

## DOES THE MAINSTREAM NEED AN ALTERNATIVE?

A few days ago, I came across an article called, 'what should the new Bollywood film be called? Underdog cinema or balcony films or new-age mainstream films? That article was very relevant with what we are discussing today. Piku, Massan, Neerja, Kapoor & Sons, Lunch box, Queen, Lootera, Margarita with a straw, Dum Laga Ke Haisha, Talvar, Highway, Aligarh and I can name many more films made in last 4-5 years which belong to this class. Where do we place such low budget-content driven films? 'Meaningful entertainers' or 'non-mainstream commercial'?? These are not necessarily classically stylized as art-house films; most of them did well on the box office and have A+ star cast; many of those are produced by big established producers; all of those are consumed by the urban, neo-rich multiplex audience. These films are *हटके (hatke)* in two major ways - they narrate a story going beyond the time-tested formulas, and secondly, many of those have a female lead as a protagonist. Film makers like Anurag Kashyap, Zoya Akhtar, Vishal Bhardwaj, Shriram Raghavan, Vikramaditya Motwane, Anurag Basu, Gauri Shinde, Abhishek Chaube, Trigmanshu Dhulia are a few of the active players in this new game. The steady growth in numbers of patrons of such films is commendable. I think that the exposure to the Hollywood cinema, world cinema through festivals and torrents, to the American and British television series has evolved the taste of the audience. Because of the commercial success of these films, the distributors honor those with publicity campaigns similar to A-listers. Trailers, extensive publicity in magazines and newspapers, city tours, appearances in popular television shows, and many such promotional activities on digital platforms are offered to these films which otherwise would have gotten corroded with no publicity.

This analysis will give us a bird's eye view of the alternative given to the mainstream in the field of Hindi cinema. The alternative is not just in terms of content and film making devices like new-age cameras, sound & editing tools, but it has reflected through the infra structure like screenings halls, projection equipments, and on-line ticket booking forums. I believe that the evolution of

alternatives has enhanced the overall quality of aesthetic experience as a whole.

These films have another great alternative available which my generation film makers never had. Availability of Internet, face-book and other social media platforms for promotion and publicity of a film is a game changer. In fact, internet is the most revolutionary alternative erupted which has slashed the monopoly of mainstream means of communication via postal or telecommunication services. YouTube is yet another forum through which ordinary citizens got access to represent or exhibit their views & talent. A cosmopolitan cultural participation became a norm only because of emergence of YouTube. Parallel economic structure in the form of on-line shopping is evolved as an alternative to our traditional markets. Net banking and plastic money have replaced the conventional banking needs. Wikipedia is an excellent example of a pool of common knowledge on various subjects which is an alternative to a realm of experts in respective fields.

Generally alternatives lead to healthy contingents in the dialectical process. Many times alternatives germinate social movements. Alternatives have the power to counter/rebel against the prevalent dominant ideas/beliefs and values of a culture. Alternatives because of its propensity to create subversive atmosphere are not welcomed by the mainstream. Thus the antithetical equation of alternatives qua mainstream is a classical binary conflict. If we look at our socio-political scenario in last decade, alternatives have proven to be the most popular channels of social change and social justice. Thus, as the tangible replacements are more visible such as landlines by cell phones, desk tops by laptops, printed books by e-books & Kindle, actual currency by credit cards, tailored clothes by readymade garments, stunt performances by computer graphics, human labour by machines, electricity by solar panels, live performances by recorded music... and so on, alternatives in socio-political life are equally discernible. Rise of AAP, mass support given to Anna Hazare and Nirbhaya, massive mandate given to the Prime Minister Modi, group therapies or movements like Alcoholic Anonymous, encouragement to citizen journalism - grants through CSR - community radio and other forms of alternative media etc. have dominated the social engagement while changing the conventional paths.

Since I dabble in those fields, I must note that the contribution of alternatives towards changing the norms of aesthetics in Visual Art and Performing Art is stupendous. Display of art in public spaces has removed artistic engagements from claustrophobic spaces. Street art, murals, graffiti are used as means of protest and also purely as aesthetic expression. The street art movement gained popularity in the 1980s as a form of art distinct from the elite spaces of museums and art galleries. Movements like DADAism from 1910, Surrealism, Futurism, Situationism to Post Minimalism, Pop Art etc. posed alternatives to established forms of art while resurrecting the variant visual artistic trends.

The 3 dimensional space of theater throws infinite possibilities of composition, lay out, lighting, movement of live human presence, sound design, etc. Unfortunately mainstream format of plays almost never explored the potential of those possibilities. Mainly plays were restricted to verbose communications and a naturalistic box set of a drawing room in a middle class house, and ancillary realistic props. I had an aversion towards such plays. While using human body and lights as my primary tools, I played with darkness which in itself had its own expression. I experimented with shadows which evoked strong imagery complementing the dialogue. I did not explore colors and opted for grey, blacks. I also tried to move the theatre from proscenium to the open spaces. I resorted to abstraction to explore something which was already defined by and through dialogues. I attempted to deconstruct the spoken text while presenting an abstract visual context. It was exciting to experiment with such contrasting juxtapositions. I drew meaning of the words through the movement of forms that emerged from those words. Such trials conferred a surreal setting to the play. Thus abstraction as an alternative to the mainstream theater did unfold narratives beyond just corporal experience.

I strongly believe that society progresses towards elevated thinking mainly because of alternatives which is necessarily a continuous process. It's the "change in the thinking pattern" is what I wish to emphasize. Needless to say, the merits of the alternatives per se can be dubious. How do we decide which hacking is ethical or unethical? For Americans, wiki leaks were unethical. For rest of the world it was not. But we have to acknowledge that hacking itself is which has taken computing to an all together higher levels. Alternatives are indeed quintessential for progression of civilization.

I am presently exploring yet another alternative which combines abstract as well as conventional painting, contemporary as well as traditional story telling tools, theater as well as videography, live performance weaved in through sculpture. This alternative is called Live Performance Art Installation.