

RENAISSANCE OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN MODERN INDIAN CINEMA

Abstract

Indigenous culture refers to the unique customs, traditions, beliefs, languages, and practices of the native peoples or ethnic groups that have inhabited a particular region for generations. These cultures are often closely tied to specific lands, and they have developed and evolved over time through a deep connection with nature, spirituality, and their ancestors. What if such a culture got representation through a powerful audio-visual medium? It can create wonders.

Cinema, a simple word, is capable of containing all kinds of talent, feelings, drama, music, and technological aspects, creating the best possible visual form of narrative. The world of film today has developed a strong connection with people's emotional, mental, and physical selves.

Everything that is displayed on a screen is much more valuable than other forms. We may see examples of several instances that have led to periods of celebrity worship where someone begins to imitate the star's every move. We can see that fans have built shrines for their favorite celebrities in several areas of India. On the other hand, they set up camps for blood donation, free tuition, camps for eye donation, or perform some charitable acts on significant occasions like their birthday or wedding anniversary. We can infer that films are having an effect on people's lives somewhere through these deeds and other cultural norms. According to Jean-Luc Godard's adage, "*Photography is truth.*" Cinema is truth twenty-four times a second, which implies that it is more than just a format for narrating stories; it is also an effective medium that, in many instances, establishes a shared forum for both encoders

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and decoders, reflecting the idea that seeing is an act of believing. This Chapter deals with the importance of the renaissance of Indigenous culture in Modern Indian Cinema.

Keywords: Renaissance, Indian Cinema, Indigenous, Culture.

I. ROLE OF NATIVITY IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Indian cinema has undergone a sizable change over the years. It all started with silent films in 1913, followed by the first talkies in 1931 and to today's colored films. Indian cinema reflects the nation's socio-economic, political, and cultural developments, as well as all of its peculiarities.

The historical drama *Raja Harishchandra*, which Dadasaheb Phalke presented on May 3, 1913, brought him fame as the "*father of Indian cinema*." This motion picture made its debut on April 21, 1913.

Nationalistic themes were also present in Phalke's 1917 films *Shrikrishna Janma* and *Kaliya Mardan*. His films introduced the mythological genre to Indian cinema and integrated his concept of Swadeshi into it. We can see that at this point in Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke chose neither any another western format nor a simple genre of movie. Instead, he went back to the beginnings of the Bharatiya Culture to revive Indian society, which had grown stronger as a result of the Puranas, Bhagavad Geeta, Vedanta, and other early writings. He might've felt that there was no better option to convince people than these stories. According to historical accounts, Phalke was a photographer and printer by profession who had a keen interest in motion pictures. After watching *The Life of Christ*, he was struck by the possibility of making a film that would showcase Indian stories and traditions on the big screen.

Phalke was particularly inspired by the film's use of special effects and its ability to tell a story without dialogue, as he believed that these elements would make cinema accessible to a wider Indian audience. Inspired by these films, the youth at that time started making patriotic films. For instance, Baburao Painter and his Maharashtra Film Company made *Kalyan Khajina* (1924), *Shahala Shah* (1925), and others. These films stirred the masses into revolt.

Even talkie-era films made a similar contribution. *Alam Ara*, Ardeshir Irani's first talkie, was released in 1931. Irani was the father of the talkie and Phalke was the father of Indian cinema. The talkies altered Indian cinema's aesthetic. Along with good looks, actors needed a strong voice and singing skills because music started to define Indian cinema. The talkie era in South Indian cinema also debuted that year. In the same year, the first talkies in Tamil (*Kalidas*), Telugu (*Bhakta Prahlad*), and Bengali (*Jumai Shasthi*) were also released. In the history of Indian cinema, the 1930s are known as the decade of social protest. Three major studios—Prabhat, Bombay Talkies, and New Theatres—took the lead in producing serious but captivating and enjoyable films for a diverse audience. During this time, several films, including *Aadmi* and *Padosi* by V. Santharam and *Duniya na Mane* by V. Santharam, made strong appeals against social injustice.

Later, even in the post-Independence era, one can see several film-makers, both at the regional and national level, who tried to depict the core of Indigenous culture through their films. India, a diverse nation with a rich tapestry of cultures and traditions, has witnessed significant changes in its cinema after gaining independence in 1947. Post-independence Indian cinema has played a vital role in representing various aspects of the country's cultural heritage, including the indigenous cultures of its tribal communities.

Post-independence Indian cinema emerged in a period of social and political transformation. The Indian government recognized the need to promote and protect the distinct cultures and identities of its indigenous tribes. This recognition influenced the representation of indigenous cultures in cinema as filmmakers sought to reflect the changing socio-political landscape. India is home to numerous indigenous communities, each with its unique languages, traditions, and lifestyles. Post-independence cinema has made some efforts to portray this diversity by featuring characters and storylines that represent various indigenous groups, such as the Adivasis of central India, the indigenous communities of the northeastern states, and the tribal populations of the Western and Southern Ghats. However, it has strived to break stereotypes associated with indigenous communities. Rather than portraying indigenous characters as one-dimensional stereotypes, films have depicted them as multi-dimensional individuals with their aspirations, struggles, and contributions to society. This approach humanizes indigenous characters and challenges preconceived notions. Though the representation of indigenous culture in post-independence Indian cinema has been a multifaceted and evolving process. It should still evolve from superficial portrayals to authentic and respectful depictions that celebrate the diversity and complexity of indigenous cultures.

Recently, we can see that a Kannada film titled '*Kantara*' not only made a huge success at the box office but also created awareness amongst the masses regarding '*Bhoota Kola*' and '*Daivaradhana*' in coastal Karnataka. Malayalam's '*Pulimurugan*', Marathi's Chinmay Mandlekar's, series on Shivaji Maharaj and many others fall on this path to overcome superficiality.

II. STAGES OF INDIGENOUS RENAISSANCE

- 1. Storytelling and Representation:** The power of storytelling has transcended time and culture, serving as a vessel for the transmission of knowledge, values, and identity. Within this global tapestry of stories, indigenous cultures have woven intricate narratives that encapsulate their unique histories, beliefs, and traditions. Filmmakers ought to begin telling tales about Indigenous communities, highlighting their distinct cultures, societal contributions, and hardships. By eschewing the stereotypical or exaggerated portrayals that were common in earlier films, these tales can aim to more accurately represent Indigenous people. One of the primary roles of storytelling in indigenous films is the preservation of cultural heritage. Indigenous communities often possess oral traditions that have been passed down through generations. These traditions encompass indigenous languages, mythologies, rituals, and practices that are central to their identity. Through films, these traditions can be captured and documented in a tangible form, safeguarding them from the threat of erosion due to modernization and globalization. Furthermore, indigenous films serve as repositories of historical knowledge. They provide a platform for recounting the collective experiences of indigenous peoples, including the struggles, triumphs, and resilience that define their narratives. In this way, storytelling in films becomes a means of preserving the memory of indigenous communities, ensuring that their stories endure for future generations.
- 2. Cultural Preservation:** Indian cinema can contribute more to the preservation of Indigenous cultures by depicting their traditions, customs, and languages on screen. The film's documentation of Indigenous cultures' diversity and richness served to increase

public awareness of them. Like '*Elephant Whisperers*'. In many indigenous communities, the resurgence of storytelling through films contributes to cultural revitalization. As indigenous peoples confront the challenges of cultural assimilation and loss, films serve as a catalyst for the revitalization of indigenous languages, customs, and traditions. These films inspire a renewed sense of pride and belonging within indigenous communities, encouraging them to reclaim and celebrate their cultural practices.

Moreover, the act of storytelling itself becomes a form of cultural expression and resistance. Indigenous filmmakers have the ability to tell their own stories from their own perspectives, countering centuries of misrepresentation and stereotyping in mainstream media. Through films, indigenous communities can regain control over their narratives, shaping how they are portrayed to the world and, in turn, how they perceive themselves.

- 3. Inclusion of Indigenous Actors and Artists:** The inclusion of indigenous actors and artists in film and media is a crucial step toward promoting cultural diversity, authenticity, and inclusion. It empowers indigenous communities, dispels stereotypes, and fosters greater cultural sensitivity. Moreover, it contributes to economic opportunities within indigenous communities and promotes global cultural exchange. By continuing to prioritize and support the inclusion of indigenous talent, the entertainment industry can play a significant role in advancing social progress and recognizing the rich contributions of indigenous cultures to our global tapestry.

Authentic representation in film and media is essential for accurately portraying the diverse cultures, languages, and traditions of indigenous communities. Indigenous actors and artists bring firsthand knowledge and lived experiences to their roles, ensuring that characters and storylines are culturally accurate. This authenticity helps dispel stereotypes and fosters a deeper understanding of indigenous cultures among audiences. The inclusion of indigenous actors and artists provides a platform for these individuals to share their voices and stories with the world. This visibility not only empowers indigenous artists but also serves as an inspiration to indigenous youth. Seeing individuals from their own communities succeed in the entertainment industry can encourage young indigenous people to pursue their artistic passions and dreams. Indigenous actors and artists often play a vital role in ensuring cultural sensitivity during the production process. They can advise on appropriate use of language, rituals, and symbols, preventing cultural misappropriation or insensitivity in the final product. This collaborative approach fosters respectful and accurate portrayals of indigenous cultures.

- 4. Social Impact and Awareness:** Indigenous films function as educational tools, not only for indigenous communities but also for the broader society. They offer a window into the lives, histories, and worldviews of indigenous peoples. For non-indigenous audiences, these films provide an opportunity to gain insight into the experiences of indigenous communities, fostering greater empathy, understanding, and cross-cultural appreciation. The power of representation in indigenous films cannot be overstated. Historically, indigenous peoples have been marginalized and misrepresented in the media, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Indigenous films counteract these stereotypes by offering authentic and nuanced portrayals of indigenous life. They challenge preconceived notions, promoting a more accurate understanding of indigenous cultures and dismantling biases. Like how some films about Indigenous cultures had a positive

social impact by increasing public awareness of the problems that these communities face, including land rights, eviction, and cultural preservation. Sometimes, this raised awareness sparks conversations and responses to these issues. Such impact-oriented movies can be brought to various dimensions.

The ability of a civilization's people to relate to their environment and one another rather than the height of its buildings is what defines civilization. And one of the key factors in making it happen is film. It's important to keep in mind that the portrayal and handling of Indigenous cultures in Indian film can be a difficult and ongoing process. While there was a trend in the right direction towards more respectful and accurate portrayals, there were still issues like cultural appropriation and a lack of opportunities for Indigenous artists and filmmakers. But this moment is ideal. The original renaissance of indigenous culture can be aided by the right efforts made at the right time by the right people.

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