

Marathi Movies: Millennial Marmalade

Manisha Patil

Gurunanak College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Mumbai (Maharashtra)

Email Id: manishadnpatil@rediffmail.com

Though Marathi Cinema is considered as regional cinema, frankly speaking, it is the pioneer of Indian Cinema. The first Indian film *Raja Harishchandra* was made by DadasahebPhalke followed by a number of Marathi film makers such as V. Shantaram, Master Vinayak, Jabbar Patel, Dada Kondke, SaiParanjape, AmolPalekar to name a few.

Marathi Cinema not only entertained but also intellectually stimulated the audience for years. Yet by 1990s, the mainstream Marathi Cinema leaned more and more toward populism, shunned new ideas, averted experimentation and in fact became rather regressive, degenerating into farcical and melodramatic caricatures of its golden period overplayed by Comedy King LaxmikantBerdeand Tragedy Queen AlkaKubal respectively. As a result, by the turn of the century, Marathi Cinema became stagnant, struggling for its survival.

In 2000, Marathi Cinema resurrected its existence with *Astitva*, which deals with the existential angst of a middle class aging housewife Aditi. Unlike Laxmi in *MaherchiSaadi*, Aditi in *Astitva* realizes the futility of patriarchal ideology of obedient daughter/ wife/ mother and instead of embracing death at the false altar of ideal womanhood, chooses to live her life as a liberated woman.

Two years later, *Vastu-Purush*(2002) liberates men from their self-made prison of tradition. Bhaskarand his mother Saraswati believe that their family is cursed by the *Vastu-Purush* (Guardian Spirit of the Family) for their Brahmanical atrocities against the other castes. Encouraged by his mother, Bhaskar becomes a doctor and then selflessly serves the poor to remedy the wrongs of his ancestors.

The 2004 National Award Winner for the Best Film, *Shwaas* tells the story of how a grandfather takes the hard decision of saving his grandson by agreeing to surgically remove his cancer-

infected eyes. This film is noteworthy for refuting all the Box-Office myths of success by doing away with popular star cast and songs and still having the mass appeal.

In 2005 was released *Pak Pak Pakaak*, again an off-beat film in which Nana Patekar played the role of Bhutya to dissipate superstitions and to inculcate scientific temper and spirit of enquiry through education among the village folk.

The ever-green comedy of Marathi folk theatre (Vag-natya) *Gadhavach Lagna*, was adapted to the silver screen in 2007 to introduce the new generation of Maharashtra to its rich cultural heritage. Its protagonist Savlya Kumbhar, a subaltern not only exposes the absurdity and corruption of high officials and their system of work but also fools them to teach a lesson. A true representative of the common man, Savlya symbolizes the folk wisdom cultivated for generations.

In contrast to folk wisdom of *Gadhavach Lagna*, *Jogwa* (2009) exposes the folk superstitions, destroying many a lives over the generations. With its undercurrent of romance, the film focuses on the social evil of dedicating children to the goddess Yellamma who are later forced into religious prostitution. With its record-breaking five National Awards—Best Film, Best Actor, Best Music Direction, Best Male Playback Singer and Best Female Playback Singer—*Jogwa* resurrected the progressive spirit of Marathi Cinema whereby entertainment and socio-political awareness go hand in hand.

On the same note of social reforms through entertainment, *Deool* (2011) compares and contrasts two opposing views on religion, god and worship—rational and superstitious. Again with three National Awards—Best Film, Best Actor and Best Dialogue—this film reveals the village life in India with all its nuances such as gullible villagers, corrupt politicians, economy thriving on superstitions and tug-of-war between forces of nativism and globalization.

As far as romance is concerned, the new millennia Marathi films present considerable variety and freshness. For instance, *Mumbai-Pune-Mumbai* (2010) is a simple and sweet girl-meets-a-boy, love-at-first-sight story of Mumbai based girl and Pune based boy with just two characters, roaming around Pune city in a single day.

In contrast, *Duniyadari* (2013) is a retro-love-saga with a love triangle (Shirin-Shreyas-Meenu), a group of friends (Digya and Co.) and a villain (Saai). This period drama with its matching look and music moves to and fro in time through its multiple flashbacks. Suspended between

anticipation and frustration of successful union of hero and heroine, it leaves the bitter-sweet taste of tragicomedy among the audience.

At the other extreme of the spectrum, *Sairat* (2016) shocks the audience with its unexpected tragic ending. Here the romance is taken out of its conventional fairy-tale setting and relocated in ruthless reality which brutally shatters it. Archi and Parashya belong to different castes and in a caste-ridden society, their greatest crime is falling in love. They struggle hard to fulfill their love, elope from their village, settle and work hard in a distant city in another state and seem to succeed in their quest, only to end up as the victims of honor killing.

Apart from these ten iconic films, a number of other films have become Box-Office hits such as *Sawarkhed*, *EkGaon* (2004), *Dombivli Fast* (2005), *Uttarayan* (2005), *Harishchandrachi Factory* (2009), *Nataranga* (2010), *Premachi Goshta* (2013), *Time Pass* (2014), *Court* (2016), *Bucket List* (2018) etc. However due to lack of space and time, only the select films from various genres are included in this paper. For instance, romantic comedy (*Mumbai-Pune-Mumbai*), romantic tragedy (*Sairat*), romantic tragicomedy (*Duniyadari*), family drama (*Shwaas*), political farce (*Gadhavach Lagna*), socio-cultural-religious reforms (*Deoland Jogwa*), empowerment of women (*Astitva*), eradication of caste (*Vastu-Purush*), and promotion of education (*Pak Pak Pakaak*). This sample survey of 21st century hit Marathi Movies reveals the secret of their mass appeal in some simple formulae consisting of

1. **Appealing story/ plot:** Despite the variety of their subjects, these films tell the stories of individuals, families and society in a heartening manner.
2. **Appropriate cast:** With their appropriate casting of actors, characters are brought to life on the silver screen. For instance, watching natural ease and realistic performance of Tabbu (Aditi in *Astitva*), Nana Patekar (Bhutya in *Pak Pak Pakaak*), Makarand Anaspure (Savlya in *Gadhavach Lagna*), we forget their stardom and instead look at them as those characters. Mukta Barve in *Jogwa* and *Mumbai-Pune-Mumbai* is two different persons and so is Swapnil Joshi in *Mumbai-Pune-Mumbai* and *Duniyadari*. Still more noteworthy are the performances of Parashuram in *Shwaas*, Archi and Parashya in *Sairat* who became stars overnight thanks to their identification with the roles they played on screen.
3. **Wonderful music:** Music in general has mass appeal to Indian audience and it has always played a pivotal role in the success of movies. It is the music composed by Ajay-Atul that finely blends folk element with modern score to produce an outstanding result. *Jogwa* won three national awards for music and frankly speaking without the mesmerizing music of Ajay-

Atul, *Sairat* could easily degenerate into boring social propaganda about honor killing. Though *Shwaasha* has no songs, its realistic soundtrack matching the humdrum of daily activities in a hospital produces the desired effect.

4. Psycho-social dynamics: Finally, all these films owe their success to psycho-social dynamics whereby individual and collective psyche of characters are thoroughly explored to demonstrate continuities and discontinuities among individual desires and collective expectations. In the process, bridges of understanding are constructed for the audiences who empathize with the characters and justify their actions. For instance, when Aditi in *Astitva* exposes the double standards of patriarchy, the viewers too share her insight and applaud her liberation. When in *Vastu-Purush* they watch the futile search for hidden treasure by Bhaskar's brother and uncle, they all the more appreciate Bhaskar's efforts to become a doctor to serve others. The audiences are moved the dilemma of the grandfather to choose a lesser evil for his beloved grandson in *Shwaas* and are happily enthralled to witness the transformation of mischievous Chiknu into a scholar in *Pak PakPakaak*. In *GadhavachLagna*, they laugh with Savlya at the foolishness of authorities while in *Jogwa*, they pity the fate of children forced into religious prostitution. *Deool* makes them introspect into the tenets of religion and to refute superstitions for the sake of rationalism. Last but not the least, like various flavors of ice-cream, romances remind them to enjoy life before it melts.

Thus Marathi Movies in the new millennia are like that marmalade which is prepared to preserve flavors of mango for a long time but is so delicious that it is finished as soon as it is made and still one feels saying, “*YehDil Mange More...*”

References:

- Bhave, Sumitra & Sunil Sukathankar (Dir). *Vastu-Purush*. NFDC. 2002
- Jadhav, Sanjay (Dir). *Duniyadari*. Dreaming 24/7 Productions. 2013
- Joglekar, Gautam (Dir). *Pak PakPakaak*. S.O.C. Films. 2005
- Kulkarni, Umesh. *Deool*. Devisha Films. 2011
- Manjarkar, Mahesh (Dir). *Astitva*. Shemaroo Video Pvt. Ltd. India. 2000
- Manjule, Nagraj. *Sairat*. Zee Studios. 2016
- Patil, Rajiv (Dir). *Jogwa*. iDream Production Pvt Ltd. 2009
- Phulkar, Raju (Dir). *GadhavachLagna*. S.B. Pardesi Productions & Sumeet Movies. 2007
- Rajwade, Satish (Dir). *Mumbai-Pune-Mumbai*. Mirah Entertainments Pvt. Ltd. 2010