

Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 05
Genre Theory

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Good morning friends. Today, we are going to talk about genre theory. So, what are genres? I know most of you would say the genres are categories; that is a simple way of putting it as the definition. Now, let us assume that you go to the DVD shop and you find DVD shelf, and located in a particular way. You often find that there is a massive range of choice, under each section; you have the war DVD section; you have the horror; you have the romantic comedy; science fiction; crime; what not? So, endless genres, endless categories, and what do these shelves explain to us, as scholars or as a student of film studies. Now, genres are created by demand. So, let us get it; let us get this thing very clear; the genres are created by demand. So, if there is a particular section in a DVD shop for horror or science section; that means, it is a demand. If there is a section for romantic films or romances or crime; that means, there is a demand for these films. For example, understand that how today, we have the graphic novel and films, based on these type of literature, which are very popular.

So, demand creates availability or supply so, genre. To get back to what we are doing

here; so, what is a genre? Genre is a French term for a kind or generally, it is denoted, it denotes a literary class, a literary type. So, the major classical genres are, let us say epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy and satire, along with of course, novel and short story. So, genres have a distinct set of rules. There is a code of shed tools, subject matter and a distinct set of rules conventions and styles, but within the rules, there must also a sense of freedom; this is important that within the rules, a film maker should be able to experiment or if we are talking about literary genre, then writer should be able to experience a sense of freedom to experiment.

Genre seek to understand film as a specific form of commodity and at more refined level, attempts to disentangle different instances on that commodity. Now, let us talk about genres in literature. So, horror genre is a very popular genre. We usually, credit American writer, the great American writer Edgar Allan Poe, who in 1820, wrote his popular Tale of Taddar. After this, Wilkie Collins published the moonstone in 1868, which can be regarded as the first two detective novels in English. In 1902, Owen Wister published the Virginians a Western, and in 1926, Yugo Gunback brought out amazing stories, the earliest examples of science fictions.

So, what are we talking about? We are talking about the development, the genres is the development and growth of various genres. Now, it is important to understand that in genres, a number of approaches have developed that address Hollywood's genres structures, all of which are underpinned by different assumption about the purpose of genre repeatism. Richard dyer, a film scholar in 1973, argued that genres are pleasurable, because they offer escapist fantasies into fictional world that remove the boredom of reality. He sees these worlds as utopian that offer an abundant of energy excitement of spontaneity. Genres are constructed for a known or guaranteed audience. They use repeated story lines and the stock characters, but again, let me tell you; this does not mean that a film maker is not free to experiment, because within a genre also, there can be various things happening, various changes and various experiments happening. People also associate reuse of sets, props and actors, which particular genres.

Now, let me focus your attention to what John Fisk, genre expert says. So, I read this citation from John Fisk. A representation of a car chase only, makes sense in relation to all the others we have seen. After all, we are unlikely to have experienced one in reality, and if we did, we would according to this model; makes sense of it by turning it into another text, which we would also understand inter textually in terms of what we have

seen so often on our screens. There is then, a cultural knowledge of the concept car chase that any one text is a prospectus for, and that it used by the viewer to decode it, and by the producer to encode it. So, what we are trying to talk about or explain here, is that genres are tried and tested, and provide an element of security for film makers as well as those who invest in cinema. For audience, it is always a pleasure to watch things that have been tried and tested. Also, budget and financial returns are easier to predict, where genres are concerned.

They allow for clear product and audience differentiation and market segmentation. The film businesses use a genre as a mood of labeling and positioning their products. Now, according to Dyer and Roop in concepts and film theory and he is another great name, associated with genres theory. So, for him, genres are a specific networks of formulas which deliver a certified product to a waiting customer. So, audience become a waiting and a willing sort of customer for particular genres. Genre ensure the production of meaning by regulating the viewer's relation to the images and narratives, constructed for them, and genre construct the proper spectators for the consumption, for their own consumption.

Rick Altman is another name, which is associated to genre theory. He has written a seminal article, a semantic syntactic approach to film genre, published in 1984, and he asked what is a genre. What is a film genre? He goes on to explain the genre analysis is both inclusive and exclusive. It is inclusive, because it includes a long list of films that can be specifically categorized. Genres are exclusive as certain films within a genre, are canonized and are discussed as exemplary text. He also felt that genre theory has ignored the fact that generic theory and definition, was first introduced by the film industry. One has to consider how genres develop new date and rise and fall in popularity. Altman too approaches to understand genres are semantic and syntactic; semantic is the building block of a genre, including costume, acting, and cinematography, iconography, etc.

Syntax concerns the over line structure and the deeper meaning. In film genre, which is a book by recalcitrant, published in 1999, Altman offers ten tendencies of literary genres, and genres have a distinct border and can be firmly identified according to Altman. Genre theories for Altman, seek to describe the already existing genres, the internal functioning of genre text is consider entirely, observable and objectively, analyzable text with similar characteristics systematically, generate similar meanings, similar usage and similar readings; produces, readers and critics; all share the same interest in genre.

Altman also adds that reader's expectation and audience reaction have received the independent, have received little independent attention.

He also raises the question of genre history and pose it if genre be or genre can be objectively or scientifically, studied. For Altman, genres are never neutral categories and genre theories generally, do not recognize the institutional character of their own generic practice. From there, we move on to another category that is sub genre. So, sub genres are categories within an overarching genre. These are defined by specific characteristics; for example, we use the term slasher films for horror films. Then we also use post apocalyptic for science fiction films. Film Nova is sub genre of gangster cinema and sports films of drama. For example, let us consider our own Chuck de India, which is a sports drama.

It is the sub genre of a broader category called drama. There is a conflict; there is a hero; there is a hero's journey and it is the story of a hero's fall and rise. So, therefore, there is plenty of drama in Chuck de India, that we have a movie. We have courtroom dramas again; they are sub genre or sub categories of drama. Think of a movie such as A Few Good Men or Twelve Angry Men and these are courtroom dramas. There are three major thrust of theoretical development here. First, the taxonomic view of genre, which attempts to map the boundaries between generic classes. Secondly, the view of genre as an economical strategy for organizing film production schedules and third, the view genre as the function of cognition as a contact between producers and consumers, which run this film intelligible on some level.

A generic analysis of cinema offers not only the possibility of describing the systematic nature of Hollywood as an industry in which, differentiation between individual films occurs only, within an overarching logic of product standardization, but we have to understand that genres are no longer just Hollywood categories. In Hindi cinema or in particularly, even or in regional cinema, we do depend a lot on generic category. Think of our own recently released Anish, which is a sub category of a slasher and horror flake; broad category is horror, but you can also call it, label it as, sorry, as slasher cinema and of course, we have family films and musicals such as [FL] that cater to another particular type of audience, the so called family audience. So, genres are very well known categories in Indian cinema and of course, in Hollywood cinema.

We have to understand that these categories prompt consideration of different genres in

terms of their collective significance or deeper meanings. In other words, exactly the same value judgment that sees Hollywood cinema as first and foremost, a cinema genre, which serves to marginalize the standard practices of Hollywood in the hands of (refer time: 13:42) critics, provided genre critics, with the critical vocabulary, appropriate to the art of those practices. Moreover, it is founded on the problematic assumption to do not only with the genre it implies but, and also that genre is somehow, already out there as an essentially structure of text, but also to do with the activity of doing genre studies. While the former assumption rest on the historical promise that genre exist in itself and that it inheritably, has essential qualities that can be revealed through proper analysis; the later assumptions tend to mass the productive roll of critics and scholars in the definition of generic categories, and the institutional frame work within which, such practices take place. Nevertheless, this find these problems, problems which Altman argued have had the effect of narrowing genre theory ever since. Aristotle model of genre analysis has by turn, proved remarkably, influential and durable and this is what Altman feels that the great Greek thinker and philosopher Aristotle, who has given us the concept of drama and its definition.

So, his model of genre analysis has been particularly, influential and durable. So, in the same way, that Aristotle identifies the epic, comedy, tragedy and so forth, as essential genres of poetry in so far as they are seen to exist in themselves as pure categories of literature. We also have Allen Williams, who has identified the principle film genres as the narrative film, experimental Avanga film and the documentary for Williams; these category at the conceptual or the other conceptual equivalent of and thus, share the same sense of prominence as those described by Aristotle. On this account, the labels we ordinarily use to distinguish between films of various kinds such as thriller, horror, science fiction, comedy, romance and so on actually, referred to the sub genres of the narrative film.

Genres evoke the look of the characters, physical environment, and significant objects. Genres identifies identity, preserves a film's integrity. They allow for some expectations; certain things can happens and certain things cant. So, for example, let us assume that in a traditionally romantic and family musical drama, such as such as [FL], we cannot certainly expect a noise environment. So, a particular genre expects certain kinds of environment, certain kinds of characters, and there are certain things, which just cannot happen, just cannot occur in a particular genre. Now, let us talk about iconography and

genres. Iconography is a key term in the analysis of genre. Iconographic approach to genre analysis involves the identification, description and interpretation of cinematic objects, events, figures, in order to see how one type of film was marked off from another on the ways of differences and visual conventions.

The western was distinguished by setting both specific and general, the west, the frontier deserts, mountains, monumentally, saloons, etc. and costume for example, the west skirt, gun belts, boots, specificities of props and even actors such as you know, dependence on reliance on actors like Gary Cooper or John Wayne and later on Clint Eastwood; however, if an attention to iconography worked well for the western and gangster film in Hollywood, it proves difficult to translate such a visually specific method, a logic to other kinds of films. For instance, it is difficult to isolate distinct iconography systems for crime films or thrillers, and most action films with any clarity. Guns and weapons, we have common to each and unlike the western and gangster film, there is not necessarily, any historically specific criteria to regulate aspects of setting and costume. Tone is another key element in understanding genres. So, tone contributes towards establishing the genre. The way a film is lit or setup; how a camera's position can be an indicator of genre; for example, let us see the use of harmonica in the western film; even guitar in the western film, where we cannot expect the leading man to break into a very modern dance; let us say disco or a break dance, or hip hop.

The horror movie includes Prince of View Shots, Silences, etc. to evoke the feelings of fear. For example, let us consider again, a film like *Anish 10*. So, now, where does all these discussion lead to? Are we trying to establish that genres are very predictable and unimaginative, depending on the same sense and the same idea, over and again, just to (refer time: 19:41) into some kind of identification with genre and comfortable, the feeling of comfort; so, is that a question. Now, it is a very difficult question to answer if genres are getting too predictable. Genres try to avoid predictability if they are audiences, who will decline and in the streets, will lose money; genres have to adopt to reflect changes in social and cultural attitudes, values and expectations. So, there has to be some change. Stale genres can be reviewed by bringing in less predictable and more imaginative elements. Think of the *Gay Teen*, introduced in a western like *Broke Back Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee. What is the role of audience in genres? So, genres depend on a set of audience. So, this is something that we have to recognize. The film industry generally, targets a niche group of audiences. These are based on gender,

sexuality, race, nationality, etc. Certain films are labeled women's films; for example, romantic, comedies, musicals, love stories.

On the other hand, genres such as war and gangsters are more like men's films. Romantic films such as a Yash Chopra's [FL] or the Hollywood movie, starring John Julia Robert's *My Best Friend's Wedding*, is supposed to be traditionally, light, a light hearted romance with a feel good factor. Think of Karan Johar's films like [FL], you know, there has to be a feel good factor here; *Student of the Year*. So, the audience expect these light hearted romantic films to have certain elements, which make them feel good. So, audience expects it to be in a certain way. So, likewise titles, posters, stars images; all these factors contribute toward a particular genre and the audiences expectation of film industry, and producers rely on genres and generic conventions to secure finances.

So, money is at the center of genres. Genres make movie easier to market, because there is a core niche audience, waiting to consume the film. Again, there is a scholar, Steve Neale, who in questions of genre, suggest that there are two things that are critical, central to the understanding of the genre; very similitude would that is being true to life and the question of social and cultural function, the genres perform. The Neale goes on to explain how some genres hold very similitude as highly important, whereas some genres can break away from strict adherence. Neale states that something, sometime breaking away from generic traditions, may bring unexpected pleasures for the audiences. Neale suggests that the future of genre studies must consider the prehistory, that is the development from other forms of media; all films, regardless of quality of those films and factors, other than content for such as advertising; what rules does advertising or a studio policy or a star images, they play in making of genres.

There is also a concept of genre blending; for example, the classic Hollywood film *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. So, it is an example of films of a film that lacks genre definition and slip between various categories. It is a film that cross genres and again, we have an example like *Star Wars*, which is essentially, a science fiction, but it also has elements of a western. *Casablanca*, coming back to it, can be called a war film; it set during the war period; it is a romance with songs; it is an adventure thriller film and it is also, a buddy film. So, it is in all things into all viewers. Again, a very contemporary film like the *Matrix*; it can be labeled as a science fiction; it is also a Hong Kong action flake; it can be seen as a neo nova and scholars have also tried to do a philosophical reading of the *Matrix* film. So, it is the pop philosophical

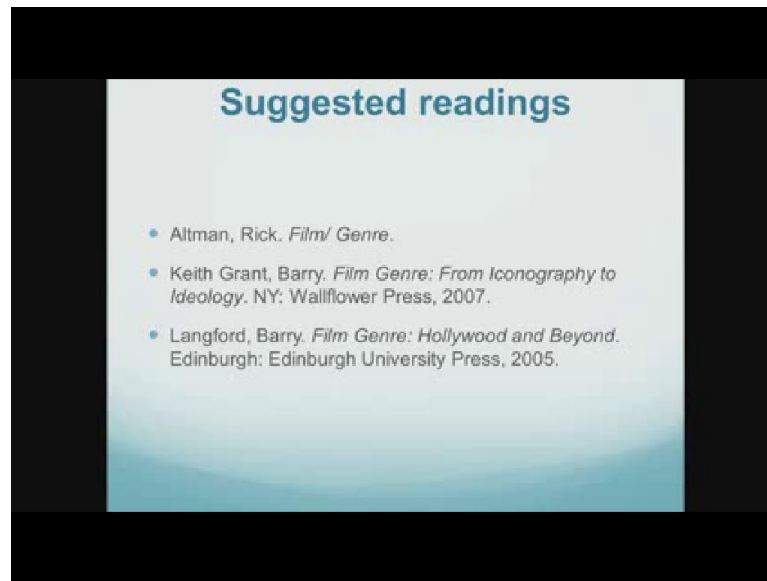
movie also. So, it is a blend of several genres.

Tarantino's Jackie Brown, again Naughts at Hong Kong action film from the 70s and 80s and also, films of the 70s. It is the sub genres with urban blacks at protagonist. It is also a highest film and it is also, Anord at Gulf Gang Flicks, such and also, the 60s western. Now, let us consider something like genre, bending a movie that completely, throws out to all the rules out of the window. I would like talk about a Hollywood film called The Hours. So, it is, The Hours is a novel by Michael Cunningham. It is a perfect example of how difficult it could be to adapt a work of literally fiction. Here, Cunningham reimagines Virginia Woolf novel, Misses Dalloway. Cunningham integrates these stories of three women in three different location, and time periods, all link through woolve's book. Now, Misses Dalloway is the story of a single day in the life of an upper class English women, as she plans a party for her husband, Richard.

All her life or memories to her acceptance of death, is in encapsulated, in a single day and Michael Cunningham wrote a present day version of Misses Dalloway in his bias. Taking the title of his book, bias from Virginia Woolf, original working title and it extends the course of a single day to three women; Woolf herself, who faces a crisis with her husband Richard over a day, during the writing of Misses Dalloway. This is set in 1923. Then housewife, named Laura Brown in 1951, Los Angeles, whose life is altered forever one day as she reads Misses Dalloway, and the book editor, named Clarissa Worms in 2001, a contemporary version of the Misses Dalloway character. So, the (refer time: 26:59) is a literary novel, based on another literary novel and glorifies reading and the power of literature. It is a genre bending work; the screen play was written by David Hair, who himself is an acclaimed dramatist.

Now, genre theory creates heated debates as it continues to puzzle and excite scholars and audiences alike. Regardless of the theoretical debates and developments in the debates, audiences enjoy genre films as they provide familiarity. Apart from various genres, we should also consider the various distinctions that are made, where cinema is concerned; for example, we have feature films and short films; we also have categories such as documentaries, where non fictional motion pictures, recreates some aspects of reality and then, we also have biographical cinema and then also, we can have great documentaries, based on some biographies or well known events and festivals or an exposure involving interviews with people. So, this is what I have to tell you about genres and here, I would like to draw your attention to the bibliography.

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So, Rick Altman's film genre Keith Grant, there is a film genre from iconography to ideology and Barry Langford's film genre Hollywood and Beyond.

So, thank you very much and we will meet for our next class.