

# Movies And Psychology: Exploring The Mind Through Cinema

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- I **Introduction.** Movies have been a captivating medium for human expression and entertainment since its beginning. Over time, they have evolved into powerful tools that not only entertain but also reflect and influence human behaviour and emotions. The intersection of movies and psychology is a fascinating area of study that delves into the profound impact of cinematic experiences on the human mind and also explores psychological themes and mental disorders. The portrayal of characters with mental health issues in movies has been a subject of interest for psychologists and film scholars alike. This essay explores the dynamic relationship between movies and psychology, highlighting how films can influence emotions, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as serve as a lens to understand human behaviour, mental processes and the complexities of the human psyche, and the role of a psychologist in character development.
- II **Psychological Impact.** As already mentioned above, movies have psychological impact on us in myriad ways. Some common psychological impacts that movies have on us are as under: -
- (a) **Emotional Impact.** Movies have a remarkable ability to evoke a wide range of emotions, from joy and laughter to fear and sadness. The power of storytelling through visuals and soundtracks can immerse viewers in fictional worlds and make them empathize with the characters' experiences. Through well-crafted narratives, movies enable viewers to understand and connect with various emotional states, which enhances emotional intelligence. Moreover, certain genres like drama and tragedy often prompt introspection and self-reflection, encouraging viewers to contemplate their own feelings and experiences.
- (b) **Catharsis and Emotional Release.** One psychological concept that aligns closely with movies is catharsis. Coined by Aristotle, catharsis refers to the purging of emotions through artistic expression. Movies, especially those that portray intense emotional situations, can provide a cathartic experience for viewers. By witnessing the struggles and triumphs of fictional characters, individuals may find an avenue to release their own pent-up emotions and gain a sense of relief and catharsis. This emotional release can be therapeutic, allowing viewers to cope with their own challenges and better understand their emotional responses. Most of the popular Bollywood films portray an ordinary man fighting all pervasive corruptions, cleaning the systems, beating the mafias and similar other things which a common man fancy.
- (c) **Influence on Behaviour.** Movies are not just a one-way street; they can also influence human behaviour and attitudes. As per **Social Learning Theory** of Albert Bandura, individuals can learn behaviours by observing and imitating others. Audiences may subconsciously internalize the behaviours and attitudes displayed on screen, which can subsequently influence their actions in real life.

(d) **Stereotyping and Prejudice.** Movies can also perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices, either intentionally or unintentionally. The representation of certain groups, cultures, or individuals can reinforce existing biases or create new ones which shape people's perceptions and attitudes towards different social groups, affecting their interactions in the real world. It is essential for filmmakers to be mindful of the impact their work can have on social attitudes and to use their platform responsibly.

III **Reflections of Human Psyche.** Beyond their psychological influence, movies can be seen as reflections of the human psyche. The themes, narratives, and character often mirror the collective consciousness of society at a given time. Filmmakers draw inspiration from their own experiences, beliefs, and emotions, infusing their work with deeply personal elements that resonate with audiences. Analysing movies through a psychological lens can provide a deeper understanding of human motivations, fears, desires, and aspirations. They serve as a lens to understand human behaviour and mental processes and the complexities of the human psyche. It is not possible to cite all the psychology-based movies in this essay, however, some notable movies are discussed here:

(a) **12 Angry Men.** This movie released in 1957, is directed by Sidney Lumet and features a talented ensemble cast of Martin Balsam, John Fiedler, Lee J. Cobb, Marshall and others. It is a movie that centres around the deliberation of a jury in a homicide trial. The entire movie takes place within a single setting, a New York City jury room in 1957. Twelve jurors are present to debate the fate of a young boy accused of murdering his father. Since the charge is first-degree murder, the accused will be put to death if found guilty. The jurors initially seem convinced of the defendant's guilt, but one juror, Juror 8, holds out for a not guilty verdict. Over the course of the movie, the backgrounds and personalities of some of the jurors become clearer. The central conflict is the tension between the prejudices of some of the other jurors and the more nuanced commitment to "reasonable doubt" upheld by Juror 8 and eventually, his allies. The film provides a rich portrayal of various social psychology concepts and theories. Some key aspects of social psychology that can be observed in the movie are: -

- (i) **Group Processes.** The film explores how group dynamics influence decision-making. The jurors initially exhibit conformity and a desire for unanimity, but as the story progresses, they engage in discussions, debates, and persuasion to reach a consensus
- (ii) **Conformity and Pressure to Conform.** There is a strong pressure for jurors to conform to the majority opinion. However, one juror challenges this conformity and introduces doubt, leading others to reconsider their initial judgments.
- (iii) **Illusion of Unanimity.** At the beginning of the deliberations, there is an illusion of unanimity among the jurors. This illusion is shattered as dissenting opinions are expressed and different perspectives are considered.
- (iv) **Self-Censorship.** Many jurors engage in self-censorship, initially hesitating to voice their doubts or concerns. This self-censorship is overcome as the deliberations progress and individuals feel more comfortable expressing their opinions.

- (v) **Prejudices and Stereotypes**. The film highlights the presence of prejudices and stereotypes among the jurors. They make judgments based on the defendant's background and upbringing, which influences their initial perceptions of guilt.
- (vi) **Faulty Eyewitness Testimony**. The movie addresses the issue of faulty eyewitness testimony, which is a common phenomenon in legal cases. Juror challenges the credibility of the witnesses and raises doubts about their accuracy.
- (vii) **Conflict and Negotiation**. The deliberations in the film involve conflict and negotiation as jurors with different perspectives and biases try to persuade others to change their opinions.
- (b) **A Beautiful Mind**. It is a biographical drama film based on the true story of mathematician John Nash. It was directed by Ron Howard and was released in 2001. The movie stars Russell Crowe in the lead as Nash. The movie follows Nash's life from his days as a graduate student at Princeton University, where he struggles with social interactions but makes a revolutionary breakthrough in mathematics. He falls in love with Alicia, one of his students, and they get married. Nash's life takes a dark turn when he starts experiencing delusions and hallucinations, leading to a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. He is institutionalized and undergoes treatment. With the help of medication and therapy, Nash's condition improves, and he returns to teaching at Princeton. Eventually, he is awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics for his contributions to game theory. The film portrays the challenges Nash faces in managing his mental illness and his triumphs in the field of mathematics
- (c) **Shutter Island**. It is a psychological thriller movie that depicts the struggles of a person suffering from severe mental illness. The film follows the story of Teddy Daniels, a U.S. Marshal, and his partner Chuck Aule, who are sent to investigate a patient named Rachel who escaped from a hospital on Shutter Island. Throughout the movie, Teddy suffers from delusional disorder and PTSD from the war. As the story progresses, Teddy's reality becomes more distorted, and he experiences hallucinations and paranoia. The movie explores various psychological factors that affect the mind and the occurrence of disorders, such as defence mechanisms, delusions, and PTSD. The film also portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 1950s, such as lobotomy. Directed by Martin Scorsese, "Shutter Island" stars Leonardo DiCaprio as Teddy Daniels, Mark Ruffalo as Chuck Aule, and Ben Kingsley as Dr. John Cawley.
- (d) **Girl, Interrupted**. It is a movie based on the autobiographical book by Susanna Kaysen, who spent two years in a psychiatric hospital. The movie is set in 1967 New England and follows the story of Susanna Kaysen, an aimless 18-year-old who experiences a nervous breakdown and is diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The movie explores various psychological factors that affect the mind and the occurrence of disorders, such as defence mechanisms, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies. The film also portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 1960s, such as electroconvulsive therapy and medication. Directed by James Mangold, "Girl, Interrupted" stars Winona Ryder as Susanna Kaysen, Angelina Jolie as Lisa Rowe, and Whoopi Goldberg as Valerie Owens, a nurse at the hospital.

- (e) **Black Swan**. The movie follows the story of Nina Sayers, a ballerina who is selected to play the Swan Queen in a production of "Swan Lake." Nina suffers from anxiety disorder with OCD behaviours and experiences hallucinations and paranoia as she tries to perfect her performance. The film portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 21st century, such as medication and therapy. The movie also explores various psychological concepts such as defence mechanisms, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies. Directed by Darren Aronofsky, "Black Swan" stars Natalie Portman as Nina Sayers, Vincent Cassel as Thomas Leroy, Mila Kunis as Lily, and Winona Ryder as Beth Macintyre
- (f) **Fight Club**. This cult classic delves into themes of identity, masculinity, and dissociative identity disorder. The movie follows the story of the narrator, an insomniac, depressed, and stuck with an unexciting job. The narrator meets Tyler Durden, a charismatic free spirit, and they eventually start a "support group" called "Fight Club," where other unhappy, unfulfilled men get together and fight each other in bare-knuckle brawls as a form of "therapy." The film portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 21st century, such as medication and therapy. The movie also explores various psychological concepts such as defence mechanisms, delusions, and clinical depression. Directed by David Fincher, "Fight Club" stars Edward Norton as the narrator, Brad Pitt as Tyler Durden, and Helena Bonham Carter as Marla Singer
- (g) **Memento**. The movie follows the story of Leonard Shelby, a man who suffers from anterograde amnesia, a condition that prevents him from forming new memories. Leonard is searching for the man who raped and murdered his wife, but he struggles to remember important details and people he meets along the way. The film portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 21st century, such as medication and therapy. The movie also explores various psychological concepts such as defence mechanisms, delusions, and clinical depression. Directed by Christopher Nolan, "Memento" stars Guy Pearce as Leonard Shelby, Carrie-Anne Moss as Natalie, and Joe Pantoliano as Teddy. The movie was released in 2000 and was based on a short story by Jonathan Nolan.
- (h) **Tare Zamin Par**. It is a Hindi movie that explores the psychological challenges faced by a child with dyslexia and the importance of understanding and supporting individuals with learning differences. The film tells the story of Ishaan Awasthi, an 8-year-old boy who struggles with reading and writing. Ishaan's difficulties in school and at home lead to frustration and isolation. However, his life takes a turn when he is sent to a boarding school where his art teacher recognizes his artistic talents and discovers his dyslexia. The movie delves into the emotional journey of Ishaan as he learns to cope with his learning disability and find his own unique way of learning. It highlights the need for empathy, patience, and specialized support for individuals with dyslexia. Directed by Aamir Khan, "Taare Zameen Par" stars Darsheel Safary as Ishaan Awasthi and also features Aamir Khan himself in a supporting role.
- (j) **Karthik Calling Karthik**. The movie follows the story of Karthik, a shy introverted guy who receives mysterious phone calls from someone claiming to be him. The caller gives Karthik advice on how to improve his life, leading to a transformation in his personality

and success in his career. However, as the story progresses, Karthik's reality becomes more distorted, and he experiences hallucinations and paranoia. The film portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 21st century, such as medication and therapy. Directed by Vijay Lalwani, "Karthik Calling Karthik" stars Farhan Akhtar as Karthik and Deepika Padukone as Shonali Mukherjee

- (k) **Ghajini.** This movie is inspired by the Hollywood movie, Memento. The movie follows the story of Sanjay Singhania, a wealthy businessman who suffers from anterograde amnesia, a condition that prevents him from forming new memories. Sanjay is searching for the man who killed his lover, Kalpana, but he struggles to remember important details and people he meets along the way. The film portrays the methods used to treat mental disorders in the 21st century, such as medication and therapy. The movie also explores various psychological concepts such as delusions, and clinical depression. Directed by A.R. Murugadoss, "Ghajini" stars Aamir Khan as Sanjay Singhania, Asin Thottumkal as Kalpana Shetty, and Pradeep Rawat as Ghajini Dharmatma.

IV **Role of a Psychologist in Movie Making.** Now a days psychologists play an essential role in the filmmaking industry by providing valuable insights into human behaviour and mental processes. They contribute to the development of realistic and relatable characters, as well as ensure that sensitive topics are handled with care and accuracy. Psychologists also collaborate in designing and conducting research on the psychological effects of movies on audiences, helping filmmakers understand the potential impact of their work.

V **Summary.** Movies and psychology share a captivating and intricate relationship. The emotional impact of movies, along with their potential to influence attitudes and behaviour, makes them a powerful medium for exploring and understanding the human mind. Whether it is through eliciting catharsis, promoting empathy, or shaping social attitudes, movies have the capacity to leave a profound impact on individuals and society as a whole. As filmmakers continue to delve into the complexities of the human psyche, the study of movies and psychology will remain an engaging and enlightening field, continually enriching our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.