

The Portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in Cinema

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Abstract—cinema is a powerful medium of entertainment and it has acquired important place in the lives of the people. It conveys ideas about history, culture, technology and science. Cinema is a fine documentation of cultural, social and historical movements and events. Crucial, essential and sometimes controversial issues are handled and screened by the cinema. Nowadays biographical cinema collected huge amount at the box office. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, has influenced authors, philosophers and directors of films. He has put forth the principles of Ahimsa, non-violence, peace and love and has helped Indians to develop these principals. This paper discusses the portrayal of Gandhi in four films. "Gandhi (1982), "Hey Ram" (2000), and "Gandhi, My Father" (2007)

Key words: film, non-violence, peace, truth, Indian Freedom Movement

Introduction: As it has been discussed earlier is that cinema is a powerful medium of not only entertainment but also of information and knowledge. It has become medium of education, a preserved documentation of our history, culture and political and social issues. It links history and culture with the contemporary world. A. Ajai, G. Bhuvanewari in his paper underlined the importance of cinema:

Cinema is the medium of the masses, given its capacity to impart complex ideas through its propelled methods; it turns into a transporter of expected philosophies, affecting world cultures by a considerable margin. Mass media like cinema turned into the storage facility for immense chronicles, culture, and custom (Bhuvanewari 191).

M. K. Gandhi: (1869- 1948) was an Indian independence activist and leader who was the primary figurehead of the Indian independence movement against British rule. Gandhi is widely regarded as one of the greatest political and spiritual leaders of the 20th century. He is often referred to as the "Father of the Nation" in India, and he played a key role in securing India's independence from British rule through nonviolent civil disobedience. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance, which he referred to as satyagraha, inspired civil rights and freedom movements around the world, including the American civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. Throughout his life, Gandhi was a champion of civil rights and liberties, and he worked tirelessly to eradicate social and economic inequality. He remains a major influence on political and social activism in India and around the world. The portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in films has been an important way of depicting his life and legacy to audiences around the world. Many films have been made about Gandhi and his role in India's independence movement, and these films often focus on different aspects of his life and characters.

The Principles of Gandhi: This spiritual and political leader advocated for non-violent civil disobedience as a means of social and political change. The key principles of his life are as follows.

1. Non-violence (Ahimsa): Gandhiji believed in this principal as a moral and peaceful weapon to make drastic change in the individual as well as in the society. It is very effective approach in the long run.
2. Truth: All actions of Mahatma Gandhi were based on truth. His title of the autobiography itself delineates his love for truth. Throughout his life, he emphasised on living and speaking truthfully.
3. Simplicity: his life is exemplary of simplicity. He was against of possession of material property and wealth as it creates inequality in the society.
4. Self-sufficiency: Gandhi believed that individuals and communities should strive to become self-sufficient, relying on their own resources and abilities rather than relying on external sources.
5. Equal rights: Gandhi was a strong advocate for equal rights, regardless of religion, caste, or gender. He saw the discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups as a fundamental violation of human rights and dignity.
6. Education: Gandhi saw education as a means of empowering individuals and communities, and he emphasized the importance of providing educational opportunities to all, especially the poor and marginalized.

Gandhi extended the principle of non-violence from individual to the social and political field. He was the first in the human history to do so. His ideas of non-violence and truth were so intermingled and he did not keep himself away from the society:

In trying to understand Gandhiji and his non-violence we should not overlook one important aspect of the truth. Gandhiji was no philosopher in the dogmatic sense of the term. He did not cut himself adrift from the daily problems and struggles of the mankind and take refuge in a solitary physical and mental corner to formulate his philosophy of non-violence. His was the unique technique of taking active role in the process of the solution of the everyday problems of the downtrodden and in this process he evolved (Bandopadhyaya 03). The Gandhian philosophy ruled the history and culture of our nation. Its impact on contemporary life is remarkable one. This is one of the most important aspects behind the study. This paper takes review of three movies on Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi (1982) the film was written by John Briley and produced by Attenborough, who spent over 20 years developing the project and raising funding for it. The movie covers the life story of Gandhi –his first experience in South Africa to his passage as the Indian spiritual and political leader to his assassination in 1948. The film also depicts his principle of non-violence and his key role in Indian independent movement. The film showed Indian history and culture on a large scale. The film produced history in the world of cinema. Many viewers can find the film emotionally moving and motivating to the audience all over the world. The casting, acting, direction and portrayal of Gandhi have made the film a milestone in the history of cinema. About the film

Bhuvaneshwari has commented:

As any mass public figure of change, Gandhi in „Gandhi, is a flat, one-sided, highly optimistic version that was aimed to serve the growing populism of alternate lifestyles that rejects the earlier generation notions of the great American dream, conformist attitudes and patriotism (Bhuvaneswari 193).

Scholars, critics, philosophers and audience have praised the film, particularly that of shri Ben Kingsley who won the Academy Award for his portrayal of Gandhiji. The film is a powerful tribute to the great leader of 20th Century. In short, everything of the film has made it a huge success. Such films are welcomed in the modern and post-modern era when violence, war, injustice and materialistic view to the life prove as menace to the world. It may be noted that nobody reads at such time media can play powerful role to teach and develop values that Gandhi espoused in his life. The researcher thinks that the film ‘Gandhi’ has surely performed its role of educating people of what is good and what is bad. **Hey Ram(2000)**. This is a different kind of film which talks of suffering due to the partition and the assassination of Gandhi. The film moves around Gandhi. In ‘Hey Ram’ Gandhi is blamed:

One of the critical accusations placed against Gandhi in the film is the poor decision making during the partition of India and Pakistan. The violence and human slaughter that ensued had caused emotional trauma on both Hindu and Muslims. Invariably, being the decision maker, Gandhi was blamed for the error ((Bhuvaneswari 1994).

Though Gandhi is blamed for his role in the partition, the film denotes the principle of non-violence. It is the best way of life. The film also explores the theme of identity, religion and nationalism. It also shows the most violent period of the history. It may be noted that the film is fictionalized account of the event surrounding the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 and tells the story of Hindu Nationalist who is conflicted about his belief and accepts Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence. In short, ‘Hey Ram’ is a complex film that touches upon a variety of philosophical and political issues. The film ‘Hey Ram’ is a different kind of movie with a different perspective. It denotes the journey of Ram from hatred and anger to compassion and understanding. It is an allegory for the spiritual path to self-realization and liberation. The film is praiseworthy as it underlines importance of principles of Gandhi among the world of hatred, jealousy and communal riots. Audience can learn the values of principles of Gandhi. They are our torch bearers and one has to espouse them to lead a peaceful life. This is the interpretation of the film. It can be interpreted in many ways.

Gandhi, My Father (2007).The film presents Gandhi’s relationship with his son Harilal Gandhi. The conflict between the father and the son is underlined. Harilal wants to go to abroad and becomes a barrister like his father. But Gandhi hopes his son to join him and fight for his ideas. The movie furthermore depicts poor condition of Harilal when he turns to alcohol for solace and turns to Islam. At one point in the movie Harilal finds it unbearable to live in the shadow of his father. After Gandhi’s assassination Harilal attends Gandhi’s funeral but as a stranger. The film shows tragic end of Harilal. He passes away in poverty.

This is very different film that moves around troubled relationship between father and the son. The film also highlights the events that led to Harilal's eventual rejection of his father's philosophy and his embrace of the western lifestyle. The three movies discussed above presents Gandhi's personality. The first two movies show impact of Gandhi's philosophy over the people. That is why such films are produced. Non-violence, peace and love have rule and are ruling the masses. The second movie shows the journey of Ram from negativity to positivity showing the impact of Gandhi's philosophy. The first movie discussed underlines that there is no great leader like Mahatma Gandhi. But the third movie has a different aspect. Rejection of Gandhi's philosophy by his son is somewhat painful. Critics and scholars may have different opinions about it. But it can be said that the philosophy of Gandhi is rejected at home. This is the other side of Gandhi's life. But he cannot be blamed for this. His son, perhaps, fails to understand Gandhi's view about life.

Conclusion:

Gandhi's ideas are deeply rooted in the tradition of Indian philosophy. Gandhi also believed that non-violence is a way of life. Throughout his life he longed for peace, justice and equality of life. Service to others was the main philosophy of Gandhi. His personality, philosophy and principles have attracted masses largely. Filmmakers are not exception to this. They have tempted to screen Gandhi in their movies. Gandhi's philosophy is very much essential in this materialistic world.

References:

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Movies Chosen:

1. *Gandhi* Attenborough, Richard, director. Gandhi. Columbia Pictures, 1982.
2. *Hey Ram (2000)*. Santoshi, Rajkumar, director. The Legend of Bhagat Singh. Tips Industries Limited, 2002.
3. *Gandhi, My Father* Feroz Abbas Khan. Director 2007.