Perspectives on Violence on Screen:
A Critical Analysis of *Seven Samurai* and *Sholay*

SHIPRA GUPTA & SWATI SAMANTARAY
Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, India

This paper traces the portrayal of violence in cinema through the ages taking into consideration two films from two disparate countries and cultures - the Japanese *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa and its remake, the Indian blockbuster *Sholay* by Ramesh Sippy which was set in two different eras. This paper critiques the representation of violence in the two films and the reasons that led the films to become blockbuster hits. It takes into account the technical innovations used during the making and the resultant effect it had on the spectators. It also discusses the aspects which show that they are similar yet different from each other. Although *Sholay* has taken inspiration from *Seven Samurai*, its aggressive, dominant villain Gabbar is a well-rounded character and light has been thrown on his sadistic means. The samurai's Bushido code of combat has been discussed concerning Kambei and the other samurai and how they remain loyal to it until the very end.

Keywords: Bandits, guns, mercenaries, revenge, samurai, swords, violence

Violence in cinema has always been a major source of controversy since the inception of films. It has played a very important role in cinema considering the beginning of motion picture and has been included in films right from the days of the black and white era of gangster movies like *The Great Train Robbery* to the present day slasher films like *Scream.* Violent images are the lifeblood of T.V and abound in the history of cinema; the history of literature and the arts, in general, would be unthinkable without them (Abel, 2007, p.1).

Some appear to be very realistic, while others are gruesome and repulsive. Depiction of violence needs to be handled skillfully to add to the artistic content of the film because its manner of presentation can either make or break a film. Violence rendered in films has evolved over the years. Earlier, showing violently explicit scenes were prohibited due to the effect it would have on the viewer's mind. These days, however, the censor board has accommodated violence in films according to the changing times and culture.

Early twentieth century depicted violence symbolically instead of showing them explicitly; for instance, a child being kidnapped and strangled would be depicted in the form of shadows that would show a man pulling the child behind a bush and later a toy falling out of it, thus confirming the child's death. There were films which tested waters and went beyond the limitations put by the censor board. King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) was very violent about its time. Jack Cole in Slant Magazine writes –

> "... the movie visualized the whistle's deafening, disruptive scream with chaotic editing that objectively, passively observes war's effect on social life" (Cole, 2013).

Correspondence to: Shipra Gupta, School of Humanities, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), Bhubaneswar-751 024, Odisha, India

The film shows in graphic detail the brutal killings of American soldiers at the hands of German snipers during World War I; it showed wounded soldiers losing legs and soldiers with blood running down their heads. *Scarface* (1932) is a film by Howard Hawks where the script required the graphic representation of brutality. It had taken inspiration from a novel by the same name, and it was handled equally artistically by the director. However, the film was presented as disparaging violence instead of applauding it because of its gruesome portrayal of brutal scenes. Simultaneously many other films with the explicit depiction of violence followed. Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* which released in 1967 had a very graphic finale scene where Bonnie and Clyde are ambushed and killed by Texas Rangers. The filmmaker used multiple cameras from various angles to shoot the massacre scene. He used special effect squibs filled with fake blood hidden under the actor's costumes which had been rigged so that they exploded at the right time emphasizing the visual effects intended to create. The scene was also shown in slow motion to heighten the effect of violence. Even films like *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960), *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1992), *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004) and other similar films were seemingly violent for their times. Motion pictures and popular entertainment, especially after World War II, started rendering violent images in their content more frequently than before. The filmmakers even employed various techniques to make the scenes seem as realistic as possible. A film on cannibalism was released in 1974 by Tobe Hooper called *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. To make the scenes seem as realistic as possible, the filmmaker made the actors wear metal sheets to protect their skin. Then they were covered with raw steak and packets filled with blood so that the end product seemed like the saw is slicing through the skin with blood oozing out of it. It received mixed reviews.

Violence in films did not just prevail in Hollywood; rather, they were popular in films all over the world. Taking for instance the South Korean films *Piagol* (Gang-cheon, 1955) and *Five Marines* (Ki-duk, 1961), the Japanese *Seven Samurai* (Kurosawa, 1954) and *Rann* (Kurosawa, 1985), the Russian *Night Watch* (Bekmambetov, 2003), the Chinese *Iron Monkey* (Woo-ping, 1993), the French *Delicatessen* (Jeunet & Caro, 1991), the Indian *Sholay* (Sippy, 1975)—all have violent content in their films to some extent. What attracts the audience towards violence has been studied extensively by Jeffery H. Goldstein in his work *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment* where he writes:

> "Many in the audience appear to be taken in by dramatic violence; perhaps attraction is enhanced by viewers' willing suspension of disbelief. After all, most violent images and models produced for entertainment and recreation are not the real things; they carry clues to their false identity" (Goldstein, 2011, p. 2).

This pretension attracts the audience towards films that entertain through violent images. Films that have violent scenes in them do not always include them for the sole purpose of voyeuristic pleasure of the audience, rather, they at times act as a release for the destructive nature of man or they show the viewers what man is capable of when provoked. In the edited work *Media Ethics* by Matthew Kieran, Gordon Graham writes:

> "... The depiction of violence can have a cathartic as well as a provocative influence; this means that as well as prompting violence, it forestalls it, by providing a fictional release for otherwise destructive emotions." (Kieran, 1998, p.157).

However, the patterns of violence can vary from film to film and from character to character presented in the film; taking, for instance, the popular Japanese movie *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa. We find the samurai following a moral code while combating their opponent; they will never attack unless the opponent is ready. However, in the same film, we find Bandits who are attacking the village and killing the villagers mercilessly

without any moral ethics or considerations. The film is set during the Sengoku Period in a sixteenth-century Japanese village which is raided by bandits during harvest to steal their food. Therefore, the villagers request a samurai, who is going through a difficult time, to help them protect their village in exchange for food. The Samurai, to defend the village from the forty bandits during the harvest season, sets forth to gather six more samurai to help him. The seven samurai teach the villagers basic combat tricks to protect themselves, and finally, when the bandits arrive, a huge battle follows. "Akira Kurosawa's films shy from neither death nor violence. Kurosawa is best known for his portrayals of samurai inflicting violence with impossible skill, and even his light-hearted samurai films have high body counts. Kurosawa could make violence kinetically fun that would go on to profoundly influence Spaghetti Westerns and action films in general" (Eisner, 2016).

The Code of Bushido[1]

Benevolence, Courage, Respect, Sincerity, Righteousness, Honour, Self-Control, and Loyalty are the eight ideals that the Bushido code or the 'Way of the Warrior' dictates. It is the ethical code governing the behavior of the warrior (bushi), based on the loyalty *(chu)* a retainer offered his lord in exchange for a fief or an allowance (Frédéric, 2002, p.94). The Samurai is supposed to follow the code until they die. In his work *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, Inazo Nitobe opines:

> "*Bu-shi-do* means Military-Knight-Ways – the ways which fighting nobles should observe in their daily life as well as their vocation; in a word, the "Precepts of Knighthood," the *noblesse oblige* of the warrior class." (Nitobe, 1900, p.3).

Although it was not a written code, it was a code of moral principles that the knights were bound to follow. Nitobe further goes on to explain about the code's genesis:

> "It was founded not on the creation of one brain, however able, or the life of a single personage, however renowned. It was an organic growth of decades and centuries of a military career. It, perhaps, fills the same position in the history of ethics that the English constitution does in political history; yet it has had nothing to compare with the Magna Charta or the Habeas Corpus Act" (p. 4).

The film presents a group of seven samurai who aren't following the Bushido code strictly but have tried to accommodate the ideals as best as they could. The leader of the seven samurai, Kambei, follows the Bushido code as closely as possible. He is benevolent towards the villagers as well as his mates with a warm sense of humor. He is courageous in a ferocious way and valiant enough to fight for what is right despite his previous failures. He respects the villagers and their principles. He is sincere in his promise to help the villagers and considers it his responsibility to find warriors to help defend the village; he is righteous and believes in doing what is correct instead of blindly following the samurai code. An intriguing scene in the film shows Kambei getting his head shaved, the top knot, which is of utmost importance to a samurai, much to the shock of the onlookers, and the loss of which is considered disgraceful. He plans to rescue a child from a brigand who has held it hostage. Kambei presents himself as a priest and combats the robber and rescues the child, thus winning the villagers' trust. The scene lasts just seven seconds, it took only that amount of time or even less owing to the slow-motion shot, for a samurai to kill the brigand, which proves the prowess of a samurai. Kambei, despite becoming a Ronin[2], has his honor intact as a samurai, it is "… his code of honor that prompts him to help them, and he assembles a crew of five other samurai plus the would-be warrior Kikuchiyo. Using a well-conceived strategy, based on the kind of planning only possible by

warriors who hold to the highest standards Kambei and the villagers save the town" (Nochimson, 2010). Ronin are wandering samurai who have lost their daimyo (master), either to defeat or to death. So without a daimyo, they are drifters from one place to another looking for a new master.

The feudal society of the Edo period in Japan rendered the Emperor powerless only with ceremonial duties. The shoguns (hereditary military generals) were de facto in charge of the different parts of the country. The shoguns had various daimios stationed under them at various states. Daimios were feudal landowners and commanded the Samurai. When the shogunates went to war among themselves to gain supremacy over the other, it led to the death and destruction of various daimios and their castles. The loyal samurai went to war to protect their respective daimyo. In her work, *Seven Samurai. BFI Film Classics Series* Joan Mellen notes – "A true samurai wanted nothing more than to be attached to a daimyo and a castle, to be 'tied down' in the classic feudal organization" (Mellen, 2002). And if the daimyo was killed or defeated, which was a regular phenomenon owing to the constant battles; his samurai became unemployed and lordless and were tagged as ronin. The absence of a warlord deprived them of means of sustenance for themselves, which forced them down the wrong path of becoming bandits and preying upon defenseless farmers for food. Not all ronin took to plundering and killing though, some of them, like the ones depicted in *Seven Samurai* looked for other upright ways to sustain themselves. They adhered to the high values of the Bushido code and employed their skills for ethical causes. Kambei, for example, is loyal to the farmers. He could have just left them midway when he found out some villagers fighting among themselves. Instead, he chose to chide them for their good and unites them against the bandits.

The other samurai also follow certain rules laid down by the Bushido code in a sense, they all follow the one rule that is of utmost importance for a samurai to protect his people, i.e., to be brave and loyal until the very end. They would rather give up their lives fighting their nemesis instead of running away from the battlefield. It comes naturally to them. In his book *Violent Affect* Marco Abel aptly observes:

> "With [my] responsibility always already being response-ability— [my] constitutive ability to respond before these images represent—what counts in such a conception of performative ethics is to examine "the production of effects, not the zero-sum game of deciding what an identity or movement really or authentically 'means'" (Abel, 2007, p.170).

Therefore, the code still defines them because they are brave and loyal to each other and their cause. They are not fighting the bandits because they will be winning honor and glory for themselves, but, because it is the right thing to do.

> "After all, it is the Samurai that developed, chose, and dedicated their entire lives to the unwritten code of conduct, known as Bushido. To do less, would be a dishonor to their memory and the legacy of martial ways, which still serves to prevent many of us from being barbarous savages, in our martial art" (Matrasko, 1999).

Swords and Spears

Kurosawa skilfully handles the action scenes in this film mostly concentrating on the heroic manner in which the samurai kill their opponents rather than how the four samurai were killed. That they were all killed by gunshots could be a reference to the fact that only machinery can overpower the indestructible and skillful samurai. Peter Wild, in his book *Akira Kurosawa*, writes:

"His technical innovations – using three cameras to shoot a scene, employing telephoto lenses, filming action scenes in slow motion – are all widely considered to have been tremendously influential" (Wild, 2014, p. 8).

The first action scene is between a brigand and Kambei who has posed as a monk. The actual combat is not shown explicitly in the film, only the onlookers, who are waiting outside with bated breath and a slow-motion shot of the robber coming out of the hut with a wound on his back while Kambei follows with a sword stained with blood. The mise-en-scene and the slow-motion shot add to the dramatic effect of this scene. The second fight scene again shows a bevy of onlookers and a duel between Kyuzo who has been challenged by another samurai. Again, a slow-motion shot of Kyuzo skilfully bringing down his opponent with very little bloodshed is shown. The next death scene shows the bringing down of three bandits who are scouting the perimeter of the village, where two of them are killed immediately, and one of them is dragged down alive to the village's old woman who avenges her son's death by killing him. Even though the actual killing is not shown, the camera angles and the shot are powerful enough to be imprinted the audience's memory. In his article *Many Acts of Killing: Violence in the Films of Akira Kurosawa*, Eric Eisner states:

"The violence stems not from an antiquated political system with unclear rules of succession, but human nature. Kurosawa explicitly intones that this dangerous element in ourselves is present now and that it always will be" (Eisner, 2016).

The anguish of the mother and the satisfaction on her face, with the prospect of revenge, is too unrestrained to miss. The third act takes place when the samurai discover a bandit camp. They stealthily move up close and set it on fire, however when the bandits start coming out with the women, Heihachi, a samurai, comes across his wife there at the bandit camp and is aggrieved. He couldn't attack the bandits further and is shot down by one of them. Most of the samurai are clueless as to what happened to him in a fraction of a second, only to discover later that his wife was held captive there. It is pertinent to note that this death scene was not presented in a slow-motion shot like the others, maybe, because it shows the defeat of a brave warrior. But the last respects paid to Heihachi will be etched vividly in one's mind; he has been glorified in the death and has been given the burial fit for a samurai. Peter Wild further states:

"The filming of seven samurai was yet another testing ground that saw Kurosawa employing three units – one for 'orthodox shots', one for action scenes and one as a guerrilla unit – alongside use of the aforementioned telephoto lenses (Kurosawa liked to shoot groups of actors from some distance away to try and encourage a greater sense of reality in the scene)" (Wild, 2014, p. 94).

The fade-in shot of Heihachi's burial is taken from a distance below, shown atop a hill where his brethren are mourning him. One comes across yet another aesthetically pleasing shot where Kurosawa focuses the camera on the bandit being killed with an arrow that passes right through his chest shot by Gorobei. But, the climactic battle in the rain is legendary. We encounter spectacular shots of Kambei slaying various bandits with his bow and arrow amidst heavy downpour, parallel to it is a scene of the battle where many bandits are slain at the hands of the samurai, then again, a slow-motion shot captured stylistically of Shichirochi slaying yet another bandit with a spear. These scenes highlight the stylistic ways of the samurai fighting. However, the samurai whose death is most visually affecting is Kyuzo's; he staggers painfully in the rain before falling to the ground; so is Kikuchiyo's death whose limp body lies face down on the mud while the rain is drenching it. He was the villager who was not a samurai by birth but fought equally fearlessly

for his people. These scenes arouse pity and sadness for the samurai in the audience's mind. Even while battling the bandits, the samurai adhered to their code of combat, they did not follow unethical practices, while the bandits killed barbarically. In his book *Violent Affect* Marco Abel throws light on the ethical practices in war, he writes:

> "… ethics is a question of responsibility, or better yet, response-ability, that does not depend on rational choice" (Abel, 2007, p. 10).

The samurai simply follow the rules of combat they have been following as a principle; it is involuntary like an automatic response, a reflex that comes from years of training and practice and no amount of barbarism could change that. Their action does not require any rational choice. They fought valiantly until the very end defeating the bandits only to die alone and still the victory was not theirs. Kambei observes in the end while looking at the happy villagers and the graves of his comrades - "So. Again we are defeated. The farmers have won. Not us" (Kurosawa, 1954)**.** He is one of the surviving samurai along with Shichiroji and Katsushiro who are left to their fate. As the critic, Roger Ebert aptly mentions on his webpage:

> "Many characters die in "Seven Samurai," but violence and action are not the points of the movie. It is more about duty and social roles. The samurai at the end have lost four of their seven, yet there are no complaints because that is the samurai's lot" (Ebert, 2001).

The film has a heavy underlying message about the past and the present. It shows the villagers happily going about their daily chores; planting rice and singing happily after the bandits are vanquished while the samurai, who are alive, are shown standing and pondering over their fate. The villagers don't need them anymore, and they go back to being the Robins they were; they denote the past that is losing its importance in this fast-paced world, and the villagers signify the fast-moving world that the samurai are living in.

Guns and Ammunitions

"So strong was *Sholay*'s hold on the imagination of the Indian masses that in 1999 BBC India declared it the 'Film of the Millennium'" (Chopra, 2000, p. 3) – writes Anupama Chopra in her book *Sholay: The Making of a Classic*. The film is about two mercenaries, Jai and Veeru, who are hired by Thakur Baldev Singh, a retired policeman, to aid him in nabbing Gabbar Singh. He is an infamous dacoit, who causes chaos and devastation in the village of Ramgarh. Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* is deemed as one of the greatest hits in Indian cinema, the film opens with a 1970s village scene, while there is background music and the credits are running. The scene gradually moves to a train passing through the village and cuts to Jai and Veeru, two outlaws, who are captives in the train being taken to prison for robbery by Thakur Baldev Singh, then a police officer. A highly gripping action scene follows when the train is attacked by bandits. However, in the time of need, the Thakur unshackles Jai and Veeru's metal handcuffs with a gunshot thus pledging his trust in them. The film which has taken inspiration from Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (Gulzar et al., 2003, p. 407), somewhat begins with a high-powered action scene which acts as precedence to what to expect in the film. Just like in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* where it becomes a personal battle for the samurai to help the villagers from the attacking bandits, in *Sholay*, Jai and Veeru want to avenge the helpless Thakur's misfortune. Diptakirti Chaudhuri, in *Written by Salim-Javed: The Story of Hindi Cinema's Greatest Screenwriters* writes:

"*Sholay* probably had the most dramatic interval post the revelation of Gabbar's brutal revenge on Thakur. While the first half establishes Jai and Veeru's prowess, they are still hired guns out to make a quick buck by catching a bandit. At the halfway point, their motivation changes with the knowledge of the Thakur's misfortune, and they too become emotionally invested in the cause" (Chaudhuri, 2015).

However, unlike the samurai, Jai and Veeru, who have been portrayed as their equivalent, protecting the village; do not follow any specific code of combats. They are small-time thieves who must do as they are instructed for a particular amount of money. They are ace gun-men and horse-riders who know how to protect themselves and the people around them. Even the notorious dacoit Gabbar, unlike the anonymous bandits of *Seven Samurai*, is a well-rounded character. His persona changed the way dacoits were presented until then in Hindi cinema. Dressed in military attire and army boots complete with a belt strung with bullets swinging on his arm, Gabbar's character seemed more unsettling because of his choice of attire. "Male attire not only enhances the aggressiveness of their persona but also gave more power to their body language" (Kaur & Sharma, 2017). He has his peculiarities and eccentricities and is presented as a sadistic, cruel man who takes pleasure in dismembering his adversaries. The Thakur, unfortunately, is one of his victims.

Gabbar avenges the Thakur because the Thakur had dared to put him behind bars. "Gabbar escapes, but he doesn't kill Thakur. He merely neutralizes his ability to be violent as a message to feudal oppressors everywhere" (Joshi, 2016). The scene, though not shown explicitly, terrifies the audience about the approaching danger. Gabbar's menacing smile, the threat in his voice saying – "*Ye hath Mujhe de de Thakur*" (Give me those hands Thakur) (Sippy, 1975)—the trepidation in the Thakur's expression and his loud piercing cry is saying "*Nahi*" (No). They add to the terrifying elements of violence to the scene; then the scene suddenly moves in a montage[3] shot showing a present-day Thakur without his arms." Hindi cinema has always struggled to describe evil" (Kaur & Sharma, 2017). But Gabbar is evil personified. His confidence that no jail has been built that could hold him embodies an aspect of evil that is irredeemable and needs to be reformed or at least neutralized for the well-being of the society. His ruthlessness is visible from the scenes where he does not even spare his men. He can kill them if they have disappointed him in any way, without giving second chances. With no morals or conscience to fog his mind or deter him from his ambitions, Gabbar's savagery is also portrayed through his determination to massacre the Thakur's family, which he eventually does, even the small child whom he shoots at point blank range. Here the cinematography plays a very important role to convey the violent mood of the scene even though actual bloodshed is not shown.

The previous scene presents a very cheerful picture of a loving family going about their daily chores and making special preparations for the Thakur's arrival, referred to as '*babuji*' in the family. Suddenly, there is an unexpected noise of an echoing gunshot, and the Thakur's son who is trying his hand at shooting a bird suddenly falls to the ground. The viewer, for a fraction of a second, would be confused as to what happened, whether the son finally succeeded in shooting a bird or whether he was shot. Then another echoing shot and his sister falling pulling along the laundry rope before touching the ground; then a third one showing his wife falling from the swing she was sitting on and the plate of peas that she was holding on to, lying scattered on the ground. The swing was still moving back and forth. A swing, with which a child associates happiness and joy, suddenly turns horrific for him when he discovers the lifeless body of his mother. All the shots remain still for

some moments for each member until Gabbar comes into the frame with his ominous smile pointing the gun at the child and the gunshot dissolves into the sound of the Thakur's approaching train. Gabbar has escaped the jail premises and is at large again. The gleeful atmosphere at once becomes dismal and forlorn.

These photographic nuances and effects add to the artistic content, and the realistic image of the film, so does the focus on Gabbar, as the villain, that adds a dramatic dimension. He has represented as the violent destabilizing force himself. Gabbar has been given important screen space compared to villains in the films shot during the 1970s. His comrades, Samba and Kaalia, have also been acknowledged specifically. Kaalia, however, is killed by Gabbar himself in a game of Russian Roulette[4]. His killing reflects the feeling of anticipation and horror in the other comrades, which in turn makes the audience apprehensive as well. Just when Kaalia and his companion start laughing along with the other bandits at their good fortune, relieved they will not die, Gabbar shoots them; thus making their deaths even more unsettling. Another shuddering incident is the one where the lifeless body of Ahmed, slayed by Gabbar, is slung on a donkey and sent to the village to instill a sense of horror and fear among the villagers. The scene consists of montage shots showing villagers going about their daily chores, which present a prevailing sense of peace and harmony amongst them, only to be shattered by Gabbar's horrendous deed. This stark contrast proves impactful in arousing a feeling of fear in the audience as well. Throughout the film, Gabbar's character has been successful in sustaining that sense of dread amidst the villagers on screen and the film viewers off-screen alike. "Sustainability, as we know, can be defined as an ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself" (Mukherjee, 2017). Gabbar's character is nuanced yet consistent in its portrayal of unrestrained sadism and barbarism, even when he is in pain caused by the Thakur's spiked shoes.

Apart from these scenes, there are other violent action sequences where Jai and Veeru are combating the bandits one to one, either through gun-shots or hand to hand combat, which has been shot in style much ahead of the times the film was made in. Jai's violent death at the hands of Gabbar's men saddens the audience as much as it aggrieves Veeru. The rocky terrains and the barren canyons add an eerie strain to the film. However, the best comes last, when the Thakur squishes Gabbar's arms to a pulp with his nail-studded shoes. That is the first time the spectator discerns blood visually in the film. Just before the Thakur is about to do the same to Gabbar's face, the police arrive and arrest the criminal. This scene puts forth a social message for the audience that it is not the responsibility of the civilian to avenge his perpetrators, rather, the law and government shall take the matter into their hands and decide the fate of the offender; thus, fulfilling the requirements of the censor board. The combined efforts of the director, cinematographer, screenplay writers, background musicians, actors and the rest of the team make the film very life-like and relatable for the then, as well as the contemporary audience. Anupama Chopra further writes:

> "Though Bollywood churns out hundreds of these *masala* films each year only a handful find success at the box-office. *Sholay*, with its audacious use of new technology, the inability of the producers to stick to schedule – and budget – and the very novelty of the script, which was a yoking together and suturing of seemingly disparate forms, styles, narratives, character traits, myths, metaphors and themes, was tipped for failure by critics from the beginning. But it defied all odds not only to become the biggest box office hit of all time but 'the ultimate classic ... [a] myth'" (Chopra, 2002, p. 3).

Conclusion

Seven Samurai and *Sholay* were blockbuster hits during their times. They used techniques that were much ahead of the era they were made in. Both films reflect the contemporary political and social turmoil giving rise to a new genre of revenge-driven violent films that express aggression and social unrest. *Sholay* portrays the lifestyle of the 1970s and *Seven Samurai*, although shot in 1954, portrays the life of Japanese people during the Sengoku period in Japan in 1586. They take the presentation of violence to new heights while staying within the boundaries set by the censor board while employing techniques that limit the visuals of blood-shed and gore but create a sense of fear and awe amongst the viewers. The characters presented are so life-like that the audience instantly connects with them, while the distinctive camera work and the choreographed action sequences give them such a varied dimension that they seem larger-than-life at the same time. Violence has been aestheticized in both films. Every character, minor and major, have added to the essence of the film. Be it the father who is horrified at the thought of the samurai's intervention in their village or his daughter who falls for the young samurai as feared by the father, or the older woman who avenges her son's death. Both leave a deep impression on the audience's mind. The exquisite detailing and the fast-paced cinematography made the film a classic masterpiece.

Similarly, Jai and Veeru who are mercenaries fighting for money follow their moral code and agree to avenge the Thakur and help the villagers in their fight against the notorious bandits, although previously planning to run away with the money. The Thakur's plight brought forth the humane aspect in their personalities that cost Jai his life; just like the four samurai who died fighting for the villagers. Other important components that made *Sholay* a hit was the portrayal of its key characters Jai, Veeru, Thakur, and Gabbar. Even minor characters like Samba with just one dialogue to speak in the whole movie, Soorma Bhopali who entertained the villagers with tall tales of his bravery, the jailor with his comic relief, Mausi with her concern for Basanti's marriage, even the horse Dhanno who helps Basanti in her time of need — all add a special touch to the film. Although with short roles, the film has provided strong characterization to these actors in its peculiar way, each adding to an important aspect of the film. All the characters in the film embodied an essential aspect of life which plucked at the cords of the audience's heart thus making the film one of the best stories ever narrated in the history of Indian cinema. These films seem realistic because unlike popular celluloid films, the heroes, in these films do feel pain, even die, which is the reality of life. When watched today both the films act as a socio-cultural and cinematographic benchmark of the respective times they were made in, of their respective countries.

Notes

[1] The unwritten Samurai code of conduct, known as Bushido, held that the true warrior must hold that loyalty, courage, veracity, compassion, and honor as important, above all else. An appreciation and respect of life were also imperative, as it added balance to the warrior character of the Samurai. (Matrasko, 1999)
[2] Ronins are wandering samurai that have no lord or master.
[3] Montage shot is a "single pictorial composition made by juxtaposing or superimposing many pictures or designs." In filmmaking, a montage is an editing technique in which shots are juxtaposed in an often fast-paced fashion that compresses time and conveys a lot of information in a relatively short period. (http://www.elementsofcinema.com).
[4] Russian roulette is a lethal game of chance in which a player places a single round in a revolver, spins the cylinder, places the muzzle against their head, and pulls the trigger. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_roulette).

References

Abel, M. (2007). *Violent Affect Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation*. Univ of Nebraska Pr.

Chaudhuri, D. (2015). *Written by Salim-Javed: The story of Hindi cinemas greatest screenwriters*. Gurgaon, Haryana, India: Penguin Books.

Chopra, A. (2000). *Sholay: The making of a classic*. New Delhi: Viking.

Cole, J., McCarthy, N., Fujishima, K., Christley, J. N., Haigis, M., & Uhlich, K. (2013,

September 30). The Big Parade | Blu-ray Review. Retrieved February 9, 2019, from https://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/review/the-big-parade

Dissayanake, W., & Sahai, M. (n.d.). Sholay, a cultural reading. Retrieved February 15, 2019,

From https://books.google.com/books/about/Sholay_a_cultural_reading.html Ebert, R (2001, August 19). The Seven Samurai Movie Review (1954) | Roger Ebert. Retrieved February 9, 2019, from http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-seven-samurai-1954

Eisner, E. (2016, February 09). Many Acts of Killing: Violence in the Films of Akira

Kurosawa. Retrieved March 12, 2019, from https://pennmoviegoer.com/2016/11/10/many-acts-of-killing-violence-in-the-films-of-akira-kurosawa.html

Frédéric, Louis. (2002). "Bushido." *Japan Encyclopedia*. (p. 94). Translated by Käthe Roth,

Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Goldstein, J. H. (2011). *Why we watch: the attractions of violent entertainment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Graham, G. (1998). *Sex and Violence in Fact and Fiction*. In Matthew Kieran(Ed.), *Media Ethics* (pp. 157). London: Routledge.

Gulazara, Nihalani. G., & Chatterjee, S. (2003). *Encyclopaedia of Hindi cinema*. New Delhi: Encyclopaedia Britannica (India).

Joshi, A. (2016, January 29). Politically Correct Talkies: The Real Villain in Sholay was

Thakur. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from https://www.thequint.com/videos/2015/10/31/politically-correct-talkies-the-real-villain-in-sholay-was-thakur

Kieran, M. (2003). *Media ethics*. London: Routledge.

Kurosawa, A. (Director). (1954). *Seven Samurai* [Motion picture]. Japan: Toho.

Kurosawa, A. (1985). *Something like an Autobiography*. Paris: Seuil/Cahiers du cinema.

Matrasko, C. (1999). Bushido, Warrior Code of Conduct, The Samurai. Retrieved April 15, 2019, from http://aikido-world.com/articles/Bushido-CodeoftheWarrior,theSamurai.htm.

Mellen, Joan. (2002). *Seven Samurai. BFI Film Classics Series*. Edited by Rob White, British Film Institute, London: UK.

Miller, J. (2013). *Film and ethics: What would you have done?* Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Montage. (n.d.). Retrieved March 22, 2019, from http://www.elementsofcinema.com/editing/montage.html

Mukherjee, S. (2017). Sustenance of Native Culture in Multilingual Written Texts: A Case Study of *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide*. *Media Watch, 8*(3). doi:10.15655/mw/2017/v8i3/49151

Nitobe, I. (1900). *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*. Philadelphia: The Leeds and Biddle.

Nochimson, M. P. (n.d.). World on Film. Retrieved March 22, 2019, from https://books.google.com/books/about/World_on_Film.html.

Prince, S. (1991). *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Ray, S. (1994). *Our Film, Their Film*. New York: Hyperion books.

Richie, D., (1998). *The films of Akira Kurosawa*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Russian Roulette. (2017, July 29). Retrieved April 15, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_roulette

Simranpreet, K., & Vandana, S. (2017). Blurring the Binaries, Blending the Gender: A Transition from Male Masculinity to Female Androgyny in Hindi Cinema. *Media Watch, 8*(2). doi:10.15655/mw/2017/v8i2/49019

Sippy, R. (Director). (1975). *Sholay* [Motion picture]. India: United Producers Sippy Films. The 100 Best Films of World Cinema. (2017, March 06). Retrieved February 19, 2019, from http://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/100-greatest-world-cinemafilms/

Wild, P. (2014). *Akira Kurosawa*. London, UK: Reaktion Books.

Written by Salim-Javed - Books on Google Play. (n.d.). Retrieved April 24, 2019, from https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Diptakirti_Chaudhuri_Written_by_Salim_Javed.

Shipra Gupta is a Research Scholar in the School of Humanities at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT-Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, India. She obtained both, her Masters and M.Phil. in English literature from Utkal University, with specialization in American literature and film studies, respectively. Her academic interests include media and culture studies, and trans-cultural adaptations.

Swati Samantaray (Ph.D., Utkal University, 2008) is an Associate Professor in the School of Humanities at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT-Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, India. Her field of interests are mysticism, eco-criticism, feminism, existentialism, folklore, dystopia, diaspora literature, the literature of the marginals.