

Introduction

Cinema is the dominant cultural institution of our age. Cinema's relationship to the modern world goes to such an extent that Strathausen comments "film screen becomes the mirror of modern life"(Shiel, Mark and Tony Fitzmaurice 25). This must be problematized since it offers only a superficial approach to film studies. Like other cultural artifacts such as literature, arts, videos etc. cinema is also said to represent reality. This is a quest to unveil the reality behind such assumptions.

The fascination to portray cities on the silver screen has a long history. The earliest motion pictures were itself an example for this fascination. Lumiere Brothers captured visions of 'Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory' and 'Arrival of a Train at a station' which were the byproducts of industrialization in a city. Since then city flicks have an evergreen hit in the film industry. This has led to a situation which made the distinction between 'the cinematic city' and 'the material city' impossible.

David B. Clarke opines in his *The Cinematic City*, "...the city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city" (Clarke, David B. 2). City has always been presented as a dichotomy of city/village. While village represents the ultimate utopia, city represents everything opposite to it- sin, corruption, treachery etc. "...on the one hand see the city as representing the highest achievement of the human race and yet on the other hand, as representing the worst excesses of humanity where corruption, overcrowding, crime, poverty, injustice and social disintegration prevail" (Fox, Kenneth J. 19).

"...city is often used as a metaphor for our dystopian excesses: corruption, sin, betrayal, segregation, alienation and entropy"(Fox, Kenneth J. 19)

This stereotyping helps the effective transmission of ideas to the audience. It is better to reinforce the existing notions rather than introducing a new concept. Following this idea films continue to (mis-)represent cities in the same light. "Stereotyping arises out of the need to generalize in order to make sense out of a very complicated environment. It allows people to easily categorize new things into comfortable spaces already defined by their experiences" (Lippmann 48).

It doesn't mean that the imagined city has remained the same for viewers forever. It underwent subtle changes over the time. For the Hindi cinema industry, Bombay was synonymous to the concept of 'the city', "a metaphor for the promise of the modern in Nehru's India"(Raghavendara, M.K. *Meanings of the City*). It naively represented cities as a place of hope. By the 1960s there was a change in the cinematic meaning of the city. It acquired the status of a land of opportunities where the migrant from the village can ascend the ladder of success though ultimately the city will corrupt him to the core. By the 1990s, city attained an altogether different

There is another instance where this multicultural aspect of the city is mentioned. Bilal John Kurishingal remarks "From big sharks to small trouts revel in the playground called Kochi. If we search for someone in this place, it will be like fishing with a fish rod in the sea"(40:34). This is a comment upon the different classes of people in the city of Kochi. "Cochin is a melting pot of cultures. The city has a diverse, multicultural and secular community" (www.cochin.org.uk). The identities of the foster sons of the character Mary John Kurishingal are also chosen carefully so as to represent the multicultural Kochi. They are Bilal, Eddy, Murugan and Bijo who belong to Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Gujarati community respectively. The film crew has given every effort to make their multicultural background obvious through their costumes.

The entrance of the protagonist Bilal John Kurishingal is shown through the arrival of a black Ford Endeavor across the Goshree Bridge which connects the suburbs to the city of Kochi. Bilal has a notorious past in the city of Bombay. From the cosmopolitan Bombay city, the protagonist is returning to the emerging Cosmo polis, the cinematic miniature Bombay/Kochi. The murderers of Mary John also hail from Andheri, Bombay. Often Mattancheri alone stands for the whole city of Kochi and its culture.

When Bilal plans to take revenge upon the murderers of his mother, Eddy John Kurishingal, his brother warns him "It is not the Old Kochi that you know"(37:42). Similar dialogues can be heard throughout the film from different characters. Later when Bilal tries to locate the murderers of his mother, another character Felix belonging to a mafia says, "It is not the old Kochi you are familiar with. We will make sure you are paid back for what you do". Bilal replies, "I know it is not the old Kochi. But I am the same Bilal" (47:05)

These conversations raise certain doubts regarding the changed circumstances in the city of Kochi. Kochi is one of the fastest growing cities in India. But what the cinematic world insinuates is not the positive aspects of the metropolitan city, but the mushrooming underworld gangs in the city. The city of Kochi is delimited to the status of a site of crimes. The film portrays BARs as place where underworld criminals get together and where crimes occur in the clear vicinity of indifferent people (May be because they are used to it).

One of the main sources of income for the natives of Kochi is from the tourists. The camera frequently pans over foreigners who have come to the Kochi. The character Eddy John Kurishingal runs a cafeteria for foreigners in his own house. He also plans to build a heritage hotel in the land which is bequeathed to him by Mary John Kurishingal.

The slums of Kochi are treated as sites of crime and as places where criminals live. This type of representation of Kochi and its slums is a recurring phenomenon in

mattress on the floor. In the morning he has to stand in a long queue in front of the pay and use toilets for his morning ablutions. He has a cheap old mobile phone in his hand which is kept intact with the help of a rubber band. The hotel he goes to for breakfast is a third rate one and the only food he can afford is a porotta that costs only Rs.5/-. The shopkeeper often ridicules him for this, but he never reacts. The whole sequence shows him as a person not cut out for this dog eat dog world. This is obvious in another scene where he fails miserably in his effort to get a seat in the boat. He proves he is incapable to cope in this highly competitive world.

On the other hand Arjun is portrayed as leading a luxurious life style. To exhibit his wealth, the film director has endowed him with 2 mobile phones, an iphone and a Samsung Galaxy in contrast to the old broken phone of Anzari. He symbolizes the ambitious inconsiderate urban who focused only on his success. For him, relationships are only a ladder to help him reach his goals.

The socio-cultural difference of the urban population is represented in the film through placing them in different urban situations and also by allocating separate costumes too. The city is organized by "operation of power and the struggle for power" (Short, John R. 6) and it is reflected in every aspect of the city too. "...these power relations are organized by social differences in class, gender, age, race and ethnicity which produce urban patterns and processes. Films reflect such urban patterns in how they code neighbourhoods as rich or poor or landscapes as urban or rural. They reflect class in costume and setting, and in whether characters are positioned inside elaborate domestic spaces or outside in the urban public space"(Mennel 15). In Chappa Kurishu while the character Arjun is endowed with a luxurious, comfortable, spacious flat for himself, Anzari has to comfort himself with a single room with cheap mattress.

Through Anzari, we will get a glimpse of the pathetic working condition of sales employees in supermarkets and malls in the big cities. They are not even treated as human beings by the employers. Anzari is abused even for the slightest omission on his part. He is an educated person, but he is forced to do the work of a sweeper. Every night Anzari struggles to get back to his rented house before the last boat leaves the harbor.

At the same time, we can see the character Arjun visiting the night clubs in the city. Night clubs are portrayed as a place for casual sexual encounters. Arjun lacks empathy and he is inconsiderate to what happens to others while he wades through his path to success. He stands for the typical urban youth who is immersed in the consumer culture. During a discussion for his new project, he casually remarks they have to evacuate 50 families for the purpose. He undoubtedly assures the corporate he can prove the place which is actually a part of the green belt was never a part of it.

midnight of December 31. The concluding custom of the carnival is the burning of the effigy of Papaanji, a Santa-claus look alike.

"Many see the New Year as a new born baby, born on January 1, who turns old in a year's time and goes away at the end of the year, carrying with him the burdens of the passing year. Another baby or year is born the next day, and so along with celebrations the truth of life is carried forward in this symbolic burning of 'papa', the chain of death and birth, of passage of time, of old and new, of time and tide"(thehindu.com).

The concept of the burning of Papaanji/ SantaClaus in the Cochin Carnival is adapted effectively by Anwar Rasheed to play a crucial role in the film. The climax of the film also occurs with the burning of Santa Claus at its backdrop.

Chhotta Mumbai also deals with the mafia wars in the city of Kochi. While unemployed, good for nothing, yet good at heart protagonist played by Mohan Lal and his sidekicks are framed as local goons, another mafia with a police officer at its helm terrorizes the city. The street from where the protagonist hails is named as Chhotta Mumbai insinuating Kochi is the miniature form of Mumbai Underworld. Chhotta Mumbai is a street in Fort Kochi where such names are common for streets like Saudi, Pakistani etc. The slum where Vasco lives also resembles those in Mumbai. The film celebrates the colonial legacy of the city through the portrayal of Cochin Carnival and also by naming the protagonist after the Portuguese sailor Vasco Da Gama.

The back drop of the film is the slums of Kochi. Slums are portrayed as places where uneducated, unemployed, good-for-nothing people live which in turn become the centres of criminal activity. The film points fingers to the inefficiency of government to help the people living there. There is a scene where we can see women standing in long queues to fetch drinking water. When the villain spits in a pot of drinking water, heroine can be heard saying this, "I may forgive everything else, but I will never forgive you spitting in the drinking water".

In order to show the pathetic condition in which people live in the slum areas, an aerial shot of the emerging metropolis of Kochi is also shown to the audience.

Conclusion

Big B, Chappa Kurishu and Chhotta Mumbai have the city of Kochi as its backdrop. Often the backdrop becomes much more than what it actually is and assumes the role of a character in the plot. Big B focuses entirely on the corrupted city life, crimes and revenge while Chappa kurishu tries to juxtapose the lives of an upper-class and a lower class representative. On the other hand Chhotta Mumbai is a story told in a lighter vein about the lives of small time goons in the street old Chhotta Mumbai in Fort Kochi.