

THE IMAGE OF MAHATMA GANDHI IN HINDI MOVIES

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi is a sublime figure in India and has impacted almost each discourse. Hindi film industry has also got influenced by this profound personality. Movies are the mirrors of the society and society is also affected deeply by the movies of its time. Gandhi has been a favourite topic of Hindi film makers because there are unending possibilities and curiosities in the society about his multi-dimensional personality. There are debates and controversies in the society about his principles which are known as 'Gandhism'. Gandhi's image which is so common and compulsory in schools, academics, politics, society, RBI currency notes sometime creates cliché and stereotype.

As a research student I found it interesting to study the image of Mahatma Gandhi in the society through the eyes of film. Film is a dominant social discourse which reflects social realities. Hindi movies are selected for the study. The critical study of these movies reflects that the movies made before 2000 has the ideal and iconic hero-worship image of Gandhi. But the movies after 2000 experimented with the godly image of Mahatma Gandhi in grey shed and in more humanistic way. From 'Gandhi' to 'LageRahoMunnabhai' the serious and godly image has been transformed into more hilarious, humorous and friendly image.

Key words:- Mahatma Gandhi, Image, Hindi Movies, Gandhism, film makers, society.

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Mahatma Gandhi is a sublime figure in India if not in the world. 'Rashtrapita' is the highest title given to him and made him fatherly figure for the country which is one of the oldest civilisation of the world. His image on every Indian currency note, his statues all over India, his photos in every government offices, roads, bridges, gardens, libraries, cities, schools, colleges, universities named after him all over India makes Mahatma Gandhi is undoubtedly the most popular personality in the Indian history and his name comes at the first position when reference come about India's freedom struggle. In 1996, the Government of India introduced the Mahatma Gandhi series of currency notes in rupees 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 denomination. Today, all the currency notes in circulation in India contain a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1969, the United Kingdom issued a series of stamps commemorating the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. There have been approximately 250 stamps issued bearing Gandhi's image from 80 different countries worldwide.¹

Such a mighty figure cannot remain aloof when it comes to film discourse. Gandhi has not shown high regards for "Film Industry". He has only has seen a single movie in his life that movie was "Ramrajya"². But when it comes to movie making, Gandhi has been an important part of Hindi films as well. Hindi movies particularly means movies made in Hindi language or dubbed in Hindi language afterwards.

Innumerable movies are made on Gandhi and his life or where Gandhi's image became main subject in the story. Gandhi's image can be studied through these movies. Movies is the mirror of society. This image helps us to understand Gandhian discourse which has impacted many other discourses in society.

The image we find in movies is made by different film makers and in their different times.

Film Gandhi made by Richard Attenborough (1982) is considered as one of the best film of all times as it grabbed 8 Oscar awards a milestone in the history of Academy Awards.³ It is the best biographical take on Mahatma Gandhi. A Westerner made the best film on the "half a nude fakir" who doomed colonized powers of theirs. The movie by great craftsman of the genre portrayed 'Gandhi' a superhuman and the central figure in freedom struggle. Though Gandhi had been already given the full credit of Independence, this movie by a western filmmaker

stamped the credit at International forum. The movie put forth all the aspect of common man who fought with such a mighty powers of colonization. Gandhi was shown in most of the adorable leader of the world whose unique style of fighting became a legend for the world. Alex Padamsi who played the role of Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the movie wrote in his autobiography 4 'about how the movie and the man called Gandhi haunted the people of Brazil who had no idea of Gandhi or India'. The movie reinstated the iconic image of Gandhi all over the world. Gandhi was shown as a main 'sun' of the Independence struggle and all great leaders like Nehru, Patel, Azad, Ambedkar, Jinnah were like planets revolving around him. All the characters are overshadowed by Gandhi's figure. Gandhi's image in this movie is iconic and sublime which was the need of the story. The epic movie made Gandhi larger than life not only in India but all over the world. The image of Gandhi became sublime with the huge success of the movie. The movie is still shown in many archives and schools as a documentary on Indian freedom struggle. This established Mahatma as Most iconic figure in India

Famous film critic Jack Kroll stated, "There are very few movies that absolutely must be seen. Sir Richard Attenborough's Gandhi is one of them."⁵

No man's life can be encompassed in one telling. There is no way to give each year its allotted weight, to include each event, each person who helped to shape a lifetime. What can be done is to be faithful in spirit to the record and to try to find one's way to the heart of the man....p. 15 of Briley (1983).⁶

Another notable movie made on Gandhi is 'The Making Of Mahatma'(1996) by ShyamBenegal. Based on the book *The Apprenticeship of a Mahatma* by Fatima Meer, this film documents the life of Gandhi as an ordinary family man whose extraordinary actions transformed him into a leader of millions. The film is about all that Gandhi had to go through to become the monumental Mahatma that he is remembered as today. According to director ShyamBenegal, "this is a more intimate story. It is concerned with so much that had to change in Gandhi before he became the Mahatma." The film shows us a more human side of Gandhi, who made mistakes, feared, struggled and failed but was adamant to bring about a change. The film had a different outlook on Gandhi as it showed the progression of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi from being a barrister in South Africa to becoming the Mahatma. Benegal makes a decent effort to avoid Indian stereotypes of Gandhian image and his relationship with whites where the 'whites' are often seen as the bad guys. He makes a good balance in distinguishing the good from the bad without giving in to stereotype. In a nutshell, 'The Making of the Mahatma' tells the compelling story of Gandhi's journey from a young lawyer to the symbol of a nation...a journey that had its costs and demanded sacrifice. Here Gandhi's efforts are highlighted in such a way that he is shown as superman. The Making of the Mahatma is a rather more straightforward and direct account of Mohandas Gandhi's actions in South Africa and his influence in winning important battles for the rights of Indian workers there. That doesn't mean however that the film is anything less than compelling or involving, the viewer left in no doubt about the nature of the abuse, mistreatment and lack of rights or justice accorded to anyone in South Africa who isn't white and European. Even in his first two days first two days in the country. Gandhi is expelled from a Durban courtroom by the judge for wearing a turban

that is traditional in his profession in India, attacked in public on a number of occasions, and physically ejected from a train for having the temerity to sit in the seat he has purchased rather than share the baggage wagon with the "coolies". The nature of such bigotry, intolerance and violence that people are subjected to and the sheer injustice of a society that represses non-whites are clearly laid out in the film and is quite shocking. More than just matter-of-factly relating a series of events then, *The Making of Mohandas* purposefully charts the progress and experiences that would transform Gandhi into the figure who would become so important in achieving the independence of India. The experience of war in the Transvaal and the war with the Zulus have a significant impact, Gandhi coming to the conclusion that injustice can only be effected through non-violent protest and civil disobedience, giving the people a voice through the Indian Opinion newspaper, opposing and then burning registration cards, leading a march to highlight the injustice of poll taxes imposed on the Indian population and intolerance for their religious beliefs. The film moves well through these events, gaining in power and in impressiveness of spectacle that culminates with the New Castle March in 1913 of Gandhi's Satyagraha army. This movie in an attempt to enlarge Gandhian image. Great directors in India too has fallen in love with the image of Mahatma and they shared his greatness through their art.

Gandhi My Father (2007) is one of the most critically appreciated movies. "To the people he was a father. To his son he was a father he never had". This is the controversial tag line of the film that explores the strained relationship of Gandhi with his eldest son, Harilal. Perhaps one of the most underrated films of the Indian film industry, *Gandhi My Father* is an extremely moving and compelling narrative that deserved more than just the critical acclaim and awards it received. The film touched a subject not many dare to speak about. Based on Harilal Gandhi's biography, the film documents the life of a young man whose identity gets lost in the monumental shadow of his father. The film is a must watch for 'Negative' side of Mahatma's life through the tragedy of his own son Harilal. The Rashtrapita and his own son relationship as the bereft and lonely son who is unable to please his great father and loses his sanity because of the pressure of living up to the great family name. The image of Mahatma is portrayed in a grey shed but the movie was a tussle between two generation – one brought in higher value and morality and the second generation who couldn't cope with those values. It's a struggle of the post-Independence generation with pre Independence generation. Even there is another angle shows Gandhi as 'failed father' as he was building a nation with his highest morality at one side and his own son behaves exactly opposite to his principles. A failed man on the front of a family but victorious at the international level is depicted very ironically. This was an attempt of new film makers and society to judge Gandhi on the basis of his father ship instead of 'Rashtrapita'. This movie was a brave attempt to portray Gandhi in negative shed.

The film *Sardar* (1993) begins with a young Sardar Patel playing cards with his friends and ridiculing Mahatma Gandhi and his policies to achieve independence. His views change however when he is introduced to Gandhi by his brother and upon listening to a lecture delivered by Gandhi, he joins him in his struggle. Sardar then successfully organises various

Satyagrahas throughout Gujarat. The film then moves to the age of the Quit India Movement and India's freedom. Sardar is instrumental in convincing the working committee of the INC and Nehru to accept a proposal for the partition of India when riots break out on the league's call for Direct Action. Sardar realises that not tackling the problem now might result in civil war in the country. Once the partition has been accepted, Sardar then works to get all the princely states to join the Union of India, the film accurately depicts his handling of the problems posed by the princely states of Kashmir, Junnagad and Hyderabad. The film also portrays his differences with Nehru and how they work together after the death of Gandhiji. The film ends with Sardar resting in a village saying that today from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, there is one independent nation. As Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was a congressman and one of the great devotee and follower of Mahatma Gandhi the image in this movie is shown in a very positive way. His image is heightened in the movie and it is one of those movie which Gandhi is credited with many attributions.

One movie made by legend Kamal Hassan Hey Ram (2000) is one of the grand movie on Mahatma Gandhi. Set in the backdrop of the partition of India and the Hindu Muslim riots, this is the story of a simple young man Saket. When his innocent wife is raped and murdered by a group of Muslim goons he is overcome with grief and then hatred. He plans revenge and joins a Hindu militant group and plans to assassinate Gandhi as they believe he is responsible for partition of the country and favours the Muslims. Saket then embarks on a journey of violence and hatred only to see more violence and pain. When he loses his own friend, Amjad Ali Khan, amidst all this he realises that fighting on grounds of religion is senseless.

The image of Gandhi in this movie is multi shaded as the protagonist grows in maturity from beginning to the end of the movie. In the beginning the protagonist hold Gandhi responsible for the killing of his wife after a brutal murder by the muslims. The violence after partition in Calcutta was shown in such a way that it ridicules Gandhi's concept of non-violence. Saket who had lost his wife and entire world of happiness with her is devastated and tries to fix his entire blame on Mahatma Gandhi. The man responsible for the massacre of the Calcutta, General Surhawardiwho let the criminals free to cut the throats of innocents was shown greeting and embracing Mahatma Gandhi in the public. Gandhi was imagined to be pro Muslim and anti-Hindu. One gets confused to judge Gandhi's image in this movie.

LageRahoMunnabhai (2006) is one of the latest film focuses Gandhi in new light and lighter way. This is the story of Happy go lucky Munna who is overjoyed to have Gandhi around to guide him. However, his happiness is cut short when he realizes that he was only hallucinating and there was no friendly spirit guiding him. The film tries to emphasise that there is a Gandhi in all of us and that we can achieve with love and compassion what we cannot get through violence. Munna realizes this and sets out on a journey to help the people of his city, listening to their problems as a radio jockey and solving them through 'Gandhigiri'. In spite of the poignancy of the subject the film is a roller coaster ride of laughter and not preachy or boring at any point.

One of the most popular and entertaining Gandhiji played in recent times was by Marathi actor DilipPrabhavalkar in 'LageyRahoMunnabhai'. This was the first film which showed Gandhi in a contemporary setting and was not a take on his freedom fight. The film very smartly used Gandhiji's teachings and adapted it to modern day world thereby introducing the concept of 'Gandhigiri'. Gandhi is portrayed in a very hilarious way contrastingly opposite to a gangster who was a violence personified. The image is made so realistic and Gandhian principles which are believed to be impractical in today's world made so suitable in the present situation. Nonviolence can be a way of living in today's cut-throat competition and even criminals can be brought down on knees if one resists passively as Gandhi did. The relevance of satyagraha and its need in the present world is shown through a humorous story. Gandhi's ideology is made to look ordinary and very useful in following and implementing.

This movie is better than hundred books. The Gandhian ideology which can be complex to understand and explain theoretically is explained and nicely elaborated in simple and easy way through a story of a gangster. The affable goon Munna, who is now masquerading as a Professor specializing in the life of Mahatma Gandhi, must now battle his very own forces and the builder - but he has one ally on his side - none other than the great man - Mahatma Gandhi.

In 2000s filmmakers became more open on historical biographies and went on to show more than what was documented in the history curriculum textbooks. Jabbar Patel's biography on BabasahebAmbedkar was one of the first films to show Gandhi in grey shades. It was a shocker to audiences to see Gandhi in a negative light. Mohan Gokhale played Gandhi's character in the film and the director showed how Gandhi used his non-cooperation policy and fasting strategies to emotionally blackmail and get things done as per his demands. While India is fighting against the British rule on the political level spear-headed by Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar wages a social battle against the Upper Caste Hindus. Ambedkar and Gandhi clash in their ideologies. Yet Gandhi admires Ambedkar and it is on his insistence that Ambedkar is made the first Law Minister in Prime Minister, Nehru's rule. The film ends on the note of salvation - where Ambedkar gives millions of untouchables an alternate religion where they find dignity, compassion and equality. He publicly renounces Hinduism and adopts Buddhism. Gandhi and Ambedkar were historic rivals over many issues. Ambedkar movie was expected to put Gandhi lower to Ambedkar. For the first time Jabbar Patel one on the legend Director ventured to outcast Gandhi in the struggle for commonest people. Ambedkar image is heightened by out casting Gandhi's image.

A portrait of the one of our greatest social reformer of our times - Ambedkar. The film documents the period between 1901 and 1956. The film delves more into Ambedkar's life as a reformer, while his personal life is sort of skimmed over. Ambedkar who is the first graduate of his community, the untouchables, is an unassuming young man. All he is concerned about, even when he goes to New York for further studies is that he's here to study, not get involved in political issues and rallies. His exchanges with Afro-Americans, his teachers who support Human Rights and the inclusion of the 14th Amendment in the US Constitution granting rights to African-Americans however rouse the reformer in him. While India is fighting against the

British rule on the political level spear-headed by Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar wages a social battle against the Upper Caste Hindus. Ambedkar and Gandhi clash in their ideologies. Yet Gandhi admires Ambedkar and it is on his insistence that Ambedkar is made the first Law Minister in Prime Minister, Nehru's rule. The film ends on the note of salvation - where Ambedkar gives millions of untouchables an alternate religion where they find dignity, compassion and equality. He publicly renounces Hinduism and adopts Buddhism. "After all, you must remember that this was the early Gandhi. He became a saint later. He was much more intolerant, much more difficult during this phase and that is why he made things so difficult for Dr Ambedkar."⁷

The image of Gandhi was Iconic and without any opposition till 2000. The epic movie 'Gandhi' had made impact so deep on the society and film makers that movies followed after that were also fell in line with the film. The last millennium was impressed so deeply and engrossed in its image that nearly for five decades nobody experimented to see Gandhi in different light. The movies that came in the wake of new millennium were more experimental and attempted to see Gandhi in critical light. To conclude image of Gandhi is being in the change. 'Gandhi' made by Richard Attenbaro was an epic movie which established serious and iconic Gandhi but 'LageRahoMunnaBhai' is a hilarious and humorous depiction of Gandhi. We can have many more movies which will be seen with lots of experiments with the image of Gandhi.

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