

Film Appreciation
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Science
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 10
Traditions in World Cinema British New wave

(Refer Time Slide: 00:18)



Good morning. We continue with our discussion of traditions in world cinema, and the topic is British new wave cinema. How many of us are aware of the, so called British new wave cinema, or even the British cinema. Surprisingly we get very little response, whenever we try to discuss British cinema. And particularly, British new wave cinema which had made an important contribution to the tradition, towards the tradition of world cinema.

So, the beginning is the end of the 1950's, which witness the advent.... in Europe.... of a succession of new waves. We have been talking about, the French new wave we also know German expressionism, Italian new realism. So, British new wave, and this is a part of success of new waves in cinema, all across Europe. It was marked by the growth of innovative productions, and characterized by emergence of young film directors, and writers. Generally it all lasted till the seventies.

The British new wave movement refers to a trend, that took place in the British film industry in the late 1950's, and early 1960's. It drew inspiration from the works of

French directors such as Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard, who are the pioneers as you know of the novel work of the French new wave cinema. British new wave is concerned with realism, and the aesthetics associated with it. The films between 1959 and 1963 are collectively known as the British new wave.

And sometimes, also the kitchen sink drama is a new term you should know the kitchen sink drama, and the British realism, social realism. Developers in the British film industry had from beginning very strong, literary routes. British new cinema was an extension of the changes in subject matter, style and themes that had first taken place during the fifties in poetry, novel, drama.

So, at the major, all the major productions of the major new wave literary adaptations, according to the critic, film critic, and scholar, Peter Wollen contrary to the French practice. The British series of films is not marked, by the leadership of a group of prominent auteurs, cinema was more literary, than its French counterpart, and that British cinema is not auteur based. Still if a new wave cinema is defined as youth oriented nationals, a movement of the period then 50s and 60s can be qualified as, British new wave cinemas.

Since, the late 30's, the British film industry had an experienced, three decades of continuous crises. The crises was averted occasionally by the fixing of quotas, and in position of high duties, and competing films, imported from Hollywood. The situation was that, people did not want to watch films, made in Britain as compared to the high production values, and glossy films of Hollywood. The studio films, it is also the time you know, when even the greatest of all film actors such as Laurence, Olivier, and Vivien Leigh, they were seeking you know carriers in Hollywood cinema. Of course, there were great British stars also, and continued making films in Britain, but they did make wonderful films in Hollywood.

Before we all forget, we have to remember how Vivien Leigh was particularly discovered by the makers of the classic *Gone With the Wind* and although she was an established actor in British cinema, and also a very unrenowned actress on the British stage, and theater that she had to go and prove herself, and there were lot of you know. There are lots of legendary stories related to, how Vivien Leigh was cast as the great characters is Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.

So, the idea is that British film industry always had to compete with Hollywood with very little success, or rather no success. They are just people, just could not compete with Hollywood cinema, and the greatest of all stars were also seeking fortunes, and carriers in the Hollywood.

So, the idea was what to do, how to compete with all this. Now, some of the directors whose body of works can be associated with the, so called British new wave, Tony Richardson, Jack Clayton, and John Schlesinger, Lindsay Anderson, Ken Loach and Desmond Davis. As if, the French new wave movement, many of the filmmakers, begin as movie critics, and film journalist.

We have been talking about the lasting impression, of the French new wave cinema, and this was one of the influences, this was one of the consequences. So, these British makers are affiliated with prominent left wing political journals magazines, such as Sequence, The New Statesmen, and the British Film Institute's Sight and Sound. They were influence by a normative idea of cinema, a vision of what cinema should be, and this was that British cinema needed to, break away from its class bound attitudes.

You see the British society has always been marked, by definite class system, and the idea was that, there should be culturally, there should be a kind of a revolution, where class system should break down, barriers should break down, the cinema and theater, made their own contribution towards breaking these, crossing these barriers. I will be talking repeatedly about some of these films, of this period, Look Back in Anger, A Taste of Honey, Billy Liar, and The L Shaped Room.

The movie A Hard Days Night, starring the great Beatles, the rock band, pop band Beatles,, it marked the end of the movement although this is very fitting tribute, to the British new wave . Oneneeds to watch A Hard Days Night, just in order to understand the things, that we have been talking about with more, the key features of the French new wave cinema. You know shooting on location camera, fluidity of camera movement, and shooting in natural light with mostly employing natural sounds, Beatles playing themselves. You know very personal kind of filmmaking.

So, we will come back to the common themes in the works of these directors, and examine some of those films a little later, in this topic, in this lecture. The changes in literary environment of the period are very significant when we considered the British

new wave. In the beginning of the 1950, the anti modernist writer such as C P snow, and J B Priestley, they expressed a preference for social relevance, and provincialism.

This style of literary tradition was supported by poets, such as Philip Larkin and Tom Gunn, novels such as John Wayne, Hurry on Down along with Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim that dealt with dissatisfied young men, from the provinces, from working class areas. The literary event of this era is of course, was John Osborne, classic play Look Back in Anger, which was staged in 1956 featuring the disgruntled protagonist, Jimmy Porter who was described as the first of the, so called angry young man.

So, you have to use this, you have to remember this term, the expression, angry, young man first used by in British cinema, to describe disgruntled young man, who is extremely anti establishment. We have our own version of angry young man, as we have seen in the films of Amitabh Bachchan in the early 70s. Then again it is a throwback on, these kinds of films where young person was anti establishment, anti authoritarian, and he had an axe to grind with the social injustices of the period.

So, British new wave cinema, we have also talk used in expression, kitchen sink realism. It refers to as kitchen sink realism, for its attention to class is one of its central themes. Class and class conflict came to be one of the central defining themes, of the new wave movement. For the first time, class came to be a subject in itself, and not a source of comic relief, as most seen in the works of earlier play rights and filmmakers.

Important literary works and most of the literary works are later adapted in to films Alan Sillitoe's, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, then David Storey, The Sporting Life, John Braine's Room At the Top, Lynne Reid Banks, The L Shaped Room and Eliot George's The Leather Boys and of course, Billy Lair.

In particular these films, a paid close attention to the nitty-gritty's of ever day life of in the working off, the working classes and there the highs, their lows, their lies, their loves of great important is the fact, that working classes were portraits, neither as victims nor as heroes. But as people with everyday life, through the use of domestic, and leisure time settings in the films, this represented a break from earliest cinema, that shied away from representation of the industrial, north, and Midlands and the use of local accents on screen.

Until the new wave most of the characters in British cinema, were from London, and spoke in the accents of the educated upper class. You have to think of the way, how accent marks class, and most of the films before the British new waves, have starring upper class characters, and using upper class accents, the standard R P.

That is Received Pronunciation of the English language, but this was the first time, the characters, the protagonist started speaking, the working class accents, and also the regional dialogues, and also a particularly you know cockney language. So, this was this head to be accepted, and defiantly this was a period, when things were changing in Britain. So, in addition to class the frustration and rebellion of the youth, and sex, and gender relation were also prominent themes of these films.

What was unique about the British new wave was the great emphasis; it laid on the social environment, its treatment of sex, and sexuality. The focus on the youth culture, their frustrations, and the dominant political attitude, especially after the Second World War, there is a remarkable amount of overlap, between the British new wave movement, and the angry young man movement. In British literature, this movement refers to playwrights, and novelist who shot to prominent in the 1950's.

We are again talking about people like Osborne, and Tony Richardson, again the key concerns about their works was also, were also a disillusionment with traditional society. Their work sort to draw attention, to the working classes in the north of England. Canonical films that were made in this period were adaptations of earlier plays or novels, that had captured the heart condition of the working classes, especially after the wars.

In the time when the people were, assume to never had it better, these films came to be seen as almost they rocked the boat, those things were not all that good in Britain. But there was a section of society that was living, under extremely trying conditions. The marker that sets apart the British new wave films, are the stylistic convention it followed, a few of them a words mentioning are like most of the films are shot in black, and white.

This is important that these even a *Hard days Night*, which was made in 1963, it starring the Beatles . It is a black and white film, and it followed a pseudo documentary style of shooting, showing clear references to the cinema, verite mode of film making in addition these films are often shot on location. Just like the French new wave films, with real people or non-professional actors, and focused on the process of capturing real life.

For example, *Room at the Top* were shot in Bradford, and *A Taste of Honey* in Manchester, and *Blackpool* among real locations. And of course, *Billy Lair* in the street in the streets of Bradford, and *Leads* again sound was daubed, and the musical score was locally influenced as well, and like the major movies of the time, these movies were often shot in 16 mm. As a result, these films often had a very spontaneous quality, and came to a body what is today known as audio realism.

The idea of subjective reality, found a lot of favor research cinema audiences were allowed in to the minds of characters, through the use of interior monologue point of view shots, and subjective camera work allowed the audience to see, what the characters could see. The purpose was to laid there his or her character detail, it is worth making the distinction here between socialist realism, and the kind of concerns, that British new wave cinema addressed often term social realism.

Unlike the former, the British new way was not produced under supervision by the government, and did not aspire to the status of official art. In addition the protagonist of social realism was often the anti hero, and was not portrait as an ideal type worthy of ambulation, he or she was dissatisfied with life and work and often frustrated in their quest for better provincial life of portrayed as claustrophobic alienating.

So, some of the important movies I mean, again I will talk about *Look Back in Anger*, *Taste of Honey*, *Billy Lair*, and particularly made in 1959 by Tony Richardson, *Look Back in Anger*. It starred Richard Burton, Mary Ure, and Claire Bloom. It is based on, as we have been talking about John Osborne's play, and the film is a love triangle between an intelligent young man Jimmy Porter, his upper middle class wife Alison, and her snobbish best friend Helena, set in Derby.

The plot explores many questions about love, sex, and morality against the background of class, that underpins the surface of working class life, the main character that is Jimmy Porter he came to symbolize the so called angry young man, and offered insight in frustration felt by the British working class.

The second movie *A Taste of Honey*, which is also in adaptation of a played by Shelagh Delaney, was directed by again by Tony Richardson, the movie starts Rita Tushingham

as Joe, and a pregnant 17 year old school girl, and Murray Melvin as Jeffry her homo sexual, flat mate and friend. Relationship between the two is a cent of piece of the movie. The large part of the films commentary, involves question of motherhood, sexuality, and raise explode through the character of Joe.

The movie was critically a claim for the manner in which drew an attention, to such issues and then there was Billy Lair, which was made in 1963 starring Tom Courtenay, and Mona Washbourne. The film was directed by John Schlesinger and he is an adaptation of a novel by the same name. The story revolves around funeral furnishing seller Billy Fisher, who dreams of escaping to London to become a comedy writer, Billy chooses to escape his reality through his Walter Mitty imagination, using it as a crutch to help him cope with the feeling of claustrophobia and alienation,

The real world in Billy life lives much to be desired, and his quest to do better gives us insight to his life. So, these films are basically canonical work for the way in, which they dealt with the themes, that came to be associated with British new wave. In addition, they certainly bring up issues, that worth taboo at the time such as unwed mother pregnancies, homosexuality race relations etc.

You know working class conditions, and told in gritty terms, and in doing all this they gave as a critical insight into the British new wave, and its importance another film, that I wanted to talk about This Sporting Life, which was released in 1963, directed by Lindsay Anderson. It was adapted from a novel by David Storey, and it has strong northern working class credential story himself of the miner's son, who like his novels here had played rugby in a northern town.

The writer had a disdain for the typical, which is specially demonstrated in the film's presentation, of its two principle characters, the rugby player, Frank Machin, and his land lady and occasional lover Mrs. Hammond. Frank is full of muscular aggressions, and Mrs. Hammond represents famine, restraint. The film is unique in the way it puts a distance between itself, and the earlier new wave films.

The quality of the film dwells in the awkwardness, we seems to parallel friends, own awkwardness, and lack of articulation, which is again a hallmark of the, so called angry young man, lack of articulation frustrations, aggression, suppressed aggression overt and covert aggression. By 1963, as we have been talking about, the British new wave of was

on its last legs, and its major players such as Jack Clayton, and Tony Richardson, turn to other kinds of production.

But they had a lasting impression, they had left a legacy for the directors, which followed them. So, we had people like John Schlesinger, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, Karel Reisz, *The French Lieutenant's Women*, and Lindsey Anderson's *If*. A new generation came into prominence with people, such as Ken Loach, Danny Boyle, and Mike Leigh, these directors have kept the tradition of social realism alive, and communicate directly to the contemporary world think, films like, *Trainspotting*. So, the British cinema continues to talk, to speak, with a contemporary look.

Thank you very much, and we will meet again in our next class.