Architecture and film
Investigating Mumbai through Films
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ABSTRACT:

In Mumbai, two different cities exist. The sprawling conurbation of nearly 14 million residents is India's commercial hub, accounting for around a quarter of its industrial output. It is the home of India's major banks and Bollywood, India's film and television industry. (Richardson) In this paper we will try to understand the city by observational survey of few films based on Mumbai city and its life style. As we told Mumbai had two expressions or even more, each film used one of it to narrate the character and the upbringing of the case in the metropolis. The paper will try to explain life of the residents of Mumbai and life of other people who came to Mumbai to fulfil their dreams of a life time. The paper will even try to explain the problems of city by analysing movies. The report will primarily concentrate on mass poverty and the sprawls that inspired many film makers. The paper will explain how spaces provoke different kind of activities in the city and how they change the life of the people and...
encourage different organizations to assist them.

Research purpose

To investigate the spaces in Mumbai and explain the effects of them through films based on Mumbai

To understand how Mumbai is portrayed in movies

To understand whether they can be used as a model to understand the lifestyle of Mumbai

Architecture and film

Architecture is immobile, but architectural experience is more about movement (Ali, 2000). Film captures movement and change in time and contrary to the other arts, it is able to project movement onto a two-dimensional screen collapsing space and time inside a frame.

This is different than photographs and drafts, which capture the architecture by freezing a moment in time. With a photograph one takes ample time to look at it and read the message within, while in film, images translate into a spatial experience through the interplay of camera movements, dollying, tracking, and zooming. At the same time, the film is based on a plot, or story, which suggests a beginning (of a process) and an ending (a resolution). Contrary to usual belief, this is not a linear process, because film can be disoriented with regard to time and place. (Ali, 2000)

Thus, film can keenly explain the architecture and lifestyle of any city.

Cities in Indian movies

The Indian Neo Wave, commonly known in India as Art Film or Parallel Cinema emerged as an alternative to the mainstream Indian cinema, is a precise movement in Indian cinema, acknowledged for its serious content, realism and naturalism. The campaign was produced as an alternative school of thought with a specific contrast to the mainstream commercialization of films, more often than not based upon Bollywood (Mumbai Film Industry). The innovators of the movement had a piercing eye on the social-political mood of the contemporary times (Piyali Chakraborty). This helped portraying the urban centers as they were.

The space and time were more prominent than the plot and story. The camera never runs behind lead character instead captures the space and time. This movement started in the 1960’s in India and continued till 1980’s. This trend in cinema helped audience to understand a city and its implication. The cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi were frequently showcased in different genres of movies.

Mumbai in films

Mumbai is a city that is always bursting with action. Its citizens are a mixture of people from various backgrounds, and each of them has their own unique tale to share. Many films in Bollywood have tried to mirror specific aspects of the multi-faceted life in Mumbai and here is a post on some realities of Mumbai as highlighted in various movies. (MumbaiMag, 2013)

The City of Dreams: Mumbai is a city of aspirations. People from all over the nation come here with the promise of...
turning their aspirations into reality. Various films have been built around this subject. In Wake up Sid, Ayesha Banerjee (Konkana Sen Sharma) moves from Kolkata to Mumbai in order to fulfill her dream of becoming a writer. Movies like Main Madhuri Dixit Banna Chahti Hoon, which recounts the story of Chutki, a small town-girl who arrives in Mumbai with the hopes of getting an actress, and Guru, continue to tell the tales of people who migrate to Mumbai from small townships with the hope that the relocation to this great city will direct them to a better standard of livelihood. And so, there are tales of inequality and violence that come forth from the impoverished sections of Mumbai as seen in films like Salaam Bombay, Traffic Signal, and the Oscar-winning film, Slumdog Millionaire. These films which come under this neo realism had tried to showcase the unwanted children and the spaces they live in. (MumbaiMag, 2013)

Mumbai in Salaam Bombay (1988)

This movie stands as a realistic approach in portrayal of the life of street kids and the spaces they were forced to live in. The resilience of street children is directed really well by Mira Nair. The spaces in the movie were real and the story is routine for street kids living there. The colonial architecture can be seen in the movie, which is at their final stage. The streets of Kamathipura were filled with two storied and three storeyed buildings with single room dwelling units used up by prostitutes. They exist as a community guided by a madam who deals with the customers. This place deals with the huge trafficking of young girls from different places of India. The house they live is just a room with a cot and the walls are decorated with photos of Laxmi (goddess of wealth) along with some posters of Bollywood.

Source: (Nair, 1988)
Krishna (street kid) works as a chaiwala while his street friends works as rat pickers, caterers in weddings and illegal activities like selling drugs and sometimes situations force them to steal a parsi old guy. This Parsi house is unique with old tiles and Kashmiri frames. They lead a very simple life as they believe in zorastarism.

The Baba (villain) lives in a station terrace of grant road. The house is climbing through a spiral wooden staircase. He will be living with a prostitute and her daughter who lives in a small room. The door of the room had a flush view and has a narrow corridor outside which has a railing projecting outward. The walls were spited with pan masala which looks like blood spots on the rampart. It reveals us the vertical slums of Kamathipura. The children in the movie sleep on roadside spaces in which walls are painted with god's image of different religions. They sleep on the floor and one them sleeps in a scooter car. These kids act more grown up than their age. They play cards in this spot which is hemmed in by trees, drums and junk. They watch movies sitting in front seat singing and enjoying the film. This theatre reveals mass viewing the cinema as a biggest recreation of their life. There is a character called Chillum who is eldest of all street kids becomes a drug addict and drug seller. He smokes drug in a typical Muslim graveyard of outer Bombay. Chillum and Krishna are good friends; they roam all around the city and sell drugs to foreigner in front of the Gateway of India. Chillum gets sick due to deficiency of drugs (brown) and these kids have to work in butcher house pealing the skin of chicken where the place in very unhygienic for kids filled with feathers and body parts of this wimp. As they can’t help Chillum he dies on the road. He remained on station platforms and roadside throughout his lifetime and when he died these street children will hold him along their shoulders along the streets on which he survived. All the people paid their respects by coming out of their homes. This reveals the strong sense of community in them. Krishna and Manju (daughter of a prostitute) will get arrested on Grant Road Bridge as they were walking with their friends after working on a wedding at late night. They were taken to Dongri remand school and Asha Sadan (orphanage). The school showcases the unwanted children in the urban center and tells about the ridiculous reasons they were picked up for. The remand school is filled with children who works inside as cooks, sweepers, cleaners, washer men etc..., And the life inside is as similar to what they did outside. Thus they tend to escape and Krishna succeeds in his endeavour. He climbs up high walls about which are fenced with iron grids. Little Manju stays in the orphanage and won’t be allowed to get backward to her prostitute mom. Krishna runs all the way back to kamathipuri crossing Bombay roads filled with vehicles. He finds nothing in a hole of the wall where he was keeping his money. This demonstrates the safety of their belongings is just fate. In the end he even kills baba and runs away to nowhere in Mumbai. At the end he becomes a grownup and takes over his destiny. This was the life of most of the street children in Bombay. They don’t have any place to live and no one to look afterwards.

They were exposed to most of the illegal and dangerous circumstances in the...
city. This movie revealed that most of the spaces in Bombay were filled with unwanted children and how helpless is the place. After this movie many foundations and trusts have set up to help this kind of small fries and they are not enough even for today.

Mumbai in Slumdog millionaire:

The film Slumdog Millionaire depicts a really minor piece of the total Indian culture. And that character is far from the most significant part. This film showcases the city from the year 1992 to 2006 and the changes it has undergone along with its name, from Bombay to Mumbai. We can experience the contested Urbanism of Dharavi in this film.

The film begins with a 18-year-old Jamal Malik (Dev. Patel) reaching the final question of the quiz, amazing his suave patronizing host, Prem (Anil Kapoor), and the nation. This boy amazingly answers till 1million and the furious, duplicitous Prem thinks he's a cheat and hand him over to the cops, who beat him up, waterboard him and knock him out with electric shocks.

In the movie, the hero lives in the slums of Dharavi with his brother, under very pathetic conditions. The sanitation conditions in that place make it unhabitable. The demise of their mother due to communal riots in 1992 makes their life more miserable. This scene reveals how unsafe the situations are in a slum. Their poverty leads them to become beggars under an organized begging community. They are taken to outskirts from Mumbai. They will get out from them and travel in trains and reach Agra. They get back to Bombay, only to find it being renamed as Mumbai. The city changes its shape due to high density. High raised buildings start eating away Dharavi slum in Juhu. They find their friend in Pyle Street, which is a gambling hub and a red light area. This street is a major spot for prostitution and human trafficking.

Source: (Boyle, 2009)
Salim and Lathika joins a mafia don Javed. Jamal works as a chai wala in call centers where the office is crowded with employees. The people from Mumbai are very much into TV shows and cinema. The show “who wants to be a millionaire” has more importance in the film.

These varieties of new opportunities are rare and winning it is a dream of every Indian. Salim manages the construction business of Javed. The high raised structures come about this slum and makes conditions of Dharavi more unhygienic. A major drinking water pipe line of Mumbai city runs beside the slum where children play and utilize them as pots. The sanitation is very poor in Dharavi; the toilets they have are placed on the banks of a pond near by which don’t have any pipelines. The settlement is highly dense with narrow streets in between. The homes are one storeyed or two with asbestos roofs staggered with red tiles and plastic bags on top. The gap between houses is zero and the sunlight they experience is really low. The lanes are floored with stones and tiles with insufficient drainage. The lanes are filled with solid waste because absence of this system. The masses from different professions and states live here and form a multilingual society.

Source: (Boyle, 2009)
Salaam Bombay vs. Slumdog Millionaire

In both flicks the story is about the unwanted. They both showcase different places of Mumbai in different timelines. The story of salaam Bombay takes place in 1988 in the streets of kamathipura while slumdog millionaire happens in years 1992 to 2006. In Salaam Bombay the chai wale cannot earn five hundred rupees while Slumdog earns 20 million rupees in just 2hrs show. The city of Salaam Bombay was at the end of the colonial era, while city in Slumdog is in the modern era. Trains are the lifeline of Mumbai city, this thing is portrayed in both flicks.

The socio-cultural and socioeconomic conditions in these movies can’t be similar, but theme of everything can be seen. The human trafficking is still happening in the city only change is the scale. The variety in building pattern is distinctly mentioned in the form of time. Salaam Bombay is not merely a depressing downward spiral of a street-kid’s life; it is a lot more than that. It is a dark portrait of the big city’s worst kept secrets- the slums, the red-light areas and the hopeless lives of their nameless, faceless residents. Slumdog Millionaire was one riveting story where human endurance and fate colluded together to conjure a triumph of a life! It got us through the dreary corridors of poverty, crime, physical abuse and sibling rivalry but it didn’t end in darkness. Instead, it offered light at the end of the tunnel. Here a determined individual aided by fate, finally lived up to his dreams against all odds!(Mandar, 2010)

Conclusion

Even though I am in perfect correspondence with critics and viewers finding out various glitches in the narrative and characterizations of Slumdog, there is one thing I don’t see eye to eye with them. A significant percentage of Indian intelligentsia was aghast that Slumdog’s stark portrayal of Mumbai’s slums, stations, sewers and sickos presented India in poor illumination. They felt films like Slumdog and Salaam Bombay focused only on the negatives plaguing India, without bothering
to demonstrate its progress as an emerging economic powerhouse. It is not real India- they proclaimed! But is it so?

India- or for that matter any country is too diverse to be portrayed in totality in any one film or a documentary but that doesn’t mean that the poverty and misery portrayed in these films is unreal! The grand mansions, glitzy saris and glamorous marriage-functions portrayed as Indian culture in TV serials and Bollywood movies; for me, that is unreal! Sure I squirmed and felt wretched and ashamed many times while watching Slumdog and Salaam Bombay. Because these pictures made me realize that still there are so many people in my country, who are living in subhuman conditions and not enough is being done for that! Salaam Bombay had resulted in the establishment of ‘Salaam Baalak Trust’ to care for the city’s street-children. I had hoped that Slumdog will do better even in that respect, but instead what we are witnessing is a sickening, mad rush by impoverished parents to sell off slum-kid actors to the highest bidders! Truth is always more potent than fantasy- the real slum-world is much darker than these two films ever portrayed.(Mandar, 2010) Slumdog encouraged many architects and planners to discuss about contested urbanism of Dharavi. As this became a pride event, the Indian government and Mumbai authorities started speeding up the renovation plans of this place.

As this spaces provoked film makers to make films which created opportunities to architects and planners in planning their space and designing their life style. Thus movies can be taken as casestudies to promote our design strategies and concepts. The concept of contested urbanism of Dharavi became a high talk between architects and planners after these movies.

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