

**‘A Study of Mythological Films of Kolhapur Film Industry’
(1920-1960)**

Dr. Kavita Gagarani

Assistant Professor,

Department of History,

The New College, Kolhapur.

Mob No. 9764469908

Email: utkrantiprakashan12@gmail.com

Film, the technological novelty of 20th century, ushered many far reaching changes in life. It brought revolution in the life styles all over the world. This medium opened a new horizon in the world of art, entertainment and communication.

The history of film making in India may be traced to Dhundiraj alis Dadasaheb Govind Phalke of Nashik. He came up with ‘Raja Harishchandra’ the first Indian film exhibited on April 24, 1913. This medium of entertainment become very popular in India within a decade. Baburao Painter of Kolhapur laid foundation of Maharashtra Film Company in 1917 and came up with his maiden mythological silent movie ‘Sairandhri’ in 1920. It was big hit and Lokmany Tilak conferred the title of ‘Cinema Kesari’ on Baburao Painter. Besides entertainment, films were looked upon as an instrument of social and political awakening and enlightenment. Various issues and problems were handled by the producers in their movies. Thus, this medium became rapidly popular.

Kolhapur Film Industry produced one hundred two movies during 1920-60. Out of them thirty four were based on mythological stories. Thematic study of these films with their specifications in undertaken in this research article.

Mythological Films:

Thirty-four movies were produced during this period may be further classified into two categories (1) Epic, (2) Others.

(1) EPIC:

Films on Mahabharat:

It was first priority of film producers. As many as sixteen films were produced on various episodes of Mahabharat such as episode of Vatsala Harm, Kaliyamardan, battle between Kauravas and Pandavas etc.

Vatsala Horan:

As many as four films were produced on the said theme. - Maharashtra Film Company's Vatsala Haran and Maya Bazar in 1921 and in 1925 respectively, Shyam Cinetone’s Parthkumar in 1934, and Prabha Chitra's Maya Bazar in 1939. Vatsala Harm is a love story of Vatsala, the daughter of Balram and Abhimanyu, the son of Aijun. Krishna is paternal uncle of Vatsala, and maternal uncle of Abhimanyu. However, Balram is not in favour of this marriage, he arranges Vatsala’s marriage with Lakshaman, son of Duryodhan. Krishna, plans a

way out with the help of Narad. Ghatotkach, a son of Bhim creates a illusionary festival with his supernatural power and in the ensuing confusion, carries off Vatsala. The story has a happy end. Maharashtra Film Company could not get a lady artist for the role of Vatsala. One Raghunath Khatavkar, an youngster aged about 13-14 years, played the role of Vatsala.¹

Shri Krishna:

Six films were produced on the legend of Shri Krishna's childhood and heroism. The Maharashtra film Company produced Krishnavatara in 1923 and Muraliwala in 1927. A film Krishnavatara was on the birth and childhood of Shri Krishna. Muraliwala, revolves around Radha's devotion for Krishna. As a result, the friction developed between Radha and her husband Anaya. Baburao Painter was inspired by the renowned play-wright of Varkar's Kunjvihari to produce the film MuraliWala²

Gopalkrishna produced by Prabhat Film Company in 1929 also depicted the exploits of child Krishna. A confrontation between Krishna and Indra was the main theme. Krishna saves the people and animals of Gokul from wrath of Indra by lifting Govardhan, a mountain on his little finger. Master Suresh who was in the role of Krishna became the household name.³

Kolhapur Cinetone's first film, Akashawani (1934) based on the destruction of the evil Kansa. The people are tired of the oppressive and brutal reign of the evil Kansa. According to divine prophecy, the eighth son of his sister Devaki would destroy him. Panicked, Kansa decides to kill all newborn children of Devaki and imprisons her and her husband Vasudeo. He manages to kill seven of her newborn babies. The eighth one, Lord Krishna, he survives as Vasudeo, his father manages with divine grace to take him safely to Gokul. Infant Krishna is brought up by Yashoda, wife of Nand. Finally, true to the prophecy Kansa is slain by Krishna, Devaki's eighth son.⁴

In the year 1935 Kolhapur Cinetone produced Kaliya Mardan on the legend of Shri Krishna captivating Kalia, the monstrous black snake living in the river Yamuna. In order to save the people from his wrath, Shri Krishna wrestles with the poisonous snake bare handed bringing him into submission. Thus divinity triumphs over the evil.⁵

Again Shri Krishna's childhood and heroism was depicted in Maharashtra Chitrawani's maiden venture Gokulcha Raja in 1950.⁶ In the year 1926 Maharashtra Film Company produced a film on Gajgauri the elephant of mighty Indra. Aqun brings him on the earth with the film help of Krishna.⁷

Maharathi Kama:

In 1928, Maharashtra Film Company produced Kama. Gitopadesh or the teachings of Lord Krishna to Aqun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, was the main theme of Kurukshetra produced by Chhatrapati Cinetone in 1934. Kaurav-Pandav war of eighteen days was very effectively shot in both the movies, according to Anant Mane.⁸

Shalini Cinetone's Usha was based on the legend of king Banasur of Shonitpur from the Dwapar Yug. Banasur, a devotee of Shiva, obtains the boons from the Lord, which he misuses to harass the Udhavas, the followers of Vishnu. Lord Krishna, the saviour, through his divine intelligence gets Banasur's daughter marry Aniruddha, his grandson. Thus, he proves to all that the powers of Shiva and Vishnu emerge from one and the same source of divine energy. Coincidentally, the actress Usha Mantri played the role of Usha.⁹

Kichak Vadh:

Two films from the mythological series were based on the famous theme, the slaying of Kichak in Mahabharata. In 1919 the Maharashtra Film Company produced Sairandhri. On the same story, color talkie was produced by the Prabhat Film Company in 1933. The story relates to incognito stay of the Pandava in the Kingdom of Virat. Kichak, the General, lusts after Draupadi who stays at king's palace as maid servant. He is ultimately slain by Bhima. Sairandhri, the silent film, had titles in Devanagari. One such title *par seva aadmi ko kitnaa lachaar barmati hai* (service of the foreigners make people helpless) gives the feel of the film. Gulabbai and Leela Chandragiri enacted Sairandhri's role in the silent film and in the talkie respectively.¹⁰

Films on Ramayana:

Ramayana, the legend of Rama, formed the theme of three films. Maharashtra Film Company's Lanka in 1930, based upon the dramatic destruction of the evil Ravana's empire in Lanka, by the ape army led by Lord Rama.¹¹

Prabhat Film Company's Chandrasena, in 1931, was the legend of Chandrasena, the daughter of the Serpent King of Patal Lok, who is a devotee of Rama. Ravana seeks help of Mahi, the husband of Chandrasena, to kill Rama. A strategy is worked out to induce Rama and Lakshman down to the Patal Lok. However, Chandrasena not only reveals the secret plot to Maruti but also the secret of vulnerability of Mahi, who is otherwise protected by divine powers. Using the said information Rama and Lakshman foil Ravana's plan and kill Mahi.¹²

Pragati Pictures produced Ayodhyachi Rani in 1940. In Ayodhyachi Rani, Rama accepts 14 years banishment to honour his father, king Dashrath's promise to queen Kaikai. Upset by this injustice, Kaikai's son Bharat meets him in the forest and he begs of him to return to Ayodhya. However, the Lord persuades him to follow his righteous duty back in Ayodhya. Bharat, obeys Rama, but instead of sitting on the throne he places the *padukas* (wooden footwear) of his beloved Rama there and in his name rules.¹³

Dhruva:

Two mythological films were produced on the legend of Dhruva in 1938 by Prabha Chitra and Shalini Cinescope. Former had only the child artists aged below 16. Dhruva, the son of king Uttanapada and Suniti, is hated by Uttam, his step brother. Once Suruchi, his step mother pushes him off. Dhruva renounces everything and observes penance in the wilderness. Spiritual enlightenment transforms him into a star, bringing him immortality.¹⁴ Triumph of good over evil is the underlying message.

Bhakta Pralhad:

Maharashtra Film Company's Bhakta Pralhad was produced in 1926 has the same message in appearance of Lord Vishnu in form of Narasimha (Half man- half lion) to save Pralhad from his vicious father, King Hiranyakashyapu.¹⁵

(2) Others

Sati Savitri:

Sati Savitri invokes Lord Yama, the God of death, to bring her dead husband, Satyavan back to life. Maharashtra Film Company's Sati Savitri was based on this theme.¹⁶

King Harishchandra:

Prabhat Film Company's first talkie Ayodheycha Raja was on the life of King Harishchandra, a man of his word. Vishwamitra demands from him, his royal throne as Guru Dakshina. The king, true to his word, abdicates the throne and along with his queen Taramati proceeds on a self imposed exile to Kashi to lead the life of ordinary people. A rich money lender Ganganath buys Taramati in an auction of slaves. Prince Rohidas tries to free his mother from bondage, but in term gets slain by Ganganath. Taramati, accused of the evil deed, is condemned to be beheaded. King Harishchandra is about to carry out the verdict when Lord Shankar appears and saves Queen Taramati. The fruit of being truthful and righteous is always sweet, is the underlined message of the film.

Machchindranath:

Prabhat Film Company projected the legend of Machchindranath in Maya Mackchindra, in 1932. The Queen of Kamroop hates men. Hence, Machchindranath creates an illusion where he visits her in Kamroop and impresses her through his divine illusion to be enchanted by the uninspiring. Gorakhnath, the disciple of Machchindranath realizes that it was all a drama of illusion and divine enchantment.¹⁷

King Jimuthavan:

In 1935, Samrat Cinetone produced Naganand on the legend of Nagas. There was the practice among the serpents to sacrifice a human being to Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. Once when they decide to sacrifice a child, King Jimuthavan volunteers himself to save the life of a child. Having killed him, Garuda realizes his mistake, and resurrects the noble king with the help of the elixir of life.¹⁸

Bhagirath

Kolhapur Cinetone's Gangavataran was based oft the legend of Ganga, the daughter of the Himalays. Kapil Muni bums the sons of King Sagara as they disturbed his Tapasya. Bhagiratha, his grandson, observes long penance to invoke Lord Shiva release Ganga from his hair and flow down to the Earth. .

Mohini:

Mohini, produced in 1940 by Maya Pictures, was based on the legend of Apsara Mohini who enchants King Fukmagandha and obtains two boons from him. She asks him to kill his son or break his Ekadashi fast¹⁹

Fantasies and Fairy Tales:

Maharashtra Film Company produced Nisha Sundry (Midnight Girl) in 1929 based on the famous fairytale of Cinderalla. The ill treatment to Cinderalla by her stepmother and finally her marriage to the Prince, thanks to her fairy Godmother was presented very well in the film.²⁰

Rani Sahiba, produced by Prabhat Film Company in 1930 was woven around the story of imaginary king and queen . Here the wise queen takes the reigns of the kingdom in her own hands in order to save it from evil minister who wants to take advantage of her simpleton husband, the king. In this film, five years old Anant Apte played the role of Rani Sahiba alias Bajarbattu.²¹

Prabhat Film Company produced Agnikankan in 1932 in which cunning General of the kingdom of Vyjayanti assassinates the king in a coup. The queen Veermati takes refuge in the wilderness with her son who returns to claim his father's throne after twenty one years. He meets the Prime Minister's daughter and with her help defeats the General in battle. He is crowned the king and accepts the prime Minister's daughter as his queen.²²

Rashtra Cinetone came up with Jadugarin alias Enchantress in 1937. In the year 1937, Shalini Cinetone produced Pratibha based on die court poet who steals another poet's poem and receives the royal acclaim. However, Pratibha the genuine poet's wife boldly pleads her husband's case before the king, and brings justice to him. Hans Picture's next film, Jwala, unfolded the story of Angaar, the ambitious general who poisons the king and marches against the prince. But his wife being loyal to the rulers walks out on him. The traitor meets his end. The film depicts the fearsome consequences of mutiny against the King.²³

Initially, because of a reasonable assurance of commercial success through committed audience, mythologies dominated. Epics like Mahabharat and Ramayan are well ingrained in the collective Indian psyche. Therefore, even illiterate audience could easily identify the storyline and all the characters in the film. Secondly, there was much impact of mythology on the Indian mind and audience would have been automatically attracted towards such films. The period of the beginning of film making in India coincides with the aggressive religion based nationalism. Since the British concept of secularism meant exclusion of religion from state interference, many Hindu Leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, used religious ideas and practices to build their political resistance. In many ways mythological background offered wide scope for symbolic expression against the despotic rule under the cover of mythology. Anti-British sentiments expressed would escape the Cencor's scissor. Thus, Kolhapur Film Industry helped and motivated Indian freedom struggle by producing mythologies.

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