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Cinema and Social Responsibility: Deep Water, Gehraiyaan, Among Others, Raise Morally Disturbing Questions



Cinema world over is stepping into dangerous territory. It is being seen as morally debased.

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Deepika Padukone-Siddhant Chaturvedi in Gehraiyaan; Ben Affleck-Ana de Armas in Deep Water

The once-upon-a-time Indian cinema had clear dividing lines. We knew who the villain or vamp was. He usually smoked and drank, and she played seductress. The good man or woman seldom indulged in any of these. Take, for instance, Hindi language actor Pran. He puffed away and played with his glass of drink. Not the noble hero. Padma Khanna or Helen taunted and teased men. Not the heroine.

Admittedly, this demarcating line was not as clear in Western cinema in which good heroes took a puff – like our famous Humphrey Bogart, who walked and talked in a swirl of smoke. But that was because smoking and drinking were normal, perfectly acceptable as a way of life in the West and even in some Far Eastern countries like Japan.

But now, cinema the world over is stepping into dangerous territory. It is being seen as morally debased. One of the earliest films that shocked me was Woody Allen's – yes Woody's – Match Point in which the leading man, Jonathan Rhys Meyers' Chris Wilton, murders his lover, Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson) when her demands begin to come in the way of his wedded bliss.

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More recently, I was aghast when Deepika Padukone, essaying yoga instructor Alisha, leaves her lover, Zain (Siddhant Chaturvedi) to drown at sea and speeds away in a motorboat! Rajat Kapoor's Jitesh portraying a

business associate is aware of this misdemeanour but agrees to keep it under wraps for a price.

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Most recently, I watched Deep Water on Amazon Prime Video. It is helmed by no less an auteur than Adrian Lyne – who has given us splendid movies like Fatal Attraction (with Glenn Close and Michael Douglas) and Indecent Proposal (with Robert Redford and Demi Moore).

Adapted from Patricia Highsmith's 1957 novel, Deep Water despite two brilliant actors – Ben Affleck and Ana De Armas – is not just hugely disappointing but insanely amoral. Vic (Affleck) and Melinda (De Armas) have an open marriage, and she begins to take one lover after another (which I do find him doing), and each of them disappears. Vic kills them. He drowns one of them in a swimming pool with a boisterous party going right across. Another guy is taken to a remote wooded area and bludgeoned to death! Melinda suspects her husband is behind all this, but in the end, turns an accomplice. Wow.

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The cops appear once and seem to investigate in a cursory sort of way. What a joke!

Lyne may take refuge in the fact that he was following the source material. But, pray, why would any good director take a novel like this for his work? A rank bad choice after a 20-year hiatus. Again, Charlie Macdowell's Windfall on Netflix with Jason Segel and Lily Collins shows a married woman shooting her husband and an intruder, and walking away with a bag full of dollar bills. She shows no remorse, no qualms. Well!

Deep Water and Windfall – much like Match Point (where the police appear as bumbling idiots) and Gehraiyaan – throw up morally disturbing questions. We all know that cinema is hugely influencing. Time was when teenagers sported Rajesh Khanna's Guru Kurta. Time was when boys had Dev Anand's hairstyle. In Tamil Nadu, Rajnikanth's mannerisms are copied freely – and reverentially.

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In a scenario like this, the question is, must cinema be so callous. Does it not have a social responsibility? Must

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I am not saying that every man or woman who watches Match Point or Gehraiyaan or Deep Water or Windfall would be tempted to kill someone they find inconvenient. But films are watched not just by adults, but impressionable youngsters, who may like to imagine that murder and mayhem are perfectly normal social behaviour. They are not, and cinema must understand this.

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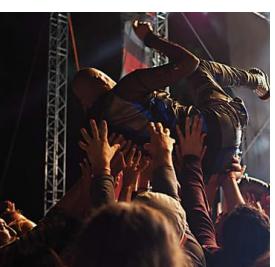


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