5 explains the growth and evolution of cinema in context to World, India and North East India respectively.

Module II of this course is based on the concept of cinematic storytelling. Unit 6 under this module talks about Film Structures including the form and content of film, camera movement, lighting, editing, etc. Unit 7 explains the semiotic theory of cinema, signs, symbols, codes, iconography, mise-en-scene, etc. as a part of film language. Again Unit 8 is based on the concept of Film Narrative. Module III is based on Film Genres and Theories. Unit 9 under this module discusses meanings and functions of genre, Film genres and characteristics, classical Hollywood genre and Indian formula films.

Unit 10 emphasizes on the film theories including Auteurist Film Theory, Psychoanalytic Model, Feminist Model , Cognitive Model

ideological model, etc. Unit 11 and 12 under this model discusses film movements and documentary films respectively.

Module IV is based on aspects of film technology and Film appreciation. Unit 13 focuses on films and technology and Unit 14 is based on Film appreciation and criticism including topics such as aesthetics of films writing, film reviews and criticism, film as art , textual and contextual analysis of film, etc.

MODULE III: FILM GENRES AND THEORIES

UNIT 9: FILM GENRES

Unit Structure

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit i.e. Unit 8, you learnt about film narrative. The different structural elements of a film's narrative, the difference between a story and a plot and the principles of plot construction were discussed. After going through the previous Unit, you must be now clear that a film narrative has two parts – the story and a discourse also called the plot.

In this Unit, you will learn about film genres and the different types of films based on genres. The beginning part of the unit will introduce you to the concept of film genres and its ever evolving nature. Following

this, you will get to learn about some major film genres, their place of origin and their characteristics in terms of narrative, central theme, characters and plot etc.

9.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Discuss the concept of film genre
- Distinguish between different film genres and their characteristics

9.3 FILM GENRE

Before dwelling into the concept of film genres, let us try to look at what 'genre' means in common parlance. 'Genre' means any category of a particular thing say literature, music or any art or entertainment form which can be written, spoken, audio or visual and are based on some set of criteria peculiar to the genre. For example, music can be classified into different genres such as classical, folk, popular etc. Genres develop by convention and may undergo changes over time. A genre may be defined as a category belonging to a shared tradition or a set of conventions. A particular genre may have sub-genres too. Anything belongs to a particular genre because of its specific and calculated style. Genres are classification based on a common pattern or peculiar style.

A film genre is nothing but a categorization of films based on certain parameters. Genres are clearly defined types of films that adhere to a set of visual and narrative patterns that are unique within the genre. Films having similarities belong to a particular genre. The term 'film genre' refers to a group of motion pictures that express similar stylistic, thematic and structural interests. The theories of film genre are borrowed from literary genre criticism. A film genre is defined by a set of codes and conventions. A genre is much more than a generic cataloguing of the film type. It also refers to the spectator expectation.

Different discourses feed into a film and form generic structures. The notion of genre serves as a key determinant of a film's meaning.

Talking of film genres, it is not just the content of the film that determines a genre but also the other processes involved in a film i.e. production, marketing and consumption. Marketing includes the hyperbolic statements and hype that is created around a film and consumption refers to the practices of the audience and critics.

9.3.1 Evolving nature of genres

The study of genres is as old as Aristotle. Genre dates back to earliest cinema and was seen as a way of organizing films according to their types. However, the problem with genres is that genres are not static; they constantly evolve and disappear with time.

A film genre is both a static and a dynamic system. It is static because it is a similar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic component. Films often portray static thematic characteristics with little or no variations. It is a dynamic system because a number of things such as changes in cultural attitudes, emergence of new genres and economics of the industry refine a film genre. As such their nature is continually evolving.

The term 'genre' in films draws from literature and other art forms such as music, painting etc. In literature, genre means a distinctive type of composition in terms of form and content. Film genre, though literary in origin, was used to identify the film industry's reaction to a popular demand for certain kinds of entertainment. When producers realized the huge market potential of film narratives, they started catering to the appetite of audiences for stories of romance, adventure, mystery, comedy, social satires and other narrative forms that appealed to the audience at large. However, producers failed to realize that film genre was a part of the historical evolution of the sub-divisions of literature since the time of Aristotle.

In his *Poetics* written in 335 BC, Aristotle defined poetry as a mode of three important types of initiation – epic, tragic and comic. These three

narrative forms have survived through the centuries and also find its application in film genres.

Films have inherited the three main sub-divisions of literary narrative forms: the epic, tragic or dramatic and comic. Other sub-divisions have evolved out of these categories. For example, epics have taken the form of biblical and historical sagas, westerns, wars and melodramas. Epic films have certain characteristics. They are lengthy, contain wide screen presentations and spectacular effects and incur high production costs. Tragic or dramatic literary genre has taken forms of modern film melodrama such as romance, crime, film noir, horror, war, thriller etc. More often, epic and tragic genres overlap. The comic genre has come to include slapsticks, screwball, dance and music, and satires.

The genesis of film genre was a result of literary evolution and primarily financial factors that determined the forms films production would adopt. The themes which were more favorably responded to were produced by the early film-makers. For example, biblical and historical films were more popular and hence movies like *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916), *The Fall of Babylon* (1917) became huge hits. Such epic films were characterized by lengthy, episodic plots, huge casts, spectacular effects, colourful landscapes, elaborate sets and elevated subject matter. Such epic films were characterized by popular heroes. Epics also portrayed the dark side of humanity in the 1930s and were later revisited in epics like *The Godfather I & II* (1972 & 1974).

Usually an epic is not an everyday, ordinary story. Hence epics heavily borrow from the Bible, Greek and Roman mythology. These epics are very popular among audience because as Sigmund Freud stated that epics serve as fulfillment of tribal wish.

Tragic: With time, the tragic genre has expanded to include drama and melodrama. Melodrama is a term commonly applied to the opera. Melodramas feature actors who are easily recognized by the audience. The protagonist or the hero and heroine and antagonist or the anti-hero or villain are characters people easily connect to. Just as the protagonist

easily command the audiences' regard, the villain also is a popular star, someone "people love to hate". Between the 1930s and 1950s, dramas and melodramas were driven by star power rather than the film plot or theme.

Comic: Comedy in films comes in different forms. However, the most popular in comic genre are the romantic archetype films. Such films usually centered on man-woman relationship. The most usual narratives used in such films involve a man trying to woo a woman in which multiple situations are combined to have a happy ending.

9.3.2 Approaches to film genre

The study of film genre has two basic approaches – the descriptive approach and the functional approach. Descriptive approach is a straightforward approach to analyzing films. This approach involves viewing a film as belonging to a category. In simple words, this approach defines each genre according to its properties. It is supposed that the film shares the same aspects with other films belonging to the same category and is analyzed comparatively. Readily identifiable elements of a genre such as plot, shot transitions, costume, location, character archetypes are analyzed to study films. The major drawback of the descriptive approach is that it may over emphasize the formal and stylistic qualities of a film while ignoring how a film's meanings and impact may change over time. Different films may convey a different meaning and leave a different impact on its audience.

The functional approach perceives a film of a particular genre as a collective expression of contemporary life that strikes a resonant chord with the audience. This approach defines the function of genre films and makes an attempt to relate a film to its historical and social context. It argues that genre films represent the basic values and anxieties of a society and is a product of a time and place.

ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. “A film genre is both a static and a dynamic system”. Explain

2. What are the three main sub-divisions of literary narrative forms that films inherit?

3. Name the two approaches to the study of film genre?

9.4 MAJOR FILM GENRES

9.4.1 Western

The Western is perhaps one of the oldest film genres of the American film industry. It is also known as ‘Horse opera’ or ‘Oater’. Characteristically American in nature, western films are all about the untamed and expansive American frontiers and the borderline between civilization and wilderness. Such films are set in the frontier West that existed in North America before the process of civilizing took place.

As a cultural category, the Western precedes the cinema. The Western emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century in different pre-cinematic forms such as the novel, theatrical plays and shows, painting etc. The Western already existed before the arrival of films. However, films provided an opportunity to create exciting visual images and movement by fleshing out cultural stories about the western expansion and the conflict between the natives and the settlers. The Western genre of films succeeded in establishing a chord with the audience and in no time became popular. Interestingly, by 1910, around 20 percent of American films were Westerns. The period during 1930-1960 was the most prolific era of the Western film genre.

Characteristics of Western film:

- **Central Theme:** The Western genre is not as simple as it sounds and therefore defies an easy summary. Such films often portray the subordination of nature and the conquest of wilderness in the name of civilization. Taking away of the territorial rights of the original inhabitants of the frontier are also depicted in Westerns.

Another central conflict in Westerns is the struggle between violence and law. The society is depicted as organized around codes of honour and personal justice dispensed by gunfights. In Westerns, the images and settings are closely linked to the underlying social values. Honour codes are played out through the depiction of a character seeking personal revenge against someone who wronged him. The concept of personal justice outlaws the justice systems usually established around the world.

- **Characters:** It often centered on the life of a heavily armed cowboy or gunfighter who rides horses and usually leads a nomadic life. The hero in Westerns is seen constantly operating between two factors – civilization and wilderness. He never really wants to accept civilization and is desirous of being on the move in the Wild West. The heroes of Westerns are seen displaying restless energy and rugged individualism which define their characterization. These characters are seen sporting cowboy hats, bandannas, boots and buckskins. Such films also peculiarly portray a protagonist's violent skills in a public space. The horse is another focal point of a Western, almost presented like a second hero.
- **Narrative:** Westerns incorporate elements from different modes of screen reality. Period costumes and detailed set design establish a feel of historical realism that co-exists with the film's

narrative. In Westerns, the narrative is overpowered by action and adventure and the supremely powerful wilderness of the protagonists and the antagonists. The overemphasis on action, adventure and wilderness draws away the historical realism of the genre into a fantasy mode.

Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) is considered to be the first Western which set the pattern for many films that followed. Gilbert M. Anderson of 'Broncho Billy' fame was the first star of a Western film genre. Other stars that became quite popular during that period were William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Buck Jones, William Boyd, Clint Eastwood, etc. Some of the popular Westerns include *Stagecoach* (1939), *Red River* (1948), *High Noon* (1952), *Shane* (1953), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Unforgiven* (1992) etc.

9.4.2 Musical

Musicals are an extremely lighthearted genre. Music serves as an integral part of a musical. The songs and music are interwoven into the narrative of a musical. Mere addition of songs does not make a musical. An important characteristic of musicals is that characters are uninhibited and express their thoughts and desires through song and dance. The songs and music help in advancing the plot of the film and the development of the characters.

Musicals originated in America. However, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Japan have also contributed to the development of this genre. Film musicals originate from the musical theatre performances that combined songs, dance, acting and dialogue on stage. The emergence of sound in films led the way for the musical genre. Films like *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *The Broadway Melody* (1929) set the stage for musicals in Hollywood.

The earlier musicals produced between the 1930-50s offered anti-realist and stylized designs. The narrative of the musicals produced this period centered on romance, courtship phase of romantic couple etc. Classical musicals such as *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), *An American in Paris* (1951), *Singing in the Rain* (1952) etc. express optimism, innocence and the absence of cynicism.

The contemporary musicals, on the other hand, follow a more realistic style. The extravagant song, dance and drama sequences accompanied by extravagant lighting and camera seem superficial for the contemporary audiences who have trouble accepting the conventions of classical musical films.

All in all, musicals are a lighthearted genre that celebrates life, love, romance, desires and the joys and simplicities of life. Musicals are heavily laden with music, song and dance. The lyrics often support the story line. Since musicals aim to create a world of fantasy, it is considered as the most escapist of all major film genres.

Characteristics of Musicals

- **Central Theme:** While the theme of musicals varies from love, romance, courtship, emotions etc, there is a sense of utopia in such films. In musicals happiness wins over sorrow and the good rules over the evil.
- **Characters:** Musicals are considered an escapist genre owing to its sheer lack of realism. The portrayal of happy-go-lucky characters is a common sight in the classic musicals. As mentioned above, the characters of musicals are uninhibited. They sing and dance and outwardly express their emotions. Characters sing and dance directly to the film audience rather than any ostensible audience within the film's story.

- **Narrative:** Musicals tend to have straight and simple narratives. The story seamlessly flows from one point to the other. The narrative is set like a dreamlike sequence.

Starting from the 1930s, musicals made headway in Hollywood. The dawn of the 1930s marked the beginning of the golden age of musicals. In the 1950s and 60s, many theatre and stage production were adapted into musical films. Disney's animated musicals like *Cindrella* (1950), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) became instant hits among viewers. Other remarkable musicals of that period such as *Mary Poppins* (1964), *My Fair Lady* (1964), *The Sound of Music* (1965) were huge successes. The 1990s heralded the golden age for Disney's musicals like *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), *Tarzan* (1999) etc. The 2016 oscar wining *La La Land* was the recent by musical.

9.4.3 Film noir

Film noir is a film genre which is marked by pessimism, fatalism and menace. The term "film noir" was coined by the French film critics in 1946 to designate a particular type of American thriller. The French categorized the hard-boiled detective novels as roman noir, 'noir' meaning "black" in French. Drawing an analogy from the roman noir, they coined the term "film noir" to imply a new type of American thriller that hit the screens of the newly liberated France in 1944. The film noir is considered to be a sub-genre of crime thrillers or gangster movies. It is because of this that film noir is considered as a movement rather than a genre.

These new types of American thrillers were characterized by dark, downbeat and black theme and looks. Films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *My Sweet* (1944), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Laura* (1944) made the French film critics

look at the dark settings of these films. Such kind of films was termed as film noir.

Film noirs portrayed the dark and inhumane side of human nature. Such films emphasize the brutal, shadowy, dark and sadistic sides of the human experience. The overall mood of a film noir is marked by skepticism, pessimism, anxiety and suspicion.

Film noir emerged from a period of political instability between 1941-1958 that arose during the time of the Second World War and the Cold War. This new kind of thriller films reflected the tensions, insecurities and paranoia that prevailed in the United States during that period of time owing to threat of nuclear annihilation. It was a period during which the American national identity was under severe strain. American films made during this period started using a particular visual style. This visual style gave way to the term 'film noir'.

Characteristics of Film noir:

Central Theme: In terms of theme, film noir is all about power relations and sexual identity. The element of *femme fatale* is common to such films. *Femme fatale* means a 'fatal woman' in French who is intelligent and sexually appealing. She uses this to her advantage of wooing and manipulating men into doing what she wants. The protagonist of film noir is often seen getting attracted to a *femme fatale* who becomes responsible for all his troubles. Film noir gives a central role to *femme fatale* who is in charge of her own sexuality and is intelligent, powerful, active and dominant. Some films may also end up showing the *femme fatale* confirming to the patriarchal system. Such women are portrayed in film noir as ambiguous, powerful, mysterious and deadly. While *femme fatale* is given prominence in film noir and it is she who becomes central to the intrigue, the emphasis is more on her sexuality than her role.

Characters: The portrayal of characters in such films is unclear. Characters are lit and framed in a way that leads to ambiguity or uncertainty about the character of the film. Lighting up one half of the character's face while leaving the other half in the dark creates this uncertainty. There is a particular type of psychology associated with the protagonist.

Narrative: Film noir narratives are often presented in a non-linear fashion. They are indirect and contain twists. The narratives are complex and bold. Flashbacks are frequently used in film noirs.

Some of the popular Film Noirs include *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Chinatown* (1974), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Third Man* (1949), *Blood Simple* (1984), *Kiss me Deadly* (1955), *They live by Night* (1948).

9.4.4 Science Fiction

Science fiction as a film genre has existed since the early years of silent movies. Also known as 'sci-fi', this genre of films employs speculative and imaginative science-based depictions. Therefore concepts like time travel, aliens and extraterrestrial life etc. form a part of science fictions.

Science films as a literary genre emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century. It was in response to the advances made in science and technology during that period. Jules Verne and H.G. Wells were two prolific and exemplary writers of the science fiction genre. As stated above, sci-fi existed during the silent era. However, very few films were produced during that time. It was only after the 1950s that science fiction as a film genre established its presence.

Science fictions are films which depict stories about science and technology and apply futuristic thinking to it. Such films are related to science as they apply partially true and partially fictitious theories of science. It transports the viewers into a world of fantasy. Science fictions also portray the relation between science and society and the impact of scientific developments on humanity.

Science fiction as a film genre engages with debates around topics like the future, extraterrestrial forces, technological inventions, artificial creations, time travel, scientific experimentation, mutation, or natural disasters. Georges Melie's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), a French silent film, is perhaps the earliest example of a science fiction film. In this film, the director portrays a voyage to the moon by a group of astronomers.

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, a German film, is considered as the first feature-length science-fiction. The film is set in a futuristic urban society. The film is about a wealthy city ruler's son and a poor female worker who try to overcome the gulf between the people of different classes in their city.

Characteristics of science fiction films

Central Theme: The science fiction films made before 1950 portrayed technology as a science-demon that would destroy humanity. The films made after 1950s centered on portraying humanity at risk from alien intruders. Alien's invasions of the earth, contraction in the outer space, concept of an alien planet were the central themes during that period. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) introduced realism to the science fiction genre. The film made use of excellent visual effect and made realistic portrayal of space travel. It introduced technology as man's potential enemy. During the later years, science fictions portrayed computer-human interface, disaster, alien invasion, genetic experimentation with films like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Armageddon* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *Jurassic Park* (1993) etc. Overall, futuristic societies, space flight, alien invaders, disaster, mutant-monster stories form the major themes of science fiction.

Characters: Just like other films, science fictions also have heroes and villains. Also because of its futuristic settings, there may be extraterrestrial life forms too. In most science fictions, the characters are seen to be in control of advanced technology and power. Aliens, mutants, androids, humanoid robots or any character arising out of future human evolution are part of science fictions.

Narrative: The narrative of science fiction films may center on the conflict between the good and evil. The narratives often explore the development or application of a new technology (spaceships, robots, and nanotechnology), new scientific principles (time travel) or new political system (utopian and dystopian societies).

Some popular science fictions include *Avatar* (2009), *Alien* (1979), *Inception* (2010), *The Martian* (2015), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *The Avengers* (2012), *Gravity* (2013), *X-Men* series (2000, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2016) etc.

Science fictions have existed in the Indian film industry as well. Tamil film *Kaadu* (1952) is considered as the first science fiction film of India. The film explores the abnormal behaviour of animals in a jungle only to find out that it is caused by an invasion of woolly mammoths. The latest and commercially popular science fictions made in India include *RaOne* (2011), *Krrish 3* (2013), *Creature 3D* (2014), etc.

9.5 OTHER POPULAR GENRES

9.5.1 Crossover Films

The term ‘crossover’ film is used for an emerging form of cinema that crosses cultural borders in terms of concept, production and marketing. Such film, therefore, manifest a hybrid cinematic grammar that has a broader audience appeal.

Crossover films are those films which appeal to an international audience or earn well in the international market. Crossover films refer to films that are not grounded in a single culture or nation. The themes of crossover films are usually broad for an international audience to relate to. Crossover films may also mean cross-culturally conceptualized cinema. Crossover films are global due to their ability to transgress cultural borders, genre and audience.

The idea of crossover cinema implies the following: a) crossover in terms of audience i.e. appealing to a wider section of audience, b) cross-

cultural conceptualization i.e. incorporating cross cultural concepts in the film that leads to textual hybridity and c) overall production of the film to appeal to a broader audience.

Some border-crossing popular films made by Indian diaspora directors include Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), Nagesh Kukunoor's *Bollywood Calling* (2003) etc. Another popular crossover film is by English film director Danny Boyle - *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) – which traversed or crossed both national and cinematic boundaries. This film uses a hybrid film grammar which is a mix of Bollywood and American production techniques. The rags-to-riches theme, use of fantasy, montage sequences is all reflective of Bollywood style of film-making. On the other hand, two parallel plotline, flashbacks etc. are reflective of Hollywood style of presentation. The use of multiple languages in the film also attributes to its cross cultural characteristic. In terms of distribution also, the international distribution and publicity made it accessible to a worldwide cosmopolitan audience.

9.5.2 Action films

Action genre constitutes those films which offer a fast-paced narrative. The narrative of action films emphasizes physical actions such as fights, chases, stunts, crash and explosions etc. It is often seen that that physical actions take precedence over dialogue and character development. Action in films have been there ever since Lumeire Brother's made the 50-second silent French film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station) in 1895. The film shows the entry of a train pulled by steam locomotion into a train station of La Ciotat, a French coastal town. However, action films as a recognizable genre made way through films like *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *The Black Pirate* (1922), *The Adventure of Robin Hood* (1940) etc. These films took action to another level by exemplifying male power and prowess.

9.5.3 Non-fiction films

Non-fiction films are those which present the actual physical reality in a creative manner while remaining faithful to the reality or actuality. It is different from fiction as non-fiction films do not attempt to transform the realities of the world. Non-fiction film-makers do not attempt to change the world realities through their imagination. Non-fiction films are creative interpretations of the real world without substantially altering it. Nonfiction films originate in the specific social situations or a problem, crisis, a person or an event. It is usually filmed in actual locations, with actual people without sets and costumes.

Non-fiction films have different approaches. The three most distinct approaches of them all are: 1) the factual approach, 2) the documentary approach and 3) the direct-cinema approach.

The factual approach considers that facts do not speak for themselves and that they require a structure and interpretation. This structure and interpretation is reflective of a film-makers vision. The cinematic aspect is prominent in factual films and they may or may not have any specific message. Factual film-makers acknowledge the fact that film-making is an art and while facts are important, a purely factual film is nearly impossible. Factual films present facts in a creative and interpretative manner.

Documentary films are those that document some aspect of reality with a view to instruct, educate or maintain a historical record. The key difference between factual film and documentary film is the element of message. Unlike factual films, documentary films have a message and a socio-political purpose. The noted film-makers who pioneered the documentary approach were John Grierson and Paul Rotha. John Grierson is regarded as the father of the documentary film. He used the term 'documentary' in a review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926). He defined the documentary film as a 'creative treatment of reality'.

ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are crossover films? Name a few crossover films by directors of the Indian diaspora.

2. What is the characterization of male actors in action films?

3. What are non-fiction films? Discuss the three distinct approaches of non-fiction films.

9.5.4 Horror film

Horror films are rooted in the silent era. Before the invention of cinema, horror existed as a literary and theatrical genre and in folklore and popular culture. Horror films have a British and European heritage. Horror films are characterized by an attempt to elicit negative emotional reaction from viewers by playing on their fears. Such films often deal with viewers' fears, revulsion, nightmares and the fear of the unknown.

Horror films have three major categories:

- 1) The unnatural,
- 2) Psychological horror and
- 3) Massacre movies.

The unnatural horror category includes vampires, witchcrafts, demonology, ghosts, body horror etc. *The Woman in Black* (2012), *The Conjuring* (2013), *Insidious* (2010), *The Witches* (1966), *Dracula* (1931), *Thirst* (2009), *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), *Drag me to Hell* (2009) etc. fall in this category of unnatural horror films.

Psychological horror films are those that aim at creating horror through the in-depth use of psychology. So instead of using physical treats, such

films use psychological treats such as madness, in-depth exploration of the mind of the protagonist and use of subtle, creepy display of horror rather than overt or explicit display of horror. For example, film like *Psycho* (1960), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Peeping Tom* (1959) etc fall under this category.

Massacre movies are those that portray annihilation, mass murders, slaughter, bloodbath etc to create fear among the audience. Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) is the best-known massacre film so far.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Make a list of as many films you have watched so far and try to identify the genres they belong to. _____
2. Watch any three science-fiction films and try to identify the common characteristics in terms of settings, theme, characters and narrative style. _____

9.6 SUMMING UP

- A film genre is a categorization of films based on certain parameters. Films displaying similar characteristics in terms of style, theme and structure may belong to a particular genre. A film genre is both a static and a dynamic system. It is static because it is a similar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic component and dynamic because a number of things change over time leading to the emergence of new genres.
- Films have inherited the three main sub-divisions of literary narrative forms: the epic, tragic or dramatic and comic.
- There are two approaches to the study of film genre – descriptive and functional. Descriptive approach involves

viewing a film as belonging to a category. Functional approach defines the function of genre films and makes an attempt to relate a film to its historical and social context.

- Film noir refers to dark cinema. The term was coined by the French film critics to classify certain American films that had a dark, gloomy, pessimistic and showed the dark side of human nature.
- Science fictions depict stories about science and technology and apply futuristic thinking to it. Hence, time travel, extraterrestrial life forms, aliens etc fall under this category of films.
- Crossover films are those that appeal to a broader, cross cultural audience and therefore manifest a hybrid cinematic grammar. These films transgress cultural borders, genre and audience.
- Action genre has a fast-paced narrative. Physical actions such as fights, chases, stunts, crash and explosions etc take precedence over dialogue and character development in action films.
- Non-fiction films are those which present the actual physical reality in a creative manner while remaining faithful to the reality or actuality. There are three approaches to non-fiction films – factual, documentary and direct cinema approach. Factual approach presents reality in a creative and interpretative manner.
- Horror movies are those that play on our fears. Unnatural horror, psychological horror and massacre movies are the three major categories of horror movies.

9.7 QUESTIONS

1. “Genres are not static; they constantly evolve and disappear with time”. Explain
2. Discuss the difference between characters of Westerns and film noir.
3. What are musicals? What are the distinct characteristics of the musical film genre?

4. Distinguish between the different approaches to non-fiction film-making.
5. What are the common characteristics of crossover films made by directors of the Indian diaspora?

9.8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 10 – FILM THEORIES

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objective
- 10.3 Film Theories
- 10.4 Realist Film Theory
- 10.5 Auteurist Film Theory
- 10.6 Psychoanalytic Model
- 10.7 Feminist Model
- 10.8 Cognitive Model
- 10.9 Ideological Model
- 10.10 Summing up
- 10.11 Questions
- 10.12 References and Recommended Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit i.e. Unit 9, you were introduced to the concept of film genre. As discussed in the Unit, a film genre is a categorization of films based on certain parameters. Films displaying similar characteristics in terms of style, theme and structure may belong to a particular genre.

In this Unit, you will get to know about the different film theories that have been developed over time and applied to the study of films. Film theories enable us to go deeper into cinema and understand the meanings they try to convey.

10.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Discuss the concept of film theories

- Explain different theories and models associated with film studies

10.3 FILM THEORY

Film theories are guiding principles that make it possible to analyze and understand a film through its application. In simpler words, film theory is a systematic attempt to think about the nature of cinema. Film theories try to analyse film as a medium, what kind of meaning it embodies and how it embodies meanings for the viewers. It refers to the interpretative frameworks that aim to explore the essence of cinema. By application of film theories, we are in a better position to understand a film's relationship to reality and how films are made and received. Film theory aims at understanding the core of a cinematic work. It takes into account that film-making is a distinct form of art.

Film theory is a distinctive field of inquiry comprising a number of discrete theories of cinema. There is no one master theory that film scholars unanimously endorse. It has gradually developed over the last hundred years and is influenced by many opinions and theories. There are a number of different paradigms that govern the area of film studies. Film theories borrow from different disciplines like art, philosophy, social science, psychology, cultural and literary theory, linguistic, economics and political science. Film theory is different from film criticism as the latter tries to answer the good and bad of films. Film theory is much more than that as it tries to understand the very essence of a film, the meanings conveyed by a film and the ways in which the meanings are conveyed.

The objective of film theory is to develop concise, systematic concepts that could be applied to the study of cinema. The early film theories attempted to legitimize cinema as an art form and also identify its unique properties and effects. Films were also studied from the standpoint of portrayal of reality. Film authorship was also a much debated topic in the 1950s. During the later phases, film theory widened

its horizon to include concepts from different disciplines such as psychoanalysis, gender studies, semiotics, anthropology and linguistics. Issues of gender representation, screen-spectator relationship, viewing pleasure etc. came to the forefront after the 1960s.

Let us now try to find about the different paradigms and theories that richly contribute to the discipline of film studies.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. What is a film theory? _____
2. What are the different disciplines that film theories borrow from? _____
3. How is film theory different from film criticism? _____

10.4 REALIST FILM THEORY

The realist film theory seeks to explain how cinema captures reality. It seeks to explain how filmmakers capture real-life situations or events with minimal distortion or how filmmakers portray fiction as real. Realist film theorists valued cinema for recording and portraying reality without authorial intervention. Realism became a key style in cinema with the *neo-realist* movement that came out of Italy during and after the Second World War i.e. the 1940s and 1950s. The neo-realist movement was inaugurated by French film director Jean Renoir and propagated by Italian directors like Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Vittorio De Sica. Neo-realist films made use of natural and real locations, absence of a script in most times and non-professional actors to give a realist feel to the film. The neo-realist films dealt with social and political issues of that period.

Realist theory is split into two categories.

- 1) Cinematic realism i.e. the verisimilitude or semblance to truth of a film to the believability of the characters and events; and
- 2) Camera's representation of reality.

Realist films provide window into reality. According to realist film theorists, the elements of realism in a film include the following: open and uncontrolled mise-en-scene, location shooting, natural lighting, non-professional actors, low-key acting and minimum editing.

Film critic Andre Bazin is best known for his defence of cinematic realism. Bazin in his article "The Ontological Realism of the Photographic Image" (1945) identifies cinema as an art that fulfills the human craving for realistic representation. According to Bazin, the goal of cinema is to portray the reality. For Bazin, realism was both the essence of cinema and a rhetoric that was simple, pure and transparent. Films like *Arrival of a Train* (Lumiere Brothers), *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica) are example of realist film. *Arrival of a Train* is a short fifty seconds film which records an everyday occurrence in a railway station. The film has shots of a train pulling into a station and the passengers going back and forth on the platform. Directed by De Sica in 1948, *The Bicycle Thief* is a story of a poor father searching for his stolen bicycle post-World War II Rome without which he will lose his job.

Strength and Weakness: One of the key strengths of the realist film theory is that it emphasizes the ethical context that exists between a filmmaker and the audience. It also challenges them to think about how a cinema has the potential of unfairly manipulating its audience. The weakness of the theory is that realism only exists as a potential, an ideal which is never quite realized in a film. It also has a tendency to minimize the degree to which even long take and deep focus cinematography can manipulate the viewer's perception.

To sum up, a realist approach to film studies examine films and their portrayal of reality. It examines how film images correspond with the social, physical and psychological realities that exist before the camera. Realist films are those with almost no or minimal manipulation by a

filmmaker thereby honouring the integrity of the events taking place in front of the camera. The use of real locations, non-professional actors and minimum editing are the distinguishing elements of a realist cinema.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. What is the realist film theory? _____
2. What are the elements of a realist film? _____
3. Who were the proponents of the realist film theory? _____

10.5 AUTEURIST FILM THEORY

The Auteurist Film Theory is a way of reading and understanding a film through the imprint or mark of an auteur. „Auteur“ is a French term for „author“. So, in this respect, the auteur theory states that a film is known by its director who happens to be the author of the film. An auteur is a film-maker who has creative ownership over the movies he or she directs and produces. An auteur is one who expresses their unique cinematic vision throughout their work. The auteur theory places the director in a supreme position by considering him or her as the major driving force of a film. It gives significance to the director as the author of a film.

Film authorship has been a much-debated topic in film theory. Although the concept of „auteur“ as a film theory arose in the 1950s, the term „auteur“ dates back to the 1920s. The term found its way in the theoretical writings of French film critics and directors of the silent era. The term „author’s film“, *Autorenfilm* in German, was coined in Germany in 1913. Back in the 1920s, the debate in France centred on auteur (director driven) versus scenario-led films (commissioned by

studios and production houses and directed by directors appointed by the studio). The focus however shifted to American films in the 1950s. Andre Bazin is usually regarded as the father of Auteurism. Bazin was a renowned and influential French film critic and film theorist. He was one of the founders of the popular French language film magazine named *Cahiers du cinema* in 1951. Bazin along with other film critics drew attention to the Hollywood and European directors by appreciating their style of filmmaking through the columns of *Cahiers du cinema*. Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawkes and Samuel Fuller were hailed as exceptional directors and as the major artists or auteurs of the cinema.

Auteurism as a theory came about in the 1960s. American film critic Andrew Sarris is considered as the strongest proponent of the auteur theory. He imported it to the United States and used it to elevate American cinema to the status of the „only good cinema“. Sarris drew three premises to the auteur theory, 1) the technical competence of a director, 2) the signature of a director that marks his/her distinctive style and 3) the interior meaning that the film conveys. If a director does not have an elementary flair for the cinema, they cannot be considered as auteurs.

The basic premise of the Auteur theory is that for a director to be called an auteur, he or she must exhibit, over a group of films, certain recurrent characteristics of his style of film-making. It can also be termed as a director's signature style. A director's signature refers to the recurrent style or characteristics in a film that is indicative of the way he thinks and feels.

American filmmakers like Alfred Hitchcock, George Cukor, Douglas Sirk are considered as masters of cinema and regarded as auteurs for their distinctive filmmaking styles. For example, in Hitchcock's films we often see the presence of a wrongly accused stranger, psychopathic killers, incompetent policemen, cameo appearances etc.

Strength and Weakness: One of the biggest contributions of the Auteur theory is increasing the status of films to art. One of the

strengths of this theory is that it stresses on the uniformity and integrity of a director's artistic vision which finds way in his or her films. However, the theory as a concept needs more clarity. It also fails to address those narratives and visual pattern that emerge but may not be meaningful.

To sum up, the auteur theory is a way of critically analyzing a film by viewing a director as the principal author and creative influence behind a film. Auterism is the examination of films by the same director for his directorial style or consistent personal vision.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Who is known as the father of Auteursism? _____
3. What qualifies a director to be considered an auteur?

10.6 PSYCOANALYTIC FILM THEORY

Psychoanalysis is a late nineteenth century phenomenon. It is a theory of the human psychology. Psychoanalysis is based on the idea that people are motivated by unrecognized wishes and desires that originate in one's subconscious mind. Although the beginning of films is as old as psychoanalysis itself, the application of psychoanalysis into film theory entered in the late 1960s.

Psychoanalytic film theory explores the screen-spectator relationships. In simpler words, it explores our relationship with the cinema. Psychoanalytic film theory draws on the concepts of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The Surrealist movement of the 1920s and 1930s was one of the first artistic movements to draw on psychoanalysis. Andre Breton was the founder of the Surrealist movement. The surrealists were highly influenced by Sigmund Freud's theory of dream and the concept of unconscious. They believed that cinema had the potential to transgress the boundaries between dreams

and reality and that cinematic technique such as slow motion, superimposition, dissolve, etc. corresponded to the nature of dreaming. In fact, the psychoanalytic film theory occurred in two distinct waves. The first wave that occurred in the late 1960s and the early 1970s focussed on a more formal criticism of cinema's dissemination of ideology. Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey and Jean-Louis Baudry were the key figures of the first wave. They drew inspiration from the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

The second wave of psychoanalytic film theory occurred in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek were the main proponents of the second wave. It was also influenced by Lacan's psychoanalysis and shifted its focus to the relationship between cinema and a trauma that disrupts the functioning of ideology.

While the initial phases of application of psychoanalysis centred on studying repressed meanings in films, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, Jean-Louis Baudry etc saw cinema as an institution or an apparatus. It dealt with studying the ideology behind a film, screen-spectator relationship etc.

Psychoanalysis in film studies analyses subjectivity in a film and the representation of the unconscious in films. There are two distinct strands of psychoanalysis that finds its way into film theory - Freudian and Lacanian. In film studies, psychoanalysis has been applied in three main areas of investigation, namely 1) film texts, 2) texts and spectator relation and 3) fantasy.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis: Freud's greatest contributions were his accounts of the unconscious, subjectivity and sexuality. Freud argued that most of the human thoughts remain unconscious. This means that the subject is not aware of the content of certain troubling ideas.

Freud identified three parts of the psyche.

- **Id:** The id is the uncontrolled, repressed part of the psyche.
- **Ego:** The ego is the conscious which attempts to control the id.

- **Super ego:** The super ego acts as higher authority over the id and the ego. It is also identified with the inner „parental voice“.

A person's ego represses these undesirable thoughts and keeps them away from consciousness. The ego is led by a person super ego also called the conscience. According to Freud, these repressed thoughts usually manifest themselves in dreams, nightmares, slips of the tongue or any form of artistic activity. These ideas have greatly influenced film study and psychoanalytic critics explore the unconscious of the film text.

STOP AND READ

Jouissance: A French term meaning physical or intellectual pleasure. Freud used the term to refer to the imaginary moment in the mirror phase when the image and self are united in bliss.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach was to investigate the psychological functioning of the human psyche and the relations we form with the outside world. According to Freud, every individual strives to fulfil their needs and desires which includes sexual desires as well. Individuals also feel guilty and become self-critical about their desires especially those that remain unfulfilled.

These feelings of guilt, frustration and disgust are repressed into one's unconscious mind. Freud argues that the unconscious does not remain forever repressed or buried. The desires in the unconscious mind often resurface in one's dreams or through projection.

Freud further identified two types of ego – realist ego and narcissist ego. The realist ego is a mediator between id that seeks pleasure and the reality. The realist ego satisfied id's desires while conforming to social realities and expectations. On the other hand, the narcissist ego is an anti-thesis to the realist ego. It is linked to early infant narcissism which means that the ego takes itself as the object of its own libidinal or

sexual drives. So the ego is both the subject and object. Freud also coined the term 'oedipal complex' to refer to a male child's repressed desire in the unconscious mind to have sexual relations with the mother.

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis: Lacan further developed Freud's idea of psychoanalysis. He, however, shifted the frame of reference from Freud's preoccupation with sexual drives and emphasized on language and subjectivity. The shift to the linguistic model is justifiable as Freud himself posits the Oedipal complex at an age when the child can talk. So during the time of primal repression, the speaking subject comes into being.

Lacan also talks of the mirror stage and the shift from the Imaginary order into Symbolic order. The imaginary order is one where the child imagines itself as one with his mother. It is the mirror stage where a child understands that he is separate from his mother and that they are not one and thereby enters the symbolic order which is based in language. The entry into language signifies both the birth of desire and the repression of such desires. Entry into language marks an entry into the social order. According to Lacan, when a child moves from the imaginary to the symbolic there are three determining moments – the mirror phase, accession to language and the Oedipus complex.

Lacan argues that the imaginary and symbolic order are always there i.e. they are co-present. The imaginary is the field of fantasies and images associated with the mirror phase. It never disappears because it involves mediation. The symbolic is based in language through which the subject can articulate or convey its feelings and desires. Lacan also talks of a third order called the real order. The real order is that which is outside the subject. A subject often bumps into the real order but may not be able to make sense of it immediately. The real is often experienced as hallucination and even linked with death.

Psychoanalysis and Film theory: The impact of psychoanalysis on film theory makes an attempt to analyse three important concepts, namely:

- Construction of subjectivity and the concept of the divided self;
- The three orders of subjectivity: imaginary, symbolic and real; and
- The unconscious and the repression of desires.

The application of psychoanalysis to film studies analyses how films work at the unconscious level. Psychoanalytic film theorists draw the analogy of the screen with the mirror to explore the screen-spectator relationship. It is assumed that while viewing a film, spectators move from the imaginary to the symbolic and is in a constant state of flux between the two. Cinema constructs the viewer as the subject and functions both for the imaginary and the symbolic.

French film theorist Christian Metz speaks of cinema going and viewing as a regression to childhood. He argued that both voyeurism and fetishism are involved in film viewing.

Psychoanalysis in films examines a cinema's relation to voyeurism and fetishism and its relation to the imaginary and the symbolic order. Cinema is seen to embody psychic desire. According to psycho analytics, cinema serves as screen for the projection of fantasies and desires which are repressed in one's unconscious.

STOP AND READ

Voyeurism: the act of obtaining sexual gratification by looking at sexual objects or acts.

Fetishism: refers to sexual attraction derived from objects, situations or body parts not traditionally viewed as sexual.

Strengths and Weakness: The strength of psychoanalytic film theory lies in its success in emphasizing the complex way in which films arouse emotions and desires in audience. The weakness of the theory is that it cannot be applied to understand or explain all dimensions of audience's emotional response to cinema.

To sum up, psychoanalytic film theory attempts to analyse subjectivity in a film and the representation of the unconscious in films. Psychoanalysis embraces investigation of film texts, the relation between the texts and the spectator and the repressed desires and fantasies that find way through the film screen.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is psychoanalysis? _____
2. What are the three important concepts that psychoanalysis in film studies seeks to examine? _____
3. What is difference between the Imaginary and the symbolic order? _____

10.7 FEMINIST FILM THEORY

Feminist film theory is theoretical film criticism which is derived from feminist politics and feminist theory. The feminist film theory is actually not just one single theory but a series of perspectives. The feminist film theory attempts to study the issues of representation in films and spectatorship. The feminists consider films as a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity and men and masculinity. Feminist film critics examine the questions of feminine identity and the representation of women in film images or object of exchange between men.

Although there were women filmmakers in the 1920s and even earlier who made statements about the suitability of the camera to a woman's expression of her own subjectivity, feminist film theory did not come until the late 1960s as a result of second wave of feminism. The early feminist theory and criticism was directed at the stereotypical representation of women in classic Hollywood films.

Feminist history is spread across three major periods: the first wave, the second wave and the third wave. The first wave spans from the turn of the century until the 1960s. The second wave is the period between the 1960s and 1970s where the bulk of feminist theory was developed. The third and the final wave spans from the 1980s to the present day.

The first wave of feminism centred on suffrage or woman's right to vote and overcoming the legal obstacles to gender equality. The second wave of feminism broadened the issues to include sexuality, reproductive rights, family, work place etc. The third wave explores in depth the theories established in the second wave and their application in the respective fields for the cause of women empowerment.

Feminist film theory made advancement during the second wave of the feminist movement. In the early 1970s in America, film analysis was generally based on sociological theory. It focused on the function of women characters in a film narrative. It also focused on the stereotypes portrayed in the films as a reflection of a society's view of women. Molly Haskell, Joan Mellen and Marjorie Rosen were leading feminists who wrote on representation of women in cinema. Their work was a part of the movement to make more realistic depictions of women in cinema.

In 1972, Claire Johnston proposed the idea of women cinema as counter cinema in her essay by the same name. She argued that by opposing sexist ideologies and conscious means of production, women filmmakers can make counter cinema. She argued that to make counter cinema, one had to first understand the ideological operations that were present in mainstream film practices. This necessitated understanding

the 'how' of female representation and the 'effect' of female positioning in the process of meaning construction.

The 'how' necessitated reading the iconography of the image such as how is the female dressed, how is she framed, how is she lit, etc. It would encompass an understanding of both the denotative and connotative meanings within the image. The „effect“ part necessitated understanding the positioning of the female within the film narrative i.e. the overall psychology behind the narrative.

The introduction of psychoanalysis in feminist film theory marked a departure from the initial phase of film criticism that was based on sociological theory. This made it possible to address femininity and masculinity as socially constructed entities and not simply as biological difference between male and female. This gave film analysts a means to analysing sexual difference rather than assuming it as a pre-determined reality. The application of psychoanalysis in feminist film theory draws from Lacanian psychoanalysis rather than Freudian psychoanalysis. This is because Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis spoke of power relations based on sexual difference. Freud coined the term „oedipus complex“ that refers to the desire of every child to have sexual relations with the parent of the opposite sex. Lacan's psychoanalysis, however, emphasized on the importance of symbolic or language in the construction of subjectivity.

British film theorist Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) is considered a key document of psychoanalytic film theory. In her essay, Mulvey talks about the issue of female spectatorship within the cinematic apparatus. She talks about how films construct the way in which woman is to be looked at.

Mulvey argues that it is the „male gaze“ that dominates classical Hollywood films. Male gaze refers to the depiction of world and women from a masculine point of view. It is the male point of view which is dominant in a film and eventually spectators identify with the male protagonist. Mulvey's concept of male gaze had three perspectives: that of the person behind the camera, that of the characters

or the film itself and that of the spectators. She described the process of viewing as scopophilia which meant 'pleasure in viewing'. According to Mulvey, a woman is represented as an erotic object for the characters within the film and for the spectators who watch the film. The man emerges dominant and the woman becomes passive to the active gaze of man. The male gaze takes precedence over female gaze which reflect an underlying power asymmetry.

Mulvey also questions as to how female spectators derive visual pleasure by watching a film. To this, she states that a female spectator must either identify with the passive position of the female character in the film or assume a male positioning to derive the visual pleasure. The application of psychoanalysis in film studies brought melodrama and women's films into the critical limelight. This exposed the dominance of male-defined problematic in a film narrative, the passive role of women as mere triggers to male action and the counter-Oedipal trajectory of film heroes etc.

Strength and Weakness: One of the key strengths of the feminist film theory is that provides way of understanding how gender is represented in films. It also addresses how gender biases influence film images about the work. However, the feminist film only looks at gender which is not the only means for analyzing one's experience of the world or organizing the design of films.

To sum up, while the initial application of feminist theory in film studies centred on the issues of representation of women and the stereotypes in films, the base of feminist film theory later broadened to include sexuality, reproductive rights, family, work place and finally the application of these theories in different fields with a view to promote women empowerment.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. What was the focus of the first, second and third wave of the Feminist movement?_____
2. Who proposed the idea of 'women cinema as counter cinema'?_

3. What is Laura Mulvey's contribution to the feminist film theory?_

10.8 COGNITIVE MODEL

The cognitive model emerged in the late 1980s. Its emergence was reaction to the dissatisfaction over the dominance of the film theories that analysed films from an ideological viewpoint or as a codified language. Marxist, Lacanian, feminist perspectives and the use of semiotics dominated the arena of film studies in the 1960s and 70s.

An approach arose as an alternative to the psychoanalytic-semiotic-Marxist theory and Lacanian feminism that dominated the discipline of film studies. This alternative approach was called „cognitivism“. It was labelled as „cognitivism“ due to its emphasis on the role of cognitive processes in explanation of cinematic communication. Unlike the theories which emphasizes on the subconscious reading of a film, this model explains that viewing film is a rational and conscious process.

The cognitive model tries to understand how audience interpret films rationally and as a conscious process as opposed to unconscious or irrational process. The premise of the cognitive theory is that looking at films is like looking at other things and watching movies is not essentially irrational.

Cognitive model studies the ways in which viewers perceive audio-visual information in a film and how they organize and categorize these

perceptions in order to derive meaning from a film. The model focuses on the experience and reaction of the film viewer, the relationship between the content of the film and the context in which the viewing experience takes place and the viewer psychology. The fundamental assumption of the cognitive model is that viewer's responses to a film are not entirely driven by the audio and visual information contained in the film. Viewers tend to draw from a large set of schemas that they have developed through their personal experiences as well which serve as frame of reference.

This approach is interdisciplinary that draws from different disciplines such as philosophy, empirical psychology and neuroscience. Cognitivism is not a unified theory but a series of small-scale theories with each offering answers to specific questions about film communication.

Proponents of the Cognitive film theory include David Bordwell, Noel Carroll, Gregory Currie, Greg M. Smith etc. David Bordwell divides narrative into two parts – *syuzhet* and *fabula*. *Syuzhet* refers to the order in which the narrative events are presented. *Fabula* is the actual chronological order of events. Bordwell prescribes that film viewers use the *syuzhet* to reconstruct the *fabula* or actual order in their minds. This is how audience creates meaning through a cognitive process.

Strength and Weakness: The strength of the cognitive model lies in the fact that it is research based approach. The empirical data provides a strong foundation of understanding how audience makes sense of film text, image and narratives. The weakness of the cognitive model lies in its inability to deal with the elicitation of emotion in film.

To sum up, the cognitive model provides a foundation for understanding how film viewers make sense of film images and narratives. This approach emphasizes on intellectual rather than emotional aspects of watching films. According to the cognitive model, viewers' interpretation of a film is a rational and conscious process and that viewers consciously engage in meaning making.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. What led to the emergence of the cognitive model of film studies?
2. What is the fundamental assumption of the cognitive model?
3. What is the meaning of *syuzhet* and *fabula*? _____

10.9 IDEOLOGICAL MODEL

The Ideological model seeks to explore the relationship between films and the society and how films represent social and political realities. Ideologies are patterns of thought that differ from society to society. Ideologies can be defined as certain beliefs held true by a particular society. People internalize these ideologies by virtue of growing up in a culture. A society contains multiple ideologies that may not necessarily be harmonious or coherent to each other. Because of this ideological tensions exists in all societies.

Cinema is language through the world communicates with one another. By virtue of this, films are also a part of the ideological system. Films also give an insight about different ideologies. Every movie presents a sense of right and wrong, positive and negative which is largely dependent on the director's sense of right and wrong. Films portray the society and gives voice to one or more social ideologies.

The Ideological film theory examines the ways in which films represent and express various ideologies. Film can convey meanings in two types of meanings - implicit and explicit. Explicit meanings are those which are clearly shown in a film. Films with explicit ideologies are often, though not always, made to persuade, influence or teach their viewers. For example, *Into the Wild* (2007) can be considered to have explicit ideology wherein a young man is shown as becoming disillusioned with

modern society and abandons everything to lead a nomadic life. The film has shots where the young man abandons his car and sets fire to the money he possesses. This conveys an explicit and direct meaning to the viewers about the character's refusal to conform to the society's basic necessities.

Implicit meanings, on the other hand, are those which are not quite evident in a film. Implicit meanings require a deeper level of interpretation to understand them. Implicit meanings are less obvious and therefore, different viewers may interpret the meanings in different ways. These interpretations will depend on the viewer's own experience, expectations and ideologies.

In order to understand the ideological stance of a film, one must look at the social values within the film and its attitude towards them and the social groups to whom these values conform to or belong.

Strength and Weakness: The ideological model succeeds in uncovering unnoticed aspects of social meaning. It also prevents the audience from becoming too complacent about the way films can display and distort social realities. However, the ideological model fails to adequate attention to particulars of a film's character and narrative.

To sum up, the ideological film model is the study of various ideologies contained in films. Every film portrays a sense of right and wrong which serve as the base of studying ideological underpinnings. Films portray ideologies both implicitly and explicitly.

10.10 SUMMING UP

- Film theory is a field of inquiry that consists of different perspectives and approaches developed over time. The objective of film theory is to develop concise, systematic concepts that could be applied to the study of cinema.
- There was also an emphasis on cinema's realism. Cinema was seen as distinct art form capable of portraying the reality without any authorial intervention.

- In the 1950s, the French critics popularized the concept of an 'auteur' to signify the director of a film. A director is hailed as an auteur if he or she exhibits recurrent characteristics or his signature style over a group of films.
- The psychoanalytic film theory attempts at examining the unconscious relationship between the film and its viewers or between characters of the film. Psychoanalysis in film studies borrows from the concepts of psycho analytics Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.
- The feminist movement also influenced the discipline of film studies by exploring gender representations in films, stereotypes in films and the questions of sexuality.
- The cognitive model arose as a reaction over the dissatisfaction over the dominance of the film theories that analysed films from an ideological viewpoint. As opposed to the unconscious, the cognitive model emphasized that viewers rationally and consciously engaged in film viewing and meaning. For the supporters of the cognitive model, film viewing is a rational process.
- The ideological model adds another strand to film theory by exploring the relationship between films and the society and how films represent the social and political realities.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Watch any three Satyajit Ray movies and try to identify the authorial style of the director. _____

2. Analyse a popular Hindu cinema from the feminist lens. _____

10.11 QUESTIONS

1. What is a film theory and what is its relevance?
2. Name some realist films of the yesteryears.
3. Does every director qualify to be an auteur? Justify.
4. What is the concept of „male gaze“ coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey?
5. Explain the application of psychoanalysis to film studies.
6. Briefly discuss the cognitive model of film studies.
7. Explain with appropriate example as to how films incorporate and portray different ideologies.

10.12 REFERENCE AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 11: FILM MOVEMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 Italian Neorealism

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11.11 References and Recommended Readings

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last Unit i.e. Unit 10, you were acquainted with the different film theories that govern the discipline of film studies. As discussed in the Unit, there is no single master theory in film studies. There are multiple theories that consist of different perspectives and approaches developed over time. The objective of film theory is to develop concise, systematic concepts that could be applied to the study of cinema.

In this Unit, you will learn about the different film movements that grew in different parts of the world. All these film movements had a historical background. Let us get into the details.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this first unit, you will be able to-

- Discuss different film movements across the world
- Explain the characteristics of these film movements

11.3 ITALIAN NEOREALISM

Before trying to understand the concept of Italian Neorealism, let us try to understand the concepts of Formalism and Realism. Since the early days of cinema to the late 1960s, film theories were divided into two opposing camps – Formalism and Realism. The formalists saw film as an independent art form. They stressed on the formal properties of cinema that enabled a filmmaker to alter reality and create a new world within the dimensions of the cine screen. Formalist filmmaking was at its peak in the 1920s, especially with the Soviet Filmmakers experimenting with the concept of montage.

Realism, on the contrary, stressed on the ability of cinema to capture reality. Theorist and film critic Andre Bazin is best known for his defence of cinematic realism. This realist approach became more prominent during the 1940s and 1950s which came to be known as Italian Neorealism. Prior to the Second World War and during the fascist rule of Italy under Mussolini, cinema that was being made was divorced from reality. The main aim of cinema during that period was to promote a good image of Italy. Neorealism in Italy was born out of some filmmakers' displeasure at the restrictions placed by the fascist government over their right to freedom of expression.

Italian neorealism as a film movement adapted the conventions of documentary realism to fiction films. It is a movement characterized by films that were set amongst the poor and the working class. The two key characteristics of such films were the use of non-professional actors and realistic locations. These films aimed at portraying the conditions, trials and tribulations of the poor and working class. Italian neorealism is rooted during and the after the Second World War. Also known as the

Golden Age, it is a national movement in Italy that took force after the end of the Second World War. The end of the War saw the fall of the Benito Mussolini's Government in Italy. The country was in a grip of political turmoil and desperate economic condition. Italian neorealism was an urgent response to the condition in Italy during those times. The neo-realist movement was inaugurated by French film director Jean Renoir and later propagated by Italian directors. Pioneering Italian directors like Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Vittorio De Sica made realistic films that reflected the state of affairs in Italy during that time. Such films portrayed the abject poverty, desperation, oppression and injustice that common people had to undergo. Neorealism marked cultural change, social progress and change in the Italian psyche post the Second World War.

As the popular Cinecittà Film Studios was significantly damaged during the War, neorealist film directors resorted to presenting contemporary stories and realities that were shot in the streets of Italy. Neo-realist films made use of natural and real locations and were characterized by the absence of a script in most times and non-professional actors to give a realist feel to the film. As stated above, the neo-realist films dealt with social and political issues of that period.

Luchino Visconti's *Obsession* (1942), *La Terra Trema* (1948), *Bellisimma* (1951) Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), *Umberto D* (1952), *Shoeshine* (1946), *Miracle in Milan* (1951), Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946), etc are some remarkable neorealist films made during that period.

Italian neorealism as a film movement, however, did not last long. It rapidly declined in the early 1950s. The political state of affairs in Italy during that time did not further encourage the growth of neorealism. The portrayals of poverty, desperation and despair were not favoured by those who were anxious for change and prosperity. Italian neorealism

enormously inspired the French New Wave cinema and the Indian Parallel Cinema movement.

To sum up, Italian neorealist films had the following characteristics:

- Rejection of the codes and conventions of old cinema and focus on portrayal of realities
- Portrayal of the impoverished conditions of the poor and the working class
- Location shoot instead of studio settings
- Use of non-professional actors
- Use of natural dialogues and language, preferably the regional dialects

11.4 FRENCH NEW WAVE

The French New Wave is one of the most significant movements in the history of cinema. The term is used to refer to films made by a new generation of French filmmakers. The French new wave came about in the late 1950s and the early 1960s when the New Wave rejuvenated France's prestigious cinema and gave momentum to international art cinema.

The French New Wave changed filmmaking in France and outside by introducing new themes, styles and modes of production all over the world. The period saw a number of new and young directors and a new generation of stars. Prominent directors of the French New Wave included Louis Malle, Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol. The new generation of stars included Jeanne Moreau, Jean-Claude Brialy, Jean-Paul Belmondo etc. These were low-budget films that went against the prevailing trends in 1950s cinema of literary adaptations, costume dramas and massive co-productions.

The French New Wave, also known as *Nouvelle vague* in French, was not initially associated with this new generation of French filmmakers.

The term was originally coined in the late 1950s by the editor of the French weekly *L'Express*, Françoise Giroud to refer to the new socially active youth class. The demand of a young and new breed of filmmakers and actors was further propelled by the gap created due to fast ageing and vanishing filmmakers who held the reins of filmmaking from the 1930s through to the 1950s. This new generation of young filmmakers came to be associated in people's mind with the *Nouvelle Vague*.

The French New Wave also drew inspiration from the artistic philosophy of the auteur theory. Derived from the French word 'auteur' meaning 'author', the theory acknowledges the director as the author of a film. It suggests that a film is known by its director who happens to be the author of a film. By virtue of this, a director has creative ownership over the movies he or she directs.

11.4.1 Two phases of French New Wave

The French New wave occurred in two phases. The first occurred in the period 1958-62 and the second during 1966-68. The first New Wave was radical in relation to what preceded it – *cinema de papa*'. *Cinema de papa*' was a term labelled by the French magazine *Cahiers du cinema* to mean old fogeys' cinema which were mostly literary adaptations, costume dramas and massive co-productions. The second New Wave is considered as politicized cinema. Both the phases of the French New Wave left a tremendous impact on future cinemas.

First French New Wave (1958-62): As stated before, the New Wave filmmakers did not conform to the cinema of the 1950s. They rather focused their attention on the auteur and *mise-en-scene*. A French term meaning 'to put on stage', *mise-en-scene* refers to everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement. It basically suggests the director's control over the visual elements within the film. *Mise-en-scene* refers to the overall look and visual design of a film.

Basically, the films of the first French New Wave were all about the individual filmmakers and their signature style. Their cinema was a complete break from the 1950s cinematic codes and conventions in terms of narratives as well as visuals.

In terms of narrative or how a story is told through a film, they were not necessarily completed or realistic. The film narratives did not have a beginning, middle and end. Most of the stories offered a slice of life. There were no stars. The film discourses were contemporary reflecting the 1960s and about young people. The taboos surrounding sexuality were broken. The couple was portrayed as a complex entity and film narratives centered on power relations, lack of communication and the questions of identity. In terms of gender representations, new wave directors made films that made positive representation of women. Unlike the film of the 1950s and before, women were presented in more prominent roles in the narrative.

Visually, the new wave films deconstructed the institutional iconography. Iconography is a means by which visual motifs and style in a film can be categorized and analyzed. These films defied the use of establishing shots which safely familiarize the audience in terms of time and space. The seamless editing style of the 1950s was replaced by fast editing style, jump cuts and unmatched shots. The use of lightweight cameras and on-location shoots became the order for the new wave directors. They abandoned the studios and took to the streets and suburbs of Paris to shoot their films. Film stock that allows the capturing and reproduction of images through the use of a camera became fast and cheap. This aspect gave films a sense of spontaneity.

Second French New Wave (1966-68): The films made during the second French New Wave were politicized in nature. Films by Jean-Luc Godard, a prominent French New Wave filmmaker, were exemplary in this context. The myths surrounding the Bourgeois or the middle class such as those surrounding marriage, family and consumption practices

were denormalized. Subjects like consumer boom, nuclear war, student politics, adolescence, Vietnam became the highlight in films.

The key characteristic of the second phase of the French New Wave films was that it was as much about the process of filmmaking as it was about exposing social practices. It was also a form of counter-Hollywood cinema that did not seek to follow the American giant as done by the films of the 1950s. The emphasis was on highlighting the personal and political tensions that the younger generation was experiencing during the 1960s. The use of hand-held cameras, non-use of studio, different editing techniques that caught attention and no-star system posit a new form of counter-cinema. The first New Wave was not politically engaged, although it did thrive on anti-bourgeois sentiments. However, by the 1960s, the time of the second New Wave, cinema had become politicized. It questioned institutions and their power effects over individuals.

To sum up, the French New Wave had the following characteristics:

- Saw the coming of a new and young breed of directors who defied the established cinematic codes and conventions of the 1950s.
- Defied the traditional style of film narrative
- Film narratives centred on power relations and the questions of identity
- Positive representation of women and their prominence in film roles
- Fast editing style with jump cuts and unmatched shots
- Use of lightweight cameras
- Non-use of studios, on-location shoots
- Portrayed both personal and political tensions of the younger generation, consumer culture, nuclear war etc.

It needs to be mentioned that the French New Wave was criticized for its focus on the individual and the confessional style of film-making. It, however, left one important legacy. The influx of film-makers into the

industry made production practices to be reconsidered. It also led to the production of cheaper and lightweight cameras in the market. The camera became democratized by becoming more accessible to those who were formerly marginalized. Another important legacy left by the French New Wave was the entry of women, Blacks and Beurs (refers to the Arab community in France) into the field of filmmaking.

11.5 GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM

As evident in the term itself, German Expressionism is used to refer to a filmic style which emerged in Germany during 1919-24. The analogy of the expressionist movement in modern art was applied to cinema that came to be termed as German expressionism. As in modern art, expressionism aimed at conveying the force of human emotion and sexuality. Expressionism refers to squeezing out of the true essence of things and people into a visible art form. The themes of expressionism were revolt, self-analysis, madness and primitive sexual savagery.

German expressionism can be said to be a modernist movement. However, it does not embrace the hopefulness of modernism but rather looks at the psychological effects of the age of technology on individuals. Expressionism which started in art and then spread to literature, theatre and architecture also touched cinema in terms of narrative, set and mise-en-scene. The use of expressionist sets and high contrast lighting became two of the major mise-en-scene strategies of German expressionist films.

The German Expressionist film movement emerged for many likely reasons. Some believed that this style of filmmaking was a reflection of the German mentality on the brink of insanity, obsessed with death and fatality and to ready to encompass fascism. A few others believed that these films were an attempt to escape the dreadful effects of the

economic crisis and inflation during that period. The movement has also been relativized within a broader context of German film production and seen as continuation of pre-war film traditions rather than a new departure.

German expressionist films are considered as a reflection of the mood of the post First World War Times. The historical context of post World War Germany was one ridden of poverty, insecurity and political instability. The period during 1918-24 witnessed civil strife and staggering inflation. The nation faced civilian deaths due to malnutrition in the early post-war year of 1919.

German expressionist films were highly stylized type of films with oblique or slanted camera angles, distorted bodies and shapes and bizarre settings that are gothic in their look and framing. High contrast lighting i.e. the use of heavy contrast between light and dark was another characteristic of such films. Such kind of lighting produced dramatic shadows. The themes of such films were often surreal and about unnatural acts or realities. There used to be a tension between the settings and the actor's style. Mise-en-scene was abstract and usually two dimensional.

In German expressionist films, the actor's body produced as much meaning as the mise-en-scene. The most striking feature of German Expressionism was the contrast between the intensity of the camera angle and the limited camera action and minimal editing. By nature, the expressionist film movement was anti-romantic and anti-naturalist in focus.

German Expressionism as a film movement saw a decline by 1924. This was primarily for two reasons. The first reason was economic and the second was the emigration of film personnel to Hollywood in the United States in search of work.

Some of the German Expressionist films include *The Students of Prague* (1913), *The Golem: How He Came into the World* (1920), *The*

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), *From Morn to Midnight* (1920), *Destiny* (1922), *Phantom* (1922), *Nosferatu* (1922), *Schatten* (1923), *The Last Laugh* (1924) etc.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. What is German expressionism?

2. Write a few characteristics of German Expressionist films. _____

11.6 RUSSIAN FORMALISM

Russian Formalism is a film movement that began in 1918. Inspired by the formalist movement in literature, formalism was adapted to filmmaking with experiments in editing. Russian formalism strongly influenced semiotics, neo-formalism, structuralism and other branches of film theory.

The Russian revolution of 1917 led to the establishment of a communist government by the Bolsheviks and ushered in a new era that encompassed arts, politics and society. Cinema began to be considered as an influential art and a valuable tool of propaganda.

After the revolution, as opposed to a shot, Soviet filmmakers believed in the primacy of a cut. Film theorist Lev Kuleshov is considered the father of the Soviet montage. He formulated a hypothesis or presumption that it was not the content of shots but rather the edit of film that creates the dramatic effect. He put this hypothesis to test by juxtaposing three identical shots of an expressionless actor with three different images – a hot bowl of soup, a girl in a coffin and a pretty

woman on a couch. Audience who viewed it exclaimed that the expressionless actor affectively conveyed varied emotions – hunger, sadness and lust or affection.

Soviet filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Pudovkin and Alexander Dovzhenko who exemplified the Soviet formalist movement believed that editing was the key in creating a revolutionary film language. Through their trials and experimentations, they championed the power of editing. Instead of using the continuity principle in editing, filmmakers like Eisenstein and Vertov juxtaposed contrasting visuals to get across an idea and stir the audience's emotions.

Sergei Mikhaylovich Eisenstein was a pioneer in the theory and practice of montage – an editing technique that he used in his films. Eisenstein's concept of montage was the collision of elements rather than linkage. His idea behind montage was that shots should not be seen as linked, but rather as conflicting with one another. The resulting conflict is intended to create new ideas in the audience. He argued that editing represented the juxtaposition of shots and the collision of two adjoining images to create a third independent entity. He believed that the human mind is capable of subconsciously associating images one with another to produce a unified effect. *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1958) etc are some of his remarkable films.

Pudovkin focused on the storytelling potential of editing. He believed that purposeful use of editing could evoke the specific emotions of the audience. His primary idea was that editing was a matter of linkage and that shots interconnected like links on a chain. Dovzhenko's films were marked by visual association rather than the classic continuity principle. This is why critics address his films as „poetry on celluloid“. The words of a poem do not form logical sentences. Similarly, in Dovzhenko's films, the visual pattern created through editing do not conform to a direct narrative logic. The use of visuals that may not be connected to each other or form a logical sequence may be initially confusing to the

audience. However, gradually a pattern emerges that takes the viewers away from the literal meaning to deeper interpretations. Soviet Formalism as film movement did not continue beyond the early 1930s.

11.7 AVANT GARDE

In simple words, Avant Garde films may be termed as experimental films. Avant Garde filmmaking uses unconventional filmmaking style and is usually devoid of a plot unlike conventional narrative films. The Avant Garde films are non-conformist to traditional style of filmmaking and challenges the idea of what films can show and how they can show them. The purpose of Avant Garde cinema is not necessarily to achieve mass appeal but to share artistic vision. Avant Garde cinema came to the fore during the late 19th century.

Such films have a history as rich as the narrative film. While Avant Garde films are usually associated with European filmmakers, America also has a rich tradition of filmmakers who made Avant Garde and experimental films. Avant Garde films are considered different from the usual narrative films as they do not conform to the norms of traditional narrative cinematic technique.

Avant Garde films are those which are made by individuals or a small group of collaborators and are financed either by the filmmaker or in collaboration with private patrons or grants from any art institution. Avant Garde films are usually distributed through film co-operatives and exhibited by small groups such as film societies, museums and universities.

They vary from their mainstream counterparts in terms of budget, distribution and exhibitions. Unlike mainstream films, Avant Garde films are intensely personal with limited or almost no budget and are distributed and marketed through different means mostly to a specific,

limited audience. Such films may or may not be mass distributed and marketed.

Avant Garde films were mostly made in Western Europe before the Second World War and in North America and Britain in the postwar period. Such films often critiqued dominant, classical Hollywood cinema and functions in relation to political movement and strategies. Some of the renowned Avant Garde filmmakers are *Jonas Mekas*, *Man Ray*, *Maya Deren*, *Andy Warhol*, *Alejandro Jodorowsky*, *Michael Snow* etc.

11. 8 INDIAN NEW WAVE

The Indian New Wave in Indian cinema is also known as „parallel cinema“. New wave is a blanket term designated to those films that do not follow the conventions of the popular mainstream cinema. Parallel cinema refers to those films which are an alternative to mainstream cinema.

Parallel cinema was a film movement that originated in West Bengal in the 1950s as an alternative to mainstream cinema. It was inspired by Italian neo-realism, French New Wave and the Japanese New Wave. With Bengal as the home ground, the New Wave was pioneered by Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray in the 1950s. Other pioneering directors of the New Wave included Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Tapan Sinha, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G.Aravindan, Shyam Benegal, Girish, Dasgupta, Goutam Ghose, Rituporno Ghosh etc.

These directors wanted to make films that steered clear of the usual formula of the mainstream films. Hence, they emphasized on depicting reality from an artful perspective through their films. Their films thrived on serious content and realism that reflected the socio-political climate of the times.

Realist films dates back to the 1920s and 1930s. Baburao Painter's *Savkari Pash* (1925) and V. Shantaram's *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) are

examples of realist films made during that period. While Savkari Pash is a story of a poor peasant who loses his land in the hands of the greedy moneylender and is forced to go the city to work in a mill. Shantaram's Duniya Na Mane critiqued the treatment of women in the Indian society. However, parallel cinema as a movement began to take shape from the late 1940s to the 1965. Pioneering film-makers such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Guru Dutt, V. Shantaram started making realistic films that broke the codes and conventions of the mainstream films. They made films that were borrowed from Indian literature and were a reflection of the society. Social and political realities and prevalent issues were highlighted through these films.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a rise in the making of parallel films. Satyajit Ray's trilogy – Pather Panchali (1955), Aparajito (1956) and The Apur Sansar (1959) – were groundbreaking films of their period. Bimal Roy's Do Bigha Zameen (1953) was another film that won the International prize at the Cannes Film Festival, 1954. Film-makers like Guru Dutt integrated art and commercial cinema in their films like Pyaasa (1957).

The 1960s saw government financing of independent art films based on Indian themes. The 1970s and 80s saw film-makers like Gulzar, Shyam Benegal, Mani Kaul who made several Indian art films. A new breed of actors like Smita Patel, Om Puri, Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Pankaj Kapoor, Farooq Shaikh, Amol Palekar, Deepti Navel ventured into art films.

It was Adoor Gopalakrishnan who extended the New Wave into Malayalam cinema with his film Swayamvaram (1972). Some of his films that won national and international acclaim are Elippathayam (1981) and Mathilukal (1989). While filmmakers like K. Balachnader, Balu Mehendra, Mahendran, Bharati Raja extended the New Wave to Tamil cinema, Pattabhirami Reddy, K.N.T Sastry, A. Rao and B. Narsing Rao brought international recognition to Telugu parallel cinema. In Karnataka, Girish Karnad, Girish Kasaravalli, B.V Karanth pioneered Kannada parallel cinema.

Assamese film-makers like Bhabendra Nath Saikia and Jahnu Barua also made groundbreaking realist films in Assamese. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *Sandhya Raag* (1977), *Anirban* (1981), *Agnisnaan* (1985), *Kolahol* (1988), *Kaal Sandhya* (1999) and Jahnu Barua's *Aparoop* (1982), *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* (1987), *Xagoroloi Bohudoor* (1995), *Konikaar Ramdhenu* (2003) are some of the acclaimed films.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Name some of the pioneers of the Indian New Wave.

2. Name two prominent Indian New Wave filmmakers of Assamese origin?

3. What are characteristics of Indian New Wave films?

Some pioneers in Indian New Wave -

11.8.1. Satyajit Ray

A legendary filmmaker and a recipient of Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 1984, Satyajit Ray was one of the pioneers of the Indian New Wave or parallel cinema. He was born on 2nd May, 1921 in Calcutta. Ray had a degree in Economics from Calcutta's Presidency College. He also studied fine arts at the Viswabharati University at Santiniketan. He worked as a visualiser in a British Advertising Company in 1943 and graduated to the art director by 1950.

He formed the Calcutta Film Society in 1948. In his capacity as the president of this society, he rendered wholehearted services to spread film culture through the film society movement. It was during his return from London that he started working on the scripts of *Pather Panchali*, a Bengali language drama film based on Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's Bengali novel of the same name.

Pather Panchali (1955) is the first film by Ray and is considered a masterpiece. The film is set in a pre-industrialization village Nischintpur and portrays the childhood of the protagonist Apu and his sister Durga. It is the story of the poor family's struggle for existence. This film paved way for Ray's Apu trilogy comprising *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* & *Apur Sansar*.

Other films of Ray include *Jalsagar* (1958) which is a story of a bankrupt landlord living amidst the decaying feudal pride, *Devi* (1960) which is a depiction of a tragic fate of a victim of superstition, *Abhijaan* (1962) which is depiction of the position of woman in the upper crust of the society. *Charulata* (1964) is based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel and is a depiction of the tragic tale of a woman's extramarital love.

Satyajit Ray was noted for his versatility and humanism. His detailed control over his films and its music was noteworthy. As a film-maker, Ray consciously avoided repeating himself. This resulted in a wide gamut of moods, milieu, periods and genre. His films covered a wide range of genres including comedy, tragedy, romance, musical, detective stories etc. He covered all the sections all the classes of the Bengali society from the mid 19th to the late 20th century.

11.8.2 Ritwik Ghatak

An Indian-Bangladeshi filmmaker, Ritwik Ghatak was another prominent and pioneering film-maker of the Indian New Wave. A contemporary of Satyajit Ray, Ghatak created his own individual style in cinema and made Bengal a trendsetter in filmmaking. He was also a theatre director, scenarist, film theorist, critic, author and actor.

Ghatak was born in Dhaka in 1925. He spent his adolescence in East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh). Owing to the Bengal Famine of 1943-44, Second World War and finally the partition of India in 1947, Ghatak was compelled to move to Calcutta. Once in Calcutta, he became actively involved in the Indian People's Theater Association (IPTA) and the Communist Party of India (CPI). Founded in 1943,

IPTA was a national theater movement that used theater as a means of addressing social injustice and British imperialism. Ghatak's association with the IPTA wing in Calcutta began in 1948 and he started writing and directing his own plays. He also acted in some of his plays.

Ghatak's involvement in filmmaking began from the 1950s. Calcutta's Paradise Café served as the meeting ground of young and aspiring Bengali filmmakers like Ghatak himself, Mrinal Sen and many others. His first involvement in cinema was as an actor and assistant director in Nema Ghosh's Bengali film *Chinnamul* (1950).

In 1952, Ghatak produced and directed his first feature film *Nagarik*. In the same year, the first International Film Festival was held in four Indian cities including Calcutta. It was a catalytic cinematic event as it exposed the Indian audience to Italian neo-realist films like Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Japanese films like Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* etc.

In his career spanning the 1950s to 1970s, Ghatak made eight feature films and ten documentaries. Ghatak's uniqueness lied in his rejection of prevailing cinematic conventions. Ghatak's films were documents of the weeping Bengali conscience. The pangs of Bengal partition in 1947 and the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 were evident in his films which portrayed the horrors of partition. His films reflected the socially and politically tumultuous period starting from the late 1940s to early 1970s. What he sought to seek through his films was the cultural identity of Bengal in the midst of new political divisions. His cinematic techniques consisted of the use of deep-focus cinematography, frequent use of close-ups, curtness of cinematic expression, use of major narrative ellipses or gaps and layered and complex soundtracks.

11.9 SUMMING UP

- Film studies entail the study of different film movements that have been witnessed in different parts of the world at different periods. All these film movements have had a historical background.
- Italian neorealism as a film movement adapted the conventions of documentary realism to fiction films.
- Italian neorealism is a movement characterized by films that were set amongst the poor and the working class. The two key characteristics of such films were the use of non-professional actors and realistic locations.
- The French New Wave refers to films made by a new generation of French filmmakers.
- The French New Wave consisted of trailblazing directors who revolutionized cinematic conventions. These directors rejected the conventional linear fashion of cinematic narrative and created a new language of films. The French New wave occurred in two phases. The first occurred in the period 1958-62 and the second during 1966-68. The films of the first French New Wave were all about the individual filmmakers and his signature style.
- German Expressionism is used to refer to a filmic style which emerged in Germany during 1919-24. German expressionist films are considered as a reflection of the mood of the post First World War Times. German expressionist films were highly stylized type of films with oblique or slanted camera angles,

distorted bodies and shapes and bizarre settings that are gothic in their look and framing. High contrast lighting was another characteristic of such films.

- Russian Formalism is a film movement that began in 1918. Inspired by the formalist movement in literature, formalism was adapted to filmmaking with experiments in editing.
- Soviet filmmakers believed in the primacy of a cut as opposed to a shot. They believed that editing was the key in creating a revolutionary film language. The concept of 'montage' was perhaps the biggest contribution of Soviet filmmakers to cinema.
- Avant Garde films are also called experimental films. Avant Garde filmmaking uses unconventional filmmaking style and is usually devoid of a plot unlike conventional narrative films.
- The Indian New Wave also known as 'parallel cinema' was a film movement that originated in West Bengal in the 1950s as an alternative to mainstream cinema. Parallel cinema thrived on serious content and realism that reflected the socio-political climate of the times.
- Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray was one of the leading figures of the Indian New Wave. Other pioneering directors of the New Wave included Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Tapan Sinha, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, Shyam Benegal, Girish Karnad, Girish Kasaravalli, Shaji N.Karun, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Goutam Ghose, Rituporno Ghosh etc.
- The major characteristic of the Indian New Wave films was that they were realistic. These films highlighted social and political issues and critiqued feudalism, nepotism, patriarchy, corruption, religious intolerance etc.

11.10 QUESTIONS

1. What was the main contribution of Soviet filmmakers to filmmaking?
2. Who is considered as the father of the Soviet montage?
3. What are Avant Garde film?
4. Name some of the pioneers of the Indian New Wave.
5. Name two prominent Indian New Wave filmmakers of Assamese origin?
6. What are characteristics of Indian New Wave films?

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UNIT 12: DOCUMENTARY FILMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives
- 12.3 Documentary Films and News
- 12.4 Documentary Films and Fiction Films
- 12.5 Types of Documentary
- 12.6 Growth of Documentary Films
 - 12.6.1 An Overview Documentary Films in India
- 12.7 Documentary Cinema and Society
- 12.8 Short Films
- 12.9 Summing Up
- 12.10 Questions
- 12.11 References and recommended readings

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Documentary films are considered as the reflection of reality and cover a wide spectrum of content that tells the ‘truth’. Earliest documented use of the term “documentary” (French: ‘documentaire’) was in the initial travelogues written in the twentieth century. It was John Grierson, an early Scottish documentary filmmaker, who first used the term „documentary“ while reviewing Robert Flaherty’s *Moana* where he argued that documentary is the “creative treatment of actuality”. There is no doubt that documentary film is part of storytelling strategy to create a character that sees and feels the difficulties through which audience feels homogenisation with reality. In this context, noted film critic Erik Barnouw expressed that the documentary filmmaker like any communicator in any medium makes endless choices; he selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds and words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not (Barnouw, 1993). Scholars

like Linda Williams criticises that documentary only generate ideologies and consciousness that forces audiences to believe something as 'true'.

A concise definition of what constitutes a documentary film is difficult to put forward. World Union of Documentary, established in 1948, defines documentary as methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture and human relations. Representation, reconstruction and interpretations of reality are among some of the basic controversial terminological modes that try to distinguish documentary from news and record. German documentary dramatist Peter Weiss in his essay *The Material and the Models: Notes Towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre*, contends that documentary theatre takes authentic materials and „puts it on the stage, unaltered in content, edited in form“ (Weiss, 1971, p.5). According to him, documentary is borne of negotiation between two potentially conflicting factors: the real and its representation.

12.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, we will learn to

- Write the origin of documentary film
- Explain the differences between documentary films and news as well as feature films
- Describe the relationship between documentary films and society along with the milestones in documentary cinema in India and the world

12.3 DOCUMENTARY FILMS AND NEWS

Although very critical and true to its content, documentary has a strong delineation from news. Documentary film gives structure and meaning to an event while news is restricted to the representation of an event, without ‘montage’ and ‘dramatic’ notion. The blending of documentary footage and dramatic reconstruction with sound is effective enough to influence the viewers’ mind. Ellis and McLane in their book *A New History of Documentary Film* identify five basic characteristics that lead to the distinction of the genre from fiction films. These are:

- **Subjects:** The subjects of documentaries are something other than the general human conditions that involves individual human feelings, relationship and actions.
- **Purpose/ viewpoint/ approach:** Documentary filmmakers approach is to persuade audience for some change or to take some actions to their subjects.
- **Form:** The determinant factors documentary forms are mainly the subject, purpose and approach of the filmmaker. The filmmakers may sometime recreate an event from “reality”, but they cannot fictionalise an event. Shooting at the site is another important criterion, e.g. a wildlife documentary filmmaker needs to record the animals in their original habitat rather than in a captivated one to justify his content.
- **Audience response:** The aesthetic experience of the filmmakers on one hand and an effect on attitude possibly leading to an action are what Ellis and McLane believe as important for audience response. (Ellis Betsy A. McLane & McLane, 2005)

12.4 DOCUMENTARY FILMS AND FICTION FILMS

Documentary films share many characteristics with fiction films but still differ from it in various ways. According to Bill Nichols, the issue of filmmaker's control over what she or he films and of the ethics of filming social actors whose lives, though represented in the film, extend well beyond it (i.e. the filmmaker), the issue of the text's structure (text) and the questions of the viewer's activity and expectations make documentary films different from the fiction films. Instead of a world provided by filmmaker, documentary films offer access to *the* world. It is not the text that differentiates fictions from documentary, rather for Nichols, it is the representation (that the filmmakers make through the text) that delineates them. Documentary films, therefore, is said to represent the world of individual responsibility and social action, common sense and everyday reason; it confronts the historically momentous and patently quotidian-all couched in style and rhetoric of classical realism (Nichols, 2010).

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Watch three documentary films and three feature films. Find out, how they differ.
2. Compare News Bulletins and documentary films. Do you find any differences?

12.5 TYPES OF DOCUMENTARY FILMS

As documentary films are made in a great variety of tradition, style, characteristics and purpose, therefore, film theorists have categorized this branch of film studies into various types. Based on the chronological existence, documentary films are categorized into five different schools.

- i) **Newsreel** strictly describes records of the actual events without dramatizing the event. Example: Reisner's *The March of Time*.
- ii) **Propagandist school** on the other hand, employs pseudo-

documentary as an instrument of political propaganda. This school primarily follows the style of Nazi propaganda films, e.g. *Triumph of the Will*.

- iii) **Realist school** portrays contemporary day-to-day life scene, gives a cross-section of reality of contemporary society and often presents a social problem to the audience.
- iv) **Romantic school** romanticizes the object, dramatizes the events and reconstructs the situations and places. It relates basically to the natural environment. The best example of this school is Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*.
- v) **Cinema-vérité school** reduces the interpretation of the events and the editing process to a minimum. It does not break the continuity but presents it to audience in its most natural manner it happens.

Apart from this, noted film theorist *Bill Nichols* identified six modes of documentary representations based on the time of their introduction.

- i) **Poetic mode** began in tandem with modernism as a way of representing reality in terms of a series of fragments, subjective impressions, in coherent acts and loose associations. Joris Ivens's *Rain* is an example of such mode of representation.
- ii) **Expository mode** assembles fragments of the historical world with more rhetorical or argumentative form. This mode addresses viewers directly with, voice-of God " commentary (e.g. *Blood of the Beasts*) or „voice of authority commentary" (*The Selling of the Pentagon*, *16 in Webster Groves*, *Shock of the New* etc.).
- iii) **Observational mode** poses a series of ethical considerations resulting in footage often seen in the works of the Italian neo-realists. Voice-over commentary, supplementary music or sound effects, inter-titles, historical re-enactments, behaviour repeats for camera, use of interviews is seldom utilised in this mode. The first and the most influential documentary of this mode is the *Triumph of the Will* where the director Leni Riefenstahl sets the stage for the German

National Socialist (Nazi) party's Nuremberg rally without an accompanying commentary.

- iv) **Participatory mode** exemplifies a combination between the subject and the filmmaker. Here the filmmaker is not simply an observer but also an active fieldworker, who makes the characters speak for themselves. It enhances live encounters between the subject and the filmmaker's quest for truth through a delicate bond of „interview“. This mode of representation establishes reality closer to the originality. Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* can be categorized in this mode.
- v) **Reflexive mode** of representation is the process of conciliation between filmmaker and viewer, which emphasizes issues of „reality“ represented by challenging continuity in editing, character development and narrative structure. Documentaries that use such approach, try to examine nature of common belief of persuasion and like to scrutinise how a society really works.
- vi) **Performative mode** asks about subjective and affective dimension of a documentary with less rhetoric. Perspective, either of the filmmaker or of the society, becomes central in this genre. This mode also emphasises on the addition of all elements including continuity editing and point of view that give texture and meaning to it. Performative mode is often criticised for excessive use of style. (Nichols, 2001)

Eric Barnouw attributed thirteen different proactive roles to documentary depending upon the role it plays. These are: Prophet, explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, burglar, prosecutor, poet, chronicler, promoter, observer, catalyst and guerrilla. Michael Renov proposed four fundamental realities in documentary films: i) record, reveal, or preserve, ii) persuade or promote, iii) analyse or interrogate and iv) express. Michael Rabiger argues that many factors influence the structure of a film: *event centred* film (significant events are the central point of argument); *process* film (life process becomes the focus of presentation); *journey*, *history*, and *biographical* films; *poetic* films;

thesis film (where the film becomes an essay); *catalogue* film (which examines certain events comprehensively rather than critically); *absurdist* film (where the theme becomes an experimental play). It is pertinent to note here that no categorization of documentary can be exclusive in its own right. Instead, a combination of all the observations is consistent with what is to be considered as an established evidence of reality (Barnouw, 1993).

It is pertinent to note here that no categorization of documentary can be exclusive in its own right. Instead, a combination of all the observations is consistent with what is to be considered as an established evidence of reality.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Watch a few documentary films and categorize them. _____

2. Find out the elements in a documentary film. _____

12.6 GROWTH OF DOCUMENTARY FILMS

12.6.1 An Overview

In spite of wide range of views among film scholars, Lumiere brothers are considered as the pioneers of documentary films. The first film they made was *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (1895). It was a combination of continuous, unedited footage of a real event showing workers coming out of the factory. The public screening of the film organised at the Grand Café in Paris on December 25, 1895 opened a new vista in the history of performative and creative art where people were able to see events through the viewfinder of a camera. Prior to Lumiere brothers, Thomas Edison invented movie machine and experimented on photographic reality as visual records of actuality. He is also credited as the first man to produce a nature film. In 1898, his company focused exclusively on ostriches and created three films titled *Ostriches Feeding*, *Ostriches Running No. 1* and *Ostriches Running Number 2*. The contents of these short films vary little from its simple descriptive titles and are devoid of any film language. Footage of

Edison's film *Feeding the Swan* is noted for its experimental use of film space. Lumiere brothers also shot a realistic short film called *Arrival of the Train* where they captured a series of visuals using two different camera positions. A shift from individual reality to social reality began with the works of British documentary filmmakers like John Grierson, Paul Rotha, Arthur Elton, Henry Watt and their followers.

From 1895 to 1917 was the time when documentary was at its infancy. It started maturing in the hands of Soviet filmmakers after the Soviet Revolution. These filmmakers and theorists captured reality and changed it aesthetically. „Juxtapositions“ of shot gave birth to a new film language called „montage“. Pudovkin and Eisenstein developed two contrasting but influential ideologies of montage, which controlled the „psychological guidance“ of the spectators. While Pudovkin used technique of montage as an aid to narrative, Eisenstein reconstructed montage in opposition to straight narrative. Though Eisenstein never made a documentary, his historical re-enactments such as *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* have the quality of a documentary realism that make them the precursors of docu-drama. Several factors contributed to the growth of modern documentary films. With the advent of colour into visual language, documentary production got a new vigour. Growth of television and the spread of cable television also enhanced documentary film production. Development of a storyline and content was significant in the 70s and 80s, along with technological progress and experiments. ‘Autobiographical’ or biographical genre in documentary production came into existence during this period. To add value to the production, documentary filmmakers started to use interviews and extra narrative style. The phenomenon of ‘reality television’ accelerated the pace of documentary film production further and helped to generate a new lineage named ‘feature-documentary’. By the late twentieth century documentary films proved that it can be dramatic and opinion builder in a pluralistic society that provide a free environment for freedom of speech and expression. Change in authorship, intrusion of cyberspace, heterogeneity in audience perspective and establishment of documentary film study as an academic branch at international schools have propagated the evolution of documentary film.

12.6.2 Documentary Films in India

Cinema came into India with the theatrical show of Lumiere Brothers Arrival of a Train on July 7, 1896 in the Watson Hall Mumbai. The first Indian documentary film, in true sense, was accidentally made by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, popularly known as Dadasaheb. To prove that he is worthy enough to receive financial assistance for making films from his friend and producer Yeshwant Nadkarni, Dadasaheb started photographing a pea plant and later created the short film, *Growth of a Pea Plant*. Following Dadasaheb, Mohan Bhavnani made two-reel short story named Mysore-Gem City of India in 1929. Three persons namely Dr. P. V. Pathy (studied cinematography in Paris), K. S. Hirlekar (studied cinematography in Germany) and D. G. Tendulkar, a student of Eisenstein, are considered to be the pioneers of documentary film production in India. Among them K. S. Hirlekar was keen on promoting cinema movement rather than making films.

By the end of the 1930s, the short film movement gained considerable ground in the country although they were in the newsreel format. Many of the filmmakers realized the importance of „reality“ shooting and gave a „documentary touch“ to their feature films. The early documentary film industry in India, obviously, grew under the umbrella of British Government. The World War II had instigated the growth of non-fiction film production. This was to boost the war effort towards British reign. At that time, J. B. H. Wadia was selected to be a part of the Film Advisory Board formulated to grow the industry. Wadia tried his best to support the trend. Establishment of Films Division in 1948 changed the filmmaking industry of India. With painstaking efforts of many filmmakers, Films Division started to sanction projects in various sectors of independent India with a goal of releasing 52 short films every year. Necessity of a guild for the independent filmmakers in India was felt and as a consequence a handful of filmmakers created Short Film Guild in 1949 in Mumbai. Towards the end of 1950, the Division also set up its Cartoon Film wing with assistance from Indo-American Technical Cooperation. Films Division became a pioneer in documentary film movement in India that recorded, conserved and preserved the history of independent India in all sphere.

Documentary in India gradually tried to examine social issues, art and culture. After independence, documentary films were screened before a feature film in theatre as mandated by the Government of India. This helped to create awareness about the documentary films in India. Moreover, the Central and State governments started to commission for documentary film productions for supporting official policies, plans and statements. This played a pivotal role in documentary films production practice. However, due to poor regulation, many of the documentary film produced via commissioned programme were dull and uninteresting.

Although television came to India in 1950s, it was only after 1980s that television became a major source of entertainment. Setting up of film institutions like Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune and organisations like IDPA (Independent Documentary Film Producers in India) spurred the development of nonfiction films. Establishment and growth of film festivals in the country also promoted documentary filmmaking in India. MIIF (Mumbai International Film Festival) is a platform for the documentary filmmakers to meet, interact and exchange ideas. A number of film festivals that include nature as a part in their agenda has sprung up in exhibition and patronage from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and individual approaches have added a new vigour to the nature documentary filmmaking process in the country.

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Observe the news channels. Find out, which channels broadcast documentaries. Also record the time and theme of broadcasting.
2. Look at for nature related documentaries. Find out how many Indian documentaries related to nature are portrayed in the channels.

Post-modern social scientists in Europe were fascinated by the new society that rose after World War II. They began to create meaning and understanding through cultural texts such as music and films. It is an established fact that culture is constituted by generation, transformation and circulation of symbolic forms that serves as a means for establishing and reaffirming ideas, values and beliefs in the society. It is important to understand the nature of ideological context and environment that lead to the establishment of societal meaning and point of view.

Non-fiction films have the ability to persuade audience in a much stronger way that leaves a lasting influence on their mind. In the recent past, through his Academy Award winning documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore further demonstrated the power of documentary film, which created international debate over the Iraq war and the role of the then President George W. Bush of the United States of America.

Rise of environmental movements, establishment of various television channels, investment in the behavioural science, development of eco-consciousness and humanitarian issues, increase of state versus citizen conflicts in post World War II period led to the genesis of new outlook in the documentary filmmaking. Television and documentary films became a kind of defender and caretaker by airing various issues environmental degradation due to human intervention in nature, conflicts between state and citizen, right of indigenous people on their property, effects of violence, gender bias etc. Hundreds of films had been made with approaches that are closely associated with daily life.

Stop and Read

Growth of the eco-consciousness is often credited to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which looked at the side effect of DDT at the mass level. The influence of the book was so great that it forced Governments to change policies and inspired the modern environment

12.8 SHORT FILMS

A short film which comprises of characteristics of a feature film is a

relatively recent addition to film genre with only difference with feature film being in the duration of the storytelling. *Academy of Motion*

Picture Arts and Sciences considers a film as a short film, when its running time is of 40 minutes duration. Many directors and producers on the other hand, extend the duration and consider it for 90 minute as the maximum length of a short film (Today, many film festivals have reduced the time to below 15 minutes, more preferably 10 minutes in their mandates). It is generally believed that short films will become the most important tool of communication in future. In today's digital communication, short films, as are released mostly on YouTube, have a bigger potential audience than the conventionally released movies. Short films are most often the platform of experiments for new directors within a short budget. Thus these films are rich in modern and powerful concepts. Short films in the forms of interviews and amateur videos captivated people during the Arab Spring in Tunisia. It has become a medium of communication for values, products, innovation and transparency. It provides opportunities to each and every one, who has the potential of storytelling in a different way. Beginning from Lumiere Brothers, all the early films were short films but today, the dimension of short film has been broadened and matured in terms of script treatment. Short films basically comprise of a few numbers of characters in comparison to feature films and are produced in very limited locations. Contents, most often bears twist in the story. For example, Sujay Ghosh's short film *Ahalya* (2015) fascinated audience for its innovative point of view of looking at an incident from *Ramayana* in very different way and captivated people for 14 minutes. With 8 million viewers in YouTube, the film gave new space and identity to the Indian Short Film industry.

However, short films are not screened at commercial halls/ multiplexes. There is no real market for this industry till date. Although a few short film festivals are organized in different parts of the world, much effort

SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Differentiate between music videos and short films. _____
2. Look at the film promos. Observe how short films and film promos are related. _____

would be needed from academicians and film fraternity to turn it into a viable industry.

12.9 SUMMING UP

Documentary films are considered as the reflection of reality and cover a wide spectrum of content that tells the „truth“. A concise definition of what constitutes a documentary film is difficult to put forward as the innumerable types of reality a documentary can portray, the varied content that it encompasses and the way it presents the subject matter has generated debate over the definition of a documentary in the last few decades. Documentary films differ from both news and feature films in terms of subject, purpose, viewpoints, approach, form, audience response and treatment. There are various categories of documentary films, depending upon the chronology, mode of presentation and point of views of the directors. History of documentary film is considered as the history of cinema as, the works of Lumiere brothers are considered to be the beginning of non-fiction films. In India, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke made the first documentary film, in true sense.

Documentary and short films have the ability to persuade audience in a much stronger way that leaves a lasting influence on their mind. Being audiovisual in nature, documentary and short films are people's medium and have potential to be the most powerful communication tool for future.

12.10 QUESTIONS

1. Define documentary films. Discuss how documentary films differ from News and Feature Films.
2. Classify the various types of documentary films.
3. What are the different modes of a documentary film? Explain.

4. Briefly enumerate the growth of documentary film in India and the world
5. Note down the basic characteristics of short films.
6. Write notes on:
 - (a) Robert Flaherty
 - (b) Documentary film and society
 - (c) Montage

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MODULE IV: TECHNOLOGY AND FILM APPRECIATION

Unit 13: FILM AND TECHNOLOGY

Unit Structure

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Objectives

13.3 Digital Cinema

13.4 Digital technology and Cinema

13.5 Advantages and disadvantages of digital cinema

13.4 YouTube

13.5 Summing Up

13.6 Questions

13.6 References and recommended readings

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Cinema is a technical medium made and distributed with the help of technology. The growth and advancement in cinema industry was discussed in Unit 2 elaborately. While discussing the evolution of film technology, we tried to evaluate the technology for image, sound and projection in detail. In this chapter, we shall try to look into digital advancement in cinema as a whole and its influence on the industry. It is pertinent to mention here that, even while you are reading this unit, many new technologies are being introduced each and every day. Every hour a new software is developed or upgraded compelling us to upgrade the existing software you have developed your skills on. Likewise, in

cinema, digital progresses have helped the medium to reach audience through a single click of the smartphone. From the big screens to the small mobile screens, cinema made a great leap in its glorious journey, establishing it as the most popular medium of mass communication.

13.2 OBJECTIVES

After completion of this unit, you will be able to

- Explain the digital techniques and advancement in cinema
- Describe the growth of digital technology and its impact on cinema
- Explain various modern platforms including YouTube that made cinema reach fingertip of audience.

13.3 DIGITAL CINEMA

Digital cinema or popularly termed as D-cinema is the latest format of cinema, based on computer imaginary. In D-cinema, computer can generate new space and time for narrative, instead of physical reality. Thus, in D-cinema, live footage actions are reduced to „just like other graphics“, merging the job of editor and special effect designer, into one cumbersome business. Linear editing was replaced by non-linear editing in computer. Lev Manovich, in his essay, “*What is Digital Cinema?*” states that digital cinema can be defined as the total of live action material + painting + image processing + compositing + 2-D computer animation + 3-D computer animation (and so on). In other words, from the point of view of making process, digital cinema is a particular case of animation which uses live-action footage and looping as few of its many elements. Due to the much internalization of camera involvement, digital cinema has turned into a „camera-reality“, instead of mime reality. Significantly lower distribution and maintenance costs, immediate access to film libraries, higher

presentation quality, and strong potential for developing new business models made digital cinema convenient to both producers and filmmaker.

Film critics are of the view that music videos and video games are the precursors of digital cinema. In the early eighties, first attempts were made to produce digital cinema with CGI in films such as *TRON* (1982) and *The Last Starfighter* (1984). This was the first wave of digital film making.

Advancement in the technology as regards to graphics and CGI in the mid-1980s, made possible for a second wave of D-cinema with a different approach in CGI with films like *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991). The film made *morphing* a household word. The success of *Jurassic Park* (1993) set the ball rolling for use computer generated graphics in film making. James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) was another CGI-driven blockbuster. With the success of *Titanic*, Cameron argued that cinema is going to witness a fundamental transformation from analogue to digital domain. The massive returns generated by the „digitally enhanced“ *Star Wars* trilogy raised the prospect of a promising future. It was understood that blockbuster movies can be made with new generations of special effects.

CGI: CGI refers to computer generated imagery

DCI: Digital Cinema Initiatives is a joint venture by the major movie studios of the world. DCI works for the standardization of digital production.

DCP: In digital cinema, prior to distribution, the digital master is encrypted and compressed into a Digital Cinema Package (DCP). This is a standard format defined by DCI.

Digital Projector: Digital projectors are machines, with huge xenon lamps that produce tens of thousands of lumens.

Trajectory for D cinema exists in three subsidiary (audio, video and data); platforms (PC, TV, Internet appliance, and game machine); and distribution (how the content gets to audience platform).

The first wave of digital projection began in 1999. Adoption of digital cinema began in real terms in 2005 when the DCI specification was agreed and concerns about interoperability and piracy were addressed. Majority of screens worldwide during this time were in transition period; using 35mm film projection as well as introducing digital projection leading to a dual-distribution system in operation. Digital cinema got momentum in 2009, with the success of *Avatar* and development of 3D.

Although the visual effects and computer imagery are credited for digital revolution in cinema, a silent change in sound technology also boosted the industry to change from analogue to digital. Digital change in sound was initiated with the introduction of Dolby Stereo in 1975 (while CGI came in later period in motion picture). Four-track Dolby stereo led to a new era of sound experimentation beginning with films such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

This unique development in sound presented a challenge to the classical Hollywood narrative. Introduction of Dolby ushered in a new kind of identification in eighties with surround sound effects. It is thus no longer the eyes, the ears and the brain that alone initiate identification and maintains contact with a sonic source; instead, it is the whole body that establishes a relationship, marching to the beat of a different woofer. Where sound was once hidden behind the image in order to allow more complete identification with the image, now the sound source is flaunted, fostering a separate sonic identification contesting the limited rational draw of the image and its characters. As such, certain model of narrative cinema had begun gradually prior to the digital threshold, and before the widespread use of CGI. This silent change endured that cinema is no longer going to be confined on 35

mm screen but will have to find a new way or format for adaptation with the changing environment.

13.4 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND CINEMA

Most digital movie effects involve one of two general processes (or both): composing and animation. The composition includes any kind of combination of two or more images, including superimposition, split-screen, etc. The special effect composition involves the use of blue and green matte screen which we can achieve by shot separately during the production stage. Digital effects are labor-intensive, as this demands more shots for editing in post-production phase in comparison to the shots used in reels. It is interesting to observe that in 1997, a major film production ideally required 300 to 400 shots for special effects, while today, a production with 400 shots would not even qualify as an effects in a movie. A routine film have between 800 and 1200 effects shots, and an advance special effect film like *Avatar* (2009) would require a much larger number. For example, the third installment of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy (2007) had approximately 2000 effects shots, out of a total of 3000. In Hollywood, total digital technology is been used in *Avatar* and *The Hobbit* series. Thus, an era of 125 years in terms of production transformed into digital making reels a redundant concept.

When the content or Digital Source Master (DSM) is shaped into a Digital Cinema Distribution Master (DCDM) then a digital print is formed. This conforms to DCI specification (Sustainability of Digital Formats). It is after compression and encryption that it is sent for transport to the theater as a DCP (Digital Cinema Package, also known as a Digital Cinema Initiatives Package). DCP uses an encryption key or KDM (Key Delivery Message) to unlock the digital print. This DCP is unpackaged, decrypted, and decompressed back into the DCDM after which it becomes suitable for exhibition. The KDM is characterized by a unique, time-limited security key for the movie that limits it to work

for only one digital cinema server provided that server is connected to an authorized projector. This prevents the KDM from being delivered to a wrong server or wrong location where it will not work. Thus such errors cannot compromise the security of the movie. Basically, digital cinema production has five phases. These are: Mastering, Transport, Storage and Playback, and Projection.

A. Mastering

Digital cinema post-production output is called as the Digital Cinema Distribution Master (DCDM). In DCDM, collection of data formats, insertion of structures for image, audio, subtitles, and auxiliary data (for example, information about lighting, curtains, special effects, etc) are performed. During mastering, image data in the DCDM is compressed using JPEG2000 (audio is not compressed). The encrypted files are then packaged to create the Digital Cinema Package (DCP) for exhibitors in formats like Material eXchange Format (MXF) specifications and extensible Mark up Language (XML).

The Image structures in DCDM may be either 2K resolution (up to 2160×1080 pixels) or 4K resolution (up to 4096×2160 pixels). The studios can choose to deliver a movie in either 2K or 4K format. A device-independent color space is also used. The bit depth of each color component is set at 12 bits and the frame rate is set to be 24Hz. In addition, a frame rate of 48Hz is also allowed for 2K content.

B. Transport

Digitally made cinema can be transported via physical media or over a network. Care is also taken so that encryption remains intact during transport. Moreover, data of the original files are held intact upon completion of the transport so that no loss is incurred during transmission.

C. Storage and Playback

At the exhibition site, the DCP is unpackaged, unencrypted, and uncompressed to create DCDM inside a secure media block for

projection. DCI specification requires the insertion of forensic watermarks into both audio and images.

D. Projection

Digital projector converts the digital image data into light that appears on the screen. The DCI specification defines several aspects of the projection system including colorimetry, performance specifications and requirements, and the physical connections to and from the projector.

JPEG2000 FOR DIGITAL CINEMA

JPEG2000 (JPEG2) is the compression format in DCI specification, adopted worldwide in 2004. This data compression technique decreases the size of the image data for economical storage and delivery.

According to DCI specification, size of each movie frame is as large as 4096x2160 pixels. With three color components, 12 bits/pixel/color component, and 24 frames/second, the total size of a three hour feature film exceeds 9 terabytes, which is too large for distribution in an uncompressed way. The DCI specifications require a 4K decoder to decode all data for every frame in a 4K distribution.

13. 5 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL CINEMA

Aesthetics and Workflows

Digital cinema is getting the prominence due to the aesthetics of projection. Digital projection offers a cleaner image than film: McCallum (producer of *Star Wars Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace*; the first film to be digitally distributed, in just four theatres) said that the idea of digital distribution was to create a system where audience are in a completely digital realm. Not only the digital arena for

capturing images, but most importantly in the distribution process too, for no loss of quality from one print to the next.

(i) Cost

Digital cinema is cost effective for distributors in the manufacture and transportation of release prints. Streaming via high-speed internet cable or dedicated satellite link or, more commonly, shipment by express courier on specialist hard disks, which are designed especially for use with digital cinema servers are common methods for digital distribution, (one feature film requires roughly 10 reels of film weighing approximately 4Kg!). The digital release print represents a cost saving for the distributor because it is easier and cheaper to release multiple versions of a digital print, in comparison to subtitling a film print: “if a caption is printed directly on the film print, then the film print

(ii) Piracy

Piracy as one of the perceived threats of digital distribution.

(iii) Digital Access

Another often-overlooked advantage of digital distribution is the area of accessibility

(iv) Space for independent filmmakers

The world of amateur filmmakers has been given a stage on the internet. Aspiring filmmakers can upload their homegrown short films on a variety of websites such as Vimeo and YouTube besides streaming.

(v) Rise of e-Cine Journalism

Viewers can obtain information, reviews and the rating of the audience from practically any film in existence at any point in time via the internet. Background information for example, about cinema or specific films, directors, actors and other related phenomena are available at platforms like IMDB.com is short for International Movie Database etc.

(vi) The Fear

A fear of losing the original files still continues in the minds of digital filmmakers. Bill Kinder, Director of Editorial and Post Production of Pixar Animation Studios who made *Toy Story 2* (Lasseter and Brannon 1999), the first movie to have an entirely digital workflow, from production to distribution, says that even though their films are born digital, entirely made up of Computer Generated Images (CGI), they still keep archival color separations on film. “So that we have a physical print we can stash away: I guess until we’ve had a hundred years of stable computer files, it’s really just speculation whether the files will last. I’ve seen them not last for even a few years, so, you know. ... Pixar of course has a pretty good understanding of how to preserve data and we have an unbelievable support system for backing up and retrieving files. But until someone comes along and says not to I’ll always say it’s a good idea to keep it on film”, he says.

(vii) Storage issue

Although D-cinema is cost-effective during production and distribution, there are storage issues that is becoming a challenge in recent times. According to Kodak, the cost of preserving digital content is estimated to be “11 times more expensive than film” (Kodak, “Film is the Only”). This is supported by Michael Cieply who, responding to the publication of the “Digital Dilemma” report, warns that “digital productions face higher preservation costs” than 35 mm productions.

(viii) Audience experiences

Carl Plantinga, the cinema educator, once said that cinema invokes emotions including fear, affect, nostalgia, sentimentality, sadness, anger, happiness in audience. Moreover, it is not only a way of seeing, but also a way of hearing, feeling, thinking, and responding. It presents not just a mental universe (of perception and cognition) but a holistic experience connected to the emotions and affects the body. Films have become portable and available through a variety of channels: they can be watched on portable devices, on a television set with a Blu-Ray™ or DVD-player, they can be streamed from the internet and so on. Movie viewing experiences have thus been transformed. Online movie viewing

at home viewing is now performing what ciné clubs were to the movie-going experience. Technology, thus is creating a new form of popular debate in regard to cinema experience that a film may provide now.

13.4 DIGITAL CINEMA IN INDIA

In India, digital cinema got its foothold with the release of *Dhoom 3* in 2013. Prior to that cinema like *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Singh is King* (2008), *Ghajini* (2008) paved the way for digital cinema in India. Sci-fi films like *Krrish* (2006), *Ra.One* (2011), *Mr. X* (2015) and the likes, helped to establish digital cinema in India. *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) and *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017) is an apt example of Indian cinema's exponential progress in the digital world. FICCI reports (2018) on advancement of digital cinema in India revealed that more than 40 Video on Demand (VoD) platforms are active in the country. Among which platforms like Amazon Prime Video, Netflix and local players like Hotstar, Voot, SonyLiv, ALT Balaji are dominating the market. The report also states that the growth of digital revenues are leading Eros to become the top online distributor of India followed by Hotstar, Netflix, Amazon Primes and others.

13.5 YouTube

YouTube is a [video-sharing](#) website which allows users to upload, view, rate, share, add to favourites, report, comment on [videos](#), and [subscribe to media files](#). [Chad Hurley](#), [Steve Chen](#), and [Jawed Karim](#) created the service in February 2005 which [Google](#) bought in November 2006. From [video to music clips](#), TV shows, films to [live streams](#), and other content such as [vlogging](#), short original videos,

[educational videos](#) You Tube provides almost everything from all sectors.

Most of the content on YouTube is uploaded by individuals, although media corporations too offer material via YouTube. YouTube has partnership with [NBC](#), [BBC](#) [MGM](#), [Lionsgate Entertainment](#) and [CBS](#). It earns revenue from Google [AdSense](#), a program which targets ads according to site content and audience. Though majority of videos are free for viewing, but there are exceptions, that includes subscription-based premium channels ([YouTube Premium](#)), film rentals, access to exclusive content etc. YouTube Go, an [Android](#) app now makes YouTube easier to access on mobile devices.

YouTube has become more interactive platform now-a-days and has enabled people to directly engage with government and clients. Yet many countries like [China](#), [North Korea](#), [Iran](#), [Uzbekistan](#) have restrictions on YouTube.

Due to user-generated contents, YouTube has emerged as the world's third most popular online destination. In addition to their own content, popular YouTuber's are utilizing traditional media to build their personal brand. You Tube's undeniable presence has a positive impact on offline marketing and advertising of cinema. Producers prefer to release trailers, teasers and songs in YouTube. Strategy designers predict the commercial success or failure of a movie based on the viewer's number of sharing and downloading. Online content reviewers create their own channels, thus, establishing a new form of cine-journalism in online media. It has also turned into an alternative medium for filmmakers or producers, who, after creating successful niche audience, move into mainstream film production. It thus promotes individual filmmakers and film making business by providing world release and reducing financial insecurity of the industry.

13.6 SUMMING UP

Cinema is a constantly evolving technical medium. It requires technical knowledge and expertise for aesthetic enhancement. Introduction of digital cinema drummed the closing of *film* and thus cinema, according to the scholars, is an end of traditional cinema. Digitalization of cinema has a long history of transformation. Step by step development in sound, onslaught of Dolby sound, development of computer graphics, animation and editing tools have led to a gradual development of digital cinema.

With digitalization, changes came to the formats and hence many prominent film producing companies united and tried to dissolve the transition phase with the introduction of a new format DCP (Digital Cinema Package).

There are five steps of digital cinema making: mastering, transport, storage and playback, and projection. Various online video platforms are helping in the growth of the digital cinema. YouTube, the video sharing online platform is another feather to the cap of digital cinema which provides individual filmmakers to make movies and release it to international audience. YouTube is thus helping in advertising and revenue generation too.

Although there are various advantages and disadvantages of digital cinema, it is true that, digital cinema is the cinema of our time. Future of cinema also depends on the digital cinema advancements.

13.7 QUESTIONS

1. Briefly illustrate the steps of digital film making.
2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of digital cinema.
3. Mention the tools of digital cinema.
4. How does YouTube help digital cinema? Explain in details.
5. Short Note
 - (i) DCI
 - (ii) JPEG 2
 - (iii) Development of digital cinema

(iv) Streaming of cinema

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UNIT 14: FILM APPRECIATION AND CRITICISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 Aesthetics of Film
- 14.4 Writing Film Review and Criticism
- 14.5 Film as Art
- 14.6 Film Analysis
- 14.7 Textual and Contextual Analysis of Films
- 14.8 Summing Up
- 14.9 Questions
- 14.10 References and recommended readings

14.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit is based on the important aspect of film appreciation and criticism which aims to building up the cinematic sense of learners as readers of a film. It also tries to explore ways for witnessing the wonders of cinema as „art to be critiqued“ rather than „consumed“ like an ordinary person. Up till now, the course has covered almost all aspects of knowledge about cinema. This chapter would enable the you to participate in the medium through use of the knowledge gained in previous chapters. Some of the major aspects such as the concept of semiotics and mise-en-scene are revisited. However, this unit would

serve as a guide to build a sense for accepting cinema as a critical art form.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

After completion of the present unit, you will be able to

- Explain the aesthetics of films
- Describe the techniques of writing film reviews, criticism and analysis of films
- Write textual and contextual analysis of films.

14.3 AESTHETICS OF FILMS

Aesthetics is associated with beauty and art. Dictionary meaning states it is a branch of philosophy that deals with the principles of beauty and judgment on ideas of art. *Oxford dictionary of Film Studies* (2012) states that, “Aesthetics of cinema involves, first of all accepting that film is a legitimate art form; and then that cinema does more than simply copy what is „out there“ in the real world; and finally that the medium possess distinctive formal and expressive qualities that potentially confer aesthetic value”. It is clear that the meaning of aesthetics associated with cinema is parallel to performing art forms. It requires aesthetic cognition, perception, cultural norms and values for understanding the beauty ingrained in the medium.

Understanding of art and interpretation of beauty is related to the changing time, context and culture. For example, definition of art in the nineteenth century was based on the analytical principles like grammar, rhetoric, logic, structural elements etc. But contemporary art and aesthetic has included technology as a powerful structure which also determines the quality and production of art and hence the aesthetic quality of cinema. Ability of „recreation“ of reality by camera made the

aesthetic sense of cinema more complex in comparison to any other art form.

What constitutes art and how aesthetic sense is built up is a question that philosophers are trying to answer from the days of Aristotle. In simple ways, aesthetic is basically a triangulation of the work created/imagined, the artist and the observer operating on the arena of space, experience (of what is represented/recreated) and on performances. In the words of Monaco, the spectrum of abstraction, modes of discourse, range of determinants and consumer characteristics are some of the approaches to comprehend aesthetics of cinema.

James Monaco states that artistic experience has four significant determinants that support the system of criticism. These are: socio-political, psychological, technical and economic leading to ethical/political, psychoanalytical, aesthetic/formalist and infrastructure criticism respectively.

14.4 WRITING FILM REVIEW AND CRITICISM

Film review and criticism are the interpretation of the meanings of a film, analyzing the intention of director, the performance of artists and uncovering technical matters, generally by experts. Therefore, reviews and criticism are modes of communication through which filmmakers communicate to the audience. Cinema, as discussed earlier, is like a language and therefore, consists of meaning making elements.

Arrangements of these elements might differ for different directors depending on their style and financial resources. Therefore, the job of a critic is to interpret possible meaning and arrange them according to the hierarchy of importance in the cinema (for example, expression of social stigma, government policies, trauma of civilians etc.). Writing film reviews and criticisms, therefore is considered as a „rhetorical art“ Stephen Prince, in his book *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film* (1997), identifies three functions of film critics:

- (i) Teases out implicit or subtle meanings

- (ii) Clarifies seemingly contradictory messages or values in a given film and
- (iii) Creates a novel way of interpreting or understanding of films.

Moreover, film critics can provoke original ideas in the minds of audience relating to a film or a director or an actor. Oftentimes, audience does not feel complete after viewing a film. In such a condition they take the shelter of a good analysis. It is, therefore, a way to bring together audience and film to appreciate the art of cinema.

Rhetoric is the art of using language for persuading and influencing people. Eminent scholars like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others influenced people with their rhetoric power.

Film reviews (*re-view*) are considered as the most common modes of film criticism. Any person, capable of arranging the ideas can write a review after viewing a movie. It is written in short and straight way for general public. Most vital information related to a film (like the director's perspective, actors performance, theme, producer etc.) is answered in a review. It is, therefore, subjective in nature. A review writer must have to understand that she/he is not allowed much space in a newspaper or television and therefore the writing will have to be crisp but detailed. It should be noted that, audience reach for reviews are higher than any other format of criticism. Thus, it helps readers to decide whether a film suits his/her taste and expectations.

Scholarly criticism, on the other hand, is targeted towards focused audiences who are acquainted with the basics of cinema and have interest in it. Writing style is explorative in nature. Such writings address one film in the light of film theories (psychoanalysis, feminism, post-modernism, etc.), history, contextual periphery (the socio-political or cultural context for instance) comparative analysis, data interpretation or technological issues. Language of the writings are more specialized in vocabulary, detailed in merits or demerits, deploys

understandings of genre, sub-genre, noir or interpret minute details on the basis of one or two models. Instead of consumerism, scholarly criticism is more academic in nature, which also takes references of earlier writers. Such writings are available in journals like *Film Quarterly*, *Cinema Journal*, and *Screen* etc.

14.5 FILMS AS ART

Why cinema is considered as an art form, has been elaborately discussed in Unit I. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2010) in their book *Film Art: An Introduction* are of the view that film form and content in totality, contribute for the establishment of film as art form. Form, in film, for them, is a system where activities (like walking, driving, swimming etc.) are performed to generate a meaning. In broader sense, it is the „overall system of relations that we can perceive among the elements in the whole film“. This may include the narrative design or stylistic elements of camera work, colour pattern, use of music and other accessories in a film. Concept of form and content are very often misleading. For critics, form is the shape or style a filmmaker adopts (example: some films may be „more technical“ in form where the director prefers technical arrangements in the content) to tell a story. The inner material or elements the filmmaker chooses to establish relationship gives meaning to the film on his own form. For example, many filmmakers in Bollywood depicted partition of India after independence using different forms. However, the recurring theme and the content echoes similar stories of misery of the affected masses. *Garam Hawa* (Dir. M. S. Sathyu 1974), *Gadar-Ek Prem Katha* (Dir. Anil Sharma, 2001), *Pinjar* (Dir. Chandraprakash Dwivedi, 2003) are movies based on the events during the partition of India, but their contents and the art of storytelling differ distinctively. Subject matter and abstract ideas (if adopted by the director) are integral part of the artwork (form). Film forms can even help audience look at a subject

matter from a new perspective, to retrospect habits and behaviour in a different way. This enables us to see, feel and think from a different standpoint. Thus, film form evokes emotion in cinema and foresees the emotional involvement of spectators with the characters of their choice. There is an intrinsic relationship between film form and meaning generation of the medium as an art. These meaning may be **referential** (giving reference to the identification of plot, character or places in a film), **explicit** (meaning generated by the context of the character), **implicit** (going beyond explicit meaning and demanding interpretation of meaning) and **symptomatic** meaning (depending upon social norms, values and ideologies). Symptomatic meaning, as such, reflects that cinema is a product of the society, and the director is a part of it.

14.6 FILM ANALYSIS

There are no definite and specific rules of film analysis. We can, however, trace some common steps of film analysis followed by the critics. These are:

- (i) *Formulation of a framework*: This framework decides the ground on which a film will be evaluated. This includes the selection of the film, the context on which the film was set, the director's other films for understanding his style of production, the related theories or models that will be reliable for analysing the film.
- (ii) *Study of earlier works*: Review of existing literature is essential, how the other critics had evaluated the film or the director. It helps in developing one's own framework of writing. For e.g. work of Satyajit Ray on *Pather Panchali* demands the study on Ray and the film before one attempts to do so, as, the basic objectives of film criticism is to develop its own interpretation than simulating others.
- (iii) *Establishing contextual periphery*: Film critics need to identify the social, political, economical, philosophical, historical or

aesthetic context of the film. For example, analysis of movies on partition of India demands the historical knowledge of the critic beyond the knowledge of audience. S/he will have to present novelty of thoughts in the context of the movie that relates to partition issues or to reject it with appropriate justifications.

- (iv) *Working on the framework*: Once the objectives are set, framework is clear, theories are identified and contextual periphery is selected, now, the critic can move on to view the movie. While review of a film can loosely be based on one's viewing, analysis or criticism of films needs viewing of a film two, three, four or sometime more than that to establish the most efficient frames/shots required for analysis. Picking up a few shots is a herculean task for beginners and this necessitates precision in labelling (camera angles, shot composition, editing technique, technicality etc.) and years of experience. Presentation of relevant details, discussion of cinematic structure and understanding the narrative are essential while doing the analysis.
- (v) *Developing an argument*: Original interpretation of a writer, after assessing theories/ models or earlier workers helps in development of an argument. Unlike literature, visual narrative of cinema has multi-dimensional and layered meaning in each frame; a phenomena, termed as polyvalent characteristic. Meticulous effort towards the subject is the only key to build a new argument. The argument should be insightful and should be able to guide reader rather than confusing them.
- (vi) *Concluding Remark*: Concluding remark is as important as setting of objecting and building the framework. Clear, concise, connected and forceful writing establishes criticism as a rhetoric art. Final proposition of a critic enrich reader's understanding about film and the art associated with the industry. Film analysis is so important that, a single, powerful analysis may give rise to such volumes of multi-dimensional analysis in future.

14.7 TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF FILMS

In both textual and contextual analysis, images are considered as representation that gives ideas, meanings and values to the visual world. As visual analysis is an intellectual and crafty process, hence, there are various methods of film study. The choice of the method depends on the nature and goal of the analysis.

Textual analysis refers to study of films as „text“. Such studies are based on the concept that images are „texts“ that can be read with the grammar of film language and therefore, is a kind of *visual content analysis*. Noted film Scholars, Van Leeuwen and Jewitt states that visual analysis may be based on what is visible within the image or collection of images. These images may be self-sufficient or capable of being inserted into many different contexts as in the study of fine arts. Various types of semiotic analysis are applicable in textual analysis of films. Social semiotics explores how „text“ constructs realities and believes that texts are not made by „accident“, rather it is both an intellectual and a skillful process. There is no specific boundary of identifying „text“ in a film; only the analyser determines what is text or what is not, for his study of a film. For example, you can choose the method of visual analysis developed by Rick Idema for textual analysis. Here, Idema specifies six levels of analytical aspects that include examinations of frame, shots, scene, sequence, generic stage and the work as a whole. Although textual analysis is like the study of language or literature, James Monaco says that „film is like language, and since it is like language, some of the methods that we use to study language might profitably be applied to a study of film. Yet, since film is not a language, narrowly linguistic concepts can be misleading“. A film scholar would require understanding the need and demand of the structure of the film that s/he wants to conduct textual analysis upon.

Contextual analysis, unlike textual analysis, is deeper in nature and searches beyond what the images or frames contain. As film images are

an artistic craft, therefore, arrangement of the images often relies on social, cultural or political environment. The point of view of a director is an important element which influences the construction of images. This is why, analysis of films as „text“ alone may sometime mislead audience about the message that the director actually portrays in his arrangement.

James Monaco, in his book, „How to Read a Film“, coherently, states the significance of society and culture in formulating contextual meaning. According to Monaco, the image is experienced as both an optical and a mental phenomenon. This mental and optical phenomenon combine to create the concept of sign. These signs when read in conjugation with cultural and saccadic aspects produce the meaning either denotative or a connotative. Filmmakers prefer to modify space (mise-en-scène) and time for developing the relationship between signs and symbols. This model of „reading“ and „understanding“ of film language is important in film study.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a broader concept in media research. Textual and contextual study share the major portion in discourse analysis.

ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. Write a review on the Bollywood film PK and analyse the context of the text.

14.8 SUMMING UP

Because cinema is a complex art form dependent on technological assistance, and being a relatively new art entry, the understanding of the

medium tends to differ from other art forms. Its aesthetic essence is higher and complex but concisely the beauty of cinema, is reliant on a three-fold structure comprising the director, critics and audience. Societal construction, cultural norms, political atmosphere, economical standards and psychological acceptance are some of the factors that help audience to understand cinema. Film critics, reviewers and analysers play a significant role in this aspect. While film review does not necessarily demand expertise in technical know-how of cinema, criticism and analysis demands a deeper knowledge of the medium. These two are systematic, planned and chronological in establishing new ideas and perception on films, trends or genre. Moreover, adopting of methods like textual and contextual analysis establishes cinema as a strong form of pedagogy, a branch of philosophy and a valued art form.

14.8 QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by aesthetics of cinema? Discuss.
2. State the significant differences between film review and film criticism.
3. Discuss film as an art form.
4. What is textual and contextual understanding of a film? Explain with a cinema as a case study.
5. Critically analyse a film you have recently enjoyed
6. Write a review on a movie that was hit of the week.

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