

A Discourse on Modern Civilization: The Cinema of Hayao Miyazaki and Gandhi

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Abstract : *The relation of human being and nature, peace and war, the quest for mystic invisible world and women empowerment are the four key themes reflected in the cinema of Hayao Miyazaki. Mahatma Gandhi has also addressed these issues in his writings and speeches. Both of them inherit the ideas of Buddha to make their positions. They have similarities of certain level and differences as well. Keeping in view the socio-economic-cultural backgrounds of Japan and India, this paper will analyze the reasons, situations and factors of their similarities and distinct understandings of these issues. Japan is a capitalistic, technological advanced and rich country. India stands almost contrary to it. These situations have a great impact on the foundation of culture and the society of Japan and India. That is why Miyazaki becomes a fan of fighter planes and Gandhi advocates Charkha, a simple weaving-wheel machine. 'Hind Swaraj' is an important document to understand the troubles of modern civilization. Miyazaki too finally reflects a hidden regret about the 'misuse' of modern technologies, particularly of atom bombs and fighter-planes. Is there any contradiction in Miyazaki? This comparative study finds that Miyazaki, partially, failed to relate the technological advancement and its repercussions on nature and society. Gandhi was clearer. Both advocates democracy and pacifism, but this socio-cultural analysis shows that Miyazaki believes in 'utilization' of nature with the help of technology, whereas Gandhi emphasizes on 'co-existence' with nature. Technological advancements, for Gandhi, are always a threat to nature. Gandhi empowers their fellow revolutionaries with the help of spiritual energy. Miyazaki also does so equipping his characters with technical objects and gadgets. Miyazaki creates his movies and characters to express his ideas and positions. Mahatma Gandhi seems to be a hero, a protagonist of a movie in his actual life and achieves his goal with moral and spiritual power, questioning the relevance of technology.*

Keywords: *cinema and culture, environment and film, Japan-India relation, peace studies.*

I. Introduction

Miyazaki Hayao (b. 1941, Tokyo, Japan) is considered as the Walt Disney of the East. Though the production techniques of his movies are very much similar to Disney but the discourse of the content is altogether different. Broadly, Miyazaki is regarded as 'orientalist' filmmaker with a different kind of attitude towards mythological treatment, nature, industrial development etc. [1]. In his early childhood, he was able to see and feel the tragic aftermaths of atomic bombardment of Hiroshima & Nagasaki. In the later part of his life, when he became manga designer and film director, he tried to define and express the causes and the reasons of such kind of ill happenings. To understand it, he went deeper into the problem. All of his movies rotate around the key themes of co-existence and understanding of 'the other' [2]. Whether it is nature and human being, man and God, female and male, mythology and history, real and abstract. Miyazaki always reiterates importance of, so-called, outdated entities through his movies.

Interestingly, Mahatma Gandhi (b.1869, Gujarat, India) was very critical towards film & music. A Hindu fanatic assassinated him in 1948, just a few years later the World War II came to an end. His philosophy and actions were focused on peace, non-violence and co-existence. Swaraj and Satyagraha (self-rule & insistence on the truth), non-violence, coexistence with the nature were his key areas of analysis and practice. He was, contrary to Miyazaki, a stringent opponent of modern technology and appreciator of cottage industries.

Though Mahatma Gandhi and Miyazaki exist in different geographical locations and historical times, but both of them have too much similarity as far as the critique of modern civilization is concerned. Mahatma Gandhi by his political action and spiritual thought and Hayao Miyazaki, by his film direction, production and modern ideas were trying to throw the light on the crisis of our civilization. Philosophy and ideas of Buddha and modern democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity are the common guiding forces for both of them.

II. Cinema of Hayao Miyazaki

Hayao Miyazaki was associated with more than ten feature length films in different capacities like producer, director and writer [Table I]. The Japanese animation films, popularly known as-anime, are famous world wide due to its finest making techniques and serious tone. Isao Takahata and Makoto Shinkai are other anime directors, producers those have adopted and developed the cine-genre of Miyazaki. Takahata was his colleague,

whereas Makoto has gained a recent fame with his mega release of *Your Name* (2016), an all time box-office hit in Japan

Table I Filmography of Hayao Miyazaki

Year	Title	Type
1979	The Castle of Cagliostro	Feature
1984	Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind	Feature
1986	Castle in the Sky	Feature
1988	My Neighbor Totoro	Feature
1989	Kiki's Delivery Service	Feature
1991	Only Yesterday	Feature
1992	Porco Rosso	Feature
1994	PomPoko	Feature
1995	Whisper of the Heart	Feature
1995	On Your Mark	Music video
1997	Princess Mononoke	Feature
2001	Spirited Away	Feature
2001	Whale Hunt	Short film
2002	Koro's Big Day Out	Short film
2002	Mei and the Kittenbus	Short film
2002	Imaginary Flying Machines	Short film
2002	The Cat Returns	Feature
2004	Howl's Moving Castle	Feature
2006	Monmon the Water Spider	Short film
2006	House-hunting	Short film
2006	The Day I Harvested a Planet	Short film
2008	Ponyo	Feature
2010	Mr. Dough and the Egg Princess	Short film
2010	The Secret World of Arrietty	Feature
2011	From Up on Poppy Hill	Feature
2013	The Wind Rises	Feature
2013	The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness	Documentary

Miyazaki's films are primarily animation feature films. Though he made music videos and short films and documentaries, occasionally. Animation cinema dilutes the particular identities of character, place and time. These films also have more communicability across nations and societies. They can equally entertain the viewer of different ages and genders. The animator has more control on the spectacle and the story, than other filmmakers. The directors and producers of Hollywood or Bollywood cannot enjoy the same kind of liberty in creating their characters, locations and situations like Miyazaki. In short, animation cinema can represent the abstract and fantasies more perfectly than any other type of production. That is the reason that Miyazaki was able to show the world, which is lesser known by human being. There are ghostly spirits, castles, invisible entities, amazing animals, nightwalkers, magical forests, trains running on water tracks, flying brooms so on and so forth. He successfully creates a bridge between seeing and unseen; the visible and invisible. He merges human being with the animals and vice-versa. His films are the hypotheses of a real problem and depict the crisis of human civilization. This depiction was possible because of the animation technique adopted by Miyazaki. An animator must be a keen, cautious and sharp observer of the surroundings. Shades, shadows and movements are all imaginative expression of the animator. Miyazaki creates his mystic, not only mysterious, world with his deep understanding and close observation of the individual and society. There is a vibrant contiguity of Indian, Arabic and Persian mysticism in Miyazaki's cinema.

He came to notice and got recognition with his feature length film, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*. The dimension of Nausicaa is very vast. But, it is broadly divided into two worlds of nature and human beings. Human beings are fighting with each other, whereas nature is supporting and trying to protect its purity. The clear and loud message is that, nature is innocent. Human civilization is creating a threat to the nature. By using symbols of Seven Days of Fire, Toxic Jungle, The Sea of Decay and particularly, the Ohms; Miyazaki brings the narration at a wider platform. This treatment provides an opportunity to show the crisis of modern civilization, which is trying to be a success by exploiting the nature and its resources. Nausicaa, the princess, with her virtue of kindness and belief in coexistence, finally succeeds to maintain calm and harmony. Thus, another huge war and destruction was averted. She endangered her life in the process and gets its glory. Miyazaki shows that even in the toxic jungle, there is a good part of it, which is trying to heal its bad or toxicated part. It is not just the jungle, but it also reflects the jungle of mankind, which is present inside in every individual. With the help of socialization and culturization processes, human values of peace, kindness, non-violence and coexistence are groomed and a new modern society comes into existence. The canvas of *Nausicaa* is bigger which is able to contain the discourses of contemporary challenges of modernization like environment, nuclear war, exploitation of nature, unequal socio-economic development etc. Then in *Castle in the Sky* he takes the theme of human and nature, love along with the mysterious location of a sky-castle. From the very

beginning Miyazaki incorporates supernatural objects in his movies. In *Castle in the Sky* there is a crystal stone with magical powers. There is a character that says that he can talk to the rocks. The heroine, Sheeta, also knows the spell of protection and destruction. Miyazaki's cinema is full of invisible, mysterious and hidden objects and powers. He also depicts greed and lust very vibrantly. In *The Castle of Cagliostro*, *Nausicaa* and *Castle in the Sky* he seems to address the human behavior. Finally, all beautiful creations of human civilization are gone away because greed, lust and dominance try to grab them. Mahatma Gandhi used to say, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." The key theme of Miyazaki's cinema is very similar to that. Greed for power is another major issue, which has been taken up in Miyazaki's films. In *Castle of Cagliostro*, corruption of power has been depicted. Power or authority always tries to retain its strength. It tries to maintain the status quo. Gandhi and Miyazaki, both, challenge and question the corruption of power.

'It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. But such Swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another' [3]. In general, modern thoughts direct and guide people to rule the others. This process requires the power, which brings danger, disturbance and destruction.

Miyazaki's most acclaimed film *Princess Mononoke*, again, brings a discourse on the relationship between humans and nature. He uses the symbols of the forbidden forest, God and the demon, prince and princess; Iron Town, which represents industrialization, and is the main cause to bring curse to the humans [4]. In this film too Miyazaki creates a bigger canvas to accommodate ages, geographical locations and different types of human and non-human activities. Several occurrences are revolving around Ashitaka, the prince, which finally brings harmony between nature and humans. Power balance is the key theme of many Miyazaki's movies. In any war or fight there is no victory or defeat. All wars remain undecided. War is an act of misunderstanding and lack of Swaraj (self-rule). One has to fight with oneself-one's own ego, tendency of dominance and greed to grab the resources. The concept of God in Miyazaki's cinema is a symbol all good values like kindness, peace, love and coexistence.

In *Princess Mononoke* an iron ball hits the boar God and this incident turns him into a demon. This demon is now creating trouble to humankind. The only thing to blame is the Iron Town, symbol of industrialization, which makes the iron balls and try to destroy the forest to expand its activities. Greed and lust for dominance are the main causes, depicted here, for human wretchedness. There are people who join Ashitaka with their ulterior motive. To name one is Jigo who eyes the gold nuggets of Ashitaka. Greed creates an artificial relationship. Jigo and Ashitaka become friends for a while and finally go to their own directions. Ashitaka finds many samurai teasing and torturing villagers, particularly women on his way to the West. As the story moves on there is description of Iron Town and its activities. Iron Town is very close to the dense, forbidden forest. It also works like an asylum for lepers and old prostitutes. Two giant white wolves encounter the Iron Town's caravan leader, Lady Eboshi. On one of the wolves a masked girl is riding. The Lady Eboshi order to shoot out the wolves and they were compelled to hide in the mountain. Then a giant and massive wolf, having two tails appears and the fight broke out once again. There are injuries and casualties from the both sides. In the meanwhile, Ashitaka, riding on his elk, Yakul reaches the foothill of the mountain and finds injured soldiers of Iron Town and also notices that a girl, San is sucking out the blood from the wounds of giant wolf, Moro to heal her. San, with her mouth full of blood is an important scene used for promotion of the film. Here we find that Iron Town and the forest dwellers are not in good relation. They try to hit each other whenever there is a chance. Ashitaka tries to get familiar with San, but San along with Moro disappear into the jungle. Ashitaka helps Eboshi's injured people to reach Iron Town. There are many Kodamas, the tiny spirits of the forest plants, roaming around in the jungle. Ashitaka asks those spirits to show the most direct route to Iron Town and also finds that there is clean, clear water, which shows that the forest is healthy and free from any infection. Courageous and adventures Ashitaka, the first human, along with Yakul was able to see and feel the beauty of the jungle. In the interior of the jungle they were able to see the Forest Spirit. They feel that the wounds are healing because of nature's magical power. They see an amazing deer like creature amidst the dense forest. The story develops in various folds and finally there is calm and harmony in the Iron Town and new white Kodamas are moving around in the jungle representing the new beginning everywhere.

Princess Mononoke is an epic film. Ashitaka, Yakul, Eboshi, San, Night Walker, Forest Spirit, Kodama carry a large message of tussle and understanding between humankind and entities of nature. In Indian culture there are different kinds of nature's entities. Monkey god-Hanuman, Elephant god-Ganesh are more common and known to the world [5]. There are many stories like *Panchtantra*; in which all animals are personified. Gandhi has an impact of all those traditional narratives. In most of his cultural discourses he emphasizes the presence of supernatural powers. This kind of environment is created by Miyazaki in his other well-conceived film *Spirited Away*. In *Spirited Away* Miyazaki creates two amazing worlds without compromising the creativity. He perfectly blends fantastic, magical and imaginative world with the real one in this movie [6]. It is a story of Chihiro, a ten-year-old girl and her parents. All trying to shift to a new home, but by confusion they followed an old, less travelled road and now they are in a deserted place. Chihiro is creepy, but her parents

persuade her to go along with them. Inside they find a street of restaurants, surprisingly all deserted. Aroma of one of them could not stop her parents to eat the meal available despite Chihiro's warning. While her parents are enjoying the feast she takes a round of nearby area and meets a boy, who warns her to leave this place before the sunset. Frightened Chihiro returns to her parents who are still eating and turned into pigs. As more and more pigs are joining now it becomes difficult for Chihiro to separate her parents from the rest of them. In the later part, endeavor of Chihiro is depicted to get her parents back in human form. Miyazaki finds his space to show the ghostly, mysterious and strange world in this part of the movie.

This is an amazing world, full of supernatural activities. Miyazaki puts a real and an imaginative world in front of each other. He, like most of his films, finds a scope to express his creative imagery in the second world. A bird with woman's head; humans turned into pigs; Yubaba, the old witch; controlled bath house; Kamaji, the boiler man; Haku, the white dragon; no-face, Zeneba, sister of Yubaba, transparent passengers, train running on water tracks. Finally, Chihiro was able to meet her parents at the tunnel gate. They don't have any memory of what had happened to them. The tunnel is a powerful symbol to connect the real and the imaginative world.

III. Other Films

My Neighbor Totoro, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Whisper of the Heart*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *The Wind Rises* are other films, which seek the attention of the critics and general viewers. Personification of the nature and humanization of the characters are the two major points, which can be recognized in these films. *My Neighbor Totoro* is a story of a family, which is trying to settle down in their new house. Satsuki and Mei are ten and four girls who are excited to move to their new home along with their father. They can meet her mother who is ailing in a hospital. The spirits occupies the new house and now they will leave because of human presence. Miyazaki focuses, like his other films, to depict the mysterious house. He makes the presence of visible persons-Satsuki, Mei, their father-Tatsuo and neighbor Granny and her grandson Kanta as well as the invisible spirits who dwell the house in absence of their owner. This film depicts the countryside environment, the old and ruined house, the Camphor tree, Catbus etc. *Kiki's Delivery Service* is another film about a young witch who is enterprising and set off to a new place. Her mother gave Kiki a broom to set forth her journey. Along with her cat Jiji, Kiki begins her journey. They reach a seaside town. The town is environmentally rich. Kiki likes this place and finally settles down. She also finds a work there. It is touching story of a struggling female. Miyazaki's commitment towards women empowerment can be seen very strongly here. Yakul is the best companion of Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke*, similarly, Jiji the best friend of Kiki in this film. Humans always find an emotional support from the animals or pets. This is the understanding, which Miyazaki establishes in most of his film.

Whisper of the Heart is movie with romantic theme. Love romances are very popular worldwide. Miyazaki makes a balance in depiction of human love. This movie is an exception. The story of this movie revolves around human love. But, the other point of focus is an American song 'Country Road.' Here too, Miyazaki takes the story towards nature. The backdrop of this story is about hometown, rich in natural beauty and strong ties of human relationship. Industrialization is shown as a curse and place of loneliness.

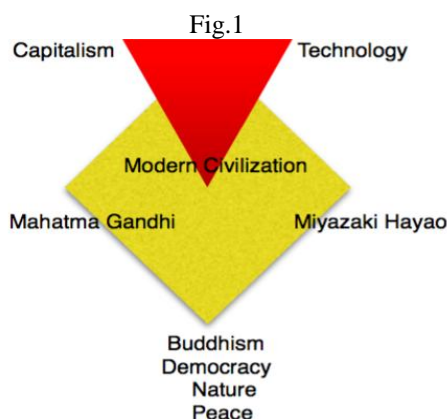
Howl's Moving Castle, as the name suggests, reflects Miyazaki's fascination for the castles. Miyazaki looks on the sky, at the earth, deep into the forest, inside the castles. He is an intermittent observer of social behavior and cultural activities. He also pays a keen attention to natural events and actions of animals. All this, converts his cinema into a wonderful spectacle.

Charles Chaplin's movies also generate a discourse on machinery. His *Modern Times* depicts the pathetic situation of factory workers. Machines convert human being into a machine. There is no time to cater relationships or even for oneself. Mahatma Gandhi has seen all this during his stay in Britain. He became staunch opponent of mechanization of human society. Though this was not the case with Hayao Miyazaki. He always admires technology. His movies advocate the use of technology for human welfare.

The Wind Rises is fictional biopics of warplane engineer Jiro Horikoshi. Inspired from real life of an engineer who worked at Mitsubishi to design the Zero planes. Romance, natural hazards and fascination for flying planes are beautifully blended in this film. This film brought controversies to Miyazaki. The plane that was glamorized in the movie and used by the Japanese navy during WWII got criticism from the other pacifist. It was his farewell movie and Miyazaki 'seriously' declared his retirement after finishing it. This film's main protagonist Jiro is highly inspired by an Italian aircraft designer Caproni. Whether Jiro and Caproni met in real life isn't an issue for the filmmakers. They were kindred spirits and are shown as forming a firm bond... in Jiro's reveries. The Italian is the sorcerer. The Japanese boy is his apprentice [7]. Can it be said, similarly, about Miyazaki and Mahatma Gandhi?

IV. The Modern Civilization

The journey of cultural values, behaviors, faiths, beliefs, rituals, customs and lifestyles is slow, secret and continues. Generally they are spread across the world by institutional organizations, but the role of an individual is also equally important. The cultural similarity among global citizens is termed as 'culture universal', which defines our common practices, habits and attitudes. Buddhism, born in India, spread in the larger part of Asia by the sole travelers, pilgrims and monks. The ancient ties between the two great civilizations developed due to these individual efforts without any institutional support. Mahatma Gandhi, a modern thinker and Hayao Miyazaki, a contemporary artist share these common values, though both of them never had a chance to meet each other like Satyajit Ray and Akira Kurosawa the two great film directors. In India, Buddhism developed in many cults in its later phase around the eighth century. Some of them were practicing magic and witchcraft. It is a matter of the query, if Miyazaki has any impact of that. In most of his acclaimed films he creates a magical, occult atmosphere very similar to that which still exist in some of the monasteries. Mahatma Gandhi proposes a religious-civilization. Civilization without religion can bring only curse. 'This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad. They lack real physical strength or courage. They keep up their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. Women, who should be the queens of the households, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories. For the sake of a pittance, half a million women in alone are laboring under trying circumstances in factories or similar institutions' [8]. This statement clearly reflects the ideas of Gandhi. It is noticeable that Gandhi also opposes the female to go for work. It should not be inferred that Gandhi does not favor the workingwomen. He categorically opposes the bad working conditions for women. Miyazaki's female characters contradict this view. They work, struggle and dream at par with their male counterparts. Rather they take lead over the male characters in respect of intelligence, courage and challenges. Gandhi also favors Varna System by saying that it will bring proficiency in work [9]. In his view females are more delicate than men. They need more congenial environment for work. Because of these ideas many contemporary has criticized him. Miyazaki's characters also project a contrary view. This difference comes because of economic conditions of India and Japan. India was always an agrarian nation. Technology is limited to a few hands even today. Japan began technological and industrial advancements almost parallel to the West. Mahatma Gandhi and Miyazaki have some common concerns but at the same time they have different outlook towards capitalism and technology as shown in Fig. 1. Miyazaki has seen the planes and its accessories in his very childhood. Technology, for him, is a part of daily life. Technological advancement brings parity in work efficiency of male and female. View towards technology is responsible to weave ideas on society and work-culture.



Mahatma Gandhi and Miyazaki both see the role Capitalism and Technology with a doubt in human development

V. Culture in Cinema

Culture is a continuous interaction between mankind and nature. All human behaviors are possible because of the presence of the nature. In cinema locale and human activity are the most important factors. Cinema carries these two, from the very beginning. The sound of the environment, human voices and emotional expressions, music, dresses and make-ups are essential part of daily activity of human society. Changes in weather, climatic happenings, rain, snowfall, volcanic eruptions and jolts are very commonly depicted in cinema. Human response to these natural phenomena and to other fellow people, jointly, reflects the culture. Cinema is the most modern art form. It incorporates all major art forms existing prior to it e.g. linguistic expressions, theatre, music, architecture, costume designing and make-up etc. The advancement in technology provided cinema an opportunity to express culture in more effective, impressive manner. Animation films, being cartoonistic in nature, discard a particular identity. People across the races and culture can get associated with

the characters of animation movies. Norman McLaren, a well-known animator, gave his definition of animation; 'Animation is not the drawing of animation that moves but rather the art of movements that are drawn' [10]. There are some scholars who have given more elaborate definitions of animation. The famous one is Zagreb School. The scholars of this school defined animation, which is very close to Miyazaki's thought. According to them, 'To animate is to give life and soul to a design, not through the copying but through the transformation of reality' [11]. Miyazaki's characters are extremely expressive and minute details are taken care of. He knows the people and has a close observation of their daily human behavior. There is hardly any emotion, which Miyazaki has skipped in his movies. Mournful faces, joyous gestures, leisure attitudes, angry and scary persons are in abundance in his cinema. He creates an amalgamation of all emotions in backdrop of natural scenery. He is a master craftsman of small details. Scenery and nature's landscape continuously address the human characters. Characters are not posed as good or bad. They are not registering the direct victory over evil, but surely, they grow emotionally and intellectually. The destination is meaningless, the journey is important. Human actions and efforts, struggles and attempts become the key factor for the character. Miyazaki's characters are the bearer of human culture. Wabi-sabi, loosely translated as plain life or the beauty of imperfection, is a key concept of Japanese daily life. Gandhi practiced it very perfectly. He spent most of his life wrapped in a single cloth, a stick in hand and simple glasses on eyes. The characters of Miyazaki are, also, the advocates of this wabi-sabi philosophy. Most of his films make balance between urban and rural locale. His *cine-craft is highly culture-coded. Feeling of association with the nature also constitutes culture. Presence of culture in cinema is very common practice among the filmmakers. Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray's movies depict Bengali culture in a vibrant manner. South Indian movies are culturally loaded films [12]. Depiction of culture in cinema is worldwide practice and popular among the film directors [13].*

VI. Conclusion

Hayao Miyazaki is an artist. Mahatma Gandhi is a thinker, social reformer and political activist. For Mahatma Gandhi life in itself is an art. He tried to rend the British Empire by making a pinch of salt. He never used any violence, not even verbally, against the huge British army. He is a historical person with mythological characteristics. He used to say, 'my life is my message.' Life and art are not the two different things for him they are monistic. Hayao Miyazaki is purely an artist. He makes commercial cinema and depicts life in it. His message is carried out by his art. A character and life, like Gandhi, can be a source of his art. Love for nature, dignity of mankind, spiritual elevation of individual, peace and democratic practices are those values which both of them insist upon continuing.

Acknowledgements

KurataNatsuki, a sophomore of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan and a brilliant student of mine inculcated an interest in me about Japanese anime. In India, it is a common perception that animation films are for kids and these rarely carry any serious debate on society. It was he, who changed my perception altogether. He also arranged many of Miyazaki's films with English subtitles from the Tsutaya stores, without which this article would haven't been possible. I am thankful to Prof. Takeshi Fujii and Prof. Yoshifumi Mizuno of the same University for their valuable inputs on Mahatma Gandhi from the Japanese point of view.

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