

Contemporaneous Effect of Charles Dickens on Digital Media

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Abstract

This paper attempts to view the works of Charles Dickens from a postcolonial approach. It conjoins two useful genres of art- literature and cinema. It looks at the novels of the great English writer Charles Dickens from a contemporary perspective. It studies the writing from a kaleidoscopic angle to see how writing affects the media through literature. In this era of digitalisation, the work is transformed into the screen using different techniques of cinema. The digital age of research has opened many avenues for research to be shared with the common man through serials and movies and plays all disseminated through the digital medium.

Keywords: Digital media, contemporaneous, literature, art, disseminated etc.

Introduction:

A homeless waif overnight becomes the sole heir to an aristocratic lineage; his past shrouded in mystery when as a child he was plucked away by cruel fate from his hapless mother's arms to pursue a life of drudgery and crime in the sewers of London. Doesn't this story sound all too familiar to the Indian psyche? Yes, indeed it touches a note somewhere. This is the stuff which is aired in every day through the tube, whether it is soap operas this is the stuff that most of the Indian cinema is replete with, nearly all of our Bollywood, Hollywood, Tollywood cinematic reels and digital new media are made of such sugar and spice and everything sweet.

People cried and laughed with the protagonist in these stories and smiled triumphantly as they identified themselves with their favourite hero on the silver screen overcoming the hurdles in his life and landing straight into the arms of his lady love who also happens to be in some kinky fashion the girl of his dreams.

What the Dickens is all this about one might ask in utter bewilderment, but this is Indian cinemas tryst with Charles Dickens. It's been two centuries, and still, the magical formula of his stories even run rampant in the Indian film scenario. Most unconsciously our directors, scriptwriters have had a rendezvous with the invisible Dickens the Charles. As the world

celebrates the bicentenary anniversary of Charles Dickens, a literary giant who stomped the Victorian era like a colossus we see how like a phoenix he rises from the Victorian age to be a part of our lives even in this postmodern age. This in a way is the effect of the immortality of the written word. What this is the first Aristotle's theory of mimesis so reinforces the superb but inane unconscious way in which our filmmakers have chosen to rub shoulders with the great Dickens of the Victorian age. Even though a blue-blooded British he unconsciously showcased the plight of the marginalised in all his serialised episodic stories. He became the ambassador of the oppressed in a misconstrued ironic manner.

The likes of characters like Pip in *Great Expectations*, Oliver in the novel *Oliver Twist*, and Sydney Carton in Dickens famous *Tale of Two Cities* and a whole array of other caricatures of other Dickensian novels run helter-skelter all through the length and depth of the Indian film scenario. Even the more poignant tales of Premchand or the stories of Satyajit Ray have similar storylines and plots. The run of the mill commercial hits of the grand master of Hindi cinema Raj Kapoor has flat caricatures like Dora and Agnes like characters in movies like *Awara* and *Mera Nam Joker*. Dickens was a social realist, and so are most of our cinemas they run amuck with social realism galore. The psychoanalyst, Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, exemplifies that consciousness lies deeply buried in our conscious minds ingrained into our psyches wrought with mysteries untold. All great artists are raring to go with stories galore illustrating human emotions and feelings that have universal appeal and universal charm.

Speaking of the immortal Dickens himself, his stories do look very much like fables from the *Arabian Nights* or has the gleanings of an 18th-century picaresque novel. The *Arabian Nights* was a source of great inspiration to Dickens because deep down inside he was a dreamer and existed in a world of fantasy and as an artist would do he transferred these plots into the stories he weaved every fortnight in episodes. The picaresque novel is a favourite sub-genre of prose fiction which is usually satirical and depicts in realistic often humorous detail the life of a low-born adventurer as he drifts from place to place. Charles Dickens was very much influenced by this style of writing which was used extensively by Henry Fielding as well. Dickens wrote his first six novels in the picaresque form. Early reviewers lauded him for a keen practical sense of the funny side of life. There are reflections of all these styles in any genre of Indian cinema as well. When we watch Hindi, Telugu, or Tamil blockbusters like *Nayakan*, *Sholay*, *Raktha Charitra*, or *Iruvar* we see a semblance to these plots and the finale so similar to the novels Charles Dickens wrote so many centuries ago.

We should remind ourselves here that Dickens also used extensively the bildungsroman style where the plot of the story mainly traces the development of a character from childhood to adulthood, through a quest for identity that leads him or her to maturity. This is the style so akin to the plot in most of the Indian cinema as well. Even the recent Danny Boyle's *Slum Dog Millionaire* not strictly speaking Indian cinema but taken in the Indian terrain with the whole cast and crew and storyline parodying one of our favourite game shows has reflections

of a picaresque style combined with that of the bildungsroman of a Charles Dickens novel. The Indian shutterbug captures the life of a protagonist through all his adventures through life, and we can see this storyline spread across most of our so-called 'Hits'. This style is so replete in most of our block buster's starring the old legends like the late Rajesh Khanna, or the still enigmatic Amitabh Bachan, or the present day heartthrobs like Shah Rukh Khan or even our Tamil screen icons like Rajnikanth or Kamala Hasan we see the protagonist taking on adventures too hard for him to handle but walking out unscathed taking on a larger than life imagery and walk out of the screen like a colossus, an icon imprinted forever in the mind of the Indian cinema-goers.

Virginia Woolf, one of the most poignant women novelists known for her feminist leanings critiquing Dickens, maintained that we remodel our psychological geography when we read Dickens as he produces characters who exist not in detail but abundantly in clusters. This is much the same way in which characteristics are presented in Indian cinema flat caricatures with no psychological depth. They race up and down the screen capturing the audience with their antics and their melodramatic interludes. The Indian cinema goer relishes these scenes to his heart's content.

In a somewhat unconventional and subtle manner, this paper is an attempt to demystify the great Charles Dickens who has in an unconscious way influenced the tribe of Indian filmmakers. He has for tuppence, and a dime undoubtedly cast a spell on our filmmakers 'collective unconscious' which makes them recreate the styles replete in his novels. But we cannot overlook the fact that Dickens was indeed a versatile genius whose stories and caricatures are immortal and genuinely possess the ability to reach out from centuries past and touch even the ordinary Indian cinema audience of the present day times. This is the contemporariness of the immortal Charles Dickens.

Conclusion

Millions view his stories over the world and images from his novels displayed in screens on the YouTube and other new media gadgets and Charles Dickens is transported to the homes of the common at least through the media and, and this must surely have been his dream because most of his novels he wrote about the travails and success of the common man. He was a writer who wrote for an audience which comprised the common man.

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