

Increasing popularity of Biopic in Indian Cinema: An Analysis of Psychological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Biopic is gradually paving its way in Indian Film Industry, especially Bollywood. Biopic is a film which depicts the life of a real person, whose real name is used. Film makers, including actors are getting inclined to making of Biopic. Showcasing diversity through Biopic may be attributed for its consistent rolling. Increasing demand from the audience, current socio-politico-economic scenario and the actors' interest may be conjectured for this current wave. Three recent biopic, viz, Mary Kom, Sanju and Karenjit Kaur are being analysed from psychological perspective and their impact on the audience and the future demand dealing with similar subjects are being addressed.

Keywords: *Biopic; Film; diversity; demand; audience.*

One of society's greatest strengths is its diversity, and this is something which is widespread in every sector of the society, including films. The varieties are often celebrated and reflected in the films that we watch. Let's accept that we like spices in life.. 'She is so caring, loving,,,, BUT....when she gets angry, she just becomes preposterous". Generally, this is the pattern of our appraisal. So, different shades-triumph and failure, attract us. From psychological point of view, it breaks the monotony of 'all good', 'all bad' phase. A mundane arena hardly earns the honour to be a part of discussion. Such colours are expected in different social matrices. This discussion is based on the increasing demand of biopic, from a psychological point of view. A biopic is a sub-genre of the narrative biographical film. George F.Custen (1992) defined biopic as "minimally composed of the life, or the portion of a life, of a real person whose real name is used." The biopic based on artistes that have obtained a theatrical or internet release will be considered in this discussion. According to Bingham (2010), the biopic genre is characterized by narrative strategies and aesthetic modalities modified by existing cultural conceptions.

Indian Hindi Cinema Industry, popularly known as Bollywood started its journey with the film Raja Harischandra in 2013; whether it can be called a biopic or not is a matter of debate. In the past few decades, several biopic have made their way to the Indian screens, but only intermittently. Films such as Gandhi (1982), Bandit Queen (1994), The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero (2005), Paan Singh Tomar

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(PST; 2010), *The Dirty Picture* and *Shahid* (2013) were released in the past. Other future projects on biopics which have been conceived by the film-makers, yet to get materialized involves the life story of iconic figures, like Guru Dutt, Madhubala, Kishore Kumar etc. Initially it mainly focused on story telling and their achievements. However, current trend in Bollywood has its spotlight essentially on Glamorization of the real life characters. So, is glamourizing an essential and potential parameter for showcasing success, or achievement per se? 18 biopics have released only in Bollywood since 2011. So, is it becoming a 'trend' for depicting life of famous (or infamous) personalities? However, the matter would be merely simplified if the popularity of biopic is attributed only to the current 'trend' of Bollywood, rather there are deeper psychological inspection which need to be done. Detailed investigation is required to analyse whether the struggle shown in the biopic movies is taking a back seat, or being presented with much camouflage of glamour component. Publicity and marketing, and thereby commoditization of the 'life' of 'famous people' are thus the new wave in Indian Entertainment Industry.

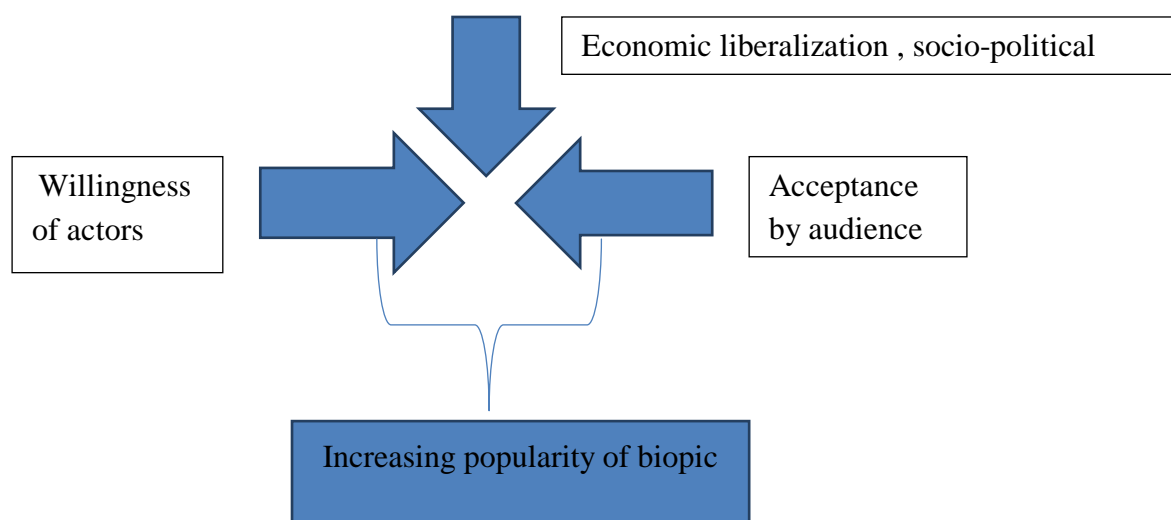
"For so many years, only the west was making biopics, while we didn't touch them. It is great that Bollywood film-makers are taking them up now. Biopic is always interesting, as they aren't made-up stories," says film-maker Omung Kumar, who directed *Mary Kom* (2014) and *Sarbjit*. Economic liberalization in 1991 has given birth to the growing doctrine of Nationalism, and the dominance of the middle classes who happen to be the audience as well, are responsible for producing and consuming film and film culture. Increasing advent of urbanization is giving rise to more 'consumption' of glamour, thereby influencing as well as enhancing its commoditization. The middle class want new heroes to represent their values of 'Indianness', sexuality and beauty. For them, more relevant and interesting figures would be those such as businessmen ('Guru' on Dhirubhai Ambani), sportsman ('Azhar' on Mohammad Azharuddin, 'Mary Kom' on Mary Kom), and actors ('Sanju' on Sanjay Dutt, or Sunny Leone). The rich historical, political, ethnic, sexual facets of biopic renders encourage the audience for a critical analysis. It draws our attention on the underlying discursive and narrative strategies of the men and women highlighted through on screen (Tuhkunen, 2017). There are certain psychological enquiry which need to be met. Is the biopic a way for cleansing a famous person's character (*Silk Smita- Dirty Picture*)? Why do the actors agree? Is it a way of rationalizing the path chosen by them, or just informing the audiences many unknown facts of the person's life, which may 'inspire' to fight? Thus, whether biopic takes a 'lesson' for inspiring the common people is a matter of concern.

The time frame of permitting the making of the biopic is an important factor. Is the agreement done at the verge of end of their career in order to be remembered 'more' by the common audience, in order to be in limelight even after the official exit (*Sachin 's biopic*)? Or are we responsible for not knowing the achievements of famous personalities (*Geeta Phogat- Dhangra*)? Is it a 'inducing a feeling of guilt' to the common mass that they are not aware of the life of *Mir Ranjan Negi* (*Chak De India* was based on this Hockey player) or *Dashrath Manjhi* (the film *Manjhi* was based on this 'mountain man') or *Arunachalam Muruganatham* (the film *Padman* was based on the life of famous social activist). The title of the film is becoming more eminent than the real life person.

The increasing demand of biopic may be attributed to the fact that audience likes to watch 'real' stories in fictionalized medium, which may be perceived to be 'unusual'. Thereby, it inculcates a feeling of 'authenticity' in the audience, and makes it more 'reliable'. Even actors are "excited" about the new challenge. *Nawazuddin Siddiqui* who is playing the late Urdu writer *Saada Hasan Manto* in *Nandita Das'* film stated, "That zone (doing a biopic) is

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still unknown to me, and I don't know how I am going to play that part. But once I am done with the film, I am sure I will be happy to have played a role that was worthwhile, and through which I got to know more about a person". Thus, Producer's demand and economy is not the only factor for the increasing popularity of biopic. Besides, there is a social responsibility of the actors to portray the character of a socially 'influential' person (blend of positive as well as negative entities). The opportunity for the actors to play a lead role that allows them to embody another celebrity or a hero is increasingly attractive. Is it a deliberate strategy taken by the actors to 'rejuvenate' their 'already seen, used to' image?



Often, the extreme cases are being showcased in biopic. For example, a rural boy belonging to lower socio-economic status, struggling and getting recognized (M.S. Dhoni). Thus, extreme cases where there is dearth of socio-politico-economic opportunity, is being illustrated. It is, thereby, antagonizing our perception regarding status (sad family background, but big achievement).

On the basis of these aforesaid premise, the current discussion will focus on two biopic movies- Mary Kom, Sanju and a biopic series 'Karenjit Kaur: the untold story of Sunny Leone'.

Mary Kom is a biopic based on the female boxer Mangte Chungeijang Kom (Priyanka Chopra is in lead role) and depicts Kom's journey of becoming a boxer to her victory at the 2008 World Boxing Championships in Ningbo. It showcases different phases of Kom's persona as well as her sports life, her relationship with her parents, husband, coach, and children. The film was a commercial success, grossing \$1.04 billion at the box office and ranked among the highest-grossing Indian films starring a female actor.

The portrayal of least explored socio-politico-economically backward area of North –eastern state, along with the striving of a female protagonist in a male dominated sport (boxing) may be one of the reasons for the film's success. Audiences are rarely exposed to such circumstances where a mother is fighting with her relatives (though, having a supportive footballer husband) in order to prove her potentiality in a niche sport like boxing. This biopic succeeds in gaining its popularity, may be as it meanders exploring the struggle of the boxer, her failure, and eventually regaining her success. Thus the audiences get a 122 minutes complete package of a female sportsperson- her temperament, persistence, co-operation,

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emotion, success and failure. Such varieties of ingredients are catering to the audience where they can explore the struggle of a 'real' female sport personality.

Our next discussion is on Sanju (Ranbir Kapoor in lead role). Based on the life of Sanjay Dutt, the film is the highest single day collection ever for a Hindi film in India. It has a worldwide gross of over ₹ 579 crore. As it is discussed initially that, audience tend to like those movies which have tints of variety. This film explores the struggle of a famous actor, who is rich and famous, but circumstances oblige him to take substances, resulting in failure in both personal and professional life. The film also delves to explore the connection with underworld, political connection, yellow journalism, labelling 'terrorist', regaining the 'lost charisma' of the actor and the influence of supportive wife. Many a times, the film tends to rationalize that strained relationship with father, untimely death of mother are responsible for the ill fate of the protagonist. Is it an act of justification of the actor which is responsible for such a hype of extravagance is an interesting matter to study?

Born in a Sikh family in an age of globalization, Kareen Kapoor (lead character played by Sunny Leone herself), is a biopic depicting the journey of Sunny Leone before becoming Miss Leone. Unemployed father and alcoholic mother pave the way of Sunny's choice for quick money in Pornography industry in Canada. The zeal of earning at a young age in order to help her father financially led her to choose the profession, in spite of being 'non-glamorous' initially. Her entry in a popular Indian reality show and eventually chosen the lead actor by a famous producer made a topic of 'gossip' for the Indian audience. Marrying a porn star and settling down in India, adopting a girl child from a economically backward area of India, becoming mother again through surrogacy and 'quitting' pornography industry made people more curious about her 'struggle'. Again, the compromised socio-economic status, disturbed familial ties, finding solace in 'work' and thereby becoming 'bold and independent', and eventually settling down are the common themes which are coming up repeatedly in our discussion. Is her biopic an answer for her insult at a National channel by a leading journalist? Whether it is a stance of cleansing her public image need to be investigated.

Thus, it may be extracted from the current discussion that, popularity of biopic is increasing gradually. Film Producers are finding it lucrative to invest in this genre. According to trade analyst Taran Adarsh, "To make a good biopic, makers should stay true to the story, people must be aware of the person [on whom the story is based], and the plot should be of interest to the audience. Also, not every actor can play such characters, so that's also a tricky part." Film analysts often apprehend that whether biopic would fade away. However, Omung Kumar disagrees and states that "No, it won't die out. People might experiment with their techniques (of telling the stories), but biopics are here to stay. Plus, actors also find them interesting because they offer them parts that are challenging. They have already heard about the people [they will be playing]".

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Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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