

Article

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## Political Propaganda in Indian Contemporary Cinema



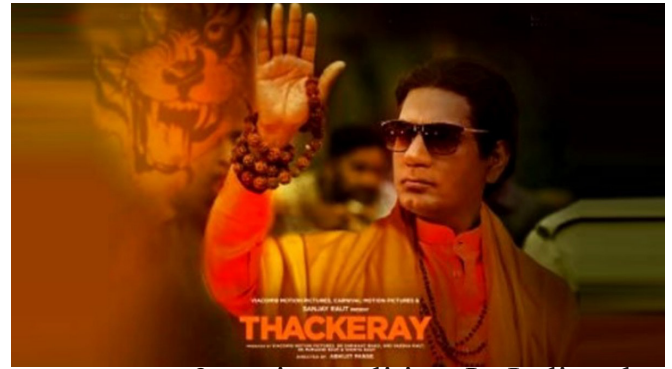
‘Cinema’ is a powerful audio-visual medium which can transcend your mind to an entire story or narration which may or may not happen with you. But for this medium, ‘Censorship’ came later in India, a Bill introduced in the British Imperial legislative council noted the “rapid growth in the popularity of cinematograph and increasing number of such exhibitions in India”. It recommended the creation of a law that would ensure both safety and the “protection of the public from indecent or otherwise objectionable representations”. Thus, was born the Cinematograph Act of 1918, and, with it, film censorship in India. All those things were happening after 1913 release of the movie ‘Raja Harishchandra’. Why this portion is important you will get to know at the end of this essay. But this is also a significant merger with ‘Official Secret Act’ which mainly deals with National Security as well. A clever turn was there where an invisible line of control of superior government to dictate their own style of choice that people should watch films recommended by them only. British authorities are gone but still the same practice is going on. But for internet

platforms right now the system got radicalized & people have enough choice for contents. Though, how long will this prevail? -is a serious question. These are like cons of this system but there are few pros too. If there is an invisible power button, then obviously ‘Propaganda’ is an optional choice for rulers. In a vast and diverse country like India, there are enormous regional language film industries parallelly running with Hindi & mainstream ‘Bollywood’. Approx. 1200-1500 films are made every year in India (‘Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)’ certified number only). But without certification the number can be multiplied by 3. We all know that India is the largest democratic country in the world so whenever there is an election, it becomes the headline. But another headline was highlighting in everywhere in 2019, which is the involvement of films into politics, mainly in April 2019 prior to ‘Lok Sabha Election’.

Now you can split the extract of the first paragraph that why CBFC or censor board context was important to start this essay. The invisible line is nothing but only major steaks for

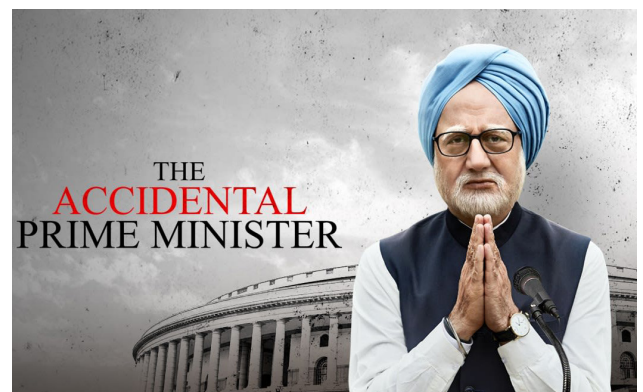
political agendas. All political parties know that the films are powerful tools that shape ideas, attitudes, and social norms. They have a greater ability to sway opinion and spread ideas compared to other media forms. As such, the sudden slew of political films and Biopics, and the timing of their release have raised questions about politicians capitalizing on the power of Bollywood and Indian cinema in general for political mileage. You can easily understand the thing after analyzing the release date, structure & motto of the below mentioned films-

- **Uri: The Surgical Strike:** - The film is based on surgical strike of Indian armed force into Pakistan occupied Kashmir for the revenge of Uri attack by terrorists. But in this cinema makers stated that which is eventually similar with ruling party's word that 'This is the first ever surgical strike outside of Indian territory'. But the thing is very much controversial where the first ever surgical strike was conducted in 2016 as per the words of Northern Army Command chief Lt-General Ranbir Singh. But the point is why the film is focusing only the later attack under different Government? The release year is 2019 in January which is quite adjacent to April 2019 election. Though there are different opinions about this film but if you watch it thoroughly then the exact similar kind of face, postures, talking style are clearly indicates the glory of an individual. In my terms this is the first ever attempt before election, but the entire list is too long to be exposed.
- **Thackery:** - In the similar month of January there was another "Exact Political Biopic" has been released on screens which is 'Thackery' based on the life of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackery, BJP's alliance partner in Maharashtra. His controversial political campaign 'Marathi Manus' was lionized in this film which is based on



caste & region politics. In India where diverse people, diverse state, diverse languages & cultures along with many more things together make this country so vibrant, there with explicit discriminative efforts consisting Thackery got released without any 'Major Cuts' from censor board.

- **The Accidental Prime Minister:** - In the month of January another film caught our sight for the subject & the presentation of former prime minister of India based on the book of cabinet secretary Sanjaya Baru. The content of this film is not the main question. The main question is why we need to watch this film or these kinds of films on a particular time when the situation of India is sensitive because of the election. This film also got the certification from CBFC who the first committee is to watch any film & have the right to tell producers for filtration in their cinemas. The most significant thing is the film's trailer & all political based updates were twitted from official twitter account of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It clearly indicates their motive to make it as a political campaign against their major opposition Congress Party.





- PM Narendra Modi:** - A biopic film about Prime Minister Narendra Modi was set to release on 5<sup>th</sup> April, just 6 days before India starts voting for the general elections on 11 April. The proximity of the film's release date to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, coupled with the fact that the trailer was launched by Bharatiya Janata Party leader and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, has raised many eyebrows. As elections loom, films are increasingly emerging as an arena for propaganda.

**Other Bollywood Films:** - A biopic on Rahul Gandhi titled *My Name is RaGa* is also timed to release around general elections next month. While some have called it a parody, some users have also labeled it "propaganda" by the BJP. Beside biopics, films such as *The Tashkent Files* are a prime example of BJP's strong agenda targeting opposition parties. The film depicts the circumstances of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's death which allegedly involved Congress leaders in Tashkent in 1965. This movie too was set to release on 12 April and is produced by well-known BJP supporter Vivek Agnihotri. If makers will go deeper aspects of this particular movie to investigate the main reason of this murder mystery, then the film will create a history in Indian Cinema, but makers failed to do that because of the coating of clever propaganda. Movies directly channeling the leading party's positions, policies and rhetoric have also surged in recent years. For instance, *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* promoted and aggrandized the "Swachh Bharat Mission" to clean up streets and roads across the nation while *Commando 2* appeared to be a sponsored

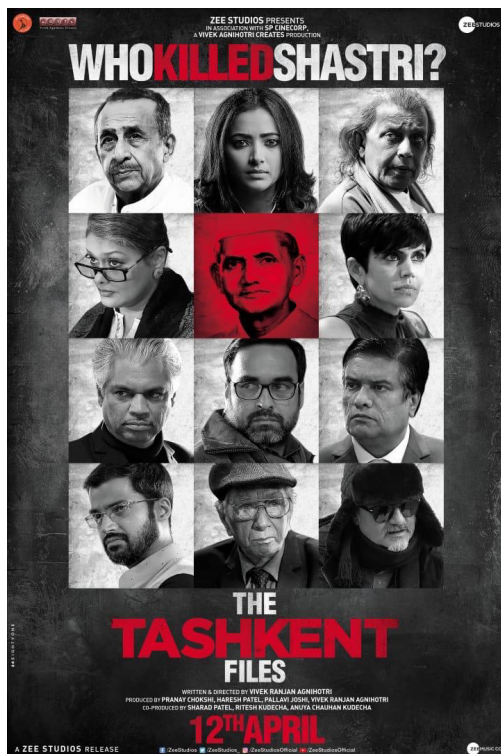
movie on the benefits of demonetization. Besides mainstream films, web series are increasingly becoming a popular form of media. A ten-part series titled *Modi* will be out in April and will premier online. The web series will show the journey of Modi's life from his childhood days to his political career as a Chief Minister and finally his landmark election as Prime Minister. The filmmakers reportedly shot the film at real locations to make a deeper impact with the audience. In South Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, celebrities have often used their careers as platforms for socio-political messaging, then partook in elections based on that image. However, films or celebrities did not explicitly endorse political parties in their work in earlier years. Recent movie *NTR Katha-anayakudu* showed the life of former and late Andhra Chief Minister NT Ramarao (NTR) and the role was played by his son Bala Krishna. The movie aimed to whip up sentiments among Telugus to clearly sway votes towards Telugu Desam Party (TDP) at a time when the state elections are set to begin. Likewise, in Tamil Nadu, a film *The Iron Lady* based on the late Chief Minister Jayalalithaa was made.



**Election Commission of India (ECI)'s Approach in Propaganda Based Cinema:** - The Election Commission of India (ECI) has stopped the release of biopic 'PM Narendra Modi' for the duration of 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In its statement, the election body said that any material disturbing the level playing field in favour of any political party or individual should not be displayed. Opposition parties have been calling for a ban on the movie in view of Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The ECI said that it has also received

complaints about ‘NTR Laxmi’ and ‘Udyama Simham’.

“Any biopic material in nature of biography sub-serving the purpose of any political entity or any individual entity connected to it, which has potential to disturb level playing field during the election, should not be displayed in electronic media including cinematograph during the operation of MCC,” the ECI said in its statement.



The ban on the PM Modi biopic is likely to extend to NaMo TV. Apart from the ban on the film, the order from the EC also calls for keeping content which furthers a candidate’s electoral prospects away from the electronic media. This might lead to the channel being taken off air till the Model Code of Conduct is in place.

“Any poster or publicity material concern- ing any such certified content, which either

depicts a candidate (including prospective) for the furtherance (or purported to further) of electoral prospects, directly or indirectly, shall not be put on display in electronic media in the area where MCC is in force,” the ECI order said.

To conclude, a point is coming in a significant manner that ECI is an autonomous body that is mainly activated before election only. But the entire propaganda-based film will not stop. Cause there is no such autonomous body or committee for surveillance. Even we do not need it cause like the effect of CBFC, this authority should be converted into a political one to measure the audience’s taste. The best part is except the film ‘Uri’ no such film created a huge impact on audiences. Most of them were flopped in box offices but this practice is our main concern when a series of film for ‘Guinea pig Testing’ on audience will be successful and like Artificial Intelligence, influential studios are also influenced by any political parties or persons will make them for their profit & manipulate the views of audiences. The only way of prevention is knowledge building of audiences. That is not meant to order them to a particular genre of films or audio visual medium but also, they will understand by their own knowledge, logical thinking & education. But in India ‘Quality Education’ is still a major problem ever after long years of independence. So, we need proper governance not the ‘Particular Government’. There is a thin line of difference between those words. ‘Proper governance’ means sustainable development of society & nation where people freely express their views in logical way to develop the nation on a high standard.

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