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CELEBRATING THE OSCARS: THE CRITICAL TRUTH!

Aneek Chaudhuri

Abstract:-An entry to the Oscars does not always seem to be a fair call, if we focus on Indian Cinema. There has always been a sweet conflict between arts and commerce; the same is witnessed in the field of Cinema, as well. Avante Garde directors have always considered European Film Festivals to be the perfect stage set for them, while Academy Awards, or the Oscars pay high reverence to a Hollywood-friendly film. But what actually are the criterions set to enter the Oscars? Is there really a standard set for it, or the manipulation are being done keeping in mind the needs and wants of American Film Fraternity? This paper focuses on every aspect possible and compares Bengali films produced all these years (starting from 1957 i.e. the first entry by India to Oscars) with the official Indian entries for Academy Awards.

Keywords:Critical Truth ,Celebrating , Hollywood-friendly film.

1.INTRODUCTION

'Academy Awards' is indeed an ironic term; here the question is 'does the festival really support art?'. There are two ways to find the actual truth behind the Oscars. Let's study it in the Indian way.

Beginning from 1957, the year when Mother India was considered to be the 'most eligible' entry to the Oscars, India toddled her way to the grandeur of Hollywood. 6 decades have passed till then and where does Bengali Cinema stand? It's actually a matter to put your thoughts at.

Apur Sansar and Mahanagar are the only two Bengali entries to the Oscars till date; the scenario has barely changed all these years as well. Bengali Cinema has been effective in bringing up a new-wave in Indian Cinema and when I say 'new-wave', it refers to the upliftment of the creme pantheon of Cinema. Following is a list of a small comparison with Bengali releases Vs Oscar entry of a particular year:

2.BENGALI EXCELLENCE VS OSCAR ENTRIES

I have further divided this section into two parts i.e. pre 1970s and the period from 2000-2013.

2.1 PERIOD PRE 1970S

Year	Bengali Releases	Oscar Entry
1957	Kabuliwala	Mother India
1958	Jalsaghar, Ajantrik, Parash Pathar	Madhumati
1962	Hansuli Baker Upakatha	Sahib Biwi Ghulam

1965	Subarnarekha, Akash Kusum	The Guide
1966	Golpo Holeo Sotti, Nayak	Amrapali
1967	Antony Firingee	Aakhri Khat
1968	Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne	Majhli Didi
1969	Bhuvan Shome	Deiva Magan

2.2 PERIOD 2000-Till Date

Millenium era doesn't present any bright spot for the Bengali film fraternity, which had been suffering from a fady patch (already) in the 1990s. Hence, no relief was imposed. Commercial scraps took over the hold of the Tollywood industry during the era with directors like Swapan Saha, Anjan Chowdhury, Haranath Chakraborty ruling the gloomy reign of Bengali cinema. The trend continued for the next 5-6 years; although, Rituparno Ghosh, Raja Sen, and an emerging Kaushik Ganguly (then) gave relieving breaks.

2006 brought about the experimentation in Bengali films with Suman Mukherjee's Herbert and Bappaditya's Kaanta Taar. Since then, Tollywood gained its much needed 'point-of-no-return' momentum. Following are the comparisons since then:

2006	Herbert, Kaanta Taar	Rang De Basanti
2007	Jara Brishtite Bhijejhilo	Eklavya
2008	Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala, Khela	Taare Zameen Par
2009	Sob Choritro Kalponik, Antaheen, Kaalbela	Harishchandrachi Factory
2010	Abohoman, Moner Manush, Autograph, Clerk, Arekti Premer Golpo, Mahanagar @ Kolkata, Shukno Lanka	Peepli Live
2011	Aami Adu, Iti Mrinalini, Chaplin, Noukadubi, Ranjana Ami Ar Ashbo Na	Adaminte Makan Abu
2012	Bhooter Bhoishyot, Aparajita Tumi, Chitrangada, Abosheshe, Laptop	Barfi
2013	Shobdo, Goynar Baksho, Meghe Dhaka Tara, Kagal Malsat, Tasher Desh, Bakita Byaktigoto, Phoring.	The Good Road

Now, it's time to analyze the above mentioned tables. In the next section, we will deliver a transparent and opinionative view on the same.

3. ANALYZING THE VIEW

Be it the era from 1957-1969 or post 2005, Bengali films have been able to impress the wide spectrum of 'intellectuals'; but what happened to the Oscars? Or, shall we conclude that they aren't intellectual enough to regard Bengali films? In this section, we will discuss about it in detail in two sub-sections:

3.1 Oscars Support Revenues Or Revenue-ed Banners!

There is a definite problem with the Bengali filmmakers that they can't lose their dignity by selling art (talking about the classy pantheon of directors). It's really a matter of concern when films like Eklavya, Taare Zameen Par, and Barfi makes the cut to the Oscars. Eklavya-The Royal Guard is indeed a blemishing piece by Vidhu Chopra, here, we can strongly speak about the impact of the banner. Here, banner does not refer to the whole piece of catalog; in film industry, a banner is as small as a monogram embedded on the large posters hanging around the streets. Say it a Vidhu Vinod Chopra banner, or a Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra banner, it does create an impact while choosing the entry to the Oscars.

Now, let's detail it.

- Eklavya has(d) a retarded storyline. A definite? for the film, if not less.
- Taare Zameen Par is highly commercial (if commerce means to employ every possible way to bring in the audiences to the theatres); it is narrowly targeted to the parents as a device against peer pressure.
- Barfi! It's indeed an exclamatory word for me. Barfi (!) is an amalgamation of silent movie classics plus the classic by Takeshi Kitano, Kikujiro. Even, the story is slightly influenced by Amelie (French movie).

From the above depictions, we conclude that:

- 1.Oscars definitely support Big-Banners; hence, debutante artists should not be encouraged.
- 2.Oscars need something that appeals to a narrow spectrum of viewers, or highly target specific. Rest are discarded.
- 3.Originality is not encouraged (highly).

The above mentioned points are a reflection of the steps taken by Indian Film Fraternity. The Indian entries to the Oscars have supported these Oscar-etic features, actually.

If we consider Peepli Live, then it's the same old story of glorifying urban/rural poverty and the struggle to sustain in daily life. "Such a story sells well", as per many of those who are responsible to shoulder Indian Cinema. Actually, global conglomeration has grabbed the scenario of film production; films are now made or (at least) sent to Academy Awards keeping in mind the perspective of the global power, America (U.S.A.). With the advent of globalization, what came forward is 'commercialization'. Being the commercial hub of globe, U.S.A. practices a free-air trade policy, affecting nations like India, South-east Asia etc.

Hence, what is a Hollywood friendly movie?

The one that is relished by the western audiences; a bit of WHAMMO (term used for sensations within short intervals of time) and treatment of Hollywood as a filmmaking don. The best way of projecting the American film industry as superior is to lower your level. Such an attitude erases your individuality. This is the foremost thing to be done in order to enter the Oscars. Then, we must say that the Indian jury members have been intelligently acting upon this act from the past six decades.

There have always been instances films that have earned well in the national film industry have been quite conveniently chosen to enter the Oscars. The popular examples are Mother India, Rang De Basanti, Peepli Live, Barfi etc. If we consider last year's case, The Good Road was favored over The Lunch Box.

The more we see, we are able to notice a random method of choosing the most eligible Indian entry for the Oscars or Academy Awards.

What is the exact reason of Big-Banners getting the slight-off advantage?

As I had already discussed in World Cinema paper about the growing trends of globalization, I need to repeat the trend of Global Merging in the modern era. With breaking down of trade barriers, media has now become more free; actually, it has turned up to become uncontrollable, with richer nations having the 'authenticated key' to control the domain. U.S.A. is certainly the dominant parent in media industry where its children are nothing but slaves to a 'single-way communicative process'. Many of the U.S. companies are now acting as the production executives or media partners to Big-Banner films. This is certainly the prime reason of Big-Banners getting the favour.

Such holistic 'Shaking hands' friendships are common nowadays, bringing more MONEY to the host nation (U.S.A.). What more does those Big-Banners expect? Hollywood is lending them their classic signature and the assured ticket to enter the Academy Awards.

4.WHERE DID BENGALI FILMS LACK?

Bengali films actually lacked nowhere, but it's the peculiar nature of choosing money over arts that sided them away. The sweet conflict between arts and commerce has kind of shaded Tollywood within a tiny acre.

I refound Satyajit Ray's best pieces to be Pather Panchali, Charulata, and Jana Aranya; none of them was able to make the cut to the Oscars. However, Mother India was almost close to the storyline of Pather Panchali which includes the struggle of people. Although, Ray had (intentionally) missed to picture the film with melodramatic elements.

2006-2014 witnesses a similar situation when films like Herbert or Shobdo or Abohomaan are discarded to enter the much 'disputed' doors of the Oscars. But India is happy with it. In a way, it doesn't hurt the audiences as well, Let's know why.

Bengal still relies on a particular spectrum of intellectual filmmakers who make films (widely) for the narrow spectrum of matured audiences. Hence, common people choose a Masala piece over such highly sensitive stuffs. So, there's barely any chance of disappointment with films earning a minimal amount of revenue to the industry. It is the reason for which quality filmmakers have always preferred Cannes or Venice Film Festival over the Academy Awards.

Once again, this year, probable entries to the Oscars have raised questions about the Standards and Specifications of the Academy Awards.

5.CONCLUSION

Despite being the producer of quality films all these years, Bengal has barely touched the stature of National representator at International level. Be it any cause, 2 films in six decades is not that Bengali Film Fraternity had deserved. The scenario has not yet changed, with pungent selections continuing till date. To improve these conditions, firstly, the respected jury members need to be unbiased while putting their votes. Secondly, political pressure should be withdrawn from the selectors. Thirdly, things should be more transparent so that no other critic gets the opportunity to raise his/her finger at the selection procedure.

U.S.A. or Hollywood (to be more specific) practises the mentality which differs vastly from that of aesthetic filmmakers of Europe; it has always been the same. However, India should not choose monetary values of a film or vox-pop attribute, while choosing the most eligible entry for the Oscars; here, one should always remember that aesthetic values of Cinema can never be overpowered by revenue earnings.

A director is the author of a film; have you ever imagined a writer writing a book, keeping in mind the earnings he/she might have from it? Same is the case with Cinema. Being the most complex form of art, one should highly take care so that the soul of the film doesn't get depleted. The first step is yet to be taken; once taken, it would bring a sense of individuality.

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