

ShortFilms: Condensed Narratives Expanded Impact

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In accordance with the title, I've divided the paper into two segments the first one will interrogate the history and relevance of the condensed form of cinematic narratives, while the following section will try to explore the significant and extended social impact made by the short films by taking into consideration some of the best shorts of the decade.

Films can be technically defined as a series of moving images connected systematically through a common storyline. The history of films can be traced to 1890s with the invention of motion picture cameras. The first film "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" by LumiereBrothers in France was actually a silent short narrative of 50 seconds which relayed a single unedited shot of arrival of a train. The early short films soon gave way to full length feature but continued to exist under its reign. During the first few decades of inception of cinema, short films were an essential accompaniment of the full length features. The subject matter of those early shorts was usually comic and they were either in form of live-actions or animations. The short films of the times were often in a serialised format, for instance *The Tramp* series featuring Charlie Chaplin. Eventually, this trend began to fade away. The decline of short films from a popular genre to a novice and art form can be attributed to many reasons: fine actors like Chaplin graduated to full length feature, cinema houses were established and they began to charm their audience with aural movies making them the most exciting form of entertainment for the masses, and finally with the invention of television, the tele serials completely engulfed the short feature. Short films began to be treated like a step sibling of the full length movies. Though Short films ended up being a practise form for the aspiring directors and actors and one of the least watched form of cinema yet it continued to be acknowledged by various festivals and awards including the prestigious Academy Awards.

Setting the parameters of short film, the Academy of Motion Picture of Arts and Sciences defined a short film as "an original motion picture that has a running time of 40 minutes or less, including all credits". The current trend is of few minutes. The nomenclature short film itself reflects the characteristics and can be elaborated to comprehend the relevance of this poignant and dynamic genre of cinema. Like the short story genre of literature short films can be explained

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as brief narratives featuring a small ensemble of characters, focusing on a single incident and aimed at educing a single effect. The narrative usually begins at a critical moment which is the turning point of the protagonist's life and at the same time frames the context of the plot. Reduced reels though constricts thematic exploration but definitely provides a wonderful opportunity for the maker to reveal his art and ideas. Shorts also diminishes glitches of finance, promotions, and other pros and cons related to the making of a full-fledged movie. These movies are usually sponsored by film grants, private companies or personal funds and are often screened at various film festivals. Nowa days viewers can easily access these small packages of entertainment and proselytization via internet. They have become viral and are gaining momentum through mouth publicity.

Over the past two decades short films have proved more than an apprenticeship tool and are regaining their initial glory and individuality. The crucial reason behind this can be attributed to the growth of technology. Initial years of 21st century have witnessed two major technological feats in communication field: one, the evolution of expensive and heavy handsets into reasonable and smart cell phones which are user friendly and second, internet accessibility through these phones. This have transformed the Smart phones from just a modern intelligent medium of communication to a capital compendium of information and knowledge. (Though the immediate effect of internet is debatable but all coins have two sides). It can captivate all the senses and potentially influence the psyche of the viewer. To use this medium to generate social cognizance and change stereotyped impressions is not just the call of the hour but also an assured way to induce revolution. The inherent restlessness of youth, the need for quick changes, shortening attention spans, and the passion for smart phones all have contributed to the admiration of short films. These condensed narratives are striking a chord with the new generation not merely as an art but as a didactic tool for social transformations that commences with the fundamental unit of society i.e. an individual.

Short films make extended impact on the viewer not just due to above said reasons but because of its subject matter as well. This is mainly because shorts are not concerned with box

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office collections which frees the makers to experiment with both the subject and the art. Short films are evolving as an art and as a cultural more that posits multi-dimensional perceptions and interpretation. Since its inception films as a form of creative media have always reflected and effected the social well-being of a nation. Celluloid representations are effective and impressive tool for confronting the dilapidations and squalors creeping in the society. Pertaining to the need of the times the aims of films have constantly shifted its parameters beyond entertainment to include issues that are socially and culturally relevant. Like main stream cinema and in fact more than it, short films focuses on critical issues that face the society.

Indian society is facing a critical time, the clash between traditional values and western progressive imitations, patriarchal set up and inclinations. These conflicts are giving way not only to newer ideologies but also to unprecedented violence on different levels especially among the youth. There is an urgent need of the hour to mirror the psychological and emotional repressions of the youth in order to channelize their views and energy in the positive directions. Short films can aid us here with its impressive and operative menagerie. To quote director Martin Scorsese

Now more than ever we need to talk to each other, to listen to each other and understand how we see the world and cinema is the best medium for doing this.

Reel life renditions of reality in small segments are today more relevant than ever because of easy accessibility of internet through smart phones. Like a Pandora's Box internet is flooded with short films from all over the world which are not just visual treats but forcing us to rethink and reframe our ideologies.

Indian short films are a cult in their choice of subject and treatment. Their thematic concern ranges from peace talks on Indo-Pak relations, to awareness against AIDS, violence against woman, condition of farmers, beggars and house help and so forth. To express the effectiveness of short films I would like to mention certain milestone films- Little Terrorist, Salt 'n' Pepper, Dum Dum Deega Deega, Mandrake! Mandrake!,Kaatal, Ahalya, Blood Brothers, Prambham, and the list is endless. Though it is not possible to explore all these movies here yet I would certainly talk a little about them in a hope that listeners feel inquisitive enough to watch them. Salt n Pepper

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narrates the tragedy of the farmers and at the same time enforces the viewer to ponder about the misguided urban youth, how one is forced to commit suicide while other takes thinks of suicide as an option after she is ditched by her lover. This contrast is striking as it reflects the growing gulf between the urban n rural India, between the so called modern youngster who has all facility yet does not value life and the poverty and debt stricken farmer who wants to survive but has no means to do so. Dum Dum Deega Deega displays the indomitable and innovative spirit of a beggar boy who refuses to earn money by demeaning himself. Positive, Migration, Prarambha, and Blood Brothers these four movies funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were made to create empathy and understanding for HIV positive patients. The list is endless and the real impact of these condensed narratives can be felt only after watching them.

In the contemporary times, with the raging inflation, consumerist attitudes, diverting attention, decreasing leisure time and the profit concerns it is not easy for film makers to drive home their point regarding social context, via a full-fledged movie. Hence the short films genre. Short films are not just an occasion to showcase talent but are significantly emerging as a mode to stir the consciousness of the techno savvy youth. The presence of smartphones in many-a-hands had made it easier for the concerned section to transmit the waves of social awareness. In a few minutes these diminutive narratives manage to leave a lasting impression on the mind and heart of the viewer. In our society, short films are already making a big impact and spreading social sentience. Be it violence against women, women empowerment, respecting our elders, cross-borders ties, literacy, or gender issues, all have been sensitively yet sharply treated in this parallel and popular form of creative media.

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