

Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anari* : Expressions of a Director

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Abstract

This research paper is an effort to study and analyze the creative expression of renowned Hindi film director, Hrishikesh Mukherjee's directorial debut, *Anari*. It is in the form of a descriptive type of research which is conducted through a case study and content analysis. The objective of the study is to explore the characteristics and appeal inherent in his signature style and to pay attention to the underlying theme of the film. Mukherjee has carved a middle path between the mainstream cinema and the stark realism of art cinema. He has toned down the entire pitch of the movies, keeping the narrative low-key. Even as the story moves on a path of conflict between crass commercial interests and social responsibility, the ending was happy - with reservations. 'Hrishida', as he is fondly called, has addressed a myriad of issues simultaneously in one cinematic experience. He has created a real, wholesome world within his microcosmic outline of stories, adding gems to the lineage of middle-class films in the Indian Cinema.

Keywords : Direction, Editing, Middle Cinema, Symbolism, Characterization

Introduction

Hrishikesh Mukherjee was born on September 30, 1922 to Sheetal Chandra Mukherjee in the joyful city of Calcutta. After passing B.Sc in Chemistry with distinction from the University of Calcutta, Hrishida worked as a teacher and a freelance artist at All India Radio. He spent many long hours at Calcutta's Paradise Café in the company of cinematic giants such as Tapan Sen, Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak. As a result, he realized his ultimate dream. In 1945, he joined Calcutta's leading studio 'New Theaters' as a laboratory assistant. He also tried a hand at cinematography and also honed his skills under the guidance of Subodh Mitter, a well-known editor of his times. Then he joined the filmmaker Bimal Roy and within just 3 years he was promoted as a film editor.

Mukherjee directed 42 films in his film career. His films gave an upward thrust to the subtle and humble middle-class cinema, keeping the essence of 'Indian Cinema' alive amidst the glitz and glamorous concept of 'Bollywood'. All his films carry a watermark which distinguishes his work from the others. For example, *Chupke Chupke* is a light-hearted, situational, family comedy which also gently touches upon the evolving husband-wife relationship over generations. *Namak Haram*, an intense social-drama which along with being a story of conflict between two men portrays the age-old tussle of the ideologies

named capitalism and socialism: symbolizing the men as two thought processes which often cloud a nation's collective psyche. Then, there is *Guddi* cleverly revealing the truths of the world of 'make-believe', better known as 'cinema' before a naïve young girl and thereby, letting her absorb and decide for herself that there's nothing more enchanting than the wonders of real, regular life.

It is essential for the researcher to find, mention and analyze early perspectives relevant to the proposed study. Thus, given below is a brief discussion of selected viewpoints of various critics which shall act as a framework to understand Mukherjee's style of film making.

Prasad (1998) examines certain defining features of various forms of narratives practiced in the Indian Cinema. He also expresses his expert comments by constantly traveling between the theoretical concepts and their detailed implications related to different aesthetics of the Indian Cinema.

Prasad opines that the middle class cinema predominantly emphasizes on the extended familial network as the bricklaying site of the emergence of nuclear couples. It is the middle class which bears the burden of national identity on its shoulders.

Ray (2001) analyzes that though the number of writers has increased overtime, they can never be called cinema's sole saviors. For the words of a writer need a strong support which lies in the command of a director's action. Positively, it is the director's version of the writer's story which plays out on the celluloid and seeks to connect the audience with the characters. Ray quotes the famous French director, Jean Renoir, "Each time I make a new film, I want to feel like a child, who is learning about the cinema for the first time."

Ganti (2004) analyzes the cultural, social and political vitality of the Hindi Cinema from both national and global perspective. Also, she provides a vivid insight into the show runners in the industry such as directors, screenwriters, stars, composers, etc.

Huda (2004) propounds that film-making is the most beautiful and communicative of all art forms. He compares the art of making films with sculpture making and music wherein the collective efforts of many talented people produces eternal, great classics. Cinema is synonymous with the point of horizon where the techniques of science and the creativity of art meet.

Somaaya (2008) deals with different topics related to the field of the Indian film fraternity and show many shades, degrees and trends of the industry.

Further is a discussion on Mukherjee's first directorial venture, *Anari* to throw some light on his style of film-making and his perception as a whole.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee was one of the few people who were successful in transferring the neo-realist's detailing for aesthetics to make the film venture commercially viable at the box-office, as Prasad analyzes. He can rightly be called a 'middle-cinema' director. Through his films he suggests that the middle class of the country is still a newer phenomenon with a lot of possibilities of 'disidentification' and eventually 'reidentification'. Hrishida's films are a

reflection of the developing, educated urban society with stories that were close to the heart intermingled with several shades of emotion, drama, comedy, satire, sarcasm and the like. He created a real, wholesome world within his microcosmic outline of stories, giving the Indian cinema a lineage of 'middle-class' films.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee was known for his planning before action. According to Amitabh Bachchan, "They (characters) were all exceptionally well-etched...He told us to stand there, walk here, say it in this manner, speak like this - that's how he used to direct all of us. So our input was nothing at all. All that you see in his films is entirely his input." (REF...)

Mukherjee's *Anari* (1959) has been studied and analyzed on the following parameters:

a) Characterization:

The protagonist, Raj Kumar is an honest and law-abiding individual. Being inarticulate, he's often fired from jobs and called names like *Anari* i.e. someone who doesn't understand worldly affairs. He bears a bitter attitude towards the rich. Therefore, on being persuaded by Aarti to charge heavily for a painting, Raj accepts the offer and remarks, "*Phir toh main lambe paise maangoonga, aameeron se koi humdardi nahi hai.*" His poverty and inability to be street-smart has made him sarcastic. He points out that it's ironical that his parents named him '*Raj Kumar*' meaning 'a prince' considering his perpetuating unemployment. Also, his stagnant condition is like his stopped alarm clock which always strikes 12!

He's a man of ideals. When Ramnath offers him money after a minor accident, Raj refuses and says, "*Main bekaar hoon, bhikhaari nahi.*" At his new job in a restaurant, Raj screams at the top of his voice on seeing a cockroach floating in food and unintentionally 'announces' it to the customers creating chaos. He's insulted for being brutally honest and fired immediately. He's generous as he offers all his earnings to Aarti (who's posing to be Asha, the maid) that he receives for the painting when he learns that her mother is ill. He dismisses her embarrassment and says, "*Ehsaan toh ameer log karte hain. Hum gareeb toh ek-dosre ki madad karte hain.*"

Aarti is an educated, rich girl who gradually becomes Raj's love interest. The following comment expresses her happy-go-lucky nature: "*Main itni subah kyun uthoon. Mujhe kaunsa chachaji ki tarah kaam par jaana hai!*" When Asha fears what her uncle's reaction will be on learning Aarti has bunked college, she coolly lays in the chair in a fetal position and says, "*Chachaji mujhse kabhi gussa nahi karte, woh mujhe bohot pyaar karte hain.*" This visual suggests that Aarti is a carefree and pampered child. It can be drawn that Aarti is kind and helpful from the conversation she has with Asha where she lovingly forces her to borrow money from her and send it home.

Seth Ramnath is Aarti's uncle. He dresses in suit-tie and is often seen enjoying a drink or a smoke, while attending the official-social gatherings. His condescendence is evident placing his hands on his waist when Raj tells him that

he's lost his 'atthanni'. He offers him some money and says patronizingly, "Ye lo! Aur aankhein kholkar chala karo!" He's pleasantly surprised by Raj's honesty and offers him a job: "Naukri chahte ho?...Iss pate par kal chale jaana...(kaam) mil jayega nahi, mil gaya!" He relies on an astrologer's forecasts (indicating his superstitious beliefs), who promises high sales to Ramnath by saying, "...Bhagwan toh door nahi hain...unhone flu Singapore se aadmiyon ke saath madras bhej diya...Bambai aane mein kya der lagti hai?"

Another important character in the film *Anari* is that of Mrs. D'sa, who is Raj's tough-looking but kind-hearted landlady. She often lies to Raj and says someone has asked her to buy paintings from him. Snatching away a painting from Raj, she says, "Ye kidhar leke jaata hai...ye toh hum bech diya...hum toh dus rupaiya le liya." However, it is she who collects all those paintings for herself as memorabilia and pays him from her own pocket. Being a religious lady, she is appalled when she suspects Raj has pick-pocketed someone and drags him before Jesus Christ's shrine to confess his sins.

b) Symbolism:

Hrishikesh Mukherjee's films contain both text and sub-text. And this sub-text can often be deciphered by the symbols used in his films.

Few of such symbolisms are discussed below:

1. When Raj irons his coat, a rat jumps out of its pocket. The appearance of the rat symbolizes on one hand that Raj belongs to a lower stratum of society in unhygienic surroundings. On the other hand, rat is a troublesome animal causing damage in his life i.e. the dearth of money. Further, Mrs. D'sa's comment, "Tumhara paaket mein se chooha nahi toh kya haathi nikalega?" inclines with Raj's unemployment and poverty as elephant is an animal which indicates power and abundance.
2. Even though there's no blood relation between them, Mrs. D'sa and Raj share a heartwarming bond. Raj's painting portraying a mother and a child cradled in her lap also symbolizes the same. In fact, Mrs. D'sa insists on buying his painting to help him with finances; something only a mother would do for her children.
3. Ramnath blackmails Aarti to stay away from Raj otherwise he would destroy him. Helpless, she succumbs to the situation and cries while resting her head on a chair's armrest. Next, an extinguished cigarette with little smoke floating around comes into focus reflecting Ramnath's successful effort in burning a never-filling hole into Aarti's heart.
4. When Mrs. D'sa collapses in the lawyer's office, her hat and walking stick fall on the floor suggesting the serious deterioration visible in her health.

c) Vision:

Another respectable quality that acts as a binding factor in Mukherjee's films is his inimitable ability to look beyond the realm of time. He was a man with impeccable vision but very subtle. His opinion on changing trends in the society and nation at large are a treat to watch out for. Discussed following are few such instances:

1. The song "1959" screams of rampant artifice and its increasing appreciation by the world around. The lyrics "*Fashion badhenge, kapde ghantenge...maalik hee jaane kitne bachenge*". Also, it sharply points out the misguided need to forget one's real identity and imitate any and every change in vogue. The lines "*Chehre pe nakli chehra chadhaao*" are self-explanatory.
2. Unfortunate situations often stem from the producers' negligence, an example still relevant in the current times. Mrs. D'sa consumes spurious medicines of Seth Ramnath's company and dies under dubious circumstances.
3. Escaping one's responsibility, trying to keep matter under wraps, using contacts to blame an innocent person and taking no cognizance of the damage one's actions can cause. The astrologer conspires against Raj and frames him for Mrs. D'sa's 'murder' to cover up Seth Ramnath's unscrupulous trade practices.
4. Measuring the status and prestige of the company by ignoring the holistic damage caused. Here, Ramnath's cold attitude is illustrated in his denial about the mix-up of faulty medicines in his factory.

d) Camera Angles and Character Placement within the Frame:

A lot can be inferred from the selection of camera angle and the positioning of the characters in the frame. Cinema, being both audio and visual, the responsibility of delivering the intended message to the viewers is immensely borne by the film's director.

Below mentioned are such selected pieces from the film, *Anari*:

1. Raj bumps into a group of girls and falls off his cycle. The camera shows Raj's subjective shot suggesting he's sprawled on the road. The shot is composed of the girls, the wheel and some portions of the sky. He's assumed to be looking at the girls bending over him, through another cycle's still-rotating wheel while on the ground. The next is a close-up shot showing an exasperated Raj resting on the ground and the shadow of the spokes reflecting on his face: suggesting the girls are still bent and look at him from a higher eye level.
2. Raj goes to a hotel to return Ramnath's wallet. The scene opens with an establishing shot of the hotel. Then the camera tilts down, a guard is seen saluting to a couple exiting from the hotel and Raj enters the frame. On reaching the hotel's entrance, a mid-shot is taken where the guard brandishes his cane and vehemently opposes Raj's entry into the hotel. Simultaneously, Raj fumbles with the wallet and the guard is surprised. Next, we see a close

up of Raj's hands holding an opened wallet loaded with money bills. This is followed by a mid-shot wherein the guard looks up at Raj, takes a step back quickly, smiles and salutes him ushering him inside.

3. In one of the shots in the song, "*Woh chand khila...*" the camera shows Aarti sitting down with her left profile visible at the eye level. Next, the camera tilts up showing the glittering marble pathway as the line "*Chaandi ki chamakti raahein woh dekho jhoom jhoomke bulaayein*" is sung. This is followed by Aarti's close-up shot which is taken from a high-angle. Here the moonlight is clearly visible shining brightly both on Aarti's face and the water source she's sitting beside.

Conclusion

Films in Hindi Cinema nowadays are manufactured in bulk and have claimed the status of a commodity. The reason is the cine-goers have transformed into consumers, owing to materialism creeping into our lives while we are busy minting money. This is where Hrishikesh Mukherjee's films such as *Anari* still make a difference. When we look at films mainly as a medium of escapism and fantasies, his films shake us up and continue to underscore the idea of 'projecting reality' instead of running away from it. Thus, being a torch-bearer for the films belonging to the faction of Indian neo-realist cinema.

His subtlety and respect for 'less-is-more' is his apparent cinematic theme and style. Clearly etched characters and illustrative use of symbolism are some of the top pointers budding directors could really learn to deliver their story more effectively to the intended masses. Depiction of a far-sighted vision addressing issues which continue to be glaringly relevant in current times and deft use of camera angle along with clever shot composition to let the visual do most of the talking provides lessons to draw from.

Most of Mukherjee's works fall under that rare category of motion pictures which were critically applauded, won awards and accolades and also proved victorious at the box-office collections. His films bear a reflection of the developing, educated urban society with heart-warming stories intermingled with shades of drama, satire, sarcasm, irony, comedy, emotion and more. His films are evergreen; hence, they appeal to audiences beyond space, time and age.

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