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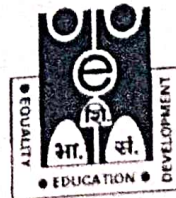
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Content...

Light, Camera, Nature: Environmental Concern in Indian Cinema

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Abstract:

Conservation of environment is one of the major concerns of the day. Due to the deforestation of forests, the quick depletion of fossil fuels, the disturbance of the seasonal cycle, and the rising frequency of ecological disasters worldwide, our environment is in risk. Given these circumstances, numerous films in the Indian film industry have explored various environmental problems, disasters, and their effects. Because art and literature are combined to produce film, it becomes more stunning and draws viewers in naturally, making them more aware of the need to protect Mother Nature. The goal of the current research paper is to provide in-depth information about how Indian cinema both commercial and art films portray the environment, natural disasters, and environmental protection.

Introduction:

Art is a means of expression. The more powerful the method of expression, the easier it will be for it to make an impression on the viewer's mind. The most potent forms of expression are in the performing arts. Theatre and other performing arts are interrelated, as demonstrated by Bharata Muni in his *Natyashastra*. The staging of Greek plays in the West and Sanskrit plays in India has a long history. In the Indian tradition, plays were presented in a room with a curtain that covered a background with scenes. With the passage of time many changes were seen in the theatre. These theaters established the cinema world. Just as elements like color, line, tone, vessel is required in art in the same way, the inclusion of elements of drama, writing, acting and presentation is necessary for theatre. In 1948, the famous filmmaker Aleksandr Astruc wrote in his canonical essay 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo'cinema "is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel" (Astruc 20). Art, literature and cinema have an important role in the society. Various aspects of the society are displayed through these. Out of these three, cinema has maximum effect on the audience because includes all the arts and literature, due to which it attracts the audience in a very effective way.

Indian film industry that began in 1912-1913 ("Cinema of India") is one of the oldest and largest film industry. The Indian film industry has got recognition and fame with thousands of fans across the globe. The truth is quite evident in Cannes 2022 festival where India is named as the 'Country of Honour' ("Cannes 2022"). Whether its commercial cinema, art cinema or regional cinema, large number of movies are produced and released every year. Initially, the purpose of cinema was only entertainment, but with time many new subjects are being accommodated in cinema, such as social sensibilities, social evils etc. The themes of the films have seen changes over time and movies were made on a variety of significant subjects which forced the society to think. At present, directors in Indian cinema are presenting new subjects as a challenge, which are being readily accepted by the audience. Environmental preservation is one such subject that has received a lot of attention in recent years. Continuous films were made on the topics of natural calamities like drought, earthquake, flood, tsunami, storm etc. These films have been influencing the audience a lot because of being related to the life of the common man and can certainly influence the behaviour of people towards preservation of environment. Even conservation researchers are becoming more and more aware of the potential of movies as a means of attaining widespread environmental goals (Jones et al. 425). Across the Globe, the impact of movies for environmental awareness is realized. Since 1991, the Environmental Media Association (EMA) has given out the Annual Environmental Media Awards to the best television programme or movie with an environmental message in an effort to promote these thematic films. The Environmental Media Association (EMA) believe "that through television, film and music, the entertainment community has the power to influence the environmental awareness of millions of people" ("Environmental Media Awards").

The movies with presentations of Environmental concerns in Cinema, have paved a way for the new concept of Eco-cinema studies. The term Eco-cinema, was coined and first usedby Roger C. Anderson in 'Ecocinema: A Plan for Preserving Nature'(Chu11), The term is used for Cinema which is produced with the intention of highlighting environmental issues and human-induced problems on that have negative consequences in the forms of environmental degradations. Ingram defines Eco-film as a film that has a conceptual content which more or less explicitly promotes ecological ideas, or, more generally, an ecological sensibility. This conceptual content is usually understood to heighten viewers' awareness of concepts such as ecocentrism and ecological interconnectedness. (44)

In other words, eco-cinema can be thought of as a technique that aids in bringing environmental and natural resource-related issues to the fore. These films not only examine how nature and humans interact, but they also act as visual alarms about the coming disaster brought on by climate change, global warming, and other ecological dangers including water contamination and air toxicity owing to rising levels of pollution worldwide. This newly established genre of eco-cinema emerged from

ecocriticism which is defined as the research into how literature and nature interact. Ecocriticism takes as its subject, the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature (Glotfelty xiii). Ecocriticism can be viewed as an analytical approach that contends that Culture and Nature interact with one another, concurrently influencing and being influenced by one another. The present paper seeks to examine how Indian cinema has depicted the relationship between nature and human and draws attention towards the issues of the environment.

Depiction of Disasters and its aftermath in Indian Movies:

Disasters that are both natural and human-caused affect thousands of people every year. Such adverse events have the potential to cause physical destruction and a catastrophic loss of life. The depiction of disaster and its aftermath has been the background of many Indian movies since long time. One such epic blockbuster movie is *Mother India* produced in 1957. This film was one of the most appreciated films of its time and won the 5th National Film Awards (Mother India). Nargis played an important role in this film. Due to no rain in the film, the farmer sat on his hands while plowing the stony land. His wife (Nargis) does agriculture for a living. Due to severe storm and flood, his house is destroyed and the crop gets ruined. In such a situation, the efforts made by the heroine to raise her family were displayed. The importance of time was depicted in the 1965 Bollywood drama film *Waqt*. In the film, Lala Kedarnath was a wealthy businessman whose house was destroyed and his family disintegrated after the earthquake disaster. The aftermath of the earthquake is depicted in the film thus a natural disaster put the whole family in trouble.

The 2001 film *Lagaan* is one of the most grossing films of Bollywood. The movie depicts how Indians lived under British control and how they were forced to endure during drought periods. The movie depicts the tale of a village that was unable to grow any crops because of a water shortage, and how the British refused to accept any justifications for not paying taxes. Although the film was marketed as entertainment, the characters poignantly captured the suffering of the farmers. The film won eight awards at the 49th National Film Awards ("*Lagaan*"). The year 2008 saw the release of the science fiction action thriller movie Dasavathaaram. In addition to exploring the importance of "chaos theory" in our lives, the narrative also examines current global politics, the threat posed by Weapons of Mass destruction and environmental issues. It also showed how the tsunami and earthquake in the Indian Ocean in 2004 affected people's life. A love story is displayed in the 2009 movie *Tum Mile* against the backdrop of the Mumbai rains of 2005. Peepli Live, a movie that was released in 2010, became quite well-known. The story of the movie concentrated on Natha's suicide, which effectively illustrated the difficulties faced by farmers due to the drought.

Oh My God is a satirical comedy-drama movie that was released in 2012. It tells the tale of businessman Kanji Lal Mehta, whose store is damaged by an earthquake. Although Kanji Lal seeks insurance coverage for the damage, the insurance provider declines his request because the earthquake was a divine act. This prompts him

to ultimately accuse God in court. The ugly face of religion and politics was shown in the disaster of the earthquake tragedy in *Kai Po Che!* in 2013. It tells the tale of three friends who had huge goals, but when an earthquake ruins the building, they were planning to open their business in, all of their hopes are dashed. This film got place in the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival on 13 February 2013 where it was the first ever Indian film to feature in the World Panorama section ("*Kai Po Che!*"). A 2014 movie called *Jal* is based on the Rann of Kutch. The story of Jal centers on a young guy named Bakka who has the extraordinary talent of finding water in the desert. The movie portrays an intricate and captivating tale of love, relationships, animosity, treachery, and situations that reveal the evil side of human nature against the backdrop of water scarcity.

Although these movies do not address environmental issues directly, however the background of these movies illustrates how humans and nature are interconnected. Regardless of various themes, all of these films demonstrate how threats to and destruction of nature turn human lives upside down, Droughts, hurricanes, and floods can all seriously harm people. Even while these occurrences are sometimes seen as natural catastrophes or as a type of naturally occurring event that endangers human life, they occasionally aren't all that natural. Human actions frequently increase the severity of natural disasters. The usage of fossil fuels, deforestation, pollution and many other human actions frequently increase the severity of natural disasters.

Environmental Concern in Indian Cinema:

The new generation film makers have come up with the films that directly give the message regarding environmental concerns. They highlight the human ignorance and greed that leads to an unstable Ecological environment. To promote films on environment, a new category of award was introduced in 1989, at the 37th National Film Awards, i.e. the Best Film on Environment Conservation/Preservation for the Rajat Kamal and is awarded annually for films produced in the year across the country, in all Indian languages . As of 2020 since its inception, twenty four films have been conferred with this award , and the first award was conferred upon the production house M/s Purbanchal Film Co-operative Society Ltdand director Jahnu Barua for their Assamese film Bonani. It is a story of a lone forest officer fighting the illegal timber mafia and protecting rights of uneducated tribals. ("National Film Awards).

The 1997 Kannada film *Bhoomi Geetha: Song of the Earth* won the Best Film Award in this category in the 45th National Film Awards. The movie with the theme of cultural and ecological displacement of tribal communities. In this film, a dam is built in their native land due to which they have to be displaced. Today various environmentalists oppose the construction of the dam on the local communities. The film depicts the destruction of a civilization by the dam. B. Sivakumar directed the 2003 Tamil short film Urumatram is another movie to win Best film award under this category at the 50th National Film Awards. It tells the tale of an elderly man whose son insists on moving to America and who sells the family house to the proprietor of a

plastics plant. The little child, who gains inspiration from the grandfather's ideas of environmental awareness and interpersonal relationships, redeems the elderly guy. The movie displays the conventional ideals of parenthood, environmental responsibility, and interpersonal relationships.

2017 movie *Irada* is yet another move to win Best Environment/ Conservation/ Preservation award at the 50th National Film Awards. This movie demonstrated the negative impacts of chemical contamination of subsurface water. The impact of egotistical goals on the environment and people's health is shown in the movie. Set in Bathinda, with its manufacturing and thermal power plants serving as the backdrop, it is based on the real history of this city and its residents. The movie discusses current environmental problems such as uranium poisoning, reverse mining, and fertilizer poisoning brought on by the green revolution and their immediate adverse impact on the lives of people.

The Marathi language drama film *Paani*, which was released in 2019, is based on actual events and is set in the Maharashtrian village of Nagdarwadi, which is suffering from a drought. The movie, which is based on the life of Hanumant Kendre, describes his battle to deliver water to his village of Nagderwadi, which was suffering from a drought. Hanumant, discouraged that his marriage has been postponed due to the lack of water in his community, decides to take action to remedy the situation. Subodh Bhave, who plays his older brother, collaborates with the government on the *Jal Yukt Shivar* (water conservation) programme. They introduce the plan to the village with his assistance. However, the entire community must band together and cooperate in order for the plan to be carried out. This is where the real struggle of Hanumant starts, since many people are opposed to this happening. Once the village has a source of water, politicians cannot use tankers to deliver free water in order to win votes. The movie depicts ugly play of politics along with the message of water conservation.

The movie took home the prize for Best Film on Environmental Conservation at the 2019 National Film Awards.

The world's biggest industrial disaster, which occurred in Bhopal on December 2-3, 1984, is the inspiration for the films *Bhopal Express* and *Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain*. Methyl isocyanate gas began to seep from a Union Carbide India Limited-owned pesticide factory nearby when the people were sound asleep which killed thousands of people. In the film Bhopal Express, Verma and Tara, a newlywed couple, portray the happenings as they were experienced. *Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain* also centres on the same occurrence from Bhopal. The movie shows how the authorities disregarded maintenance and safety precautions. Officials disregarded a reporter's published reports that questioned the chemicals utilised in the factory. The plant's safety chief, Roy, voices his alarm, but the authorities disregarded his warnings, which caused a worker to pass away when methyl isocyanate from a pipeline leak fell on his hand. The worker was accused by the authorities for being careless, yet the factory is still in operation. A safety measure fails one night, exposing the gas to the environment and causing

thousands of deaths. Both movies show a disaster that was brought on by human ignorance. *Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain's* character Dilip's final lines, which depict the suffering of those who escaped the catastrophe but were left with a permanently terrible memory. "Whatever may be the cause of the disaster, Carbide never left Bhopal" (qt. in Samaddar & Eshwar). Both the movies sensitive people about this man-made tragedy due to ignorance and insensitivity on the part of corporate sector and administration.

The 2017 Hindi drama film *Kadwillawa* is based on real-life events that occurred in the drought-prone Bundelkhand region and the disappearing villages of coastal Odisha and the Chambal district of Dholpur, Rajasthan. The imaginary village of Mahua is plagued by a drought, and the story is set there. It centres on a blind father named Hedu who tries to stop his farmer son Mukund from killing himself. The movie provides a powerful portrayal of the effects of climate change and global warming in India, which are depleting natural resources and harming the environment following agricultural problem. Which further results to Indian farmer suicide epidemic.

The movie *Kedarnath* released in 2018, skilfully weave 2013 Kedarnath tragedy deftly into the story of two interfaith lovers, Mandakini (Hindu priest's daughter) and Mansoor (a muslim boy who works as a human porter). "In the early hours of June 17, 2013, a flash flood came down upon the overflowing banks of the Chorabari lake in Uttarakhand. Carrying huge amounts of silt and rocks, it destroyed lives, houses and everything else that came its way." 144 bridges collapsed, 400 villages were washed away, and 1636 roads were damaged, sweeping with them, over 15000 thousand villagers and pilgrims and 5000 animals (Das 201). The story depicts how Kullu, the priest's prospective son-in-law plans construction of hotel and lodge keeping in stake environment concerns despite the warnings of head priest. Mansoor and Mandakini are also anxious about the degradation and ecological deterioration of the natural resources. As Mandakini and Mansoor come closer, the couple encounter numerous challenges including parental opposition, they are further challenged when the rains of the 2013 Uttarakhand floods decimate the region. Audiences were startled out of their disbelief and instilled with a feeling of urgency regarding the global problem by the innovative yet horrifying representation of deathly rain and flood that overwhelmed thousands of pilgrims, villages, animals, bridges, highways, and buildings.

The film 2.0 released in 2018, is a Tamil language science fiction action which portrays the problem of extinction of birds due to phone tower radiation. Electromagnetic radiation or EMR is a kind of non-visible pollution and is very much part of environment now a days. But since its invisible, not much attention is paid to it. Mohommad Dilawar, the ornithologist known as India's sparrow man, who was also a member of the committee constituted by the Ministry of Forest and Environment that undertook research on the effects of tower radiations on the birds, bees and wildlife in India, says, "While the decline of sparrows in cities is not caused merely by the cellular towers, they are very much a culprit. There are other reasons as well because of which

Dilawar says thorough research is mandatory." He further says" I'd like to thank Rajinikanth and Akshay Kumar for raising the birds' issue in 2.0. It is a wonderful sign. This has brought a once forgotten pollutant back in the limelight." (Rajnikant's 2.0)

The All Living Things Environmental Film Festival (ALT EFF), which debuted in 2021, is a further initiative by youthful enthusiasts with the goal of encouraging films that raise awareness of environmental issues. The 2021 edition included documentary films that ran online between October 9 and 17, featured 44 environmental films from 31 countries. Numerous Indian films were premiered and brought to light the problems associated with human-wildlife conflict, difficulties in the lives of fisherfolk, and the nature of city expansions and its environmental and social implications. *Not Just Roads, Divarah, Shoot That Leopard, Sagarputra: Offspring of the Sea, Your Tiger Our Forest* are some of the commendable movies that showcased human-wildlife conflict, the lives of fisherfolk and the environmental complications that arise with road developments. Commenting on the changing style of environmental films, the directors respond, "We're entering a new world of environmentalism, where there are new ideas. Some of them are not apocalyptic, but propositional. We're going to see more environmental films of every shade. More films are trying to showcase the challenges of everyday life, which is something to be encouraged." (Shankar)

Conclusion:

The world appears to be more damaged than ever before as a result of human interference with nature's processes, which has led to significant environmental deterioration. A severe shift in the global climate that has caused droughts, floods, cyclones, and storms makes this destruction abundantly obvious. The general public, who are reluctant to make adjustments to their way of life and reduce their carbon footprint, has not been able to overcome their persistent state of denial despite the terrible records of these catastrophes. Because of their wide audience reach, movies have the potential to spread awareness of the threat posed by human actions. Indian cinema has raised concerns about human intervention that has resulted in a drastic change in temperature. The new-generation filmmakers have significantly contributed to the genre of Ecocinema. They have taken on the responsibility of awakening the "ecological conscience" of the audiences. These movies act as an alarming call to awaken people out of their denial state and understand importance of environmental conservation. Continuous films on this topic are being produced not just in India but also in western nations. Hollywood productions like Day After Tomorrow, 2012, Muana, Avatar, Happy Feet, and Twister and documentaries like A Before the Flood Warcraft, An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power have won praise for the amazing images and ways in which they convey environmental challenges that demand our immediate attention.

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