

# Chapter 3

## Green Cinema: Reading the Context in Select Indian Cinematic Texts

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nature has everything for man's need but not for man's greed. This classic statement by the father of the nation sounds merely like a didactic one-liner instead of being realised as a universal thought in the present paranoia. The unquenchable thirst for material success has instigated humanity into destroying the natural green womb from where it has sprouted. The big-ticket Hollywood blockbusters like Avatar and Wall E have demonstrated the ecological concerns in an effective manner. Indian celluloid is devoid of such extravagance and romanticised imaginative depiction on a colossal scale. This chapter attempts to analyse the ambit of green Indian films. It covers the religious ethos and the modern scientific need for conserving the environment plus the intertwining of political and economic dynamics with the ecological narratives.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The amalgamation of cinema and literature is increasing rapidly in a world where mediated reality portrayed in the digital medium is the order of the day. With movies not being confined to the theatres alone and available to the residents in multiple mediums, story-tellers find the tool of cinema to be a very viable medium to convey various social and cultural issues. The issues could range from addressing the peace and conflict situation to human rights (Luczon, 2016). Sometimes cinema could be from the disabled society (Biswal, 2017 & 2019) to the Dalit community (Yengde, 2018; Vidushi, 2015). The cinematic narrative could be on the issue of gender identity (Kusuma, 2018). Therefore, employing cinematic expressions, the message on the varied topics can be cultivated and disseminated to the public.

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One such burning issue is environmental conservation, which has caught the imagination of new-age filmmakers. Western cinema has weaved around more substantial than life movies on the various forms of environmental degradation, which has resulted in significant commercial benefits. On the other hand, off-beat filmmakers who do not want to dilute the message-oriented approach of their storytelling by obliging to the conventional gimmicks of popular cinema resort to making documentaries and short films. Hollywood has a rich tradition of both popular and niche 'green' movies while in India, it has been predominantly the indie film-makers who have explored the topic of environmental preservation. Pat Brereton (2004) the writer of the seminal book *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* gives a positive image of green movies. Brereton suggests these films also "initiated [the] cultural process of charting the expression of ecological issues" and "helped construct a universal if nascent, eco-consciousness through the growing understanding and fear of (un)natural forces and their resulting threats to human nature" (pp. 141-142). With global warming becoming a severe menace to humankind and climate change becoming a primary concern for our Mother Earth, it is very pertinent that more and more cinematic endeavours depicting ecological concerns crop up. The reach of cinema is too profound and it has been widely accepted that cinema is the most suitable medium for nourishing public consciousness about protecting our biological environment.

Ivakhiv (2008) asserts, "Debates on the political impacts of visual modes such as the sublime and the beautiful are far from being resolved. Some argue that by aestheticising and reifying natural landscapes, the condition of the movie, a sentimental and nostalgic attitude to nature, an attitude more conducive to possession and consumption than for understanding ecological dynamics of human relationships. The natural world; while others suggest that such visual representation encourage an attachment that can trigger resistance and action if the object of attachment found out to be under threat." This chapter focusses on the various dynamics of the 'green films' made in Hollywood as well as attempting an eco-critical study of a handful of environmental movies made in India.

The western cinema has got a rich tradition of environmental films with commercial blockbusters like the record-breaker *Avatar*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Wall E* bringing out sensitive ecological issues in a very mass-oriented style. Documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Before the Flood* have beautifully explored the abuse of nature by human interference and the severe repercussions that it has upon our earth. Most of these documentaries have focused on the phenomenon of global warming, which has resulted in climate change throughout the world. In the current postmodern society where consumerism has altered the dynamics of the relationship between the consumers and producers, the alienation from the environment becomes more and more prominent. Interestingly the modern generation supposes environment conservation as an outward activity. Their belief is further validated by the extensive public relations inspired gimmicks of celebrities posing as the 'promoters of green and clean earth'. Therefore, the importance of movies grows manifold as the audience get a first-hand impression of the intensity of the catastrophic events that are to occur humanity if reformative measures concerning environmental degradation are not taken. Thus, the movies act as a vital source of information as well as an instrument of social change.

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