

Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 01
Introduction

Good morning. So, this is our new course, Film Appreciation, and I am going to give you introduction to the course. So, introduction to the course, which is called, Film Appreciation, this is your summer course. I am your instructor Aysha Iqbal Viswamohan. I am a professor of film studies, drama and literature in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences here at IIT-Madras.

So, these are the principle things, that we are going to look in to and before I start, I would like to just tell that you must have seen the website of the course and there are couple of changes in what we are actually going to do in this course. So, the change is not very radical, but it is, it has got something do with the ordering and restructuring of the modules. So, please pay attention to this. So, what you may see on the website in week 1 or week 2 or subsequently, subsequent weeks, there may be little change in the order of the modules. We will also be looking at certain theoretical aspect of film studies because we feel that that is also important to understand or appreciate cinema and therefore, there is a module added to whatever we have given in the or on the website.

So, one of the first things that you are going to learn in this course is: plot. So, this will be a part of the course, 'what is a plot'. Plot is the narrative foundation upon which all the stories are built. We often say a comment on what kind of plot was that and this is what we mean, it is the foundation. And we should know, that text is the verbal, written or visual artifacts. It is created by us and narrative is the way a story is told. This is the difference between narrative and story. Story is the basic outline, narrative is the way it is told. Film combines all these elements and therefore, is more complex or rather most complex of all arts. We should also know, that most stories reflect the universal human experiences, which are birth, growth, going on adventure, facing temptation, falling in love, loosing love and finally, life lessons derived and most plots focus on these aspects of life.

There is a difference between plot and a screenplay. A screenplay is a script for a film or television show. It includes dialogues, as well as stage directions and character actions

and movement. I know, that many of you are aspiring screenwriters and therefore, you might be interested in this course. So, this is one aspect that you should learn, that screenplay is not just outline story or the plot, but it also includes dialogues and stage direction.

We will also be looking at semiotics of cinema, which is also called semiology. It is the study of signs, film images are signs, s, i, g, n, s. Filmmaking is choosing the precise images for the particular story. Now, Peter Wollen in signs and meaning in cinema talks of signs as a triadic index, icon and symbol and indexical signs lead to something important. You might have seen index signs like indexical signs, like clocks, for example In the Mood For Love, a film by Wong Kar-wai, the Chinese director. So, these are, these indexical signs are something that point towards something important.

You will also learn something about cinematic terms. Why, because these things will be referred to repeatedly throughout the course. So, you will be learning, for instance, about concepts such as androgyny and anagnorisis, counter cultures, emblematic shots, ethnicity, historical films, martial arts films, action cinema, meta-cinema, war films and much more.

We will be also doing a session on surrealism with particular reference to the Spanish director, Luis Bunuel. Surrealism is a term related to art and theater movement, which explores subjective dream states and it is concerned with the, with subverting the logic representation. Bunuel collaborated with Salvador Dali on Un Chien Andalou, which is an unusual debut film with surrealist images and it has one of the most iconic images of the surrealist cinema, which is that of a hand slicing a woman's eyeball. This is, this clip is, rather the movie is available on YouTube and I would like you to watch it. Surrealism is also technique, which demonstrated Bunuel's obsession with playing with the narrative.... and when we talked about this eye splicing scene, it cuts to a cloud drifting along the moon and we, the viewers, get the sense the narrative is seemingly, not very logical. The film was shot in two weeks and was really a shocker, and we are talking about 1928 when, cinema was rather conventional.

We will also talk about cinematography and editing technics. So, the film editor is responsible for putting the pieces together into coherent shots. Films are made using shots. So, there are film using shots and shots are pieced together, placed together and that is the editor's job. He or she must guide our thoughts, associations and emotional

responses effectively from one image to another or from sound to another so that their interrelationships of separate images and sounds are clear and the transition between signs, scenes and sequence are smooth to achieve the goal. The editor must consider the aesthetic, dramatic and psychological effect of the juxtaposition of image to image, sound to sound or image to sound and place each piece of film and soundtrack together accordingly.

In this, in this relation we will be also talking about editing techniques, such as jump cut and montage. In the past, filmmakers made routine use of several optical effects created in the film lab during the printing of the film to create smooth and clear transaction between the film's most important divisions, such as between two sequences that take place at a different place of the time.

These transitional devices include wipe, which is when a new image is separated from the previous image by means of horizontal vertical or diagonal line that moves across the screen to wipe the previous image away. There is a flip frame where entire frame appears to flip over to reveal a new scene, creating a visual effect very similar to turning a page. There is also fade-out fade-in by last image of one-sequence fades momentarily to black and the first image of the next sequence is gradually eliminated. There is also the famous dissolve, the end of one shot and it gradually merges in to the beginning of the next, so that the effect is produced by superimposing a fade-out on to a fade-in of equal length or imposing one scene over another. See examples of all these scenes or all these concepts are very easily available on the net. All you have to do is to key in terms such as dissolve or wipe or fade and you will get what you want

I would also at this the point try to make an announcement, that due to copyright reasons, we might not be able to show you actual clippings or even stills from films, but we will be referring to these. And you will also find, that perhaps I would give you a couple of links at the beginning of lectures and I would ask you to watch that. Go to the link, watch that particular sequence and come back to us. So, that would make the discussion easier.

Apart from the editing and cinematographic techniques, we will be talking about narrative. We will talk about how shots are taken and how frames are used by filmmakers. We will also talk about elements of mise-en-scene, which is literally putting on stage. It is a French term, which originates from theater where it designates everything, that appears on stage including sets, colors, lighting, character movements,

elements of visual style and it is designed to create the narrative space and hence, progress the narrative.

We will also be talking about cult films. For example, I know, for most of you a cult film would be something like *Reservoir Dogs* or *Pulp Fiction*, a kind of film that has a dedicated set of followers, who watch it over and over again and discuss various aspects of it. They also try to interpret the film in its own way. Cult films have a huge following among a particular set or group of people.

We will also talk about remakes and the theory of remakes particularly, as given to us by Constantine Verevis in film *Remake*, which talks about remaking as industrial category, as textual category and also as critical category. Remaking is a very integral part of world cinema, Indian cinema, regional cinema and we will be talking about that because I am sure, some of you are interested in this aspect of cinema also along with adaptation. Many of you who are perhaps in college, you might be having a course such as literature and adaptation or film adaptation where we talk about how a text is translated on to screen and you will be talking about what is lost and what is gained through this transition or adaptation.

We will also discuss elements of full and feature films as compared to short films and documentary. At this point, I would urge you to watch a movie by Roman Polanski and it is one of his earlier films, called *Two Men and a Wardrobe*. This is a short film that I would like you to watch. We will also talk about, as I already told you, the seminal features of a documentary.

Our next area of interest would be genre. Genre is a French word and it means, category or a type or a collection of instantly recognizable stylistic features. It is addressed as a system for organizing production as well as groupings of individual films, which have collective and singular significance. From the commercial point of view, genres are important because there is a demand for these categories. Classification of films into genre has always helped the film industry to produce and market films. There are variety of genre we will be discussing it, particularly with reference to mythological, musicals and also action cinema, which I know, most of you enjoy a lot.

We will also be talking about traditions in world cinema. Now, what do you understand by traditions in world cinema? How cinema has evolved over a period of over hundred years or so? There have been major cinematic movements, experiments all over the

world. So, we have instances of German expressionism, which started in Germany, but it had a far-reaching influence, particularly with reference to a device of expressionism, a theory of expressionism. We will also talk about Italian neorealism, French new wave and French new wave is very influential. It had a far-reaching influence, particularly on cinemas of other countries and even America where the entire American new Hollywood period, you know, starting from the late 60s. It all owes and it is very largely indebted to French new wave and the seminal filmmakers of this period such as Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard.

We will be also talking about the British new wave, Iranian and Latin American cinema and also transnational Chinese cinema. Of course, a major thrust of this course would be on Indian cinema. We, I will be doing a module on, Introduction to Indian cinema. We will be talking about the history and growth of Indian cinema, the contribution of the great Dada Saheb Phalke, the studio system such a Bombay Talkies. I will talk about early films such as mythological and overall, how the history of Indian cinema is important to understand our cinema.

We will talk about various theater and art forms, such as painting. I have already talked about surrealism, we will also talk, we will also talk about other art forms, such as cubism, etcetera. I have already informed you, that we will talk about neorealism and also realism. Realism is something, that finds its roots in the literature, in the writings of French writers such as Honore de Balzac, Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert and then, Zola is also famously associated with the naturalistic tradition in literature and cinema. Historically, this is a point where art is reacted against the romantic moment of the 18th and early 19th century. So, we will be looking at realism and one of the seminal works in this area has been done by a film critic, the French film critic Andre Bazin and we will be looking at his theories as well.

We will be also talk about the growth of theater and its influence, rather than the growth of theater, the influence of the theater on cinema. Coming to Indian cinema, we will talk about the importance accorded to song and dance elements in films, the formulaic film, which are so popular, the genres and formulas in film. We will talk about, as I have already told you, mythology and also musicals, both in India and Hollywood. They were, in Hollywood we do not find too many musicals nowadays, but once upon a time musical was very important, very successful and popular genre in Hollywood as well. In India, of course, it goes without saying that musicals still exist and are extremely

popular. We will talk about masculine charisma and also stardom when we discuss Indian cinema and Hindi film stars, rather Indian film stars.

We will talk about melodrama in Indian cinema. Melodrama in Hindi films are, or Indian films are rather known for their melodramatic aspect. Melodrama has its, good definition of melodrama is provided by The great M.H. Abrams in his book called, *Literary Terms*, where he mentions, that the terms melodrama and melodramatic are in an extended sense applied to any literally work or episode, whether in drama or prose fiction, that relies on implausible events and sensational action. Melodrama in this sense was a standard fare in cowboy and Indian and cops and robber types of silent films and remains alive and flourishing in current cinematic and television production.

Again, according to film critic David Thomson, melodrama in film is often a world in which few people live in mid shadow. The image sustains a thought, that romantic dreams are the pivot of life. These days the melodramatic is used mostly to dismiss a film as excessive and not worthy of discussion, but then, that is not really true because there has been a resurgence interest in serious study, academic study of melodrama. And in India, people have done good work on melodrama and Indian cinema. And in Hollywood, the cinema of Douglas Sirk are studied there for melodramatic content.

We will be talking about the so called categories, A list films and B list films also as along with canonical films. Coming to India, we will also talk about canonical Indian films as well as parallel cinema in India, which are not so mainstream. Parallel cinema is generally associated with the late 60s, efflorescence of cinema in the late 60s, can be early 70s and it went on till the mid-80s when we had films like *Ardhasatya*, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* and *Arth*. We are talking about that kind of movement and for a while there was a dip in this kind of cinema, but then avant garde cinema has found its voice again in India. And I will be talking about post liberalization films in India where we will be discussing mainstream films, NRI films, as well as avant garde films, especially with people like Dibakar Banerjee, Anurag Kashyap and Balki at the helm of these films.

So, I am glad to see you here for this course and we will be having regular interactions. So, keep watching this place for more.

Thank you very much.