

CHILDREN AND CINEMA: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is a popular mass medium to reach wider and spectacular audiences across the globe. The journey of film making has went through sagas of success stories and evolved with much more possibilities and effectiveness as medium of communication. In the broad spectrum of audience, cinema cater to children should be carefully examined and evaluated for several significant factors. The inevitable social change has developed numerous changes in the idea of children and cinema which must be analysed to understand it in each of its passing phases. The increase in demand of cartoon and animation has brought a hypnotic effect on children which altered the traditional idea of children's cinema in to a whole new perspective. The mental health of children and shaping of childhood paralleling to the construction of society has further extended the problems and possibilities of cinema to children. The very notion of business combining to children's literature and cinema has led to conglomeration of cinema industry with several other institutions around the world. The objective of this study is to do a historical research attempting to draw the changing perspectives happened in the context of children and cinema over the years. The thorough understanding of previous studies and content analysis would be the methodology adopted for this research. However, this research has not limited to detailed content analysis of any selected films rather has been attempting to discover the overall approaches, perspectives, progresses and changes happening between children and cinema.

Keywords: *cinema, children, social construction, mainstream media, social change, impact*

INTRODUCTION

Since latter half of twentieth century there has been many serious researches rising up about changing nature of children and childhood. In any society, irrespective of the period of time, mass media has been worked as catalyst for social change. Cinema provides unlimited possibilities for communication opening opportunities to learn and unlearn in varied genres of cinema. When its 'children and cinema', it could be cinema for children, cinema of children, cinema by children, cinema enacted by children, cinema of subjects related to children. Because, its not children labelling the category of 'children films', many times the whole idea and agenda changes. The never-ending demands and scope cartoons and animation have always enhanced the effects of cinema as mass entertainment medium for communication. The idea of commercialisation happening in so claimed 'children cinema' and the rapid advents like 3D,7D, 9D since beginning has totally shifted the traditional purposes to wider and sometime complicating conditions. In every year, the highest grossing cinema are made for children continuing this medium to help children in cultural participation because cinema introduces "world of stories", the idea of society and thereby world to young minds. So, cinema can definitely be considered as a cause for concern on children's behaviour, views and values making it as an important need to analyse the contents of children's media.

Generally, children would like to spend time by watching films or cartoons serials which sometimes make them addicted to screens. In a society where technology is ruling the human minds and lifestyle, it's also important to understand the content it shares especially with the young minds. Childhood can be considered as a significant stage of any individual because childhood shapes adulthood and helps to determine the character of that individual. Usually, people would like to cherish the fond memories developed during childhood throughout the life. Hence, children should be provided good quality content which will definitely penetrate to their minds and tend to live long. Each time when children would be exposed to any forms of media, it's essential to make sure that only content which are meant to reach children has only been shared.

Cinema has a hypnotic effect on children and they act highly passive. The increase in demand towards animation and cartoons has always opened up the way for starting of several production houses leading it to a booming industry. In the history of literature and cinema writing for children and producing children's cinema could be considered as the most challenging and difficult forms. Because understanding the young minds, their interests, level of thinking, standards of acceptance and scope of interpretations should be well understood to master before making cinema for children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The book '*Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*', (2000) by Ian Wojcik-Andrews discusses about children's literature and background study of children's film pointing out the politics in them. The author attempts to critically analyse the moral and cultural issues in children's cinema comprising film theory. The book has also included the history and evolution of children's cinema recommending the pedagogical aspect of them.

The book '*Kidding Around: The Child in Film and Media*' (2014) edited by Alexander N. Howe and Wynn Yarbrough include collection of essays base on text produced of children and about children generated after holding conference titled '*Kidding Around: The Child in Film and Media*' at University of the District of Columbia. The representation of children and childhood in different twentieth and twenty first century media has been primarily analysed by the author in this book. In this, the politics and thematic narrative approaches towards the notion of childhood has been analysed by using suitable methodologies offering reader's new perspectives and possibilities to study children's cinema.

In the book '*Childhood and Cinema*' (2008) written by Vicky Lebeau investigates about the technical possibility of showing subjects effectively in children's cinema comprising visuals and sound. This books also examines cinematic effects of child in film and the child of life discussing about contents like violence, trauma, its controversies and hope. The role of cinema to exhibit the problems of children in a realistic world rather than always showcasing the subjects of illusions, fantasy and adventures has been tried to incorporate in this literature.

The research paper titled '*Using Critical Race Theory to Analyse How Disney Constructs Diversity: A Construct for the Baccalaureate Human Behaviour in the Social Environment Curriculum*' by Amy Cappiccie has tried to throw light up on the conscious messages Disney animation would carry in them shaping the view and values among children. The usage of Critical Race theory to examine the racial concerns exhibiting in Disney images has been able to validate the same to a larger extent studying the features and factors of them. The pervasive forms of racism and issues of racism spectrum have been addressed predominantly by the author drawing analysis and significance of including racial studies in the pedagogical aspect.

In the book, '*Childhood and Growing up*' written by Dr. Pratap Kumar Panda has intended to define and discuss about childhood, its developmental stages along with the characteristics in each growing period. The issues and problems during childhood including physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and negligence has been tried explore. The significance of heredity, environment and individual difference while defining the various serious mental and physical health aspects of childhood. The effects of globalisation on children's mental health has been studied by the author drawing examples and case studies from Indian scenario making easier to relate and relevant.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this study is to understand the changing perspectives between cinema and children over the years. The researcher also aims to study the varying approaches in cinema to the subjects of children leading to a major commercial platform.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality the structure of human mind and behaviour could be base on the three component parts of the mind which include id, ego, superego. This Freud's structural theory of personality focusses on the unconscious psychological factor affecting the behaviour and personality of an individual. Freud argues that the interaction among three fundamental components and effort of an individual would help in finding balance to determine the behaviour and approach to the world. The balance between biological aggressive and pleasure-seeking tendencies in a society with internal controlling factors has been tried define by Sigmund Freud. He has also believed that the nature of id, ego and superego would change as a person grows from child to adult over the time.

METHODOLOGY

In the context of changing perspectives between cinema and children, each of its developmental stages evolved over the years would be essential to study. The scientific research method helps to draw the accurate data findings and analysis. In this specific study, researcher adopts historic research methodology aiming to explore primary sources of information created at various significant times in the history of cinema and analysing secondary sources of information which are published later. The detailed understanding of data collected for findings and analysis has been tried to examine accurately.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

During European Christian tradition, children has been considered to repressed, disciplined and civilised in contrast to the Romantic period which enhanced childhood as the epitome of innocence and to be celebrated, protected and desired. In the concept of children and cinema at Russia there has been produced synonymic number of cinemas designating the same phenomenon and can be classified in to two types of films for children – children's film and family film referring to cast children in them or subjects relating to them. Children's cinema has produced targeting only children and may not general audience. The term 'family film' can be considered as an American expression while 'children's film' seen as a European expression. Also, there has been differences in fixing the cast of such films i.e., may be European film prefer to cast children looking ordinary in contrast to American film which has to meet certain criteria or requirement on appearance. Since 1920s, the persuasiveness and propaganda effects of cinema have made them as effective tool for socialist construction. Beyond any other art form, cinema can attempt in affecting the cultural and educational

ideologies which may bring up a new personality itself for the audience. Meanwhile, in Russia, children's cinema has built an identity becoming the tool of social education because through social, cultural, economic, global and historical changes directed country's development. The perception of viewing anything on screen as 'reality' or non-fiction especially by children during 1920 has greatly influenced the younger generation. This led to risen up of several issues that need to investigated and managed well offering a new technique for working with children.

Since beginning, Indian cinema can never be detached from mythology because it always carries essence and elements from mythology. In Indian scenarios, the stories of Little Krishna, Little Hanuman or Little Ganapathy have been common tales in any art forms. In such a situation where childhood stories of Gods have been widely narrated to the audience helping to educate and respect children and to accept the way they are. The tradition of worshipping them reveals the significance of childhood and its interpretations connecting to reality. But in modern times, with the advancements of scientific research, children have become an object for adult gaze in a different manner. In India, 1955, Children Film Society of India was established under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as suggested by Former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru producing short films and feature films for children in different languages of India. Also, several initiatives have undertaken by Government of India considering aftermaths effects of visual images to children. However, in Indian situation, the problem of children and the childhood could be totally different comparing to many western countries and thus with children and cinema. Many times, subjects relating to child treatment and vulnerabilities have been less discussed area in cinema. In contrast to the realistic problems of Indian society comprising issues like child marriage, life as refugees, lack of spreading education, child abuse and violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, child lacking parental care problems of street children, disabled children, health and sanitation mainstream cinema majorly engaged fantasy, horror and romance as subjects.

Cinema has played a significant role in social education. Cinema catering to children could act as a record of time and motion contributing towards different social and economic conditions of the country. In referring to history, film preserve and provide an opportunity to learn about the everyday life of people across the world allowing cinema to transform as a tool of social education abundantly. Understanding the importance of leisure in the lives of every man, cinema holds lots of significance and demands. Obviously, the intrinsic way of communication in cinema has played a crucial and contradictory role among children i.e., firstly by propagating and by instigating subjects and visuals which are traditionally considered as taboo in the society leading to disturb the social values and norms. There could be so much of effects of cinema on children as on the objectionable children's imaging in cinema.

Traditionally childhood would be engaged with moral stories, grandmother stories or bed time stories withering the seeds of creativity and imagination in the minds of children. So, children are always fascinated and curious towards to listen stories turning it as the most influential and effective way of communicating to them. At an early age, the pattern of changing behaviour among children at different conditions and their preferences and attentions to the cinema helps the relationships between both of them. This makes once again relevant to define the problems and possibilities of cinema which may do during morale building activities. The social conditions in each period of time reveal the aspect of cinema during then making it as a serious agent towards development. In turn, examining the cinema produced in certain period of time helps to understand the social views and situations of that time allowing audience to imagine and producing great historic and cultural values.

Initially several associations and communities have been engaged in organising screening of cinema for children based on the age peculiarities of children and the film which was selected for showing. This pointed out the fact that cinema enthusiasts and children who are keen to watch cinema would find all the possible and impossible ways to make it regularly.

But, parallelly the significant harm cinema may do to health of children as they usually sit closer to screen weaken their eyesight. Also, cinema taking long run-in duration of time and screening in dark could affect the health and lifestyle of children. The increasing awareness of the health problems with respect to watching cinema slightly started to shift the focus of parents. The frequent viewing of cinema by children also tends to do a baneful effect on them by awakening and provoking them sometimes. In this regard, there has been a necessity to look into cinema defining the obligatory characteristics of such films. Educational institutions have also included visual hours in to curriculum. The screening of cinema interesting to children and relating to the subjects of children has been a memorable childhood experience to many. Depending on the budget available and age of the children, teachers may select certain cinema for screening which could stimulate the imagination and interpretations differently by everyone.

Undoubtedly, the availability of children's programs and cartoon animations in mini screen has definitely elevated the demands and possibilities of them. This has resulted in advent of many technical aspects of producing children cinema like developing animation hubs leading it to become a booming industry itself. In the context of consumerism, the whole idea about the purpose of children's cinema has changed in very less span of time. In 1923, two brothers named Walt and Roy O. Disney has founded Disney Brother Cartoon Studio - the present Walt Disney Company headquartered at Walt Disney Studio Complex Burbank, California. The company became the leader of American Animation industry producing many worlds famous and recognising cartoon characters including 'Mickey Mouse' and 'Mini Mouse' in Steamboat Willie. Today, anyone would be familiar with any production of Disney bringing the idea that only Walt Disney Company produce exclusive children's cinema though they have gained viewers and followers belonging to all age groups. The technical progresses and later the concept of globalisation have given risen to special effects, 3D, 5D, 7D, platforms like IMAX have stretched the advantages and reach of cinema for children. This widened the range of audience pulling not only children but also individuals belonging to different age groups. This further extended the need of pedagogical relevance of advancing educational and cultural ideologies among cinema.

When cinema introduces the world and supposed human actions to children their impression would predominantly base on the characters they like to watch on the screen. The varied features of the characters in the motion pictures including their colour, physique, expressions, actions, behaviour would directly influence children. The unconcerned psychological impact may affect larger than the expectation. There have been studies done on all of Disney's princess like Aurora in 'Sleeping Beauty' describing as extra ordinarily beauty throughout which may propose wrong notion that is how one may give importance to their look. The power of portraying characters of Marvel bringing an evident behavioural change among children would be another case of studying this. Children are finding connection to spider man, hulk, iron man or any of their favourite Marvel character influencing them to the extent of selecting toys or dresses matching to their favourite character's colour. The application of traditional colour theory in characters of children would leave the emergency and need to investigate what each colour could and supposed to do in the minds of youngsters. The feel and energy children perceive and carries with each could would control the pattern of their choices and defining them as individuals.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical experiments allow to explore the cause effect relationship of cinema and children and historical research about this would open up interesting connections, dependencies and mediation towards children dealing cinema. Over the years, in the world cinema scene there has been loud acclamation of cinema belonging to different genres technically and subjectively. This led to collaboration of several establishments within the mainstream media widening the scope of cinema and its effects on society. Considering cinema targeting children as the audience has experimented and evolved extensively at different times. But, the context of children and cinema may attempt to derive cinema about kids, cinema of children, cinema enacted by children, cinema for children or cinema by children though it's very rarely decided and labelled by them. The interpretations and interchangeable variations happening in such cinema would further opens up problems and possibilities. During the process of writing or producing for cinema it's much needed to be concerned about the negatives effects that may do on children mentally and evidently. Beyond consumerism and commercialisation of cinema catering to children unlike to general audience it's a responsibility to filter and include the content which are really meant to serve to them. There has always been importance in balancing child and mental state as otherwise excessive exposing to violence and sexual content would affect their childhood and behaviour. Cinema being mirror of society reflects the social transformations and trends setting way for many more new trends to emerge becoming relevant to study about cinema especially in a multicultural and multilinguistic country like India.

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