

SPARK

WOR.D.WORLD.WISDOM

JUNE 2011



MOVIE MAGIC

Spark—June 2011: The Team

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05 June 2011

Dear Reader,

This issue is all about Cinema. Fun, isn't it? Well, we just don't want to say more!

Just get going and catch all the wonderful contributions in the edition. Don't forget to let us know what you thought of this issue of Spark. Mail us at

feedback@sparkthemagazine.com.

We will see you next month with yet another interesting edition!

Till then, goodbye and God bless!

Cheers,

Spark Editorial Team





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WHAT CINEMA MEANS TO US



INTRODUCTION BY ANUPAMA KRISHNAKUMAR

“What would life be without cinema? It really would have been so much less fun. And why not, when it does so many things? It makes you dream. It entertains you. It makes you laugh. It moves you to a tear or two. It awakens admiration in you. It makes you think deeply. It throws you back in time. It teaches you the nature of life. It lets you glimpse larger than life images. And in some way, it lets you forget your own self and makes you feel you are part of a larger, unified scheme, for a brief while.

Of course, there are good movies and the bad ones and those that evoke mixed responses. And I suppose it makes perfect sense when I say it’s only the good ones, essentially those that are close to our heart, that more or less define our perspective of cinema. Undoubtedly, there can never be one unifying perception of cinema. To that effect, the unified image of movies is but a result of countless pixels of individual viewpoints on its nature and purpose.

That being said, cinema, to most of us, is a collage of many experiences, thoughts and expectations.

Experiences of love, hatred, despair, reflection, joy and fear, as one sits lost in the ambience defined by chairs, a giant screen, popcorn and a fine stream of light illuminating the invincible dust, finally reaching the womb of a screen, giving birth to vivid, fancy imagery. Thoughts that parade in your head even as you watch the movie and after that. Following which, perceptions may be redefined, some ideas may be reinforced and some notions may be born. And for their part, these thoughts would owe their redefinition or birth or existence to the artists, the writer, the filmmaker and eventually the film itself. And then of course, there are the expectations from a filmmaker, a music director, and an actor, as well as the unexpected that baffles you with its sheer power and then the boundaries of expectations are altered.

And that’s essentially what this issue seeks to explore. The different aspects of cinema and the sheer joy that films bring to our lives. Ladies and Gentlemen, we welcome you to revel in Movie Magic.”

VARSHA SREENIVASAN

The Mystery and Magic of Harry Potter

When one thinks of Harry Potter, the acclaimed wizard boy from J.K.Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series, the mind effortlessly conjures the image of a certain bespectacled, serious-looking boy, thanks to the books having been given a visual form through seven brilliant movies. Inspired by series of books and their film versions, Varsha Sreenivasan writes an interesting conversation featuring Harry and a certain 'Curious Spark' who is an excited, curious and die-hard fan of Harry Potter. While Curious Spark shoots the questions, the sober and mature Harry opens up; resulting in what you will realize is a philosophical and revealing dialogue.

No artistic debut probably has met with more collective gasps than J.K Rowling's book series on Harry Potter and his magical world of witchcraft and wizardry. Masterfully spun into seven motion pictures, Harry has come alive in flesh and blood leaping out of feverish imagination and into plain sight. Eager kids and grown-ups across the world breathlessly await the final movie that will drive the last nail into chief villain Lord Voldemort's coffin. While they wait, um, let them wait. For the readers of this magazine, there's a special treat in store... ink and magical quill in hand I mount my Swift-800 broomstick and set out to chart the sudden arrival and rise of this character to the top of our favourites list. And I do this with none other than... hold your breath... Harry himself!!

Harry Potter, the boy who lived, the phenomenon, the miracle boy, the last hope... his qualifiers are several. Breathtaking Harry, fascinating Harry, amazing Harry... if you haven't got enough of Harry Potter as yet, fasten your broombelts. Here we come...

Caution - We might dive into hitherto uncharted territory.

Question. Hi H-h-h-arry. This is Curious Spark. Hic. Nope, I'm okay. Yep, let's start. So Harry, the interesting question first. Tell our readers something about yourself that they don't probably know yet.

Harry: Hi, Curious. I, well... I... don't know how many of you know this yet... but you know J.K right?

Curious: The author you mean?

Harry: Yes. Author for you. GOD for me. (Modest smile) What I was saying is that you probably know that I might be J.K's favourite character, but it's not me she'll go out for dinner with.

Curious: Nope?

Harry: No. (Shaking his head smiling) It would be Dumbledore.

Curious: And just why would that be?

Harry: Well... Dumbledore's advice wins over all else I guess.

Curious: What! After penning all those volumes, ... dropping you on the scene, popping Voldemort off, J.K still needs advice?!

Harry: Everybody does. (Smiles looking at ease)

Curious mutters at her quill that's scribbling on its own: "Probably has the Philosopher's Stone in his pockets right now."

Curious: Okay, next question. Your association with whom or what is most responsible for your hallowed status amongst muggles? Voldemort, the Order, your friends or the prophecy?

Harry: (Thinking) Maybe Voldemort. He's got this invincible dark wizard reputation that at several points overrides people's faith in me, the prophecy or the Order. Maybe the sheer impossibility of escaping him makes everyone want to see it happen. He's the darkest wizard most of us have ever met.

Curious: You mean you owe your fame to Voldemort?

Harry: Maybe. But Dumbledore doesn't owe anybody. He is the most brilliant wizard to have walked the earth yet. (Lost in thought)

Curious whispers to her quill, "Superwizard admits Dumbledore is his Hero."

Curious: So Dumbledore's your role model?

Harry: (Nodding) Dumbledore's my teacher, guide, friend and guardian. But those are just words. For an orphan like me, he was the rock a parent would have been. He was all rolled into one. (Suddenly quieter)

Curious: But you were also a favoured student of Dumbledore's. Is there any special teaching of his that you would like to share with our readers?



Harry: Maybe yes. Dumbledore was very unlike the doting parent one would see nowadays. His interest was more in the kind of person I should become rather than ensuring that I thought well of him. It was okay with him if I did not obey him, if I broke a few school rules here and there, but it was necessary that I had the best interests of everyone in mind. It was necessary that I did not break the rules of my character. I'm sure you know, and this is what I owe him most for, for making the crucial decision to leave me with harsh, uncaring relatives in the initial years of my life. He ensured I pass through fire and emerge a better, more understanding being, than stay surrounded by admirers and turn into a pompous brittle wizard.

Curious is more curious now than ever.

Curious: But we thought you did not approve of your rude relatives!

Harry: That's what I said. Dumbledore didn't base his decision on whether or not I approved of them or him. But it is hard to ignore that the tough foundation I got in my formative years has helped me all along in making my hardest decisions. It has helped me realize my priorities and weigh clearly my options. Had Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon or for that matter the great Dumbledore himself been any softer, you might just find Voldemort still walking the earth.

Curious: But what about you? What about your precious childhood lost due to their careless, sometimes ruthless behaviour?

Harry: My great teacher has taught me - others first. I am my last priority. Thankfully, Dumbledore always managed to get me to look ahead and remember who I really was and why I was actually there.





Harry: I beg to differ. Emotions are important. In fact, that's what makes all the difference between Voldemort and us. He operates on cold-blooded logic, incapable of emotions. We differ. Let me put it this way: emotions are the rudder that help you stay focussed in the right direction. This is where Voldemort lost.

Curious: Voldemort was emotionless long before you both met or had your now famous duel. Your words seem to imply that Voldemort was thus rudderless and had lost long before his actual defeat at your hands?

Harry: (Nodding) Just like Dumbledore does not need a comparison to be a truly invincible wizard; Voldemort was a defeated being even before duelling anybody.

Curious: (Astonished) Could you please make yourself more clear to our readers?

Harry: Sure. I have learned from my teacher that a person is one's own friend and one's own enemy. The most crucial relationship is that which one has with one's conscience. If it is based on integrity, faith and understanding of oneself, it becomes a strong bond. If it is based on falsehood, deceit and craving for power, there is a constant duel. Victory and success bind and keep you whole. Defeat and loss make you brittle. Voldemort was a broken being and an already defeated wizard.

Curious: (With a nervous laugh) Wow... that's some food for thought. Is there anything more from Dumbledore you'd like to share with our readers before we roll up the quill scrolls?

Harry: (With a quick glance at the quill hovering over thick white parchment) Yes, maybe one last bit. But it's a curiosity.

Curious: (Perked up) And what is that?

Harry: Dumbledore always encouraged questions; but didn't quite believe in giving the answers. I admit it irked me a great deal and he knew that. (Sheepish grin)

As opposed to parents who provide for everything their kid needs, Dumbledore would rather let me work things out. He gave me the gift of time and his respect for the solutions I might come up with taught me to have faith in myself and to always try without the worry of failure. I am a wholesome wizard thanks to him.

COMING SOON

Curious: Do you mean you appreciate your wants being denied?

Harry: I appreciate this person's ability to stand firm and be able to say, "No, my boy." Dumbledore was no weakling. And he is my teacher.

Curious: (Looking quieter now) Let me admit something. I was expecting somebody more flamboyant with all that giddy fame. You're not a very charismatic person!

Harry: (Laughs out loud) Maybe that's why J.K wouldn't go out to a wand-lit dinner with me. Maybe, you too should give Dumbledore a try! (Winks)

Curious and Harry share a laugh. The quill scribbles away, "Don't forget to catch the refreshing monsoon showers and the last part of the series expected to hit screens in July this year. Hope you enjoyed reading. Curious and Harry have decided to drop in for ginger beer at Hogsmeade. While Aberforth keeps them company and until we meet in a month or two, it's adieu boy-wonder for now. Ciao!"

Oh, the Horror!

Art by Amrita Sarkar





**‘I’m very snobbish
about the star-
rating system!’**

Jai Arjun Singh is a freelance writer and journalist based in Delhi. He writes a fortnightly film column for Yahoo! India and has also written for Business Standard, The Hindu, Tehelka, The Sunday Guardian, Outlook and The Hindustan Times, among other publications. His book about the film 'Jaane bhi do Yaaro' was published by Harper Collins India in 2010. He has also edited an anthology of film writing, 'The Popcorn Essayists: What Movies do to Writers', for Tranquebar. Jai blogs at Jabberwock (<http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com>). In an interview to Spark, he gets talking about his thoughts on cinema, his blog and his books. Interview by Anupama Krishnakumar.

1) Two books on movies, a fortnightly film column for Yahoo! and a blog that deals sizeably with cinema, among others. What is it that fascinates you about cinema and writing about it?

I've been a movie buff since childhood, but around the age of 13 I became seriously interested in a variety of films – not just the Hindi films I had grown up with but old American and foreign-language films too. Simultaneously, I started reading a lot of film-related literature, which opened my eyes to new ways of watching movies. I became fascinated by how many different ways there were of visually telling a story – or in some cases, not so much telling a proper story but creating a mood.

I like thinking about the films I watch, and writing my thoughts down. Long before I became a professional writer, I would scribble little notes about practically any film I saw. Once I started working as a journalist and feature writer, it became possible to do this for a living.

2) a) Cinema is like a mirror that reflects the society for it to see. b) Cinema is a flight to fantasy. It represents all that the average man/woman dreams of. Which of these statements come closest to your viewpoint on the nature and purpose of cinema?

I'll sound like a fence-sitter here, but really, I'm not a fan of rigid definitions. There can be great films that are primarily mirrors to society, and great films that are primarily "flights to fantasy", and there can be great films that are some combination of both things. In any case, such divisions can be very misleading. (In the context of literature: great fantasy writing, even if it's set in a completely imaginary world, can be a mirror to our own society. Though it might require a little more effort on a reader's part to grasp this.)

If I were ordered to make a statement about "the nature and purpose of cinema" with a gun pointed at my head, I'd probably say something like, "A really good film is one where form and content come together in the best possible way – regardless of whether the subject matter is escapist or grounded in hard realities."

3) You write a lot about Hindi movies on your blog. How do you feel Hindi cinema has evolved over the years? (particularly from the 70s to today?)

This would require a full-fledged essay, but briefly: the line between "commercial/mainstream cinema" and "parallel/art cinema" is no longer as clear as before; the multiplex culture has made it possible for even big mainstream stars to do relatively small, experimental films. The best directors of today – people like Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee and Vishal Bhardwaj – have had a lot of exposure to international cinema and their approach to movie-making is comparable to that of the 1970s American directors (Scorsese, Spielberg, DePalma, etc) who were film students first and directors second.

Technology has improved, and in my opinion the best films made today are smoother, more visually pleasing than most of the films made in the past. When I say "visually pleasing" I'm not necessarily talking about surface gloss or computer-generated effects or music video-like "stylishness" – what I mean is that in the really good films today, one scene flows naturally into the next and you get a sense of the film as a unified organism. Whereas in the past it was common to see abrupt cuts that were purely functional and convenience-driven; there were jarring shifts in tone and films had a generally episodic quality.

4) Do you think Bollywood is really an overhyped phenomenon today or do you think it deserves all the attention it has been getting?

Isn't EVERYTHING overhyped today? No, seriously – with media congestion, furious competition among newspapers and 24-hour channels, added to the fact that we've always been a movie-mad country anyway, it's inevitable that Bollywood is in our face all the time. Movie stars routinely occupy centre-stage even in fields that are way outside their areas of expertise – at book launches, hosting TV shows, even writing Advice Guru columns in newspapers supplements. It's quite comical at times.

5) Are you a fan of documentaries? If yes, what is it about them that captures your interest? Could you tell us about some documentaries that you really loved?

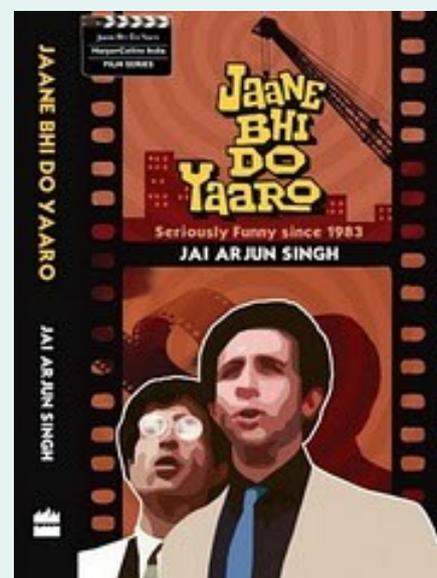
This is a big gap in my film-watching, unfortunately. I've seen very few documentaries, and the ones that I'm really familiar with – and think highly of – tend not to be “pure documentaries”. I'm talking about films like Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North and Orson Welles' F For Fake, films that continually blur the line between fictional and non-fictional representations, and in some cases force us to think about the nature of the difference between documentaries and feature films.

6) You have mentioned in your blog that you used to carry a small notepad around noting down movies and marking them with stars. Has your perception of movies changed over the years? How? It would also be interesting to know whether your reviewing method has changed too! :)

Well, the first thing to be said is that I'm very snobbish now about the star-rating system! That small-notepad thing you're talking about is probably from when I was 8-9 years old, when I would rate a film anywhere between 1 star and 16 stars, depending on what took my fancy. (The exclusive, rarefied 16-star rating was of course reserved for a single film, Sholay!) But from there the next step was writing small, unstructured notes about every film I saw. And when I started reading serious literature about films, I understood that allotting “stars” or “marks” was by far the least interesting thing you could do as a reviewer. It was far more important to engage carefully with a film, think about it and articulate your thoughts as well as you could.

7) Talking about your books, I understand that your first book, 'Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro' is part of a Harper Collins series on movies. What prompted you to choose this film over many other choices that you may have had?

I've answered this question so often it's coming out of my ears. See this blog [post](#) for details, but briefly: the film was one of the cultural milestones of my childhood. There are so many memories of watching it on Doordarshan on a black-and-white TV set, guffawing away at the comedy but also puzzled and disoriented by the very bleak ending. It's a very intriguing movie to write about because of the way it uses various modes of humour (satire, black comedy,



absurdity, slapstick) for social commentary; there's hardly anything else like it in Hindi cinema.

Also, so many important people from the world of theatre and parallel cinema were involved in the making of JBDY – I thought it would be interesting to do a book that was part-reportage, part-analysis.

8) How was the experience of researching for the book? I believe you met members of the cast and crew and spoke to them. Tell us about it!

I spent a lot of time with writer-director Kundan Shah in particular, and I also spoke to Ranjit Kapoor (the dialogue writer, described by Kundan as the film's architect), Naseeruddin Shah, Ravi Baswani, Satish Shah, Om Puri, Binod Pradhan, Sudhir Mishra and others. Getting Kundan to open up took a bit of time, and I was nervous because being based in Delhi, funding my own travel and working on other things simultaneously, I didn't have the luxury of making frequent trips to Mumbai. But once he was convinced about the project, it was smooth going.

One of the highlights was a long chat I had with Pawan Malhotra, who had gone to Mumbai in the early 80s to become an actor but found himself working as a production assistant on this film, doing all sorts of odd jobs such as going to a municipal building to collect a dead rat for a two-second shot in the film! Pawan was a joy to talk to, very warm and forthcoming. Ravi Baswani (whom I met a year before his death) was very candid too.

One thing I keenly felt the absence of: not being able to speak to Renu Saluja, the wonderful editor who passed away a few years ago; she was a key player in the Jaane bhi do Yaaro story.

9) And before I ask you about your second book, I must say lovely title - the popcorn essayists. Tell us how the book came about. What made you decide on coming up with a collection like this?

I think there's a lot of potential in India for intelligent yet accessible long-form film writing. The Tranquebar editor Deepthi Talwar and I were talking about this and we thought it would be interesting



to commission film-related pieces by established writers – novelists, short-story writers – who don't write professionally about cinema. That way we'd be assured of quality writing as well as a fresh perspective. And we'd let them choose their subjects.

For the title, full credit goes to the effortlessly creative Manjula Padmanabhan, who is one of the contributors to the book.

10) How was the experience of putting the anthology together? What was that one common feature that you felt emerged from the pieces?

It's been very satisfying. I consider myself fortunate because when you're putting an anthology of original writing together on a deadline, you usually have to make little compromises here and there. But in this case, nearly everything came together very

smoothly – there were only a couple of writers who backed out at the last minute – and every writer in the book is someone whose work I have a basic regard for.

Common feature? Good writing about cinema, with a personal touch – that's it. The tones and styles vary – for example, Namita Gokhale's piece about her days publishing a gossip magazine in the 1970s is chatty and free-flowing, while Anjum Hasan's piece about the films of the Kaurismaki brothers is more formally structured, in the style of the classical long-form journal essay. But they are both high-quality pieces of writing about how cinema intersected the author's life in some way.

11) Finally, what's the next book coming out of Jai's stable? Give us a teaser!

No plans for another book as of now. I'm not the sort of guy who's likely to get addicted to book-writing; perhaps because I've worked on the literary beat for a few years now, I'm quite blasé about the publishing process and I don't get an adrenaline rush from seeing my name on a book. Right now I'm happy with the longish reviews/columns I get to write for some publications, and with the space that I always have on my blog. Definitely need more practice in the field of long-form writing though (by which I mean essays that are 5000 words or more in length).

If I do another book at some point though, I think it will be a film-related book again.

RAPID FIRE WITH JAI

Two movies you would watch N times over

Cruel question, impossible to answer. (In fact, I recently wrote a column about the fact that it's much more practical to think in terms of watching favourite sequences repeatedly rather than whole movies – especially when there's always so much to keep up with, so much viewing and reading to do and so little time.) But let me give an honorary mention to the first hour of Hitchcock's Psycho. It's always a hypnotic experience for me.

Five Unforgettable characters (across languages/genres)

Can I skip this, please? Okay, I'll do it – but bear in mind that the list would be completely different if you asked me to do it again after a minute. And completely different again after another minute. And so on. It would be easier to do this if you asked for a list of 1000 unforgettable characters.

But just off the top of my head:

- The tragically disfigured girl, wandering her father's mansion alone with a white mask on her face, in Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face*
- Mr Scratch (a.k.a. The Devil) as played by Walter Huston in *The Devil and Daniel Webster*
- The revenge-seeking ichaadhaari naag in Jaani Dushman: *Ek Anokhi Kahaani*, which was Raj Kumar Kohli's remake of his own 1970s film *Nagin*. Kohli's blank-expressoned son Armaan Kohli played the Reena Roy role in the remake, which is one of the most eye-poppingly entertaining movies I've ever seen.
- Joan of Arc, as hauntingly played by the magnificent Maria Falconetti in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.
- And I'll end by being horribly clichéd and saying: Gabbar Singh in *Sholay*

One advantage that Indian cinema has over Hollywood

Difficult to say. Speaking potentially: the fact that, being an ancient and varied culture, we have access to a large treasure trove of stories, which can provide good material – and inspiration – for writers. But I don't know if that resource is being used enough.

Your thoughts on South Indian movies

Have hardly watched any, sadly, though I love S Srinivasa Rao's Pushpak.

A book on cinema that you have enjoyed

There are dozens, but here are some I have very special affection for: Robin Wood's Hitchcock's Films Revisited, V F Perkins' Film as Film, Danny Peary's Cult Movies series, Joy Gould Boyum's Double Exposure: Fiction Into Film, Pauline Kael's For Keeps, Peter Conrad's The Hitchcock Murders, Garson Kanin's Tracy and Hepburn, Kirk Douglas's The Ragman's Son, David Thomson's Have You Seen...? and Luis Bunuel's My Last Breath.

Multiplexes or ordinary theatres?

The last time I went to an "ordinary theatre" – though there was nothing particularly ordinary about it, apart from the fact that it had a single screen – was at the elegantly revamped Delite cinema in central Delhi. But generally speaking, it's been multiplexes for the last few years.

Your idea of a perfect movie review

Firstly, a really good review (and I'm ideally talking about a long review here, not a 300-word snippet) must stand up as a good piece of writing on its own terms – something that is both a pleasure to read and a mind-opener. The reviewer should be an intelligent, perceptive person who has some background knowledge of what he's writing about – so, for example, if he's reviewing a film, it would be great if he's familiar with the director's/crew's previous work so he can make observations about recurring themes, visual motifs, contrast the film with an earlier film, and so on.

The review should be personal in the sense that it provides the reader with a sense of how a particular individual has responded to a particular film. It should open a window to a perspective that might be completely different from your own but be so well-expressed that you have to nod your head and say, "I disagree with this guy, but I understand what he's saying and where he's coming from."

Epiphany

Fiction by Preeti Madhusudhan

Nick, a die-hard 'Star Wars' fan, has all that he had wanted of life and even more. One fine day, an epiphany occurs and life isn't the same again. Based on the premise that there is a force that binds the universe, all pervading and omnipresent, and that this force can be realised and utilised by a person to his advantage and/or for the community's benefit or can also be used for dark side or evil, Preeti Madhusudhan writes a story around the popular movie, Star Wars.

"Epiphany." "Epiphany." Joseph Campbell, the American philosopher, was stressing on the "pif" in epiphany, as though the vision that was divine and spectacular depended on its "pif"ness. "What?" "What are you saying?" This was Nick a.k.a Neelakandan's ego, or alter-ego, as he preferred to call it. They held a regular dialogue on almost everything that appealed to Nick, he and his ego. The old interview that was being telecast on the Contra Costa county educational channel's morning slot had caught Nick's eye as he was flipping through the channels, homework propped against his knees. There it was again. E-piphffff-any. His blue eyes became bigger, moister each time he enunciated that word. Nick watched expecting Campbell to do a Yoda-like "within everyone is capacity for bliss, follow it you must, believe in it you must." But all he said was in an annoyingly normal manner "Follow your bliss."

Anything associated with the Star Wars series was nectar to Nick, or the local beer or Napa Valley wine or what have you, you know what it means. It was not so much a hobby of trivia as it was an obsession. It was a religiously cultivated passion. It started when he was in the ninth grade, studying with his friend for the Physics test the next day. They did not need to study for the test; they could set question papers for third year students majoring in Physics. But sometimes they needed to downgrade in order to come back to ground zero and score here so they could transcend someday to university level when they will already be eligible to defend their own thesis papers. It appeared to be one long excruciatingly dull progression of years for a pair of brilliant students claustrophobic in confinement. They could stand each other only out of necessity, as everyone else viewed them as freaks.

As a super geek blessed with average looks, Nick needed an edge, an aura, a sheath to not set him apart but belong—to a group, any group. Unlike your normal super geek who prefers to blend with the furniture, dreaming of his favorite Amazonian algae or calculating the fuel needed for the next pay-load satellite that he was helping NASA with, Nick was social or atleast thought he was. Having decided when he was around 11 that he would do his graduate studies and doctorate in the U.S, he was looking for the object to obsess over, when he spotted a Star Wars poster hiding under a multitude of jeans and shirts that hung on hooks on the door of his friend's room.

It was obsession at first sight, or at least a decision to obsess at first sight. It was quirky, dark, evocative of power and it called out to him. He would later describe that as “the force” luring the “jedi” in him.

He loved it. He had been looking for something scientific (to sustain his interest), something cult-like (and hence always fashionable) and fun (people tire of statistical data on sports or movements on Mars Rover, after the first two minutes). Now, here he was at Berkeley, working on his doctorate. It has been eight years since he moved here. And the “force” was what got him through. His mentor, his Yoda, who also happened to be the Dean of his department, was a Star Wars fanatic; he even had a saber stashed away in his room buried beneath layers of papers, science journals, and dust, and days-old burger (or was it Panini?). He was most likely to take a bite to make sure. “Make not it a difference boy, days are for the empire not a Jedi, the force that flows through me does so through this Panini too,” he would say, miming Yoda.

“Force is ebbing away from that Panini, sir, since it looks like last week’s lunch,” Nick would correct, trying hard not to grimace or puke. And then, he would urgently add, seeing the expression on the dean’s face, “But this only proves that force, like matter, just reincarnates. What was once a beautiful Panini is now a ball of stink; in other words, the Panini still packs a strong forceful punch on the olfactory nerves.” And Nick would sigh with relief as the Dean laughed.

At first he was just the brilliant boy from India, who was obnoxiously right on everything, disturbingly punctual (he submitted homework a day before anyone else did) and the Dean’s pet. As much as Nick enjoyed being all this, he yearned for attention and got just that with the release of the prequels of the Star Wars series. He hosted screenings of the first three or technically the last three movies in his tiny apartment. The house was more like a temple to the movie’s memorabilia and trinkets that Nick had created. There was a 3D laser projection of Princess Leia in his bedroom, a life-size C3PO robot (patent pending) with the crisp British accent, which made his breakfast in his tiny kitchen and a personalized hover craft that ran on solar power (also awaiting patent) named Chewy after the rambunctious ape from Star Wars. When asked about the conspicuously absent Yoda, he replied “Looking at the master you are.” The movie was projected like a laser show, dinner included purple gray masses of squid (conveniently Star-Wars-like-goey food, also “a Sicilian delicacy” the guests were informed) and murky brown swamps of drinks that were surprisingly delicious. He was a hit. For a person who had neither the time nor the inclination toward women (not that he was gay and like Mr. Jerry Seinfeld would say “not that there was anything wrong with that”) shunning that as a frivolous pursuit, he now had the phone numbers of every girl in campus and invitations to almost any event that involved people in Berkeley.

He had arrived.

It had taken time, but there he was. He had craved and yearned for it even when he knew he did not have the time for it. Now he was popular and did not know what to do with it.

It was three in the morning and he was cleaning his apartment, C3PO close at hand, its electronic buzzing filling the place with reassuring warmth when he suddenly felt overcome with weariness. He was what he had endeavored to be, Mr. Know-all from Somerset Maugham’s story, the man everyone loved to hate. Now that he had made sure that he had surpassed loathing and edged it with a grudging admiration and inclusion,



he was drained. As he watched Campbell, he sensed it was futile. He felt years of obsession leave him like scrubbed dead cells off his skin.

“Epiphany,” Joseph Campbell’s voice rang clear in the room.

Well, he had had his, thought Nick. Shelving his paper that was due this week, he composed a mail to the firm that had been after his C3PO for months now. He handed in a letter expressing his desire to terminate his doctorate, to a dumb-struck Dean who for once had nothing to say. “The force” in that room was dead for practical purposes. Within the week he had sold the rights to his personal robot-valet and the solar-powered hover craft and made money enough to make the Sultan of Brunei seem a pauper. Within the end of that fortnight he made the covers of The Times, The People, milk cartons, ice-cream tubs, toothpaste covers and even condom wrappers. He drank coffee with Oprah, pretended to sip a cuppa with Jay Leno, had a book written on him that came inclusive of movie rights. He was as much a cult as Star wars. This now irked him. He had got more than he had strived for. He had got it and was now nauseated with it. Try as he might, there was no shrugging it off. He was sick of it.

“Epiphany,” he heard it again. He listened through the interview, ready to lick the screen like a dog would his bone or a teenager would, his rock-idol. The prequels were coming! He thought excitedly as he planned for the screening party of the initial trilogy.



PHOTOGRAPHS

Sandhya Ramachandran

Cut chop snip

A trim here

A spruce there

A dash of colour

Chemicals to rinse

Dark

And then bright, bright red lights

Surreal setting of real noir

To create and bare the reel.

Soaked

Dripping wet

Selectively darkened

Selectively brightened

Exposing it for the first time

Since its conception

Introducing it to light

Through darkness

Friends and strangers meet.



Poetry

Sheer Poetry

As images materialize

On a stark white canvas

As if some magical thought

Breathed into emptiness

A light frozen for eternity

Void slowly eaten up

Chewed by black lines

Gray forms

Coloured curves.

Choked

The void crumbles into itself

Filled

Saturated

With a zigzag of forms

Together symphonizing a whole

A composition they call an image

That which an eye saw

A heart leaped forth on seeing

A soul stirred for a moment

A brain triggered a response

A plastic shutter opened and closed

For a set time

Allowing just the bit of light

That the vision teased it to commit.



MERE PAAS CINE'MAA' HAI!

NON-FICTION BY PARTH PANDYA

India is a movie-crazy country. We celebrate films with sheer delight, dump them heartlessly, adore movie stars, praying for them and cursing them like our own. Well, that's India! Parth Pandya talks about what cinema means to this country, with particular emphasis on Hindi movies.

In the cacophonous din of the theater, a catatonic worn-out male in his forties sits with his eyes glued to a big screen, where a cataclysmic event is unfolding itself. Pure evil drips from the tongue of a villain, clearly in command of the situation. The good guy is in suspended animation – his arms stretched to the hilt with ropes. His lady love has just been asked to dance on, for once her legs stop, the hero's breath will too – as if they are Siamese twins, dependent upon each other for sustenance. The lady love projects a look of agony, breaks into a dance and to enunciate her undying devotion, sings dulcet tones in an impossibly perfect voice. The villain is not satisfied.



He now breaks a bottle on the ground. The shards scatter on the rocky terrain. How strong is your love, he seems to ask. The heroine answers by dancing over the glass. All hope is lost. The face of the catatonic man does not change, but his eyes reflect the hopelessness. Love is defeated – or is it? In streams the good guy in a barrage of gunfire. The henchmen start dropping one after another, and the good guys regain control again. The man breaks into a smile. The one constant in his life has not failed him. His heroes have won. Again.

Cinema is different to different people. Is it a home away from home, a fight against the system, the voice of the little man, a fantasy of the oppressed? Or is it just a flight of fancy, poetry in motion, art condensed in three hours, an expression of emotion? Cinema in general, and Indian cinema in particular, have made inroads into the modern cultural landscape. They say that a thousand Indias reside within the borders of this country. I'd argue that a thousand cinemas reside here too. You may love it, you may hate it, but it is darn difficult to be indifferent to it. From the pan-Indian appeal of mainstream Hindi cinema, to the niche markets of art-house movies, from the regional strongholds down south, to the creative energies from the east, there is an audience for each type of movie. It is not by accident that a minor enterprise in the pre-independence era has turned out to be the largest movie producing industry in the world. About a thousand movies are released each year in India, and they find a different vehicle for projection. From the moving theaters in villages to the single screen large theaters to the new boom of multiplexes, money and eyeballs are dedicated to movies. People share their love for movies, but each receives their joy

in their own personal way.

Hindi cinema is perhaps a good thing to discuss in this context. The impact of Hindi films on Indian society is a topic worth multiple doctorate theses. Hindi movies have served as a mirror for society, through socially relevant movies such as 'Do Beegha Zameen' or given voice to the angry young man of the seventies fighting the system in 'Zanzeer' and 'Deewar'. On occasion, life has mirrored art, as movies such as 'Rang De Basanti' and '3 Idiots' have led to an examination and discussion of issues because of their influence on the Indian populace. The question to ask is: why are we so hooked to movies as a nation? There is an almost emotional connection we have with our movies and our stars. The format is also to the liking of a country where nearly half the population is illiterate. The use of contemporary language and relatable situations makes us feel one with the characters and the stories. The make-believe nature of the movies is never questioned, and whether mindless or otherwise, it is considered entertainment.

What also sets us apart from films from Hollywood or other industries is the use of song and dances. This derives from the age-old Indian story-telling tradition where tales are weaved into music. Hindi film music has been blessed with some rich musical talent, right from the outset. If you thought that 14 songs in 'Hum Aapke Hain Kaun' were excessive, hark back to a movie released in 1932, Indrasabha, which had up to 70 songs! With greats like Mohammad Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar lending their voices to thousands of songs composed by great composers like Naushad and astute poets like Sahir Ludhianvi, independent India was blessed with a rich treasure trove of music to connect the generations. Look around you, and you'll find new parents turning to old music to spark the love of music in their kids and find a

way to connect back to their own childhood. Indians by nature are attuned to music, and more than classical and semi-classical music, it is the humming of the film song that will escape the lips of an Indian the quickest.

Movies are also an aspirational vehicle in India. Zoya Akhtar captured the sentiment very well in her movie 'Luck By Chance', where the true spotlight really was on the behind-the-scenes people who flock to Mumbai in hope of making it big. Everyone aspires, or is inspired, at some stage or the other by the allure and aura of film stars. Who hasn't imitated a heroine's dance moves, or visualized himself as Amitabh bashing the goons and mouthing great dialogues by Salim-Javed? In this world of Twitter and instant approachability, while some of the mystique is lost, you may do well to remember that Amitabh Bachchan once approached Dilip Kumar for an autograph as a wide-eyed kid.

Hindi cinema in particular has gone through some good phases and bad. While the fifties to seventies were littered with classics and great music, the eighties and the nineties pushed the bar down. The stories had become staid and the willingness to experiment was little. The new millennium has brought in innovation. While the odd 'Dabbang' proliferates, so does 'Taare Zameen Par'. For every 'Main Hoon Na', there is also an 'Udaan' being made. The film industry also has adopted and cashed in on the celebrity culture like never before. Today, there are cricketers and there are film stars and then there are the rest.

Ultimately though, when you are one among the many waiting for the silver screen to light up, it is hard to escape the sense of excitement that a well-lit screen in a dark room brings us. For a few hours, you can leave the world outside the doors and enjoy the task at hand. The world might have its worries, its tensions, its demands, but you know you can tell it to wait patiently. All you need to say is, 'Mere paas CineMaa hai'.



The Lion King—in a Different Light

Non-fiction by Vani Viswanathan

What does it mean to watch a different, beautiful take on your favourite movie? Vani Viswanathan had one such experience recently watching The Lion King's musical adaptation and tells you how it felt.

The Lion King is a special movie – I'm sure you'll all agree. When I watched the movie, I was seven or eight, and I remember watching it with my father in a cinema in Chennai, not quite understanding a lot of what was happening, but knowing that Mufasa dies, Simba runs away, Scar is a villain enlisting the help of bad wolves, a rhino (now I know it's a warthog) and another strange creature help Simba as he grows up. I remember listening to the songs and noting my favourites 'I just can't wait to be king' and 'Can you feel the love?' but when watching, 'the Circle of Life' was my top favourite. In the dozens of times I have watched the movie since, I still get goose bumps every time I see Mufasa with his fierce face breaking into a smile, little Simba sneezing and the beautiful scene when the mandrill hoists Simba up for all the world to see, and the skies opening to bless him.

Last May, I had the chance to watch The Lion King in a different light – something that elevated the status of the movie in my mind. I watched the musical version of the story, one that's been around for over 10 years and was a massive hit in Broadway.

Thanks to me, my friends and I were a few minutes late, and we had to wait outside our entrance gate, where I saw ladies in white with birds on their heads and hands, and two men joined together by a suit, and seconds later, one of them put on a rhino head. We could hear the inimitable African initial chants in the song 'The Circle of Life,' and the 'rhino' we were standing next to started moving about in rhythm to the chant. The animals were part of the ensemble that goes to Pride Rock to see the christening of Simba, and we were soon let in to stand by the aisles as the scene progressed. And there I saw deer prancing gracefully, elephants coming in, birds flying, as the wise mandrill made its way through the crowd to lift Simba up in the air, and all the animals cried in joy for the new prince.

What's beautiful about all this is that the cast is entirely human, but with beautiful props – lions are African men with a lion headdress that can spring forward when the lions clash in combat (Mufasa vs. Scar), deer are stuck on the person's head and both arms, and they prance forward gracefully to show a bunch of deer galloping, giraffe are men on stilts with a headdress that becomes the long neck and head of the giraffe. It was a magnificent ensemble, one that moved me to tears for the sheer beauty of it.





The cast couldn't have been better. Except for grown-up Nala, who I wish had been taller, the rest of the cast were perfect for their roles. Mufasa was a tall, built African man, one whom I felt like going up to later and congratulating for the brilliant performance of a king who is fierce, omnipresent, kind-hearted and above all else, a doting father. Scar and Zazu were perfect, and had perfect 'chemistry' chasing each other around. Little Simba was an absolute delight – his singing was impeccable and my heart swelled at his mischief, joy and the grief and confusion he faces once Mufasa dies. Grown-up Simba was a beefy, brawny, good-looking man, and had all the naughtiness and character that the future king shows. Timon and Pumba were thoroughly enjoyable, and the team did well to include some local flavour into the dialogue through references to Chinese dragons, the Merlion, 'ni how' ('How are you?') and 'si sie ni' ('Thank you').

As with proper theater, the cast sang their songs and said their dialogues – in brilliant, far-reaching voices, ridden with emotion that could be heard no matter where you sat. Extras – trees in the background, lionesses dancing as a troupe, insects in the background – all performed too, and at times, we were treated to singers standing at the aisles and giving us a close-up performance of the brilliant African chants too. Their beautiful harmonizing made me fall in love with their music! We also had the percussionists performing by the sides of the stage, and saw them picking up the strangest of instruments to provide the most beautiful of effects.

It was a two-and-a-half hour performance, and not for a minute through it all did anything look less grandiose or beautiful, or did the audience lose interest. The effort that went into making the sets, the make-up for each and every bird, tree and lion, was apparent in every scene. The whole performance was totally worth every dollar paid – and I made up my mind to watch it again some ten years later, to relive the magic that one of my favourite movies is.

FILMY FEEL

Maheswaran Sathiamoorthy

Ever wanted to enjoy the thrill of seeing a photograph you clicked like a frame from a movie? It's not an uphill task, really. It takes only a bit of photo processing to do it as Maheswaran Sathiamoorthy explains through a simple tutorial and some of his processed photographs. Read on.

Have you ever wondered why Hollywood movies look so different from the handheld videos you shot, even if you had used, say a DSLR? Some of the obvious differences include the use of really expensive cameras and a variety of tripods, stabilizers and other equipment to minimize shaking. But in this tutorial I will try to bring out some of the other differences, especially those you can control, and will also give a general workflow to convert a normal looking image into a cinematic one.

The first step would involve opening the image in an image editor such as Photoshop or Lightroom (I will use Photoshop in this example; Lightroom can be used for the most part, and if you don't have any of these, you could play with the editor you know). I would mostly recommend using a RAW image from any DSLR as it gives us complete control over the image. Also, certain types of images work well, like the one below which happens to be a nice landscape image. Portraits may not work well unless they have great bokeh.



Now open any movie (not in Photoshop), and pause it for a moment. One obvious thing to note is that movies are widescreen whereas the images coming out of the DSLR are not, so you should crop it to 16:9 or even wider say 20:9, but I recommend doing the cropping at the end of the processing.

Also, if you look carefully, the colors don't look spectacular. Yes, that's right, they look desaturated. So decrease the saturation a little bit. In order to do this, go to Hue/Saturation in the Adjustments panel and drag the saturation slider towards the left. If you go all the way, you can see that the image becomes black and white. Experiment with it and find out a sweet spot in between so that the image is now dull-colored. You can also increase the blacks a little bit by going to Levels and dragging the left slider below the histogram a little bit towards the right. You can see that the black regions become blacker and the image is less washed out. It's just to add more contrast to the image and this one is optional. Don't overdo it.



Now go back to more movie watching. This time try to see Pan's Labyrinth, or The Matrix or Amelie. If you don't have access to these movies, just search for them in Google Images. You can see that there is some kind of a tint, generally blue, green or orange (warmth). Not all the movies have this effect but in most cases the colors are a bit off. You will have to definitely play a lot for this one. Go to color balance and you could change the balance a little bit to get a blue, green or orange hue. For example, with Midtones selected, drag the first slider to say -30, the next one to say -10 and the last one (yellow -blue) to +20. You must be mostly done by now.

The final step is where the money is, so don't tell this to your friends. Add an extra layer at the top of the image and fill that layer with grey so that at this point you should have lost the image and must just be able to see the color you pasted. Now go to the layers panel and drag the opacity all the way down to around 10%. You must be able to see your image, but it will be washed out now. Not all movies have this effect, but if you do it, your image will be unmistakably cinematic.

This effect works quite well in images with people too. Finish the image by adding a bit of vignetting and add the black frames at the top. Note that for the landscape image, I have not added this extra layer and neither did I add the vignetting. You need to decide for yourself which effect to use for which image.

There are also a lot of other features – such as good lighting, the use of zoom lens to narrow the perspective and use of wide aperture lenses to get stunning bokehhs and so on which can add to the cinematic feel.



Music 'Behind' the Movies

Non-fiction by Srikanth Suresh Kumar

Srikanth Suresh Kumar unravels the music behind movies, sharing his personal thoughts and some of his favourite tracks. For once, have music ringing in your ears, with the help of words! Read on.

The 50 – 60 odd gathered at the Valhalla lounge in south Bombay were waiting in anticipation to know the next song on the setlist for the night. The crowd had been treated to an eclectic mix of original compositions and some famous Zappa, Beatles and Hendrix numbers by Blackstratblues, the band performing that night. The chatter had grown louder, and it was just then that Warren Mendonsa, the lead guitarist, gave us a hint of the next song. He didn't name the artist/title of the track though. He just mentioned that this was his current ringtone and started playing. The drums and the bass kicked in. Just 5 seconds into the song, and the crowd went crazy! I asked my friend, isn't this from the Pulp Fiction OST? He simply nodded in agreement, "*Misirlou* dude!"

I have always wondered how certain tunes simply remain in your head long after the movie has finished. A genius in compiling excellent soundtracks for movies is maverick filmmaker Quentin Tarantino. How can one forget the beautiful Shoshanna in a dazzling red dress, her mood full of vengeance, just craving to eliminate the entire Nazi top bass by setting her cinema house on fire?. The scene became memorable owing to the background score: David Bowie's Cat People with sarcastic lyrics like "putting out the fire with gasoline". Tarantino has managed such gems time and again: Bullwinkle when John Travolta is driving his car under influence of cocaine, Uma Thurman dancing to Girl, you'll be a woman soon, a Neil Diamond classic, George Baker's Little Green Bag in Reservoir Dogs, Twisted Nerve by Bernard Herrmann played when the nurse prepares the wrong injection for a comatose Uma Thurman in Kill Bill – Vol 1, and Nancy Sinatra's absolutely mild and melodious Bang Bang (My baby shot me down) at the start of the same movie, a song so serene that the audience would have no idea of the violence that lay ahead in the movie.



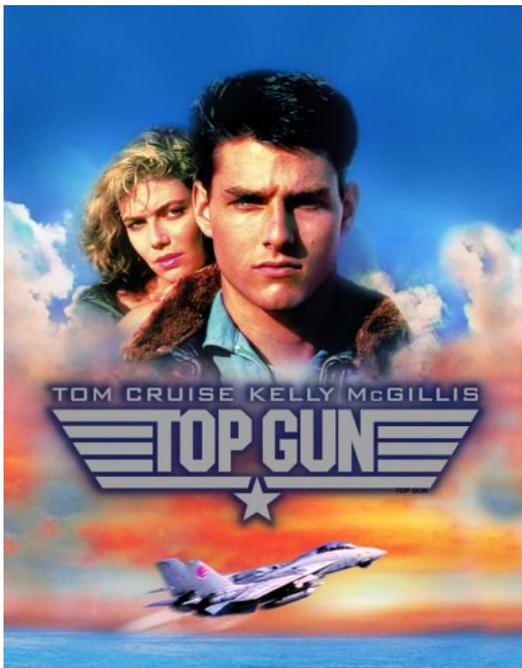
In many ways, I believe the journey of memorable background scores begins in 1961 when Bobby Darin composed the theme for Come September. I was fortunate enough to hear the Maharashtra Police brass band play this famous tune at a show a few days ago at Malabar Hill. Just goes to show how famous the melody is. Few years down Ennio Morricone composed the title tracks for Sergio Leone in the spaghetti western trilogy A Fistful of Dollars, For a Few Dollars More, and the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. Even to this day, over 40 years later, these tunes are remembered in so many ringtones and playlists. Morricone with his orchestra would have had little idea what a massive impact these compositions would have on music lovers across so many generations. Morricone has given us many more wonderful compositions, most notable being the soundtracks of the Sicilian Clan (1969) and the somewhat funny score of My Name is Nobody (1973).

The seventies began with Nino Rota creating magic for the movie of the century, The Godfather. Many cinema-loving souls have the Godfather theme somewhere in their music collection for sure. A true gem indeed considering the manner in which the music score so elegantly propels the story. His compositions enhanced the beauty of works of directors like Fellini and Francis Ford Copolla. Bill Conti was also special – with a memorable soundtrack for the Rocky series he made Sylvester Stallone a poster boy for the working class. Rocky climbing the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum became an iconic scene owing to the epic tracks like Going the Distance and Gonna Fly Now. And then, towards the end of the seventies Saturday Night Fever happened. John Travolta became every teenage girl’s dream. Disco music and bombastic Bee Gee beats ruled the Billboard music charts. At about the same time, John Williams wrote the score for Star Wars series, which went on to become a landmark in background music history. It was performed by a massive 87 piece London Symphony Orchestra in 1977.

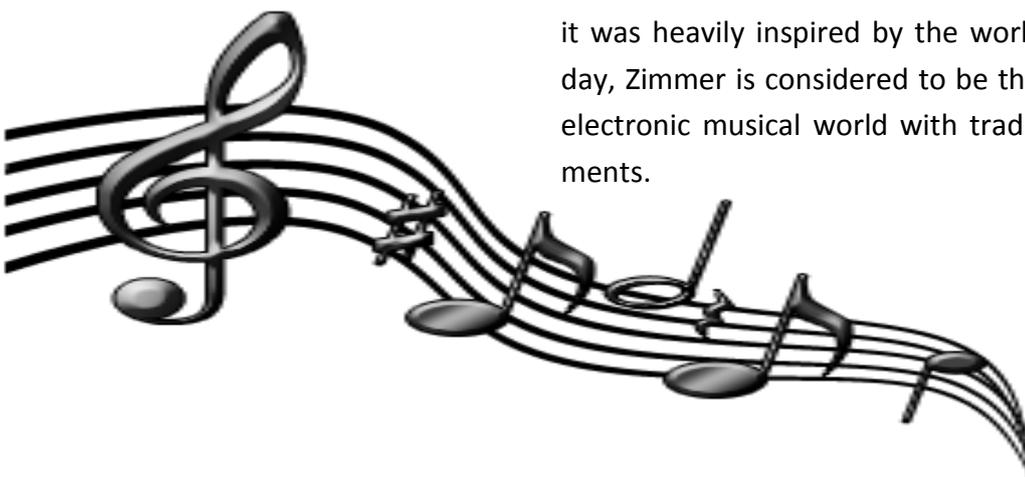


Meanwhile, Giorgio Moroder was giving rise to synth-based electronic sound in movie soundtracks. Musicland, the underground studio in Munich, co-founded by him, was already a popular recording destination for legendary rock bands like the Rolling Stones, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and Queen for its quadrophonic consoles. Musicland played a significant role in allowing him to experiment with a variety of instruments most notably the MOOG synthesizers to good effect. He was awarded the Academy award for Best Original Score for *Midnight Children* in '78. His album $E=MC^2$ was released in 1979 as the first electronic live to digital album. Moroder's best contribution though remains his score for Brian de Palma's *Scarface*. Tony's theme epitomized Tony Montana's (Al Pacino) rise and fall so beautifully that it was fitting that this cult movie began and ended with this track.

Harold Faltermeyer, a protégé of Moroder, was getting groomed to take over the mantle of techno pop from the former. First came the soundtrack for *Beverly Hills Cop*. The extremely famous Axel F soundtrack (not the Crazy frog version we know of) was a massive hit. Then came the movie that made Tom Cruise and Ray Ban aviators a household name. This movie had everything. Mean machines, young star cast, nice script, classic dialogues and numerous adrenalin gushing moments. Faltermeyer just added excellent music score to this list. Moroder meanwhile earned an Academy for Best Original Song for writing *Take My Breath Away* played during the famous love scene in *Top Gun*. The background score of Giuseppe Tornatore's 1989 Oscar winning movie *Cinema Paradiso* once again reminded one and all of Ennio Morricone's greatness as a composer. The heart warming tale of life, nostalgia and love for cinema was well supported by a very emotional score.



Many of us are familiar with images of an autistic Dustin Hoffman walking behind Tom Cruise through a tree-lined avenue in the 1989 saga *Rainman*. Hans Zimmer used synthesizers mixed with steel drums for this movie's track that proved to be a huge career turning point in his career. Hans Zimmer influenced the 90s as much as Harold F belonged to the 80s. In a way Harold's works in the 80s were a prelude for more refined and modern synth music of the 90s. His style of composing heavily synthesized scores and ballads was taken up by many including Hans Zimmer who, in turn redefined scoring albeit using the same techniques but using modern technologies and infusing them with world music wherever required. Zimmer went on to achieve immense success in *Lion King*. The powerful background score for Ridley Scott's epic *Gladiator* was another notable creation of Hans Zimmer. He claims it was heavily inspired by the works of Richard Wagner. Today, Zimmer is considered to be the father of integrating the electronic musical world with traditional orchestral arrangements.



Critically acclaimed director Christopher Nolan brought Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard together for *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Night* and *Inception*. They ended up creating melodic brilliance that so perfectly accompanies the images and sounds of a Christopher Nolan thriller. Contemporary background music by the likes of James Newton Howard (*I am a Legend*, *Blood Diamond*) Thomas Newman (*Scent of a Woman*, *Shawshank Redemption*, *American Beauty*) and Howard Shore (*The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy) has continued to add flair to the movie it is composed for.

Music has always accompanied movies. Even silent movies of yore had music playing in the background be it an organ or a whole symphony orchestra. Actors are invariably the stars of any movie. But many a time, it's the music BEHIND the movie that makes an actor's performance memorable.



With inputs from Girish Nair

Entwined Worlds

Poetry by Sayandev Paul

Take me on Your glowing wings,
to the lost cities, secrets untold-
To the nadir of despair, to the brink of happiness-
where the blossom of youth unfolds.

Let my emotions flow with Yours,
my mind Your maid, my soul Your slave.
As I would laugh and cry, dream and sigh
on the cradle of Your waves.

I dream to be with You forever
but a dream finishes-
As I see with my own eyes, the broken fragments
of places You fantasize .

Even death You showed in grace
the gallows as Kashmir-
As the damask rose withers on my eyes
to the chasms of reality, dreams *au revoir!*

I close my eyes and You come near,
A world of grace, where freedom rules the skies -
And cravings to be with You
glisten in my moist, tired eyes.



How I wonder where you are?

Non-fiction by Sandhya Ramachandran

Tele-films are something that need to be revived, feels Sandhya Ramachandran, especially at a time when saas-bahu serials and a dozen reality shows are dominating the small screen. Read on to find out about her earliest memories of tele-films, the immense potential they hold and much more.

There was a time when I was around 10 or 12 when television meant Doordarshan and there were these wonderful things called tele-films that existed.

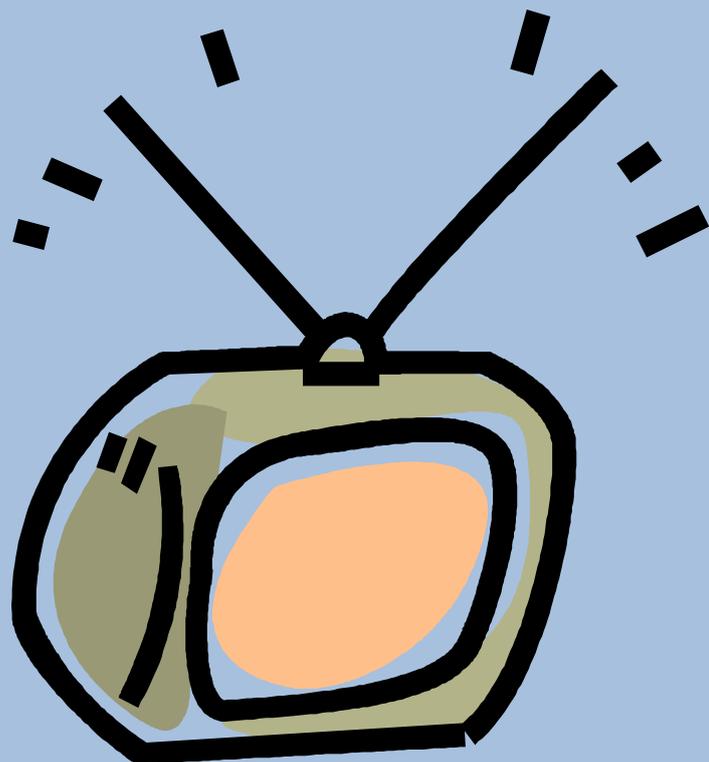
Just an hour, and a story was told, and it was never boring. There were no item numbers that had to be plugged in to keep us glued. Masalas stuck to their kitchen boxes and formulae to our chemistry books. The films took us on a content-rich journey.

A tele-film (or TV film, television movie, TV movie, television film, telemovie, made-for-television film, movie of the week (MOTW or MOW), feature-length drama, single drama, and original movie, as Wikipedia informs) is a film made for our idiot box, unlike its cousins, which are made solely for distribution across “theatres worldwide” as they famously claim.

I vividly remember a particular slot called “Director’s Cut” on the long dead DD-2/ DD Metro, on week-ends, between 9 pm and 10 pm, when tele-films made by famous directors were shown. I don’t recollect missing a single show. In fact I even remember that a couple of them had songs! And those songs are stuck in my head till date owing to my very impressionable age at that time!

In a world that swears by its bread pakode (thanks to Band Baaja Baaraat) instead of fighting for a sadhya meal, one feels that it is time to enter into the biggest reality show of them all—the search for tele-films! One search in YouTube or Vimeo shows that short films are being made dime a dozen. When movie-making has been made cheap and film studies are not taboo anymore even in the most conservative of houses, the future of the film industry lies in tapping these content-driven well-executed passionate pieces of work.

Television soaps are forever chasing saas-es and bahu-s (who are mostly chasing one another) or falling for the endless reality shows. Channel X declares Singer A as the “Best Singer in the whole nation”, and Channel Y, the very next day has Singer B being declared something similar. It is quite a pity that we have nothing else but these contradictory shows to occupy our prime time.



What television must do is rope in directors – veterans, student filmmakers and enthusiasts – to develop myriad content to fill the best four hours of our evening with tele features and short films. Our own demi-gods should also understand that no matter which IMAX their films screen at, it is the little corner telly that still captivates the largest audience in a developing nation like India. And every actor worth his emotional palette would only want to be a part of this franchise.

A whole market could be made out of tele-films. Producers needn't wake up in nightmares after having invested in crores for a 'masala entertainer'. Tele-films will mostly turn out a lot cheaper to make (excluding a few exceptional themes that inherently demand their extra paisa). The reach and advertising market is such that the returns would be splendid too. And at the end of the day, the financial guru could surely come up with wackier ways in drawing out more money from this enterprise!

Short films, which, unlike their feature friends, are less than 40 minutes long and could even be just a few seconds long, could also be arrayed into a programme that will last 30 minutes (inclusive of those never-ending ads). One cannot think of a more refreshing type of programming in this regard! Stories, perspectives, slices-of-life delivered in seconds and minutes lending a new angle to your own thoughts.

The best part is these tele-features and shorts could be fictional, documentary or experimental in nature. Imagine the kind of themes they could explore, the nature of the exposure they would provide to our general public! Socially relevant campaigns could have better reach, new talented actors could be launched, unexplored places could be seen from your favourite armchair.

The far-reaching consequences of this idea are many. It is a pity that television channels have not thought of the marriage of the smaller and larger screen content-wise!

Buy your home-made popcorn, or go for the hot bajjis, if you please, and settle down cosily in front of the TV to see a film unfold. What better delight can a cineaste expect? If affording this becomes a big issue for television channels (which I highly doubt, well knowing how much money they freely spend in creating 'family serials' from the perspectives of maternal cousin twice-removed, grandfather's brother's wife's daughter-in-law and the like), they could slot this as a weekly affair. But oh, what an affair to remember and relish it would be!

