



Role films/television shows play in biodiversity conservation

Barsha Ghosh

Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, India

Abstract

Films/Television shows are creative content designed to serve as a means of entertainment. Or can be described as the medium of an artist to express their creativity. The biggest strength of these shows is that it reaches out to a wide population and has an impact on its viewers who tune in to this content due to factors which differs from person to person. Although it is not the onus of the films/television shows to play a direct role in dealing with issues faced by a nation, society or environment yet it plays the role of an intermediary thereby making it a potential influencer. So, there arises a need to analyse the content aired via various screens at the home or in theatre and watched by people across geographical boundaries, age groups, income groups and communities.

Keywords: Television, biodiveristy, conservation, biological creature

1. Introduction

Biodiversity conservation is not just an environmental drive that should be focused on as it is a moral duty but the reality of ever rising pressure of urbanisation, population and consumerism has made it a burning issue to be dealt with immediately. Biodiversity conservation is the preservation and safeguarding of wide variety of biological creatures found on this planet. The term biodiversity was coined for the first time by Edward Wilson.

India is one of the twelve mega biodiversity countries of the world. It has only 2.4 % of the land area in the world. However, it has 8.1 % of the global species diversity. As an estimate, there are around 45,000 species of plants and about 90,000-1, 00,000 species of animals. There are still quite a number of species that are yet to be discovered.

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that it reaches out to a wide population and has an impact on its viewers who tune in to this content due to factors which differs from person to person. Although it is not the onus of the films/television shows to play a direct role in dealing with issues faced by a nation, society or environment yet it plays the role of an intermediary thereby making it a potential influencer. So, there arises a need to analyse the content aired via various screens at the home or in theatre and watched by people across geographical boundaries, age groups, income groups and communities.

In this paper, we propose to understand the values in a film or television show regarding environmental issues, to gather how much the content in these shows/films are inherent are in sync with the reality and to find out the solutions, if any, the shows/films lead to.

2. Reviewing literature

Yong et al (2011) explores in their paper that big screen animations can be used as a potential biodiversity weapon to reach out to the large cinema going audience despite their limitations. Silk et al (2017)

in their paper throws light between Hollywood and biodiversity conservation tries to grasp the opportunities and risks arising from the portrayal of biodiversity in cinema and along with it provide a framework so that the biodiversity conservationists and filmmakers collaborate to make an impact. Kilpatrick et al (2017) in their paper tries to establish that how biodiversity conservation can be used and linked to enhance human life. Shreedhar & Mourato (2018) explores in their paper that the impact bio-diversity videos or media interventions' impact on the audience in terms of willingness to pay and willingness to donate to an environmental campaign. It was found that media exposure has a positive impact on willingness to pay but not on willingness to donate. Verissimo et al (2019) discusses in their paper the credibility whether the movie 'Finding Dory' that featured a blue tang fish increased its demand in the pet market. It was found that there was increase in google searches of the said fish but no substantial evidence was found with regard to increase in the import of blue tang fish in United States. Callahan et al (2019) in the paper attempts to test whether the Phylo Trading Card Game inspired by Pokemon has any role in bringing pro environmental actions among the masses. It was found that the Phylo game not only educated people about species but also motivated people to donate.

3. Biodiversity and films

Films are nothing but an artist's medium to portray a story using audio-visual medium. In this chapter few such shows and films relevant to the issue of biodiversity are explored to find out what they stand for. In the film 'The Day After Tomorrow' (2004), depicts the disastrous effect of global warming and takes on the fictional route like the disruption of the North Atlantic Ocean and brings the Ice Age back. However, the film was criticised for scientific inaccuracies. In the cult film 'Avatar' (2009), which beautifully shows the conflict that arise when humans from earth starts exploring an earth sized moon for minerals in the outer space. The humans are confronted by the inhabitants of the alien world who are very much in sync with the nature. 'Before The Flood' (2016), a documentary aired in National Geographic starring the renowned Hollywood movie star Leonardo Di Caprio, shows the dangers of climate change and the possible solutions. The solutions that would prevent the demise of endangered species, ecosystem and native communities across the planet. In 'A Plastic Ocean' (2016), an adventure document shows the exploration

journey of a journalist who travels to twenty locations around the world to find that the oceans are heavily polluted with plastic. In yet another documentary 'Chasing Coral' (2017) a team of divers, scientists and photographers presents the decline of coral reefs. Through it the team tries to present the causes behind the decline by decoding the underwater mystery.

The scenario in India is very different. Although films are a very important part of people's lives, yet films on the issues of biodiversity and environment are rare and not at all mainstream. The National Film Award does have a category known as Best Film on Environment Conservation/Preservation. In its inaugural year the first award under this category was conferred on an Assamese film, 'Bonani' (1989) which portrays a forest ranger as the central character. The central character stands up against timber trade which is not legal. 'Jal' (2013) is a hindi language film set in the Rann of Kutch which draws attention to the issue of water crisis. Due to which it is discovered that Kutch is a drier land than it was before and the reason why flamingoes are fewer in number which are otherwise found here. 'Forest Man' (2013) a short documentary narrates the story of Jadav Payeng an Indian man who single-handedly planted nearly 1400 acres of forest to save his island, Majuli.

4. Biodiversity and television shows

Television shows too plays a very important role as they are telecasted on regular basis or during weekends. There are devoted channels too that focuses on biodiversity like the Animal Planet, Nat Geo Wild, Discovery. The show 'On the Brink', the host journeys through the sub-continent, immersing in the most incredible landscapes and habitats in the country and coming eye to eye with the rarely spotted animals that live here. In 'Extinct or Alive', the host Forrest Gallante, a wildlife biologist, scours the globe using cutting edge technology on his mission to find species that the world has stopped looking for; seeking out evidence and eyewitnesses to track and bring back to life creatures mistakenly labelled as extinct. In 'Tales from Rhino Land' based on India's Kaziranga National Park captures India's magnificent Big Five wild animals in one frame - the last surviving population of eastern swamp deer, Asiatic elephants, wild buffalos, tiger and rhinoceros. The show 'Frozen Planet' features stunning footage of wildlife whose habitat is in arctic climates, including polar bears, killer whales and arctic wolves. In 'Carbon Cops', the hosts of this show evaluate the energy consumption and lifestyle of

average families and give them tips on how to implement more environmentally friendly habits into their homes and daily lives. The popular show 'Man vs Wild' the host goes to the forests, national parks or places with challenging conditions shows tactics to survive in extreme conditions.

5. Values propagated

The various films and television shows have been thoroughly discussed and the role played by them cannot be undermined. The films were found to be dealing with issues harming the environment as a whole thereby affecting the creatures in it. These films were educating the public about the dangers of climate change with high entertainment value and some even took the fictional route to provoke the seriousness associated with the issue. Due to which some of the plot were found to be scientifically inaccurate. Few films also tried to bring a sense of fear in the minds of audience if they disrespect nature and ignore the threats posed due to exploitation of nature. Documentaries were mostly about introducing the audience to the issues related to environment without the entertainment factor. Therefore, it would draw the attention of those who are really interested in the issue of environment. However, films when they portray the dangers can also lead to some overwhelming effect on the audience. Say, a movie which shows that the earth has come to an end. To draw the attention of the mass audience, films which took the route of fiction or were animated were more appealing.

On the other hand, in television, environment or biodiversity-based shows were telecasted mainly by channels like Animal Planet, Nat Geo Wild, Discovery

and National Geographic. The shows were hosted by professionals in the field of biologists thereby giving us a glimpse of corners of the earth showing diversity in nature. These shows are also of educative nature and therefore are more useful in spreading knowledge or raising awareness. However, the viewership is restricted to the ones who are interested in these issues and not the ordinary people.

In India, the collaboration of films and biodiversity has not happened on a level to catch the attention of the audience. Most of the shows that are broadcasted in television are by foreign creators including the documentary on the Forest Man of India, Jadav Payeng. However, most of the films winning the National Award in the environment category are regional films.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be concluded that to take actions with respect to biodiversity conservation it is very important that it does not remain a project of the experts. The effort needs to spread and cross the professional barriers or field experts. As films can take creative route, lot of complex messages can be passed on to the masses. However, scientific shortcomings in the films can also mislead people. Films are also important in the sense as it is a source of entertainment for common people it becomes easier to attract their footsteps as compared to a seminar or conference which are mostly attended by the academia. But the messaging through these mediums needs to be subtle as if it is too overwhelming it would depress the audience or if too preachy the audience shall not receive it positively.

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