Proposing a Theoretical Frame to Study Film Education in India

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Abstract

The teaching of film in Indian academia follows a number of methods and approaches which ranges from considering film as an art object to a medium of entertainment; from a social and political practice to a narrative form. Besides these theoretical approaches, a majority of film courses in India also emphasize making of film as their primary objective. Educational institutions offer a range of courses, varying from comprehensive degree or diploma programs to elective courses within the CBCS system. Additionally, there are research programs available, leading to M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees. A comprehensive mapping of these approaches has become necessary in light of the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes multidisciplinary education as a guiding principle for higher learning. With this context, the present paper proposes a framework of study to provide a systematic understanding of the teaching approaches employed by universities and film schools, outlining the challenges and potential of film education in India.

Keywords: Film education, media studies, mass communication, film studies, media and communication, NEP 2020, film pedagogy

Introduction

The studies of cinema started in India initially as a topic for social enquiry (in university research projects since the 1950s) and later as a skill to be learned as a part of popular communication. The Film Enquiry Committee (1951) appointed by the Government of India recommended promoting research and education on cinema in the universities and establishing film training institutes.[1] The institutional film education in India traced two different paths in the beginning: One, a culture of film appreciation and film making, based on the art-appreciation model and the curricular structure of the film institutes abroad, developed in the film schools (signified through the establishment of the Film Institute of India, Pune in 1960). Also, some university departments gradually started including film (mostly the 'art' films or adaptations) in their curricula in line with the film appreciation model. The second approach came through the mass communication departments, where film /cinema was primarily considered a mass medium. The spread of television from the 1970s brought a change in this scenario, as theories and practices of television were clubbed with film education. In 1993, the first university department of Film Studies in India was established in Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Though as a discipline, Film Studies was already there in the West with its defined protocols of learning, authoritative books, standardized methodology, and institutional sites, it was fairly new in India. Since then, many film departments are opened in Indian institutes with various names. The arrival of digital technology and the spread of audiovisual media accelerated this change. A variety of courses and programmes are introduced over the

last two decades: film studies, film making, film and television studies, media studies, media science, visual communications, film marketing, and many others. These courses focus on diverse aspects of cinema and adopt different approaches to impart knowledge and skills to the students. In addition to the taught programmes, academic research has also experienced a surge in film-related topics, with a broader interdisciplinary appeal. The increasingly multidisciplinary nature of higher education also facilitated such developments. Yet, there is a lack in understating protocols of film education and research, which is often reflected in the confusing naming of the departments/specializations/projects. The scenario demands a comprehensive understanding of what is being taught and researched on cinema, the pedagogy, and approaches to standardize and streamline film education in line with the new policies adopted by the Government of India.

Research Gap

In spite of an abundance of film courses, there is no research conducted on the history, approach, and pedagogy of film education in India. Not even a comprehensive database exists to know what kind of programmes and courses on film are offered by various institutes and what the learners learn. That lack limits the possibility of using cinema as a part of the new pedagogy. There are studies on using film in teaching social sciences, even in medical and engineering courses, in India and other countries. A few surveys are done by organisations like FICCI and the Film Chamber of Commerce to gauge the status of the awareness about cinema, where film education forms a part. However, apart from providing a set of data and examples, these can hardly address the problem as a whole. In contrast to the dearth of documentation and absence of any guideline about film education in India, the recent decades witnessed a mushrooming of film courses across the country. Institutes and universities (public and private) run various progarmmes on filmmaking and film studies, often with 'confusing' names. It is not that the problem is not acknowledged. There were a few attempts by UGC and institutes in terms of Refreshers Courses and FDPs, where the faculty members are given insights about teaching cinema in the classroom. Jadavpur University organized a conference on Teaching Film Studies in India in 2012, which discussed some of these issues. The discussions were published in a journal as well.[2] Yet, apart from these intermittent initiatives, there is no dedicated attempt to look deeper into the status of film education in India. The present article proposes a framework and methodology to produce a document that may create a database and chart the different approaches and methods currently adopted to teach cinema in India.

Objectives

The proposed study may have the a few general and specific objectives. First, let us talk about the general objective. It may begin with charting the history of film education in India. It may happen in understanding the changes in approach towards the study of cinema. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a visible change in the approaches that are being used to teach cinema. The first objective of the study may be to assess the limits and effects of those changes. The second objective may be framed to produce a database for the film courses conducted/offered by the institutes. As a sampling technique, it may be proposed that only NIRF-ranked universities/colleges/institutes and the select film schools will be taken primarily. There may be another objective to add with these. It might be frames to assess the pedagogy and curricula to identify the status of the film courses (whether knowledge- based or skill-

based) and the desired outcome that they yield. It would complement the enquiry that the first objective initiates.

Additionally, the study may also include a few ancillary objectives as well. These would be used to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practice of the academic community in teaching/making film /cinema as a part of the curricula, to identify challenges and promises of film education as a part of multidisciplinary higher education in light of the National Education Policy 2020. This is particularly important in this regard, as film education plays a crucial role in the context of the National Education Policy 2020, recognizing the significance of arts and creativity in holistic development. Film education goes beyond mere entertainment, offering a comprehensive understanding of cinema as an art form, cultural expression, and a medium of communication. By integrating film education into the curriculum, students are exposed to diverse narratives, visual literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to analyze and interpret the world around them. It fosters creativity, empathy, and cultural awareness, encouraging students to engage with different perspectives, historical contexts, and social issues. Moreover, film education equips students with practical skills related to filmmaking, storytelling, and media literacy, preparing them for careers in the creative industries. This context somehow necessitates the planning of comprehensive curricula to explore the true essence of multidisciplinary education by integrating studies about film into it.

Research Questions

The study may raise the following research questions. These questions are framed to explore various aspects of film education in India, with a focus on the types of programs offered, desired outcomes, balance between skill-based and knowledge-based courses, naming conventions, research faculty, contemporary trends, and the potential for standardizing film curricula:

1. How many universities/institutes/colleges in India run a full-fledged programme on film/cinema? What are the desired outcomes of these courses?
2. How many programmes are there with film/cinema as a subsidiary/elective? How is the desired outcome planned for an elective course?
3. Are most of the film courses skill-based or knowledge-based? How do the institutions maintain a balance between them?
4. What are the varieties of the names of these courses? Do these varieties in naming film courses and programmes signify any confusion in understanding the differences between skill-based and knowledge-based learning? What type of training for the faculties is required in this regard?
5. How many universities/institutes have a dedicated research faculty to facilitate researches on film/cinema? How do the faculty research and Ph.D./MPhil projects aid film education in general?
6. Is it possible to make a generic categorization of the film courses (taught and research) in India? Is it possible to understand the contemporary trends in film pedagogy and the demands from the learners?
7. How do these findings can provide a direction in framing standardised film curricula in the future?

Proposed Methodology

The methods may be planned to focus on qualitative observations. Since the study will vhave a dynamic data sample, gathering varying answers for a better research outcome is desired. Tentatively, the following methods can be used to conduct the research. These methods are not exclusive, and the study understands them as mutually overlapping and inclusive:

1. Survey/Questionnaire: It would be used to collect primary data. Software like Google forms or MS Teams will be used. Questionnaires/survey sheets will be prepared with relevant questions – like the name of the course, focus, orientation, etc. – for circulation. A tentative list of the prospective respondents will be prepared for a better and timely outcome. The field investigators will help to identify the institutes and will be responsible for the authenticity of data. Another set of questionnaires will be prepared for the researchers/faculty members. That will also be circulated through the field investigators, research assistants, and project directors. The data will be closely observed and tabulated with required notes and remarks.

2. Case study: For specific courses and programmes, like FTII's film appreciation course or Film Studies programme of Jadavpur University, a closer examination of syllabi and curriculum development will be required. It might involve a visit to the institution/library/archive to access the materials. The case study will help to trace the trajectory of the development of film teaching in India.

3. One-on-one interview: It will primarily be used with the educationists, resource persons, and subject/field experts. It might happen online as well. Since it will be done after an initial set of data arrives, the questions for the interviews will be designed based on material evidence. Expecting their responses mostly qualitative in nature, the report will provide transcripts in annexures.

4. Focus group: Focus group discussions will mainly be directed towards gathering qualitative responses. The groups will be composed of present students, alumni, researchers, faculty members, administrators, and the likes. Considering the current situation, most of the focus group discussions will happen online on Google meet, Zoom or MS Teams.

5. Textual study: The review of the primary and secondary materials, already identified in the literature review, will be an important exercise in this project. It will lay the foundation for a detailed research design and help plan questionnaires, interviews, etc. Nevertheless, any new issue arising during the research might require accommodating new methods with the existing ones.

Discussion about primary and secondary sources, and data

The study categorizes the available literature as primary and secondary sources. As primary sources, it includes curriculum and pedagogy-related documents, government reports, syllabus drafts, etc. The *Film Enquiry Committee Report* (1951) shows the then government's approach in developing appreciation for cinema. [3] The constitution of FTII and its course materials are important as they provide a broad overview of early film education in India. [4] The syllabus of the first Film Appreciation course, instituted by FTII, is an important document in this regard. The syllabus made by the Film Studies Department of Jadavpur University shows how a programme on cinema has evolved in an Indian university from 1993 to 2021. As of now, four public universities in India offer MA in Film Studies – Jadavpur University, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi, West Bengal State University, and the University of Mumbai. A few other universities offer film studies or filmmaking as a specialisation. A comparative study of their curricula shows a tendency that often attempts to maintain a balance between skill and knowledge- based learning. Several media institutes run courses with film as a part. A study of their curricula explains how cinema has been accommodated in media education. Also, a thorough review of the National Education Policy 2020 perhaps justifies the need of the present study, as it outlines the need for multidisciplinary education.

As secondary sources, the study mostly considers works that discuss the teaching of cinema in India and abroad. There is a dearth of research works that discusses the problems and issues of teaching cinema in India. Sumita Chakravarty's article "Teaching Indian Cinema" outlines the cultural aspects that are required to introduce Indian cinema to the students. [5] The special issue of the *Journal of the Moving Images* provides an overview of the journey of film studies in India. Moinak Biswas' contribution to that volume, "Teaching film studies in India: Curricula and crises" discusses the challenges that Indian film education has been facing in framing the curricula for the last few decades. [6]

On the other hand, there exists a substantial number of works that discuss the same issues in the context of western academia. S. Clarke's "Teaching Filmmaking Creatively" [6] or H Wegner's "Teaching with Film" [7] can be considered as early interventions. Lynn Kear's "Teaching Film Studies: The Viewer Response Approach" proposes using 'viewer response theory' in teaching film studies. [8] R. H. Fehlman provided a rejoinder to this in "Teaching film in the 1990s", where he foregrounded the importance of culture and context of the film. [9] Elizabeth Ellsworth's conceptual enquiry on 'mode of address' moved further advocating the cultural teaching of cinema, [10] In the contemporary era, there are many interventions, like "Teachers and teaching in film" by Ayers, [11] "Teaching film and history" by Ron Briley, [12] "Teaching filmmaking: whether you wanted to or not" by Malcom Burt, [13] "Commentary on "Filmmaking and Research" and "Images of Influence" by J. E. Champoux, [14] etc., which talk about various methods and approaches. There are a few very recent contributions as well, like "Cinema, Life and Other Viruses: The Future of Filmmaking, Film Education and Film Studies in the Age of Covid-19 Pandemic" by Murat Akser, [15] an edited volume by M. Anderson *Teaching the screen: Film education for generation next*, [16] or A. Kuhn and G. Westwell's significant intervention "What film studies is". [17] The project, needless to say, will be open to accommodate the insights gained from any new, relevant material.

On the other hand, the study is expected to generate data to list the number of film courses and research programmes offered in the NIRF-ranked institutes. It will categorise the data in terms of skill-based and knowledge-based courses. The analysis can further be used to see which geographical region has a significant number of film courses to understand whether this particular region has a demand for skill or knowledge-based courses. We may also trace any confusion in naming the courses and planning the desired outcome through this charting. It will also map the significant changes that have taken place in the teaching of film/cinema in India.

Conclusion

The findings of this research will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and institutions involved in film education in India. Understanding the number of universities/institutes/colleges offering film programs, the desired outcomes of these courses, and the balance between skill-based and knowledge-based approaches will help in shaping curriculum development and improving the overall quality of film education. Additionally, analyzing the naming conventions, the availability of research faculty, and the role of research projects will provide insights into the academic and research dimensions of film education. By recognizing contemporary trends in film pedagogy and learner demands, this research can contribute to the evolution and innovation of film education practices in India. Ultimately, these findings will guide the future framing of standardized film

curricula, fostering a more cohesive and enriching learning experience for aspiring filmmakers and film enthusiasts across the country.

Acknowledgement

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