

Revival of Gandhi in Twenty First Century: A Study of *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*

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Mahatma Gandhi became renowned as Mahatma for his fearless, unselfish and peaceful philosophies. He lived his life in pursuit of the truth. Gandhi is known for his ideas which sparked global campaigns for civil rights and independence. Gandhi's statue was unveiled at UN headquarters on December 15, 2022. The presence of this memorial will serve as a constant reminder of the principles Gandhi supported and to which we must remain committed. Satya Jit Ray believed Indian cinema needed an icon, uniquely Indian, who would give us distinct identity. In course of time Gandhi came to be seen as inspiration who became a popular subject of cinema in India and abroad. The ideas of Gandhi and Gandhism are popular subjects of visual narratives.

During pre-independence period, before arrival of Gandhi, there existed two types of anti-British leaders. One being the extremists, who were influenced by the ideas of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, the second were revolutionaries who wanted to achieve independence through violence. Gandhi came to India in 1915 and in 1917; he started a movement named the Champaran Satyagraha. Through this Gandhi entirely changed the technique of freedom movement. And the Britishers were clueless on how to deal with Gandhi and his movement. Because earlier the Britishers were following Lord Macaulay's policies. The Britishers were not facing any big challenge but Gandhian Satyagraha and non-violence came as a threat for them and the Britishers started facing the problem on how to deal with Satyagraha? Primarily Gandhi's Satyagraha was not in favour of constitutional bargaining and neither had it supported the violence. This is the importance of Gandhi in freedom struggle (Pandey).

Visual narratives have a cascading impact on the masses who are exposed to its ideas. Gandhi as a subject has been represented by the art of film making since long back. Gandhi is perhaps the only personality in India, next to the fictional romantic hero Devdas, created by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay on whom several films were produced in different languages.

The same notion of Satyagraha is seen in various movies. The first movies on Gandhi was released in the year 1963 titled *Nine Hours to Rama*. But this movie focused more on Nathu Ram Godse's last nine hours before assassinating Gandhi than life, ideas and movements of Gandhi. The year 1982 saw first of its kind movie by Richard Attenborough's titled *Gandhi*, this Hollywood movie was a big hit and was dubbed in various languages including Hindi. This year marked a changed in Hindi cinema as well and various Indian directors and producers started making movies on Gandhi as leading character or Gandhi as a character of significant value. Some prominent movies are *Sardar* (1993) directed by Ketan Mehta, Shyam Benegal's *The Making of the Mahatma* in 1996, Jamil Dehlavi's *Jinnah* in the year 1998, Tirllok Malik directed *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* in 2000, *Netaji: Subhash Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* in 2004 directed by Shyam Benegal. These movies were made within the criteria of documentary films which had limited or no commercial features. On the other hand, Indian cinema had movies like *Hey Ram* released in 2000, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002), *Mane Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005), *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), *Gandhi, My Father* (2007), *Papilio Buddha* (2014) are some of the movies which got commercial treatments and appealed the masses in different ways (Pandey 84).

Dwyer (2011) in his article titled 'The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema' wrote the 1950s are often referred to as the Nehruvian period in Hindi cinema, but the films are mostly quiet about Gandhi and are concerned instead with issues of modernity and the new nation'. Then the Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru in a speech told the Rajya Sabha in December 1963 that 'the production of a film

on the life of Gandhi was too difficult a proposition a Government department to take up. The Government was not fit to do this and they had not got competent people to do it (Dwyer).

The two films on Gandhi that were able to create the biggest popular impact and won many honours is Richard Attenborough's 1982 release *Gandhi*, primarily made in English and also released in a Hindi dubbed version in India, and the Raj Kumar Hirani directed Hindi film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* released in 2006. Both the films are set in a completely different backdrop with the entire plot portraying many facets of the life and teachings of Gandhi. While Attenborough's *Gandhi* won eight Academy awards, *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* won four National film awards in India. What is more, unlike any of the other films that have mentioned, both these films witnessed a great box-office collection, making them commerciality a hit. Hence an academic discourse is viable proposition to assess the depiction of the reconstruction of Gandhian philosophy in visual narratives.

The film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (hereafter LRMB) does not look to the past for inheritance, heritage or tragedy. The film isn't even aiming for a utopian future. The film focuses on a specific aspect of a historical figure in the context of a specific time and place. Surprisingly, the film's new narrative was well received by the general public. When a film or any popular art form can instil the vibe and experience of the present, it receives widespread acclaim from the general public.

In 2004, Raj Kumar Hirani made his directorial debut with Sanjay Dutt as Munna Bhai, real name, Murali Prasad Sharma, a new film hero who is a gangster. Munna Bhai MMBS, the first movie of the Munna Bhai series, portrayed the main protagonist Munna who cure the patients with love and compassion after an unsuccessful attempt to do an MBBS. Munna appealed to a wide range of audiences as well as critiques. The success of the first movie encouraged the producers and director to launch a sequel.

LRMB is a fairy tale about a lovable local gangster who is motivated by love and aspires to be a history professor and a Gandhian thinker. Unlike other films based on Gandhi and his thoughts, LRMB employs a novel narrative technique to promote Gandhism through a patriotic humorous genre. The film perfectly reconstitutes history in contemporary age of globalization, industrialization, rapid urbanization and ignorance of downtrodden, helpless people. The movie's evolving ideas make it flawlessly compatible with present popular cultural space. Without any jingoism of a patriotic picture or a documentary style storytelling method the movie gave a cinematic tribute to Gandhi (Ghosh and Babu 5225). *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* marked a revival of Gandhian thought and was successful in unifying them to the Indian way of thought that has been hybridized because of global influence. *Bande Mein Tha Dam* (The guy had guts), *Bandemataram* was the opening line of a song saluting the greatness of Gandhi. LRMB abstained from dealing with a complicated view of Gandhi but showed the protagonist Munna, who is fatherless and has no authority discovering Gandhi to fulfil this role in his life. Munna garners limited knowledge about Gandhi and his philosophy after his brief visit to the public library. Munna started practising Gandhism which he avows as Gandhigiri and as a result the film follows the transformation in his character and life style in totality. Protagonist Munna adapts to Gandhian strategies of satyagraha and non-violence to find ethical resolution of his conflict with property mafia in his city. The film shows the apparition of Gandhi that is visible only to Munna, advising him in a very brief manner. The advices are then used by Munna to guide common citizens to deal with their daily life issues. Munna's Gandhigiri is certainly more influential than that of any academic research on Gandhi. Gandhigiri revived the public consciousness about Gandhi, especially among the youths, who started to follow Gandhigiri as a non political tool to fight corruption and misappropriation of power. Gandhigiri has installed a moral way of behaving among the contemporary generation (Das 5). The movie's idea of Gandhigiri gained popularity almost immediately after its debut in 2006, and this paper attempts to comprehend and summarizes Gandhigiri in the current situation.

The Gandhi of the LRMB is a populist Gandhi. Munna's Gandhi may not be a distant and historical figure, but rather someone with whom the modern masses can identify (Ghosh and Babu 5225). The film does not discuss Gandhi's socio-economic concepts or the underlying values of Gandhian ideology. It makes no mention of Gandhi's fundamental and unique views, such as the village economy, critique of contemporary technology, the concept of 'Ram Rajya,' or any other part of Gandhian socio-economic principles that are extensively studied and propagated by Gandhi himself, in his various speeches and works. On the contrary the movies portray few statements which has nothing to do with Gandhian philosophy and can be termed as anti-Gandhian statements.

Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006), in particular, re-established the morals Mahatma Gandhi practiced and prescribed during his lifetime. The sequel of *Munnabhai MBBS*, which ironically had nothing in common with the original except for Sanjay Dutt and Arshad Warshi and Mumbai's tapori language, set the trend for "gandhigiri", a new style of Gandhian protests across the country. According to newspaper reports, the film caused an increase in the sale of books on Gandhi, and several schools organized group screenings (Paranjape).

The film '*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*' is a satirical comedy-drama about a softhearted goon of suburban Mumbai. The critic explained the movie as "simple, racy, witty and uproariously funny (Ghosh and Babu). In the movie, the goon Munna Bhai (acted by Sanjay Dutt) falls in love with a Radio Jockey Janhavi (acted by Vidya Balan). By kidnapping some Professors and forcing them to answer for a 'phone in Quiz contest' on Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti. Munna Bhai somehow manages to meet his love interest. During the meeting with Janhavi, Munna Bhai introduces himself as a Professor and a follower of Gandhism.

Impressed by his deliberations on Gandhi, Janhavi invites him to deliver a lecture on Gandhi to her home where a commune of a few aged people live like an old age home along with her grandfather. They named their house 'Second Innings Home'. To impress Janhavi, Munna Bhai

starts reading about Gandhi for preparing the lecture. He continues his study for three days without a sleep and as a consequence starts hallucinating.

In the process he starts visualising Gandhi corporeally and he even starts conversation with this imaginative figure of Gandhi. His imaginative Gandhi gets ready to help him to impress Janhavi but says that Munna will have to follow his path in return. Munna promises Gandhi that he will follow him. Gandhi helps Munna and in return asks him to tell her the truth – the real identity of Munna. Munna denies following his advice as he feels the fear of losing her.

In the meantime a builder Lucky Singh, for whom Munna Bhai works, tries to take hold of 'Second Innings Home' illegally for giving it as a gift to Mr. Kkhuranna. He promised the house to Mr. Kkhuranna as he arranged a marriage of his daughter to the son of Mr. Kkhuranna. When Lucky Singh comes to know that Munna loves the girl from 'Second Innings Home', he convinces Munna to go for a trip to Goa along with Janhavi and all the members of 'Second Innings Home'. In the meantime he encroaches the house by using Circuit (acted by Arshad Warsi) - the friend of Munna. After coming back from Goa, Munna asks Lucky Singh to return 'Second Innings Home' to Janhavi and the elders. But Lucky Singh threatened Munna that if he tries to take it away from him then he will expose Munna's real identity to Janhavi. Munna was trapped by his lies. Then Munna remembers Gandhi. His imaginative Gandhi shows him the path of the Gandhism. He follows Gandhian method or 'Gandhigiri' to fight against Lucky Singh. He even tells Janhavi about his real identity (Ray 119).

So finally by following Gandhi's path, Munna succeeded to get back the 'Second Innings Home' for Janhavi and the elders. He also gets back his love and eventually, Lucky Singh becomes a changed man.

The 'Gandhigiri' of the movie got popularity immediately after the release of the movie in 2006. So the paper is an effort to understand revival of Gandhi in the present context. So, basically, the Gandhi of LRMB is a Gandhi with a populist appeal. In an article, titled 'Lage Raho Munna

Bhai: Unravelling Brand Gandhigiri', it was rightly said that "Munna's Gandhi perhaps is not someone distant and historical but someone with whom the contemporary masses can relate" (Ghosh and Babu). The movie does not talk about the deeper values of Gandhian thought or the socio-economic ideas of Gandhi. It does not even mention about the basic and unique ideas of Gandhism like idea of the village economy, criticism of modern technology, the idea of 'Ram Rajya' or any other aspects of Gandhian socio-economic ideas elaborately discussed by Gandhi himself in his different writings and lectures. On the contrary, there are certain statements in the movie that can be considered as 'anti-Gandhian'.

In a dramatic scene of the movie, the protagonist Munna Bhai says, "He thought he will make the country great – exactly like 'imported one' . . . but we destroyed everything." This statement is exactly the opposite of Gandhi's vision about India. Gandhi elaborately explained his vision of India in his book 'Hind Swaraj'. He was critical about 'importing' values, ideas, or western science from the West or any other foreign countries. He criticised the popular vision of his time of material development of the country on the basis of the standard of western developed nations or countries like Japan. He wrote:

We want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want. (Gandhi 25)

In another scene of the movie – when Munna Bhai interacts with the elders of 'Second Innings Home', he says that Gandhi liberated the country from the foreigners, but then the people of the country has turned strangers to him. This is a political statement of the movie and interestingly this statement comes before the hallucination of Munna Bhai or before he read about Gandhi. The statement mildly directs to the socio-economic thoughts of Gandhi, but which is a "complete no-no for today's consumer economy driven India (Ghosh and Babu 5227).

Reacting on Munna Bhai's statement, one member of the 'Second Innings Home' comments that the situation of the country is not so bad and India is developing. Munna gets more aggressive by this comment and says,

To hell with the development!. . . There are pipes- but not water, there are bulbs-but no electricity . . . there are more potholes than cars on the road . . . you can't walk by the footpath because there are shops over there . . . there are trains, but the name is on waiting list...if ticket gets confirmed then the train gets cancelled.

This statement is nothing to do with the Gandhian idea or his vision. This statement is just a popular narrative of the middleclass people about the underdevelopment of the country. These narratives on the daily woes of an ordinary person became popular again during the time of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement in 2011. In that movement, the corruption of the country was projected to be the sole cause of the underdevelopment of the country. Another aspect of the movie is the language of the protagonist. The movie does not use some 'refined and mainstream' language to talk about Gandhi. Gandhi himself was a person who tried to understand the vibe of the common masses by living their life.

But in the movie LRMB, Gandhism was taught by Munna who speaks 'Tapori' - a language often connected to the Mumbai slum dwellers (5226). The resounding success of the film forced many other filmmakers from the world of fantasy to commence making movies on the Mahatma. Film critics took note of this and called Gandhi the flavour of the season in Bollywood after the release of the LRM and other films on the father of the Indian nation (Kaushik 17-18).

Guess who's the flavour of the season in Bollywood right now? No, it's not the scrumptious King Khan, nor is it AB's beautiful Baby. The man who's got several film makers firmly in his thrall is none other than a thin, dhoticlad, a freedom fighter who was shot dead more than 50 years ago. Yes, it's Mahatma Gandhi we're talking about, a national icon who is often regarded as someone who's been largely forgotten by the young today. . . . Suddenly, a clutch of films is being made on Gandhi (Ramachandran).

In the movie the security guard of Lucky Singh smacks Munna Bhai in a hilarious scene from the LRMB, he provides another cheek for slapping, as Gandhi said, "If someone slaps you on one side of your face, turn the other to him." When the guard hits him again, Munna smacks him in the face and claims Gandhi say nothing what to do if someone slaps second time. Munna tells Circuit to aim a gun at the astrologer in another scene to demonstrate that astrology is nothing more than a superstition. As a result, in the film, the protagonist Munna Bhai employs a limited set of Gandhian concepts as a strategy for dealing with or confronting specific problems. The Gandhi of LRMB was accurately defined as a pragmatic art of living' (Visvanathan). From faraway myth, he is now part of modern folklore, re-engineered in a new capacity as agony aunt and management consultant (Visvanathan) According to the Frankfurt School's definition of mass media is a cultural industry, LRMB is unmistakably a product of mass culture. However, the fact that 'Gandhigiri' has a cult following after the film demonstrates its 'pop culture' (or popular culture) appeal. 'Pop culture' is not limited to the dimension of mass production and consumption of entertainment products. Popular culture is, in this sense, a more 'personal' process. Popular culture can spread not only through the media, but also through other types of human connection. The concept of 'Gandhigiri' was coined by the film, although its appeal was not limited to the film alone. Many people became aware of 'Gandhigiri' or engaged in 'Gandhigiri-inspired movements' without ever seeing the film. In 2006, for example, 2,000 farmers in India's Vidarbha region protested with flowers to persuade a bank to disperse loans under the influence of Gandhigiri (Ahmed). Medical students from the King George Medical College undertook a 'ShramDaan,' or voluntary activity, in the same year, inspired by the film, and planted many tree saplings (SRIJAN). People in Lucknow protested a liquor trader by presenting him with flowers, just like Munna Bhai (Pradhan). The demonstrators in an American Customs and Immigration Services office were influenced by 'Gandhigiri' in 2007 (News 18) The film LRMB successfully branded Gandhian ideology as 'Gandhigiri,' and as a result, the brand 'Gandhigiri' gained rapid

recognition in popular culture. The brand Gandhigiri is the message in post-liberalization India (Ghosh and Babu 5227).

The LRMB's depiction of 'Gandhigiri' offered a desired remedy to the frustrations produced by the Indian version of modernism. Rather than delving deeper into Gandhi's theory, the film reengineered several Gandhian notions to utilize as a strategy to combat some of the issues that ordinary people confront in their daily lives. The movie portrayed Gandhi as an iconic critic and problem solver for the public's dissatisfaction with modernism. Gandhi, not Gandhism or Gandhian philosophy, became the message through 'Gandhigiri'. The film demonstrates that Gandhi's context is still relevant and powerful enough to inspire both optimism and contempt.

In fact Barack Obama, former US President perceives Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration and used to keep Gandhiji's portrait in his office as a champion of peace. According to him, he has always looked to Mahatma as an inspiration and that is so because he remark In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he exemplifies the sort of transformation that can be brought about when ordinary people set out and come together to do something extraordinary. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader who was under house arrest for several years, was greatly inspired by Gandhiji. She learnt the importance of fearlessness in order to be able to translate the doctrine of peace and reconciliation into practice (Acharya 10-11).

This research paper is about revival of Gandhi by the film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*. In this paper an attempt has been made to focus on Gandhism, Bollywood movies, content of the film and certain aspects of contemporary society and culture. Many ideas of Gandhi have become more relevant in present century. The movie *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* re-engineered certain ideas of Gandhi without going to the deeper meaning of Gandhian philosophy. This movie has transformed Gandhism in a new practical approach Gandhigiri. This movie has revived Gandhi and his principles again. *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, in particular, re-established the morals Gandhi practiced and prescribed during his

lifetime. Hence this paper strives to examine different dimensions of Gandhigiri and indicates that ideas of Gandhi and his persona are still relevant in twenty first century. Thus we can say that the movie LRMB has revived Gandhi again in present scenario.

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