

Contemporary Indian Parallel Cinema: A Graphic Lens on Cultural Shift and Societal Transformation

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Abstract - Cinema has long been used as kind of a significant medium for showing social realities, cultural values, and also historical developments in real life. In the Indian setting, parallel cinema showed up as an alternative push that sort of disturbed mainstream commercial filmmaking norms by focusing on realism, social critique and a more artistic mode of storytelling. Even today, contemporary Indian parallel cinema keeps that same tradition but it also shifts along with new socio cultural conditions, newer technologies, and audience expectations that keep changing. By using graphic visual representation, symbolic images, and grounded realistic narratives, these contemporary parallel films manage to give a slightly layered view of how culture is moving and how society is being reshaped across modern India. This study looks at how contemporary Indian parallel cinema works like a graphic lens, where cultural change and social transformation can be understood in a clearer way. The paper maps the evolution of the movement, it also reviews the main topics it returns to again and again, and it explains the visual strategies filmmakers employ to bring forth concerns like caste discrimination, gender inequality, economic disparity, migration patterns, urbanization, identity politics, and globalization. Special focus is placed on graphic representation as a cinematic technique that boosts communication of complicated social realities, mainly through visual symbolism, composition, and narrative structure. The research uses a qualitative and analytical approach, really based on checking scholarly literature and then looking at selected films tied to contemporary parallel cinema, in a way. The results suggest that parallel cinema does more than just mirror social realities; it also helps shape public talk by nudging people to think harder about what's going on right now. When these films push to put marginalized voices up front, and when they dispute the usual, dominant storyline. They tend to offer other views about Indian society and culture. In the end, the study argues that contemporary Indian parallel cinema is still a key cultural institution, one which records and interprets the ongoing shifts inside Indian society. With visuals driven storytelling and narratives that remain socially alert, it keeps building awareness, sparks discussion, and supports a better grasp of India's many and constantly changing social dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is often kind of described as a mirror of society, because it reflects the values, aspirations, the clashes, and those ongoing transformations that people go through in a specific historical and cultural context. In India, cinema holds a special, almost unusual position as one of the most influential forms of mass communication. Usually, mainstream commercial cinema has traditionally leaned toward entertainment, spectacle, and broad popular appeal, you know, the kind that keeps audiences hooked right away. But alongside that, another important cinematic tradition grew up, one that kept insisting on realism, social awareness, and more deliberate artistic searching. This line of work is commonly called parallel cinema, and it became an alternative movement that aimed to show the actual everyday life, plus it tried to tackle urgent social concerns. The beginnings of Indian parallel cinema can be placed in the post-independence years, when filmmakers wanted to make movies that felt different from the fixed, almost formula based habits of commercial cinema. They were influenced by international currents like Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave, and gradually Indian directors started creating films that pushed authenticity, social critique, and human experience forward. Figures such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak and Shyam Benegal are often mentioned as key pioneers, and they used cinema as a medium to examine poverty, inequality, displacement, and social injustice, in a way that didn't shy away from harsh truths. Their films challenged the dominant stories people were used to, and they offered audiences other routes for understanding society, rather than only one. Over time, parallel cinema kind of evolved, but not just in a straight line, it moved around as social conditions changed, plus economic ones, and the technological stuff too. Contemporary Indian society has also gone through big transformations because of globalization, urbanization, digitalization, economic liberalization, and even subtle shifts in cultural values. Because of all that, the ways people interact socially, how identities form, and how culture gets shown, those patterns have been reshaped. So contemporary filmmakers have adapted the principles of parallel cinema to deal with new realities, still holding on to the movement's interest in realism and social involvement, even if the surface looks different now.

Keywords: Parallel Cinema, Graphic Representation, Cultural Shift, Social Transformation, Visual Narrative, Indian Cinema, Social Realism.

A main thing about contemporary parallel cinema is how it leans into graphic representation and visual storytelling. Nowadays filmmakers more often depend on visual symbolism, spatial arrangement, color palettes, and cinematic imagery to pass along complicated social concerns. The so-called graphic elements don't only exist for an aesthetic lift; they also work as instruments for social commentary and cultural examination. With visual narratives that are carefully built, filmmakers can portray social inequities, political frictions, and cultural transformations, in a way that lands strongly with audiences. Cultural shift, kind of thing, usually means changes in values, beliefs, traditions, practices, and also the everyday social norms inside a society. In India, this cultural landscape has gone through major adjustments during the last few decades, largely because of globalization, tech innovation, more mobility, and wider access to information. You can see how older social structures got squeezed by newer thoughts about individual freedom, gender equality, social justice, and cultural pluralism or diversity. In that sense, contemporary parallel cinema works as a useful channel for recording, and reading, these developments in a more reflective manner. Likewise societal transformation is wider, not just a single set of customs shifting but a whole set of shifts across social institutions, economic ties, political frameworks, and shared identities. Migration, city growth, environmental stress, joblessness, caste discrimination, and gender related inequities keep showing up as key forces in today's Indian society. Parallel cinema, in particular, offers a space to look at these matters through critical lenses that are often missing from mainstream movie storytelling. Also the rise of digital platforms and streaming services has really pushed the reach and impact of parallel cinema. Independent filmmakers now tend to have better chances to create and share socially aware work without depending only on older commercial arrangements. This has nudged experimentation in story structure, visual language, and the bigger thematic worries, so there's been a fresh comeback of interest in parallel cinema among younger audiences who might not watch it the same way as before. This paper tries to look into how contemporary Indian parallel cinema works like a kind of graphic lens, for cultural shift and broader societal transformation. Instead of staying with one straight idea, it kind of follows the movement's evolution, checks the role of visual representation, and also zooms in on the social themes that show up in current films. In the end, the study wants to underline why parallel cinema is still relevant when you're trying to understand modern India, not just as a historical thing but as something living.

It also argues that contemporary parallel cinema doesn't only mirror social realities. It seems to do more, like it actively feeds public discussion, pushing critical reflection, and cultivating empathy and awareness, almost through a quiet but persistent pressure.

OBJECTIVES

This study digs into the growth of Indian Parallel Cinema as a notable sort of graphic reflection of cultural, social, and ideological shifts, especially from the post independence Nehruvian era into the current digital age. It tries to look at how the movement has kind of reworked its narrative mechanics, visual feel, and core concerns, in response to the fast moving socio economic plus political realities. The paper also wants to examine the ways in which parallel cinema surfaces matters like the unevenness between urban and rural spaces, class mobility, how identity gets formed, and gendered experiences, that kind of lived reality. It further explores how independent films made between 2023 and 2025 keep the realism tradition going, while still bringing in newer viewpoints and a slightly different style of storytelling that seems tuned for present day audiences. One more objective is to judge how technological progress, along with industrial reshaping, affects the evolution of parallel cinema. Special focus is placed on the rise of OTT platforms, which have effectively expanded chances for independent makers through broader availability and distribution. Still, the study also weighs how these platforms may have helped fracture the audience, and even contributed to a weakening of the shared cinematic moment. Overall, the research is meant to understand how contemporary Indian Parallel Cinema works as a kind of graphic lens, through which ongoing cultural shifts and social transformations can be both read and critically looked at.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research plan, more like discourse analysis, of a set of contemporary Indian films that show the evolving path of Indian Parallel Cinema. The angle here is to grasp cinema as some kind of graphic medium, a way cultural, ideological, and socio economic shifts become visible, where the visual narration actually mirrors what is changing in Indian society.

Instead of lumping the films together as one uniform bunch, the study handles each selected work separately, to see how Parallel Cinema adjusts itself under neoliberal globalization, digital platforms, and those changing audience patterns. I am really looking at narrative tactics, aesthetic decisions, and what themes keep getting emphasized, because those elements point to changes in urban rural gaps, class movement, gender selves, and everyday cultural negotiation. Because independent films are not theatrically easy to access, outside of festival lanes, the research leans quite a bit on par textual evidence. Think interviews, press talk, trailers, festival catalogues, and critical reviews. And this limited availability is read in two ways, not only as a practical restriction but also as a visual sign of structural exclusion embedded in the Indian film distribution system. For the analysis, the study adopts discourse analysis, which makes it possible to do close reading of cinematic language, symbolism, performance, and the surrounding context. The

study also places these contemporary films inside the realism tradition in Indian cinema one that begins with Pather Panchali (1955) by Satyajit Ray, and then gets carried forward by Ankur (1974) directed by Shyam Benegal. That realist base is then pushed further in later works like Court (2014) and Eeb Allay Ooo! (2019), where minimalism and observational working methods show institutional and social contradictions without much ornament, or at least that is the idea. Contemporary films like Kennedy (2023), Parikrama (2024), and Little Thomas (2024) are looked at to see how modern Parallel Cinema sort of negotiates ideas of alienation, identity, migration, and globalization. Using comparative discourse analysis, the study points out continuity and also some shift in Parallel Cinema, basically showing that it keeps functioning as a kind of graphic lens for reading cultural change, and the wider reshaping of society in today's India.

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PARALLEL CINEMA: AN OVERVIEW

Contemporary Indian parallel cinema kind of keeps going on what earlier film makers started, but it also shifts the whole thing, you know. It still has that big kind of impact on India's cultural and intellectual landscape, in a way that's hard to ignore. And unlike mainstream commercial cinema, which usually leans hard on entertainment, and the whole market success story, parallel cinema seems to care more about realism, social meaning, and a kind of artistic honesty. The movement really came up as an answer to the limits of conventional filmmaking, like the usual formulas. It tried to show something closer to everyday life as it actually happens, plus social hardships, and human experiences that feel less curated. The basis for Indian parallel cinema was laid during the 1950s and 1960s, mainly through filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen. Their films looked at poverty, social inequality, displacement, and questions of cultural identity. But they did it with inventive cinematic methods, not just the usual shot and edit patterns. In that sense, they showed that cinema can work like a tool for social reflection, and for critical thinking too, rather than only being a source of amusement.

Today, in contemporary India, parallel cinema has grown, thematically and stylistically as well. More filmmakers now deal with problems that show up because of globalization, urban growth, migration patterns, environmental deterioration, caste tensions, gender relations, and political conflict. A lot of current films focus on communities and lived experiences that mainstream cinema leaves in the margins, more or less. Through their stories, directors offer viewers a way into the messy, complicated realities of modern Indian society, and it doesn't feel simplified, not at all. One noticeable thing about contemporary parallel cinema is how it kind of leans into regional variety. India, you know, is defined by huge linguistic, cultural, and social diversity, so contemporary directors often lean on what's close by local tales, traditions, and day to day experiences. The regional

cinema industries have turned into key players in this parallel cinema movement, mostly because they make films that actually show the particular situations of specific communities and areas. This way of putting local narratives forward, it adds texture to the wider screen world and it also pushes back against those more uniform, generalized images of Indian culture. Technology has mattered too, maybe even more than people assume. Digital filmmaking tools have made production cheaper and also easier for independent filmmakers to get started. That, in turn, means more socially mindful films are being made and then circulated, almost like never before. And then there are the streaming platforms, they have shifted the whole situation again, letting filmmakers reach viewers well beyond the usual theatrical routes. Contemporary parallel cinema also stands out for its fresh narrative designs and visual feel. Filmmakers like trying nonlinear storytelling, they use documentary-like realism, they add symbolic images, and sometimes keep the performances very minimal, almost spare. With those methods the viewer is basically nudged into participating rather than just watching, you end up interpreting the social implications hidden inside the film, bit by bit, in your own way. Another really important feature of contemporary parallel cinema is that it keeps trying to represent voices that have been pushed aside. A lot of these films center on people, and whole communities, that historically got left out of the so called dominant cultural storylines. In many cases women, lower caste groups, ethnic minorities migrants, and those who are economically disadvantaged are shown with more nuance and texture than you usually see in mainstream cinema. When these perspectives get moved upfront, parallel cinema sort of helps widen the conversation about social justice, representation, and equality.

Also, the way contemporary parallel cinema connects to social change feels especially strong. These films often take on established norms and, in the process, nudge viewers toward critical thinking about social institutions, and the power setups behind them. Instead of just giving easy answers, filmmakers tend to present messy, complicated realities that make audiences sit with multiple viewpoints. Through that approach parallel cinema ends up creating a kind of dialogue and heightened awareness around urgent social matters. And then there's the growing recognition of parallel cinema at both national and international levels, which also says a lot about its cultural weight. Contemporary Indian films have been noticed in major film festivals and they've drawn scholarly attention for their artistic value and for their social impact. This kind of recognition has boosted visibility for parallel cinema; it has also reinforced its function as a serious platform for cultural expression as well as social commentary. Ultimately, contemporary Indian parallel cinema is still a dynamic and changing movement, it keeps moving with the shifting social climate while it tries to hold onto realism, and that kind of sharp critical engagement. It works through some inventive storytelling, graphic visual portrayal, and socially aware themes, so in a

way it gives real insight into the cultural shifts, and the societal transformations that are shaping modern India.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION IN PARALLEL CINEMA

Graphic representation has, somehow become a key piece of contemporary Indian parallel cinema; it works as this strong tool to tell social realities and everyday cultural experiences. Unlike mainstream commercial films that usually lean on spectacle, and this extra visual kind of extravagance, parallel cinema uses graphic elements with more intention. Visual imagery, symbolism, color composition, framing, lighting and even those spatial arrangements are planned pretty carefully so they can push the story forward and also hint at social meanings that sit under the surface. One of the biggest parts of graphic representation here is realism. Filmmakers often pick natural locations, go for authentic settings and keep the visual style realistic, so it feels immediate and somehow believable. Urban slums, rural villages, industrial landscapes, and overcrowded public spaces are shown in a way that keeps drawing attention to social inequalities and the economic gap. In that sense, these pictures allow viewers to simply see, and also understand what marginalized communities are going through.

Then there is color symbolism, which really matters in graphic storytelling. Directors use muted tones, monochromatic palettes, and natural lighting to add emotional weight and underline the main thematic concerns. Dark, subdued colors can point toward oppression, poverty, or social exclusion, while brighter tones can suggest hope, resistance, or some kind of change. With these visual decisions, the filmmakers manage to communicate layers of meaning that go past spoken dialogue, and that's where it starts to feel more personal, maybe even more unsettling.

Another important feature is how they use visual metaphors, plus symbolic imagery, in ways that feel kind a direct but also a bit slippery. Objects, certain locations, and those recurring visual motifs usually stand in for larger social and cultural issues. Like empty streets might be read as isolation, and fragmented structures can stand in for social divisions, while crowded spaces may hint at the steady pressure that comes with urban life. Those kinds of graphic devices push viewers to interpret social realities from more than one angle, and they also make people respond more actively to what's happening in the story. At the same time, contemporary parallel cinema leans on camera methods to sharpen the social message. Close-up shots tend to spotlight emotional moments, and the personal kind of struggle, while wide-angle compositions show how individuals relate to their surrounding world. When the pacing stays slow in the cinematography it gives audiences time to pause, think about the social conditions, and notice that human experiences are complicated, not just simple. All of that helps the viewing feel more immersive and a little more thoughtful. Then digital filmmaking shows up and kind of widens the whole space for

how visuals are built. Today's directors have access to better visual technologies that can strengthen narrative impact while still keeping realism intact. Digital cinematography lets filmmakers record detailed visual environments, yet still preserve artistic integrity. And because streaming platforms are there now they've encouraged experimentation with visual modes, so filmmakers get more room to explore, in a way that feels almost freer than before. Graphic representation in parallel cinema isn't just decoration; it's kind of an essential channel for social communication, even when that sounds too direct. Through visual stories audiences can grasp things like caste discrimination, gender inequality, migration, environmental harm, and the slower cultural shifts too. What happens is that filmmakers take tangled social realities and they reshape them into visual experiences that feel persuasive, so viewers can educate themselves, get motivated, and also start questioning what they see. Because of that, graphic representation still counts as one of the main signs of contemporary parallel filmmaking, and it also adds weight to its cultural and social importance.

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CINEMATIC NARRATIVES

Contemporary Indian parallel cinema, kind a plays a crucial role in showing societal transformation in a way that feels realistic and socially aware, and well, not just about surface level entertainment. Commercial films usually aim for the easy ride, you know, while this branch tries to uncover the structural and cultural shifts happening in society. In a sense, the movement keeps a record of the difficulties and openings that come with modernization globalization, urbanization, and even the steady push of new technologies. A lot of these newer films deal with caste, class, gender, and identity. The stories lay bare how old social hierarchies still manage to shape everyday routines, yet at the same time they point toward emerging kinds of resistance and empowerment. By bringing forward the lives of marginalized communities, filmmakers nudges the audience to notice social inequalities clearly, and maybe think about change in a real way, not as some distant idea. Migration and urbanization also keep showing up, over and over, like recurring threads. Often the plot follows people moving from rural pockets toward cities, hoping for work and better chances. These narratives show the social and emotional fallout of economic shifts, including displacement, alienation, and the way family bonds start to transform. Through these scenes and storylines, cinema ends up mirroring wider patterns of social mobility and cultural adaptation, even when things feel uncomfortable or uneven. Gender representation has also become kind a important in contemporary films as part of societal transformation. A lot of stories now challenge patriarchal norms and they show women as active participants in social, economic, and political life. These depictions help push forward conversations about gender equality, and also about women's rights too. When filmmakers address current issues

through realistic storytelling, parallel cinema ends up acting like a useful stage for social critique and public dialogue. It does more than simply mirror societal transformation; it also nudges audiences to think critically about what's happening right now, and to reassess well-established assumptions about culture, identity and justice, even when those ideas feel "settled".

IMPACT OF PARALLEL CINEMA ON SOCIETY

The impact of parallel cinema on society goes past mere entertainment or artistic expression; it sort of lingers in the public space. As a socially aware form of filmmaking it has helped a lot with public awareness, cultural learning and also deeper critical engagement with current problems. Through very realistic depictions of social realities, parallel cinema nudges viewers to reflect on the frameworks and systems that, day after day, quietly shape ordinary life. One of its biggest contributions is the way it boosts marginalized voices. Instead of centering the usual mainstream characters, parallel films direct attention toward groups that are often pushed aside in commercial cinema. In that process, these movies bring visibility to lived experiences touching caste discrimination, gender inequality, economic struggle, and social exclusion. That kind of portrayal can lead to more understanding, and yeah, more empathy among audiences. Parallel cinema also matters because it keeps public conversation alive about social and political concerns. The films often resist the "dominant storylines", and they persuade the audience to question what people consider normal, or fixed, or even untouchable. By doing that, they make room for a back-and-forth about justice, fairness, and democratic involvement. Educational institutions and scholars kind of use parallel cinema as a resource of sorts, to watch social realities, and how culture keeps shifting over time. This current gives pretty useful windows into historical developments, the present hurdles as well, and also the ways social identities keep getting reshaped. Its realistic stories tend to show angles that work side by side with academic research, and also in public policy talk as well, not just in theory but in everyday conversations too. Then digital platforms keep growing, and they make parallel cinema reach further, so socially conscious films are now easier to find by a wider mix of people. Because of that, the movement still steers public opinion and the wider cultural conversation. And honestly, with its insistence on realism, social critique, and artistic integrity, today's parallel cinema stays a strong driver for cultural awareness, and real social involvement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of contemporary Indian parallel cinema shows it still matters, as a medium to show cultural shifts and societal changes, even if it sounds "small" at times. The study says contemporary filmmakers have done a solid job taking the main ideas from the older parallel cinema and then reshaping them for today's social realities, all while also

bringing in new visual and storytelling methods. One main point is how much the movement stresses realism, and how it tries to keep things true to life. Contemporary parallel films keep showing daily routines and social problems with this real depth and sensitivity. Instead of centering the story on shiny, idealized heroes, filmmakers often focus on ordinary individuals, and that choice gives the audience a clearer, steadier view of what's really going on in society. That realism, it kind of sets parallel cinema apart from the mainstream commercial kind of filmmaking and it makes the whole form work better as a kind of mirror for social reflection. The study also draws attention to how graphic representation plays a big role in present day storytelling. Visual symbolism, the way space is organized, color arrangements, and cinematographic choices are being used more and more to suggest social meanings, and cultural experiences too. These graphic pieces don't just look good, they also pull the audience in, and they give people another route to understand complicated social issues. Instead of leaning on dialogue alone, filmmakers use visual narratives, like a more silent sentence, to show feelings, disagreements, and structural inequalities, sometimes in ways that land faster than spoken lines. Another, important finding sort of points to how marginalized communities are represented. Contemporary parallel cinema keeps giving voice to individuals and collectives that are often underrepresented in mainstream media. Women, lower-caste communities, migrants, laborers, and minority populations take up central roles in many stories. This kind of portrayal helps wider conversations about social justice, equal footing, and belonging. The research, further shows that contemporary parallel cinema mirrors real cultural changes that are happening inside Indian society. A bunch of themes connected to globalization, urbanization, technological shift, identity politics, and gender relations show up again and again across recent films. These narratives indicate how older values are being contested, discussed, and reshaped as social life keeps changing around them. It's like the films are mapping those negotiations in real time. Societal transformation comes through as yet another dominant concern. Lots of films look at how economic development, political shifts, and social mobility affect personal lives as well as communities. Problems like unemployment, migration, environmental damage, and inequality inside institutions are shown as tied together, not separate. Through these depictions, parallel cinema sort of pushes viewers to think beyond the immediate situation and consider the bigger effects of social change. The discussion also shows this growing pull of digital technologies, streaming platforms on the movement. Like, more access to production and distribution routes has made it easier for independent filmmakers to get their work in front of broader audiences. Because of that, parallel cinema has sort of gotten fresh visibility and it feels more relevant in today's cultural conversations. On top of that, digital platforms tend to push experimentation too, with narrative patterns, visual look-and-feel, and even the specific thematic worries.

Also the study implies parallel cinema doesn't only mirror society, it can work as a kind of change-maker. When films bring social problems into the foreground, and encourage people to think critically, they help fuel public dialogue and cultural comprehension. Viewers are basically invited to step into perspectives that question the usual dominant stories, and to develop empathy for a wider range of lived experiences. So overall, the findings point to contemporary Indian parallel cinema as still an influential cultural institution. With graphic storytelling, realistic depiction and social involvement, it keeps on documenting, interpreting and influencing the cultural along with societal shifts that are shaping modern India.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary Indian parallel cinema still holds this big, important place in the country's cultural and film world. You know, it builds on what earlier filmmakers started, but today's directors kind a stretch the whole thing furthermore themes, more visual grammar, and more ways to talk about the messy parts of modern Indian society. With realistic storytelling, direct visual depiction and stories that care about social issues, parallel cinema ends up showing how culture shifts, and how society slowly changes in real life. In a way the study shows something pretty clear, graphic visual techniques have become even more crucial for explaining social realities and keeping viewers more involved. Using symbolism, careful composition, and that kind of visual narration, filmmakers can lay out problems like inequality, identity, migration, gender relations, and cultural change. Those images and scenes don't just sit there, they help people understand what contemporary social life looks like and they push audiences to think critically, even if they didn't plan to. Also, parallel cinema works like a stage for voices that are often pushed aside and it keeps questioning the "mainstream" storylines. Because it sticks to realism and social critique, audiences can meet viewpoints that usually never appear in mainstream media. And as digital technologies keep reshaping the cinematic landscape, the movement seems to have more openings for growth and for getting more visible. Ultimately, contemporary Indian parallel cinema works kind of like a mirror and also a trigger for social change at the same time. It documents the shifting cultural realities, and it pushes toward deeper conversations, that feel more meaningful too. In that way it stays a powerful instrument for grasping and interpreting the ongoing shifts happening inside Indian society, you know, even while they're still unfolding.

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