# Films in India as an Effective Educational Tool: A Look at Advantages and Challenges

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**Abstract**

Indian cinema is a popular mode of entertainment for all. Moreover, Indian Films have gone beyond the geographical boundaries. They have come out of the epoch of love and fantasy and learnt to work on experimental plots. Films can have a leading role in education. Films enable students to learn visually unlike textual learning through books. Films can have a bigger pie in their role to promote knowledge in the digitalized world we are living in. This paper attempts to explore the concept of learning with entertainment through the use of films. It looks into some of the popular films of the year 2016 and delves into the portrayal of social messages that they delivered. It has randomly chosen films of different genres such as biopics, dramas, sports dramas, action, thriller films for diversity. The cases of these selected films exhibit the soft power of these films to deliver the impressionable messages not only in India but at a global scale. Films need to be placed at the heart of young people's learning experiences.

## Introduction to film and film industry

Indian cinema is a popular mode of entertainment for all. Moreover, Indian Films have gone beyond the geographical boundaries. They have come out of the epoch of love and fantasy and learnt to work on experimental plots. There have been many great inspirational iconic films which teach us important life lessons. Film/cinema is the Latin spelling of the Greek word 'kinema', meaning 'a motion'. Cinema is the British word for a movie theatre. The related words for cinema are film, movie, celluloid, theatre, flicks.

***Digitalisation in films:*** Digitalisation is considered to be the next best thing for Indian Cinema and it is in a position to exploit the technology in all aspects from building capacity, content creation, processing, management and distribution of the digital content in various formats and sources (Pannu and Tomar, 2011). The effect of globalization of Indian cinema is applicable not only to Bollywood, but also to the regional film industries of the country. Many Indian films are not only making more money outside the home market but also attracting foreign producers and directors to the industry.

***Indian Film Industry:*** The Indian film industry is alive and an established one. Indian film Industry is considered a huge film industry in terms of production. In addition to 'Bollywood', the regional cinema also constitutes the gamut of the Indian Film industry. India has the largest film industry in the world, making on an average of nearly two thousand feature films and nearly fifteen hundred short films every year (CBFC, 2017). Films can be exhibited after being certified.

***Role of Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) in the Indian Film Industry:*** There are many bodies associated with the film industry in India. One of the bodies, CBFC, popularly known as the *Censor Board,* is a government of India regulatory body and censorship board of India under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It reviews, rates and censors' films, television shows television advertisements, and promotional material. Films cannot be exhibited on any of the platforms whether cinema halls, television without being certified by CBFC.

***Rating of films:*** The rating system for films by CBFC is as mentioned here:

U: Unrestricted/Universal Public Exhibition for films suitable for 'family viewing' and the film contains no or mild violence and sensuality.

U/A: Unrestricted/Universal Public Exhibition but with parental guidance for children below 12

years and may contain mild violence, language and sexuality.

A: Adults: 'A' Films are meant for Adult audiences above 18 years.

S: Specialized Audience: This rating is given very rarely and signifies that the film is meant for a specialized audience such as Doctors.

No rating: Several films do not receive a rating, indicating they are disallowed from public screening.

Films are certified in Hindi and other regional languages and a greater number of films have been certified belonging to Hindi language in the year 2016, as depicted in table 1. The figures in table 1 indicate rise and fall in production of films in Digital in major Indian languages as compared to the year April 2015 to March 2016. During the year April 2016 to March 2017 the largest number of films were certified in Hindi (364) followed by Tamil (304), Telugu (294), Kannada (220), Bengali (163), Malayalam (156), Marathi (117) and so on.

**Table1: Production of films in Digital in major Indian languages and providing comparison in years April 2015 and March 2016**

| Language | Films certified in April 2015 to March 2016 | Films certified in April 2016 to March 2017 | Increase (+) Decrease (-) in the number of Films certified |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hindi | 340 | 364 | (+) 24 |
| Tamil | 291 | 304 | (+) 13 |
| Telugu | 275 | 294 | (+) 19 |
| Malayalam | 168 | 156 | (-) 12 |
| Kannada | 204 | 220 | (+) 16 |
| Marathi | 180 | 117 | (-) 63 |
| Bengali | 149 | 163 | (+) 14 |

*(Source: Annual Report 2016-2017, Central Board of Film Certification)*

Looking into the films certified as per classification of Indian feature films revealed by CBFC, one gets a peek into the types of classification of themes in films and their number certified in different categories. Out of the total feature films certified in 1986, majority were falling into the category of social films as depicted in table 2. As can be read from table 2 that the largest number of films are being certified under the 'social' type of film category.

**Table 2: Classification of Indian Feature Films (Digital) Certified From 1-4-2016 To 31-3-2017**

| S. No. | Classification | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social | 1571 | 79 |
| 2 | Crime | 83 | 4.2 |
| 3 | Comedy | 37 | 1.8 |
| 4 | Action | 34 | 1.7 |
| 5 | Thriller | 61 | 3.07 |
| 6 | Horror | 107 | 5.4 |
| 7 | Fantasy | 12 | 0.6 |
| 8 | Historical | 10 | 0.5 |
| 9 | Children's Film | 8 | 0.4 |
| 10 | Fiction | 2 | 0.1 |
| 11 | Sci. fiction | 4 | 0.2 |
| 12 | Adventure | 4 | 0.2 |
| 13 | Devotional | 8 | 0.4 |
| 14 | Documentary | 4 | 0.2 |
| 15 | Others | 14 | 0.7 |

| 16 | Biographical | 14 | 0.7 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | Action/ Thriller | 3 | 0.15 |
| 18 | Mythological | 8 | 0.4 |
| 19 | Revenge | 2 | 0.1 |
| | Total | 1986 | 100% |

*(Source: Annual Report 2016-2017, Central Board of Film Certification)*

***Conflict of freedom of expression and censorship in films:*** Should films, being an important instrument of expression of ideas and free thoughts, remain free and unrestricted from any kind of censorship or should one keep in mind the practical realities of the society in which such ideas through the films will be broadcasted? There is a need to maintain a balance and peace in the society to make way for harmony between freedom of expression and a sense of security and peace being maintained in the society.

***Films for social Change:*** Films are now used by scholars, historians, educationalists and students of media, to study the utility from numerous aspects as well as to map the changing demographics and socio-economic as well political temperament of the Indian populace. Right from its inception, Indian cinema has had people who wanted to and did use the medium for more than entertainment (Pannu and Tomar, 2011). History of films is replete with examples of films with strong social messages. They used films to highlight prevalent issues concerning the society and sometimes to throw open new issues for the public. To counter this, they created many genres' and several of the films took creative liberty and depicted reality from an artful perspective.

Social issues are also highlighted in recent films too. There are other films as well that deal with sensitive social issues and are examples of social dramas where the film either focuses upon a particular contemporary problem or portrays the social degeneration.

**Methodology**

In today's day and age, education has transcended the traditional and orthodox methods of teaching. Gone are the times when using technology for imparting knowledge seemed like a distant dream. A product of this technological development, the modern concept of utilizing films as a tool for providing education continues to find new suitors with each passing day.

This paper attempts to explore the concept of learning with entertainment through the use of films. It looks into some of the popular films of the year 2016 and delves into the portrayal of social messages that they delivered. It has randomly chosen films of different genres such as biopics, dramas, sports dramas, action, thriller films for diversity. The cases of these selected films exhibit the soft power of these films to deliver the impressionable messages not only in India but at a global scale.

**Discussions**

With textbooks often failing to entice the younger students, combining learning with a source of entertainment seems like the ideal way of getting the most out of them. While this method has its own set of critics, the pros outweigh the cons.

***Film can help in learning:*** Films enable students to learn visually unlike textual learning through books. Using films to teach can definitely be a challenge, but when carried out in a proper manner, it boasts of numerous benefits. The movie *Gandhi*, for example, allows a student to view a recreation of the life of Mahatma Gandhi, a paramount figure in the history books. The visual clips provide a greater understanding of the time and era as well as the lifestyle of the historical figure than simple words. Additionally, films are not limited in the way books are. They occasionally go beyond the curriculum and touch upon topics which might not be part of the course but important nonetheless, like the class and gender conflicts forming an inherent part of the film *Gandhi*.

***Great inspirational films:*** Looking through the history of films, some of them standout due to a high impact factor as they are deeply etched on the minds of the viewers. These teach with important life lessons to learn from their stories presented in an inspiring formula. Watching inspirational films brings back those

exciting moments of great creativity and inspiration. They can inspire people or students to give everything they can to see their vision implemented or work towards achievement of their goals and may keep them going through difficult times. For instance, the biopic films depict and dramatize the life of an important historical personage (or group) from the past or present era. Sometimes, historical biopics stretch the truth and tell a life story with varying degrees of accuracy and yet be inspiring.

***The mindfulness factor:*** The interest of the viewers is an important factor of learning as it brings mindfulness to the theme and the associated task at hand. Research has revealed that on a general level, many students respond better to watching films than to reading which helps in keeping them interested and prevent them from getting easily distracted. This is especially effective for those who are not motivated readers and prefer videos over the written word.

The use of subtitled videos has proven to substantially improve reading and literacy skills. And with so many novels or books of various genres' getting film adaptations, teaching the subject of literature has become more versatile. Students can choose the type of platform of studying they prefer and even start a healthy debate on which version they found better and why.

For some students, learning through films is actually a boon. Even those with the severe learning disabilities have shown a response to films and can relate to them. Students belonging to deprived backgrounds, without books to learn from at home, often show the inability to read properly but still willingly and excitedly talk about films they are familiar with and which they relate to. With the film industries growing diverse by the day, more and more films are starting to cater to the preferences of different types of people throughout the world by being relatable. Films can be considered as a 'universal language' which overcomes the barrier of textual learning for all backgrounds.

***Popular films and the portrayal of social messages:*** Some of the popular films of the year 2016 were randomly selected and the portrayal of social messages that they delivered were explored and deliberated upon. *Dangal* (2016) was an action, biographical drama. It was

directed by Nitesh Tiwari and the cast boasted Amir Khan, Sakshi Tanwar, Fatima Sana Shaikh and Sanya Malhotra. It is a film about a former wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat and his two wrestler daughters who struggle towards glory at the Commonwealth Games in the face of societal oppression. The film had focussed on two parameters –firstly, being a straight-forward film about a popular sport of wrestling in India and secondly, the strong feminist statement about equality of girls and they being equal to boys, if not better, in an sport where they have never been seen, let alone accepted. It turned out to be a hugely entertaining sporting saga that blended humour with intensity, and intimacy with spectacle, to perfection. The film won Filmfare awards for Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Action categories in January 2017.

*MS Dhoni–The Untold Story* (2016) was a biographical, sports-based drama, directed by Neeraj Pandey and had a star cast including Sushant Singh Rajput, Kiara Advani, Anupam Kher and Disha Patani. The film chronicles the life of Dhoni from a young age through a series of life events. The untold story of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's journey from a ticket collector at Kharagpur Station to a celebrated trophy collector and finally the world-cup-winning captain of the Indian Cricket Team made known. The film remains focused on the unwavering eulogising of Dhoni and that helps it get an unmistakeable emotional acuity.

*Pink* (2016), a drama and a thriller, was directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury and starred Tapsee Pannu, Amitabh Bachchan, Kirti Kulhari and Andrea Tariang. It's plot showcases a situation about three young women being implicated in a crime and stepping forward of an initially reluctantly retired lawyer who helps them to clear their names. It was well acted, well intentioned and inspiringly brave. It is a powerful statement on the existing feudal mindset of a majority of India, where men and women are judged by a different yardstick. Mike McCahill, a top-rated critic at Guardian, said, "Another notable stride forwards for Hindi cinema: a naturalistic drama that forms a serious attempt to grapple with India's rape culture (McCahill, September 15, 2016).

*Aligarh* (2016), a biography and a drama, was directed by Hansal Mehta and had a star cast of Manoj Bajpayee, Rajkumar Rao, Ashish Vidyarthi and Balaji Gauri. Bajpayee won

critical acclaim and a Filmfare Award. The plot shows a gay, linguistic professor living in a small orthodox city deals with the aftermath of a sting operation that puts his sexual orientation in front of the entire nation. Set in the city of Aligarh, UP, it is the true story of a professor of Marathi, who was suspended on grounds of morality. The film starts at the moment when the professor's privacy is invaded by a film crew from a local TV station who forcibly enter his house and film him having sex with a male rickshaw-puller. He is forced to leave his housing at the university, and is suspended from his job. He is contacted by a journalist who is sympathetic to him, and his case is taken up in court. The court rules in his favour and his suspension is revoked, but before he can return to work, he is found dead. It is that rare film that courageously stands for human rights, including those of homosexuals. It is credited to start the much-needed conversation about the treatment meted out to the often ignored minority group of homosexuals.

*Sarabjit* (2016) belongs to biography and drama genres', and is directed by Omung Kumar and stars Randeep Hooda (as Sarabjit), Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (as Darshan Kaur, his older sister) and Richa Chadha and Darshan Kumar in other supporting roles. The film is a biopic of Sarabjit Singh, a farmer residing at Bhikiwind, Punjab, near the Indo-Pak border who mistakenly crossed the border after consuming alcoholic drinks. In Pakistan he was caught, arrested and mistaken to be an Indian spy and sentenced with capital punishment. He was sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1991 and consequently spent 22 years in prison for alleged terrorism and spying. The film prominently features Dalbir Kaur, Sarabjit's sister and her relentless efforts to get her younger brother freed from jail and prove his innocence.

*Neerja* (2016), a biographical, drama, and a thriller was directed by Ram Madhvani, and stars Sonam Kapoor in the lead actor role supported by Shabana Azmi, Yogendra Tiku, Abrar Zahoor in supporting roles. The plot of the film Neerja is based on a real-life event. It is the story of the courageous Neerja Bhanot, who sacrificed her life while protecting the lives of 359 passengers on the Pan Am flight number 73 in 1986. The flight was hijacked by a terrorist organization. The film is shown from the point of view of Neerja Bhanot, the flight's head purser, who

thwarted the hijack attempt by alerting the pilots, thus grounding the plane. Neerja died trying to help save 359 of the 379 passengers and crew on board. The film pays a tribute to Neerja, who was eventually honoured posthumously with the Ashoka Chakra, India's highest military decoration awarded for peacetime valour, courageous action or self-sacrifice.

*Sultan* (2016), is an action, sports drama, directed by Ali Abbas Zafar and starring Salman Khan and Anushka Sharma in lead roles. *Sultan* is a classic underdog tale about a wrestler's journey, looking for a comeback by defeating all odds. The film focuses on Sultan Ali Khan, a fictional wrestler and former world wrestling champion from Haryana, whose successful career has created a rift in his personal life. Ultimately, from an overweight, broken spirited wrestler, it marks the triumph of a spirited and focussed wrestler who becomes an award winning one and overcomes his personal upheavals to emerge an all-round winner.

***Films as an effective educational tool****: Films can have a leading role in education. Some of the points which have emerged on the potential of films to act as an effective educational tool can be summed up here:

The popularity of the films that have been cited here shows that children as viewers can relate to them irrespective of factors such as viewers' family background or learning abilities. In other words, films prove to be a great leveller. A film can be a gateway to exploring complex ideas and open children's eyes to other ways of looking at the world. The review of films has been used to spark discussions about issues that could be difficult to tackle, such as domestic violence, racism or homophobia.

It is important to ponder that young viewers, including the students, are increasingly visually literate and it needs to be reflected in their curriculum of the present modern knowledge-based and information technology enabled 21st century we are living in. The natural film-making talent of many young people and the films posted online by teenagers who had made them with minimal equipment at their homes point to an astonishingly high quality and depth of understanding.

Films have the potential to promote inclusivity in the dissemination of knowledge. We all are living in a highly connected internet-based

digital world and witnessing a digital revolution. Films can contribute towards inclusive growth and development because those without digital access such as the films will be excluded.

***Challenges Ahead:*** While there is no questioning the fact that films can be a competent method of education, there are still several challenges it needs to overcome to be accepted universally.

Some of the challenges are mentioned here. Lack of resources specifically the lack of technical and economic resources can be a barrier in the adoption and implementation of this process of learning. It is well known that old habits die hard. Parents may not value learning through films as the older generation still has not come to terms with the educational aspects of the cinematic universe and many parents still carry the perception that screening films is an inadequate form of teaching. If there is no will to change from the conventional teaching methods for the more conventional teachers, then adopting a new method can be an arduous task. It can be compounded by the lack of training and support to teachers and schools in the emerging field of using films as an educational communication tool. Proper training and support need to be provided to the teachers to ensure they are capable and confident.

Proper planning is essential for this method to be an effective tool and the choice of films needs to be careful and precise for the student to actually learn something by the narrative, treatment and the climax. More exposure through proper positioning of film clubs in schools can help overcome some challenges. Review of research has shown that fil clubs are of help to break down barriers in the adoption of films as a means of education.

## Conclusion

Films enable students to learn visually unlike textual learning through books and films can have a bigger pie in their role to promote knowledge in the digitalized world we are living in. In this sense, the study of films as a discipline exists as one in which the teacher does not always assume the primary educator role; the featured film itself serves that function can be extremely rewarding and participatory in nature. It needs to be placed at the heart of young people's learning experiences.

There is a need to overcome some of the challenges associated with the role of films for education such as acquiring skills. If we are able to overcome the challenges to a certain extent and study of films continues to grow at the current rate, a future dominated by full-fledged cinematic education could well be on the horizon. Can it be said that the study of films and its relevance for education can be more than education? Because as a future career, film-making could be hugely empowering.

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