

Engaging With Ethical Principles and Justice: A Movie Review of ‘Do Aankhen Barah Haath’

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The 1957 Hindi film ‘Do aankhen barah haath’ is a tale of one warden and 12 prisoners. The basic premise of the film is that there are 6 criminals who are charged with brutal crimes and the warden named ‘Adinath’ wants to rehabilitates these criminals. For this purpose he seeks permission from the jail superintendent and they reluctantly agree. Adinath takes them to an isolated area and expects them to cultivate the barren land and grow crops for living- the idea being that the sense of community, pride of purpose and self-sufficiency that comes from this productive labor will serve to help the convicts overcome their anti-social ways and discover their better nature. In Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning, in stage 5 moral decisions are made after carefully thinking about all the alternatives and striking a balance between human rights and the laws of society. Individual judgement is based on self-chosen principles and moral reasoning is based on individual rights and justice. In this stage, the individual becomes aware of the laws/rules that might exist for the good of the greatest number, may at times there are times when they will work against the interest of a particular individual. Same happened with Adinath who decides to go

against the laws and took all the prisoners with him to an isolated land to make them a better person. There comes a time when all the prisoners run away but the fear of the two eyes of Adinath bring Adinath’s bring them back. Gradually, they all realize the faith and loyalty that they all placed in Adinath is so powerful that they refrain to betraying him. This shows the stage 3 of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development that moral decisions are guided most by conforming to the standards of others we value. At this stage, we begin to internalize the moral standards of valued adult role models. Authority is internalized but not questioned, and reasoning is based on the norms of the group of which the person belongs. Similarly here in this movie, the criminals return back because they think thought what Adinath would make of the situation think if they were to go away. Therefore answers relate to the approval of others. The jailor and the six criminals by their hard work and good intentions produce a good harvest from the stale land. This makes everyone happy. When the barren land becomes a fertile one and the criminals produce a good harvest from the land, this successful yield of the land becomes a threat to a corrupt land owner nearby. He cannot see Adinath and his team produce a good harvest which destroys in the area and poses a strict competition to him. There is a female character in this movie named Sandhya who sells vegetables to nearby villages, one being this farm. She is often a victim of eve teasing by the criminals even though she had helped them without any self-motivation self-motive and to change for their good. She soon befriends the jailor and all the six criminals.

The film shows that how the criminals have reached to the 3rd stage from the 1st stage of moral development theory of Kohlberg. At first, they are on the level of self-interest where their moral decisions were are based primarily on fear of punishment or the need to be obedient. For e.g. on the first night at the barren land the criminals can’t sleep because they become used

to being shackled in heavy chains. On the other hand, when they returned back with their own will shows that they reached to the next stage of moral reasoning.

‘Do aankhen barah haath’ is a revolutionary movie which compelled the people to rethink how to treat convicts and prisoners. He wanted to reform the prisoners into socially productive beings not in the confines of prison but in the real world. In the final stage of Kohlberg’s moral development theory, when a person considers universally accepted ethical principles. The judgement may become innate and the person becomes attached to his own principles of justice. Adinath can be an example of an individual who has reached this stage. He followed the humanistic approach according to which there is always a good element in every human being. He reproduced the humanity in the prisoners which was reducing behind the bars. Slowly but surely, he instils in them the traits of humanity that were fast disappearing in the dehumanizing world of the prison, where they were reduced to just a number. He was a compassionate, caring and a kind man. Many challenges came in the way to stop them but due to his great leadership and motivational skills he was able to achieve his task and successfully rehabilitates the prisoners into good citizens. In the process of teaching the criminals to live in a better and sensible way.

There came many situations when he had to choose between mercilessness and kindness, egocentricity and selflessness and violence and non-violence but he always opted for what he ethically seemed right. For example, in the beginning a prisoner attempted to attack him

attack on him and in that moment he could have lifted the stick and beaten the prisoner yet he pressed the door calling bell so that the guards could rescue him.

Utility for a teacher

This movie is a great example of transformational leadership. It shows how a teacher must lead their students with trust, faith and respect. The phenomenon is when you start expecting people to behave in a certain manner then people eventually begin to behave accordingly. . Usually society thinks that criminals can mend only with the help of punishment and without the harsh treatment they can never improve. But the outstanding efforts of Adinath in transformation of criminals without the help of punishment proves such assumptions wrong. He believed that they can and must be reformed and not punished. Similarly, a teacher thinks that a student can only be taught with the help of punishment rather than the other better ways. The never give up attitude of Adinath represents that how persistent behavior of a teacher can help their students a lot. The more you expect, the better they perform. This can be seen in the film when the prisoners were unable to betray Adinath due to his persistent belief and faith. And at last all the prisoners adopted his peaceful and virtuous way of living. For a teacher, it is very important to inculcate moral values, positive thinking, attitude of helping and ethical values in the students so that they become a good citizen. It is the duty of the teacher to recognize the positive things in the students and refines them properly. If the teacher supports and nurtures students accurately then they will surely become successful in their life.