

Amol Palekar - The 'Common Man Actor' Who Redefines the Image of Hindi Cinema Hero

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The Hindi Cinema industry commonly termed as Bollywood in 1970s was a combination of mainstream movies featuring 'superstars' and the growing popularity of the 'angry young man'. But in the race to represent the woes and frustrations of Indian Populace, Popular cinema inherit tendency to use escapism. The protagonists were shown to reach from complexity to limelight, correct all the wrongs by the virtue of 'heroism'. This resulted in a 'reel' depiction of real public, which was based on aspirations rather than reality. This gap was bridged in the 1970s, with the portrayal of the 'common man'. In the era of 1970s where most of the actors were seen portraying larger than life characters, Amol Palekar choses to portray character of a common man. Amol Palekar not only portrayed character of a common man with conviction but also lived the character with utter simplicity which creates a special place in the hearts of the audience.

Amol Palekar, an ingenious actor and a social worker has an unconventional style of acting which made him rule the Indian Cinema during the 70s era. He is a known director and a famous painter. 'Amol' means precious and indeed Amol Palekar is one of the precious personalities. Palekar is considered one of those few actors in Hindi Cinema who splendidly perform character of common man on silver screen. His 'heroism' and persona was always simple and unconventional. In most of his films, he displayed the common man who has drawbacks, limitations, dreams and that's the main reason why audience could connect with him because they can see their own reflection on screen through Palekar's characters. Quality of simplicity not only bring Palekar closer to his audience but also make him stand apart among his contemporaries especially in those times when angry young man Amitabh Bachchan, romantic

Rajesh Khanna and talented Sanjeev Kumar, and many others were already ruling the silver screen. Palekar movie's plot used to be different from his contemporaries works because of its uniqueness and simplicity. His presence always had the charm of freshness, simplicity and reality, and his movies are still loved among the audience. His movies are known for its good storyline, acting and direction. Amol comes from a lower middle class background, where his father worked in GPO and mother in a private company. They could not even afford a radio for young Amol, hence he used to listen songs in neighborhood. As child he used to help in household works along with his sisters, he used to sweep the floor, make beds and also assist in the kitchen. He considers that this helped him throughout his life. He also did odd jobs to pay his fee, learnt type-writing and also taught others. Amol didn't initially plan to pursue acting, his first love still is Painting. He pursued graduation in Fine Arts from Sir J J School of Arts, Mumbai and has many exhibitions to his credit. He even worked eight years in Bank of India as a clerk. During same time he joined theatre and started enjoying it. He even performed for Satyadev Dubey Marathi Plays. After observing his spectacular performances in several plays, Director Basu Chaterjee approached Palekar for film, but initially he was hesitant in stepping towards the cinema but Basu Chaterjee doesn't lose hope and again approached Palekar for another movie and this time he agreed finally.

He began his filmy career with Marathi movies *Bajiraocha Beta* and *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* and then appeared in Hindi Cinema. Palekar as an actor worked in several other regional languages such as Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, and Malayalam. He started his Bollywood career with *Rajnigandha*. He played the role of Sanjaya a talkative, careless

and happy go lucky person. The plot of the movie is simple but what catches audience attention is the presence of simplicity in Palekar's character. Being the main lead of the film Palekar is never shown in fancy clothes or stylish hairstyle. He appears like one among us, sleek oiled hair parted at one side of the head, thin moustache, plain casual shirts, following mundane routine of 9-5 job, discussion with colleagues about office partiality and politics and struggle to meet girlfriend on time. Palekar is never shown coming out through car or even two-wheeler, rather like a typical upstart middle class person who travels from local transport, Palekar's character is depicted generally travelling from local bus or auto and dreams of getting promoted to officer grade so that he can get married and settled, he often seems discussing real struggles of life, office scenario and chances of his promotion with his girlfriend as she's the only companion he has apart from his few office colleagues. Palekar's character was never larger than life but they were definitely larger part of common man's life.

His character in *Chhoti Si Baat* is of an accountant, a simple and shy boy who likes a girl working in another office and dreams of admiring her, interacting with her and having lovely time with her, but in reality he is not able to utter a single word in front of her, similarly in those era people who were more decent and simple found it really difficult to approach a girl whether they travel in the same bus, work in nearby offices or observe each other through their terraces or windows. Palekar's character went under transformation in the movie or rather through personality development to gain her lady love confidence. It wouldn't be wrong to comment that Palekar merely reflect common man, rather he imitated common man's life on silver screen. In his another movie *Baton Baton Mein*, he played the character of Christian boy Tony who is a cartoonist and travel from Mumbai Local to his office where he notices his lady love and it is very interesting to observe how he convey his thoughts in chits through co-passengers and how he interacted with the girl's uncle about each other. Mumbaikar's can feel the essence of Mumbai Local and can also understand what importance it holds in common man's life. Palekar movies are not just

about winning lady's love but also the situations which a common man goes through. In the movie Palekar character Tony is a cartoonist working on provision and earns 300 for now but has vision and ambition of getting settled well in future. In the movie *Rang Birangi*, Amol plays a character of a successful businessman Ajay Sharma who has done very well for himself and his family but always appears busy in his work and doesn't pay much attention at home. In between his friend makes a cute mischievous plan to bring back colors in his dull and gloomy life. It's interesting to observe how Amol Palekar's character innocently get trapped in the whole plan and performed according to his friend. But his friend proves to be a blessing in disguise and Ajay's life is again filled with colors. It is noteworthy how Palekar's character proves it's good to be ordinary because that's the extraordinariness of life. Palekar's *Chitchor* has a simple sweet romance plot where once again Palekar proves that even simple innocent smile and honesty is enough to begin a new relationship. Another stellar performance of Palekar is seen in *Naram Garam* where he plays the character of lower middle class where one of his dialogues is a worth- mention "Main aadmi Kahan hoon main toh gareeb hoon!" (I am not a man I am just poor...) The sentence appears very simple but the conviction through which Palekar has delivered this sentence reflects real emotions of struggling poor.

Palekar is successful in depicting the pain, hardship and the struggle of survival for existence in such a subtle way that it is difficult to differentiate between 'reel' and 'real'. Apart from all these stellar performances and many others, Palekar is still considered best for his performance in *Golmaal* a masterpiece movie with outstanding performances, which is still considered one of the finest comedy movies of Hindi Cinema. In the movie Palekar plays the role of Ramprasad a graduate who spoke several false truths to his boss to give an ideal impression of person and save his job where he earns 950 in those times. The movie is mainly remembered for Palekar subtle portrayal of a common man wearing short kurta with jacket, hanging jhola, parted oiled hair with a thin moustache, his way of addressing Sirrr, hindi one-

liners touches audience heart and brings a broader smile on their faces similar like Palekar's. His dialogue from the movie caught attention of many people, "Kabir ko padne-padane ke liye pura jeevan hi kam hai, par main koshish karunga ki saade saath baje tak khatam kar doon", (To understand and teach Sant Kabir whole life is less but I will try to teach by 7:30) Palekar's smile is considered very honest similar to his work, people considers that the beauty of simplicity in his characters is because he himself is a very grounded person.

Palekar is among few actors who mainly appears as main leads in the films but was never known for the standard 'heroism', he created his own measures of heroism or rather he made common man 'hero'. Palekar also hold the title of 'Boy next door' and this can be probably because of his own simple background and simplistic charm. Most of his characters make us feel that he is someone among us as he searches for rented room like us, stand in a queue for bus, slightly admire the girl, does a job of clerk, spends evening at coffee house with his lady love, talks about world facts with friends, combs his hair after little intervals, wipe his face with handkerchief, ride Bajaj scooter, wander around India Gate, watches cinema while having peanuts, talk for hours while sitting in the park, travel by train, bus or even normal rickshaw, he appears someone among us who have stood up and appears on silver screen. While watching Amol Palekar movies it always felt that someone has recorded our daily lives events and projected in theatres. He was so close to realism that his unemployment, second hand bike, struggle of eating at English restaurant with fork or knife, his happiness and sadness, his unpredictable laughter, bellbottom pants, casual sleeves shirt, thin moustache, big glasses eyewear, hair length till ears, looks similar to how our father and uncles appear in those times. Palekar movies female leads were never typical Hindi movie heroines who met him while dancing or roaming around rather they used to stay near his locality or they used to study in same college or work in nearby offices. He feels shy while proposing or approaching a girl, he felt happy even if he gets a chance to sit next to the girl, if a girl merely ask about time his heart is filled with emotions and

imaginations. Palekar never had the persona of the hero who performed action oriented roles or punches straight on the faces of goons, hesitant and afraid from his boss, quite in front of bunch of unknown people, he was neither like any superman or angry young man he was like our uncle or known one's and this 'extra' ordinariness made him our 'hero'.

Amol Palekar made ordinariness of life extraordinary or rather special on silver screen, in one of his interviews he states, "Shouting from the rooftop is not my nature at all. One of my contemporaries was talking about my acting, he said acting kahan karta hai (he doesn't act) I feel that was the best compliment. Palekar continues and states, "The very concept of Amol Palekar becoming popular came through because he was not larger than life, because he was someone who would rather travel by bus or local train."

Palekar characters were closer to reality, simple, sweet, intense, down- to-earth, closer to life, did not indulge in violent revenge but had the capability to emerge as a hero despite his apparent flaws. Palekar's biggest achievement was his great accessibility to the common man, he expressed their day-to-day woes and heartbreaks without going over the top, his conviction was realistic and the common man adored him for that.

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