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Defining ‘REAL HAPPINESS’ vis-a-vis Beacons of Hope on ‘REEL’. A Study Through Select Hindi Films

Dr. Runoo Ravi
Assistant Professor of English
Gaya College, Gaya
Magadh University.

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Abstract:

The state of happiness is dependent on many factors. These factors collectively denote the feeling of wellness. This state requires being in a state of good health which is not confined to physical health, exercise or nutrition. It means the complete integration of states of social, emotional, moral or spiritual, environmental, economical, mental and physical wellness. But even when we aspire towards a peaceful and contented life, we face conflict due to the gaps that exist between personal desires and societal expectations: basically between the ‘social self’ and the ‘essential self’. When desires remain unfulfilled, a state of non-wellness is created. The paper proposes to present characters from select Hindi films of veteran director Hrishikesh Mukherjee to bring new realms and dimensions to the concept of happiness, wellness and peace. These ‘reel’ characters are seen engaged in ‘real’ life situations demonstrating how we can learn to be happy and be at peace. Films have been chosen as a medium of discourse since films go beyond the boundaries of class, hierarchy and literacy and provide guidance under the guise of wholesome entertainment.

Keywords: Peace, well-being, conflict, films, heroes, message.

“Pleasure comes with the fulfilment of desire---getting what you want and wanting what you get. Happiness comes from the fulfilment of the person. And much of our moral confusion comes from the fact that we no longer know what happiness is, nor how to obtain it”. (Ratcliffe 129)

Spiritual wellness and moral strength refer to the intrinsic goodness and righteous principles that govern a human being’s life and help not only in individual betterment but also in the betterment of the society on the whole. A person has to be happy inside to make the

world a happier place for others. The concept of happiness has however, undergone a paradigm change in the present scenario.

The age of globalization today does provide potentials for massive growth and development opportunities. Unfortunately it is also the age of chaos, confusion and competition; pushing the individual into the vicious circle of name, fame and wealth resulting in the relentless pursuit of unending dreams and desires. What emerges then is complete lack of peace and unrest and a deep, undefined lacunae, affecting the wellness of life most threateningly albeit most unconsciously.

The question of 'well-being' is thus a very important concept in the present age. What exactly is this well-being? What makes a human being happy? What can give him extreme self-contentment? What is that one desires the most and what does one fear the most? Since when did happiness, satisfaction and well-being begun to be measured, compared and calculated? Why is happiness disappearing from our lives? Have we actually lost the purity of the soul, the nobility, the selflessness that lead to conscious and deliberate correct action; proceeding to the general welfare and spreading the feeling of goodness and wellbeing? These questions need to be answered to define the meaning of well-being in the present world and whether or not it is achievable today.

The present paper proposes to present the role of cinema as an educator, a promoter of peace and a motivator for the betterment of society. Cinema emerges as not only a strong but also very effective medium to bind souls. It is a collective creative act that reaches out to the masses. Many things have changed in the process of film-making; be it advanced technology or a radical approach. What remains unchanged is the passion of the film-maker; notwithstanding the huge investments needed. What the viewer anticipates most is the amalgamation of *this* passion with an equally passionate subject that always results in meaningful cinema. The films of veteran director Hrishikesh Mukherjee always present this passion. In fact, his films have been described as "a study of human relationships" (Somaaya et al 81) and this remains one of the many reasons, the select films of this particular director have been chosen to analyze the various parameters/shades of happiness and wellbeing through a selection of memorable/unforgettable characters from celluloid. There is another equally important criterion for this selectiveness. Hrishikesh Mukherjee made films that cloaked their didactic tones under the umbrella of wholesome entertainment and were definitely more effective : a technique learnt and implemented by later directors and

producers as Aamir Khan(*Taare Zameen Par & Lagaan*),Raj Kumar Hirani (*Munnabhai MBBS & Lage Raho Munnabhai*) and Ayan Mukherjee (*Wake Up Sid & Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*).Besides, *he created very ordinary common characters –not with a ‘larger than life’ image: they are from amongst us; genuine, relatable and imitable; who teach us ‘how to live’ and not to ‘just live’: the characters we can relate to and follow: because it is easy to appreciate a ‘Singham’ but quite difficult in real life to become one.*

The characters in his films exhibit Social Realism which is the representation of reality. In literature, this term is understood as an international art movement that includes the work of painters, printmakers, photographers and filmmakers who draw attention to the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor, and who are critical of the social structures that maintain these conditions. While the movement's artistic styles vary from nation to nation, it almost always uses a form of descriptive or critical realism.(URL:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_realism.access 07.04.2017) Social Realism is in complete opposition to the concept of Magic Realism, a literary genre or style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction. : "Magical realism is defined as what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe, (URL:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_realism.access 07.04.2017) seen largely in most mainstream Hindi movies. Films interlaced with the element of Magic Realism can be cathartic in nature and provide a temporary relief; but are not beneficial in the long run, that is, if we consider cinema as an important social discourse, which it definitely is, since it transgresses the boundaries of class, caste, gender and most importantly, literacy. One does not need to be educated to understand and appreciate good cinema. Cinema *is* a great educative tool and an integral part of Cultural Studies today since it comprises both; the society it comes from and the society it is meant for. The characters thus become a part of this important discourse. Independent filmmaker and researcher Ranjani Mazumdar opines that:

Masking/masquerade, while inherently fragile, nevertheless plays a crucial role in de-naturalizing the body, and generating multiple signs of recognition/identification for the film public. The ability to generate a mode of address that could articulate and draw on a variety of social experiences, a range of human emotions and an easy handling of different forms of body attire----all within one single narrative...The interesting thing is that these

different forms of emotions and feelings continue to be preserved in their distinctiveness.(Vasudevan 244)

The characters from the select Hindi films do retain their distinctiveness and compel us to introspect and self-examine ourselves in the context of real peace and happiness. These characters also present some relevant and pertinent questions in front of us.

1. Where has all the happiness gone?
2. Why has it disappeared?
3. Why is our happiness more 'fake' now?
4. What actually constitutes happiness leading to real peace?

The answers to these questions will be attempted to be derived through immortal characters picked out from different genres; romance, comedy and tragedy: characters that show us what constitutes real happiness and what it takes to spread this happiness among people. The films remain timeless because society may change, the world may grow, technology may develop but the basic human values remain the same, everywhere all the time: whether you decide to follow them or not, are entirely the discretion of the individual. These characters exhibit purity of the soul. The real sense of goodness in them and the happiness they spread all around them is genuine because it is not targeted towards a particular goal---as seen in *Jolly LLB* or *Kahaani 2*. The sense of well-being catered to things that affected and infected people in general. Whether it was the dysfunctional family seen all over the world in *Bawarchi* ; adolescent problems and infatuation towards stardom which was handled with so much sensitivity in *Guddi*; removing the fear of death and living each day as a gift of god as taught by *Anand*; how people who spread happiness can affect those with the lowest self esteem and worthlessness so positively shown by *Mili* and the value of friendship but the greater value of humanity in *Namakharam*: the select films show all this and much more.

ANAND (1971) is the story of a man suffering from a rare disease, (lymphosarcoma of the intestine, a rare type of cancer) who knows he cannot live long but he wishes to spend every single moment on this earth with happiness and joy and what's more, he wants to spread this joy among all ; friends and strangers alike. His taciturn doctor is furious at his casual treatment of something as horrifying as death; he does not realize that Anand has lost

his fear of death; he mocks death and like Donne, robs it of its pride by overcoming the fear: “...poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me...” (URL: [wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_Be_Not_Proud_\(poem\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_Be_Not_Proud_(poem)).access 28.09.2018) Besides, he also feels that ‘*zindagi badi honi chahiye ,lambi nahin*’. He does not want anyone’s pity either. Anand demonstrates a rare thankfulness for this great gift of life ; he knows he has to die but he does not want to die every single day ; before the d-day comes, seeing that fear in everyone’s eyes. He tells Bhaskar, his oncologist, that everyone should remember him as a lively person and not as a cancer patient. His end comes and he dies amongst his friends, at peace with himself and with his ardent wish getting fulfilled: everyone remembers him as a vibrant and lively person. Anand also subtly reminds the doctors of their real duty: they cannot cure all the people of all the diseases all the time. But instead of being disheartened or depressed by this thought, they should realize the value of the Hippocratic Oath and try to treat all patients with empathy and maturity; rich or poor alike. The importance of palliative care and the vital part it plays in bringing peace and comfort to the patient, both mental and physical was also shown in the film.

GUDDI (January, 1971) is the story of a young schoolgirl Kusum, obsessed with the actor Dharmendra whom she regards as a superman who can do no wrong. She is unable to distinguish between his on-screen image and the real person behind the star.

The film deals with the excessive obsession that people have for the film stars and shows how this phenomenon could lead to disastrous psychological effects. It also exposes the harsh reality of the glittering Bollywood; the inflated romanticism of the boring shoots and the hypocrisy behind the hero’s machoism and the pained labours behind the heroine’s sexy looks. *Guddi* also highlighted a very dangerous evil; the flight of youngsters to the Mayanagari; to become hero and heroine; the struggles and the abuse were intolerable most of the time. The failure and the inability to cope with the failure always resulted in disastrous consequences.

However, the most noticeable thing about the movie is the behaviour of the superstar; Dharmendra, the superstar is plays himself in the film. That he behaves in the most humble manner, realizing that Kusum’s obsession with his image is disturbing her life is commendable. Not only does he deliberately undermine himself; getting beaten by the *goondas* and letting Kusum be rescued by her boyfriend, but also assures her that the bravery he shows on screen is actually a farce. He exemplifies the fact that “[T]hat action is best,

which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers". (Ratcliffe 185) His magnanimous gesture, at the cost of ruining his own macho image, shows the greatness of his personality. The screen persona also reveals the vulnerable and the more human side of the celebrity; generally perceived as authoritative, insensitive and ill-tempered. Dharmendra's efforts are not in vain. Exposed for the first time to the grime and the cruel and heartless world behind the glamour of cinema, with the help of Dharmendra, Guddi realises that nothing is true in the reel world. While her respect for Dharmendra grows, Guddi comes to realise that he is just as human as anyone around and lives with the same fears and insecurities as anyone else.

NAMAK HARAM (1973) is a film about the deep friendship between two friends, although placed at the two extremes of socio-economic binaries. The song '*diye jale hain full khilte hai...badi mushkil se magar duniya mein dost milte hain...*' is a fitting ode to this friendship between the influential and rich Vicky, and the intellectual and poor Shomu. And as if to exemplify this bond, Shomu accompanies his rich friend to the office; planning and conniving to avenge the insult borne by Vicky, the short tempered rich man, at the hands of the union leader of his factory. Somu alias Chander impersonates as a factory worker and fools everyone, extracting secrets and manipulating them; winning their confidence and betraying them to please Vicky and help him settle his scores. However, a point comes when Shomu realizes the difference between true happiness and selfish happiness. Shomu also feels the pain and agony of the underprivileged class and understands their shimmering anger as well as their genuine problems. He realizes that "[I]f weaker sections in India are to rise in revolt because they feel that only violence permits their voice to be heard, the nation will pay a very heavy price for this." (Ahuja 160-161) This self-realization results in an ideological clash where friendship is preceded by basic principles of life. When forced to choose between general welfare and his friend's satisfaction, Shomu chooses the well-being of humanity at large, earns the ire of Vicky and also loses his life in the end, fighting till his last breath for the betterment of the very same factory workers he had tricked and manipulated earlier. A point comes when he has nobody beside him. His friend is angry because he feels betrayed and the workers express the same anger but with more collective intensity as they feel cheated too; especially due to their vulnerable position. As Henrik Ibsen puts it, "[T]he thing is, you see, that the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone." (Ratcliffe 265) Shomu wanted desperately to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor: even at the cost of his own life. However, his sacrifice is not in vain. Not only does Vicky realize his

folly and change his commercial orientation towards a Marxist philosophy he also fulfills his friend's dream; aiming for general welfare and not towards concentration of wealth and power in only a few hands.

BAWARCHI (1973) is centred on the squabbling Sharma family, headed by their eccentric Daduji, which has a dubious reputation of the inability to retain a cook for more than a few months due to their ill treatment of their servants. The family's disrepute spreads to such an extent that no person wants to be employed as a cook in their home, ironically named Shanti Niwas (abode of peace). Sociologist Narendra Singh rightly opines that "individuals should be allowed to pursue their self-interest and seek happiness as long as it does not infringe on others' right to do so... Individual groups compete for limited resources..."(23) However, the family members at Shanti Niwas are so self-obsessed and selfish that they choose to become oblivious to what is happening around them and are caught in a web of ego and false pride; definitely the products of the philistine, competitive world.

Then one day a young man named Raghu offers to work as a cook, and is hired. Raghu, however, lives up to this challenge and becomes the apple of the eye of every inmate of Shanti Niwas. He even defuses the internal squabbles and re-unites the family. What does Raghu get out of this? Who is he? Why is he doing this? Why is nothing revealed about his past? Is he really one of those good Samaritans who continue touching lives positively without any iota of self-interest? Have we really become so uncommunicative and wrapped in our cocoons that it is an outsider who has to intervene and fill the vacuum? Raghu comes like an 'angel' in the dysfunctional family; he solves all the problems; unites them; digs up the love among brothers that had been buried under towers of misunderstanding, neglect and myriad tensions. The loving camaraderie among their wives is developed once again, courtesy Raghu. He is shown lying shamelessly but he considers such lies mandatory. Telling the *bhabhi* that his *devar* missed the curry prepared by her, or telling the younger brother how proud his *bhaiyya* is of him, is the strategy used by him to bridge the gaps between hearts. The film leaves us with two questions in the present perspective. Have we really become so uncommunicative and wrapped in our cocoons that we need an outsider to fill the vacuum? And will any home trust any 'Raghu' so blindly in the present times?

Raghu is also shown upholding the banner of Indian culture; through variations in dress, habits, choice of dance and general behavior. The transgressions observed in the errant

spoilt daughter is soon brought under control. Apart from this, the value of education of the girl-child, emphasized through the character of the orphaned female protagonist is subtly shown. "Films such as these invoke the social and familial matrix of the everyday" (Vasudevan 127) The film ends with the scene of Raghu travelling to a new destination and the voice over announcing that "Raghu is going to a new home. Let's hope it is not yours." The subtle message being conveyed is not lost. There is the probability of this 'Raghu' landing in our very home; we might be having such issues too.

MILI (1975) is the story of a young and bubbly girl who suffers from pernicious anaemia, a disease considered untreatable during the period the film was produced. Her lively, inquisitive and cheerful demeanour spreads happiness in everyone's life. She becomes an inspiration to her new neighbour Shekhar who is a drunkard and remains depressed and sullen, fighting the ghosts from his past. Due to the tragedy in his family that cast a slur, he exhibits very low self-esteem and is bereft of "an individual's capacity to feel warmth, empathy, trust, sense of security, identity, stability, consistent emotional closeness, and stability in relationships with chosen other human beings". (Singh A 169)

With her cheerful ways and patient persistence, Mili manages to bring a complete change in Shekhar's negative orientation and pessimistic perspective. She manages to break the wall he had built around himself and helps him deal with his psychological constraints. Shekhar falls in love with her, and feels secure and cared once more. But he is completely unaware of her ailment. When he comes to know about it, he immediately sinks back into his former self and thinks of going away as he cannot bear to see her die. A reproach from a neighbour makes him reconsider his decision. As he loves the girl, he offers to marry her and take her abroad for her treatment. The film begins and ends with a scene of a jet aircraft taking off, ostensibly carrying the couple to Switzerland where they hope to find a cure. The positive note on which the film ended effectively wiped out the depressing fact: a truth that had to be endured but 'could' be cured.

This film had two memorable characters: the 'hero' and the 'she-ro'. Mili was the she-ro, full of joy and positivity, 'loving and living' life and spreading happiness all around. She passes the same message to Vijay and saves him from his demons. The wastrel Vijay then returns the favour to Mili, emerging as the 'real' hero. It is he who gives a new lease of life to the vivacious Mili, offering her happiness; marrying her, taking her abroad for better treatment; for once thinking not about himself and his sorrows but about making others

happy. This is not done out of pity but for the love and admiration for this girl; one who taught him to 'live' life, not to 'waste' this precious gift.

“...Just as violence, and the dismemberment brought about by it...needs to be accepted as an existential reality...there is the search for peace, which follows a parallel course in human history.”(Bande & Kaushal 2011)Peace is needed to make a complete paradigmatic change in the societies all over, to make the world a better place to live in. *And, for once, it won't be improper to emulate such characters from celluloid; especially in the present times.*

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