Point of View

Challenges of Film Education in the Age of Internet and Information Technology

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Abstract

The word 'Film' that was associated with celluloid and with the experience of watching films in a cinema hall has moved forward. Today films are made using celluloid/ video and digital technology. These films are shown in cinema halls, Television, Computer or Mobile phone or out- of- home screens via cable and Internet. Challenge for filmmakers is to understand the strengths and limitations of each screen and structure the content accordingly. This presentation will justify the need for film education and discuss the Scope, Possibilities of Formal, Online and Non-formal modes of Film Education and challenges faced in the Internet age.

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NEED OF FILM EDUCATION

In the article *The Role of Film in Society*, Vikas Shah writes**,** "Film has a uniquely powerful ubiquity within human culture. In 2009, across major territories, there were over 6.8 billion cinema admissions (compared against a world population of roughly the same number) creating global box office revenues of over US$30 billion" … "British Tourist Authority estimates that approximately 20% visited the UK because of the way it is portrayed in films or on television…." (thoughteconomics.com).

Data shared by Film Federation of India on their website indicates, "Nineteen hundred sixty seven feature films (1967) in 38 Indian languages were censored in the year 2014-15." (www.filmfed.org). No data could be traced on the number of short films; non-fiction films; experimental films and educational or propaganda films made in the same year (2014-15). The number of films made under these categories could easily run over a few thousand films.

Technology has simplified the process of Film making. With a cell phone in hand and a computer at home, a large number of individuals are making films today. To this group of film makers their creative urge to express their ideas supersedes over to understand and follow language of cinema. Outlet for these filmmakers is YouTube or other Internet platforms, '25 film festivals in India and many more internationally' (Wiki pedia.org) says FICCI-KPMG Indian Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2015. The Indian Media and entertainment sector, which is expected to grow at a CAGR – Compound Annual Growth of 13.9% and is expected to reach INR 1,964 billion by 2019, has a higher demand for skilled professionals across each of its sub-sector" (www.kpmg.com)

Table 1 M&E Sector Employment by Sub-Sector

Sub Sector	Employment (in millions)		
	2013	2017	2022
Television	0.14	0.28	0.64
Print	0.06	0.07	0.13
Radio	0.02	0.03	0.04
Animation, VFX and Gaming	0.02	0.03	0.04
Films	0.16	0.24	0.44
Overall Sector	0.40	0.65	1.30

Source: www.kpmg.com

BIEF- India Brand Equity foundation's January 2016 report says, "The Indian media industry has tremendous scope for growth in all the segments due to rising incomes and evolving lifestyles. Media is consumed by audience

across demographics and various avenues such as television, films, out of home (OoH), radio, animation and visual effect (VFX), music, gaming, digital advertising and print". (*www.ibef.org*), What these reports and data suggest is that the education system must gear up to develop professionals in Media in an order of 1.30 million by 2022 or about 0.21 million per year.

State of Film and Media Education in India

Like in the past, till today, individual storywriters, journalists, poets, musicians, singers, aspiring actors, engineers and other professionals come to join the film industry. They acquire filmmaking skills churned by the industry. Till the time Film Institute Pune came into existence (1960), the only formal education in films was available at Sri Jayachamarajendra Polytechnic in Bangalore. Under Radio Engineering program, this polytechnic offered courses in cinematography and sound recording. FTII Pune started offering courses in Direction, Screen Play Writing, Cinematography, Sound Recording and Sound Engineering, Editing and Acting with an intake of 10 to 12 students per discipline each year. Film Institute of India officially became Film and Television Institute of India in 1971. However, Training in Television -not education - was brought to the FTII campus only in 1975, four years after that. It was only in the year 2003 that FTII started offering one-year course in Television production. Wikipedia lists 17 institutions in India offering specific area formal education in filmmaking; this includes SRFTI – Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata, West Bengal that came into existence in 1995.

In 1980's, universities offering journalism courses moved on to establish mass communication courses. According to shiksha.com "there are 470 colleges in India offering courses in mass communication" (media.shiksha. com). These colleges do introduce the students to some production techniques in Radio, Film and Television.

Two Aspects of Film Education

There are two major aspects of education in films. One is understanding

cinema, its historical perspective, its socio-political, cultural milieu and nuances etc., The other aspect is education of making films, which involves teamwork where different contributors put together their respective expertise, knowledge and skills that each of these professional requires and mental faculties or attitudes that are essential to each of them. In a film school both these aspects must go side by side.

Access to films through Internet

Today, Internet has brought films on the doorstep to watch. They are available through official streaming avenues like Netflix as well as through unofficial sites. Many important or talked-about films, that otherwise are not available to interested viewers, are now accessible to them. This has helped in widening the understanding of cinema to a great extent – especially with the younger generation.

This interest in films is also being transformed into a desire to make films. This medium of expression fascinates people of different walks of life, of different age groups. However, formal education in filmmaking is neither possible, nor practical or desirable to many of them. For such aspiring filmmakers, guidance for making films is also being available on the Internet or through short-term courses offered by many private institutes.

Guidance for Filmmaking

Today, thanks to Internet, one can read essays discussing the critical aspects of a film. One can watch a film as various aspects of it are discussed in Voice Over by experts. Video lectures in detail by experts (like Syd Field) on subjects like screenplay writing and so on are available on Internet. Articles on various subjects related to films and filmmaking are available. There are structured, progressive tutorials on different areas of filmmaking (for example grammar of editing as well as step-by-step guidance for operations of editing softwares).

Today, Internet has become a platform where individuals can share their thoughts and experiences. Film makers internationally are sharing their experience in making a film, what went in developing scripts, challenges

faced in making the film and so on. They have also started sharing how VFX assists them in constructing certain images that they could visualize but were unable to capture in real life shooting. Images that would give new experience to the audiences. Not only filmmakers, even the viewers too put in their response to a film or a television show they have seen. A testimony of Dr Juergen Schaefer – "how TV's Dr. House helps solve a real medical mystery" (www.ew.com) is one example. It shows how much research must have gone into the scripts of such shows, what kind of appeal they hold and why. Like yesterday's sci-fi becomes a reality today. With this kind of opening up of film fraternity, filmmaking has suddenly started looking accessible. All this information on net encourages individuals to make films. However, randomly learning through Internet without a learning plan may pose some problems.

Every now and then we come across people who have made short films without following the basic principles of film grammar or ways of effective communication. This is not because one wants to reject grammar, but because one is not aware of it. What many of such individuals search on the net is tutorials related to operations that will enable them to use their camera and editing software effectively. With this information in hand and an idea or subject in mind, they start making films. Once a film is ready, they are confident that whatever they wanted to say will reach the audience. They show their films to their friends and family who are aware of their ideas. They provide explanations if anyone is not clear, and fill in with information they wanted to share. Actually there are gaps in what they want to say and what is on the screen. In the excitement of having made a film, they even post their films to various film festivals and upload on You Tube. This process of filmmaking is good as a starting point. But to be effective communicators, much more is needed apart from operating knowledge. They require guidance to know what else is to be learnt. In this environment, task of the educators (face to face or on Internet) would be: push the boundaries of students' prior learning and introduce new systematic learning without shattering his confidence, a learning that will motivate the students to embrace risks and experiment with content without losing the essence of the subject.

Formal Education in Film Making

When so much information is available on the Internet, are the institutes involved in formal education become redundant? The answer is a definite no. As we all know, there are many advantages of formal education in any field.

Environment

Formal institutes offer an environment where groups come together with a common objective for a specific period and with a specific mindset. They come where actual contact with teachers and with fellow students is the crux.

Structured syllabus

Formal education is syllabus oriented. A panel of experts puts together the essentials of each stream – knowledge, skills, and attitudes. While designing curriculum, desired learning outcomes are listed, task breakdown is done. Then activities are designed to facilitate the learning of these parts.

Actual experience of making films

The biggest advantage of formal education could be that the students get to actually make the progressive exercises, experience the problems as well as excitement of making films, get feedback, develop understanding to judge their own work.

Different streams of film-making team under one roof

Making films is a collaborative art. Also, it is technology dependent. Collective learning in a formal setup offers much advantage. An ideal film school will impart education in all possible aspects of film making - creative, technical as well as managerial - under one roof. Making a Film is a collaborated effort of a creative team supported by managers and marketing teams. Creative team for a feature length film can have all or some of these team members - (1) Screen Writer, Dialogue, lyrics writer (2) Director (3) Cinematographer (4) Production Designer / Art Director (5) Sound recording

and sound designer (6) Editor (7) Music Director (8) Costume designer (9) Make-up and Hairstyle professional (9) Choreographer (10) Stunt coordinator and fight master (11) VFX and Animation experts (12) Actors and voice artists.

While educating students in the above-mentioned streams, Film Studies, which enhances the understanding of cinema, cannot be ignored in film schools. Non-fiction films like Documentary, Educational Films, Social Message Films, Corporate Films and Advertisement films, Gaming , Media Management and Research, Social Effects of media, Communication-Theories and Practices Media Technology – Production and Exhibition etc., too have a great potential and demand for specialized inputs. To make a film in any genre, the first thing one is expected to do is to write a screenplay. And so, of all the streams suggested above, Screen writing should be given the highest weightage. Screenplay is the backbone of a film, a road map to film production.

Screenplays

Most of the times, writing screenplay is a collaborative effort between Director and Screenwriter. Such collaboration is easily possible in formal education. Besides, further collaboration with students of production designer and cinematography can give complete visual design to a script and a direction to move forward. Scripts, thus developed and written, can then be made into films. In formal system, the same script can also be given to different production teams to make a film. Examining different films made on the same script can provide some explanation to how a written work evokes different sensibilities.

Classrooms

If a classroom is hooked with Internet, a teacher can use video examples to illustrate a point. In the same way, students too can show video that fit best for their explanation of a topic.

After Schooling

Peer groups thus formed can continue to work together after completing education. Not only this, one of the practical advantages that film school students automatically get is that they become a part of the lineage their school has created. This makes it easier for them to approach their seniors when they are out of the school. They also get to do networking with professionals during workshops.

The Wide Gap

Though there are advantages of formal education in film making, there are some problems also. The biggest one is the gap between the capacity of the existing institutes offering formal education and the requirement of trained and qualified professionals needed by the industry. Another aspect is the time frame of formal education. It may not be possible for everyone to put in that much time and, also, money. The solution here is internet**.**

Reducing the Gap – Leaders must lead

Knowing well that it is too expensive to setup a film school, it is time that leading film schools in India - FTII, SRFTI, State Govt. funded Film Institutes and Private Film schools – open their doors of knowledge and let aspiring film makers learn from them through ONLINE courses supported by hands on workshops. Along with this, these organizations should offer short courses and workshops for school / college teachers who can guide and encourage students in making films using low end equipment – even their mobile phones - and computer with basic editing software (developing a new generation of film makers.)

Challenges

Hundred years of cinematic experience and nearly 60 years of FTII has not given students of cinema text books on film making. Non-availability of text books in Indian languages with illustrated examples from our own films creates a gap in learning.

Language of communication – verbal and written – Learning is language dependent. Today, in India, we are making feature films in 38 languages. If filmmakers are taught film making in their own language, he/she will be able to learn the language of cinema faster. One may argue here that Internet offers translation of text in different languages. So why to write books and articles in many languages. Internet translations match words but need not give matching meaning to a sentence in translated language. (For example – 'capture' *images, = Kabja karna*).

Develop curricula that will offer choice based education in filmmaking and other allied media. A system that will offer full flexibility to a student to choose what one wants to learn and, if desired, acquire multiple skills. (Multiple skills are especially needed in non-fiction film production).

Guidance on production work will put additional demands on faculty. The biggest challenge of all is that Indian Universities have not accepted film making and other allied subjects as a subject of mainstream education. They need to find a way to treat these practical-oriented professional subjects in a different manner than only the scholarly, theory-oriented subjects.

ONLINE – Open Learning

Teaching filmmaking-using Internet, in Indian context, can offer challenges from film production technology. Here it would be expected that students would have some means to capture and edit video images – at least a mobile phone and a computer with editing software. Any organization offering ONLINE course in filmmaking must establish a website where students will upload their project work. All students of the ONLINE course will have access to see the work of others. Organization should also establish a web based forum where students could discuss each other's work to develop a better understanding of a subject. Faculty also should visit this forum regularly and respond when it is found that discussion is drifting away. Conducting practical examination and assessing specific area learning will be a time consuming exercise. The process of ONLINE film education will become much more effective when virtual classroom technology takes its root in Indian environment.

Non-formal Education

Non-formal education in any subject including filmmaking has one very strong aspect – a student is highly motivated. It is for this passion to learn that a student searches for a mentor. This mode is full of risk as a student may be exploited. But once again student is mentally ready for this. For a mentor, the challenge is to look beyond the desire and need of the student and guide him through. Typically, in film making profession where there is a huge uncertainty, providing systematic inputs is a difficult task. Studios/ production houses do accommodate professionals with varied backgrounds as internees. In these places, it is largely the responsibility of a learner to intensify self learning by observing and persuading experts to share. With access to Internet and watching discussions and tutorials a learner can connect/ relate to what is happening in pre-production planning, production and post-production, and grow. Lastly, a creative mind combined with command over techniques and technology – the art, together with the craft – can produce wonders.

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