

## **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA'S MOVIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article aims to bring out the various film critics view about Akira Kurosawa's movies and to analyze the various aspects, methodology, techniques that he used. It also intends to highlight the regional movies which were influenced by Akira Kurosawa's masterpieces.

### **PROPOSAL**

#### **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS METHOD**

Akira Kurosawa was the most important, respected and influential film maker/director in the history of cinema. Well known Film directors around the globe have acknowledged Akira Kurosawa as their mentor who inspired them for their success.

Hollywood Film Director George Lucas has thanked Kurosawa's 'Hidden Fortress' for inspiring his science fiction film 'Star Wars'.

Hollywood block buster movie 'A Fistful of Dollars' was a virtual (unauthorized) scene-by-scene remake of Kurosawa's 'Yojimbo' ('The Bodyguard').

Ingmar Bergman commented that his film 'The Virgin Spring' was a poor imitation of Akira Kurosawa's movies. He also said that the effect of 'Seven Samurai' was so great that he himself felt like a Samurai.

Federico Fellini said that Akira Kurosawa was the living example of an ideal director. Bernardo Bertolucci admitted that Akira Kurosawa was the one who made him a film director.

Francis Ford Coppola told that Akira Kurosawa didn't make just one masterpiece or two masterpieces, but made eight masterpieces.

Steven Spielberg admitted that Akira Kurosawa had influenced him more than anyone else.

Martin Scorsese revered Akira Kurosawa as his Guru.

World famous Indian Film director Satyajit Ray told that the effect of Akira Kurosawa's 'Rashomon' was so great that he saw the film again and again continuously for three days. He also said that he could learn all aspects of a film from that movie.

South Indian Film Director Mani Ratnam has used many scenes from Akira Kurosawa's movies in his movies including his Tamil film 'Thalapathy' in which he showed the Tamil Superstar Rajinikanth as a Samurai riding on a horse.

Akira Kurosawa's movies are used to teach the elements of film in film schools and media colleges around the world. His narration techniques, editing style and script-writing methods are studied and followed by budding

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film enthusiasts. Right from selecting the story, scripting, planning, set design, construction, shooting, editing, sound mixing, Akira Kurosawa was involved in every aspect of his movie passionately. He loved cinema more than anything else as was expressed in his desire to release his last breath while making a movie.

While commercial directors use two layers of sound—one for voice and the other for background music, Akira Kurosawa used an unbelievable nine layers of sound.

He also used multiple cameras to shoot close-up, mid and long shots, saving on shooting time, cost and effort. This avoided actors acting only within the frame and not out of it, and this helped them to bring out their best natural performance, since they did not know which camera recording would appear in the final edited version.

Since there would be more footage from multiple cameras, to avoid confusion later, he edited every day as soon as the shooting was over. This avoided months spent on editing by other directors. He also remembered each shot like a computer, which helped him in editing in those olden days without any software to assist.

Akira Kurosawa repeated the same action from multiple cameras in editing to emphasize time duration and emotions.

He used wipes for transition more than anyone else to stress the shift in scenes and to compare actions. For example in 'Ikiru', when the village girls are continuously directed from one department to another before receiving their petition, the wipe effect emphasizes the apathy of the bureaucrats and the comedy of the situation.

Unlike other Hollywood directors, Akira Kurosawa used contrasting music to emphasize moods. For example, he used cheerful, fast paced music in a tragic scene, to emphasize helplessness of the characters and the irony of the situation.

Akira Kurosawa took immense pain and care in creating his sets and set properties. For 'Red Beard', he used old wood from previous sets to create the Hospital Gate to get that old look, and for the same film, he asked his assistants to pour thousands of liters of tea in the tea cups to get the tea stain in the cups (he could have saved money had he used real old cups).

Unlike other directors, Akira Kurosawa used to conduct rehearsal for the actors before commencing the actual shooting, a practice he continued from his theatrical days.

From 1936 to 1995, his film career extended to an unbelievable period of six decades, which is more than the average life expectancy of many African countries.

Akira Kurosawa was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1910 in Tokyo, Japan. His father Isamu was a member of Samurai family, who encouraged him to watch movies. His mother Shima was a member of a merchant's family.

His inspiration was his elder brother Heigo, who was a 'silent film narrator' of foreign films. Akira Kurosawa would be watching all the movies when his brother was narrating the silent movies. This was the basic film education he had as a youngster.

His interest in painting helped him draw his own story boards for his movies. His painting of a castle was used in his movie 'Ran' to construct the sets.

In 1936, he joined Photo Chemical Laboratories to work as an assistant director. In five years, he worked in twenty four films, mostly with the director Yamamoto. He learnt all aspects of film from script writing to editing, which laid a strong foundation for him to become an all rounder in film making.

Yamamoto told him that the strength of a director lied in script writing. Akira Kurosawa

soon realized that the scripts he had already written would fetch him more money than working as an assistant director.

When he was thirty three, he directed his first movie 'Sanshiro Sugata'. This very first movie was a big success. The film also won great press reviews and public opinion.

His next movie was based on the life in a factory. He asked all his actors to live and work in a factory to learn the feelings of a factory worker. This was one of the success formulae of Akira Kurosawa – not just acting but living the life of the characters.

The lead actress of this movie Yōko Yaguchi became close to Akira Kurosawa during the production and both of them married in 1945. They lived together till death parted them four decades later.

In 1948, Akira Kurosawa's 'Drunken Angel' was selected as the movie of the year in Tokyo.

In 1951, Akira Kurosawa's 'Rashomon' won Golden Lion award in the prestigious Venice Film Festival. The subtitled version of this movie was screened in United States, the success of which paved a lucrative market for Japanese films in US.

In 1952, Akira Kurosawa's 'Ikiru' won the best film award and became a box office hit.

In 1954, Akira Kurosawa's 'Seven Samurai' was marketed internationally and became the biggest hit ever made by him. This film is considered as the best Japanese film ever made which was confirmed by a poll conducted in 1979.

In 1957, Akira Kurosawa's 'Throne of blood', an adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, became the best film ever made on Shakespeare's themes.

After Seven Samurai, since Akira Kurosawa's three movies met with financial failure in the local market, though succeeded abroad, he got

dejected because of it and suffered from mental depression. He changed his style and made an Action Movie—'The Hidden Fortress' in 1958, which became a box office hit in Japan and abroad.

In 1959, Akira Kurosawa started his own film production company-'Kurosawa Production Company'. Yojimbo (The Bodyguard), made by this company, broke all previous records in the box office. This movie started a new genre and inspired many Hollywood movies including 'A fistful of dollars'.

In 1963, Akira Kurosawa's 'High and Low', based on an American novel, broke all of his previous box office records. Akira Kurosawa's original intention was to condemn kidnapping through this film. But to the contrary, the incidence of kidnapping increased in Japan and Akira Kurosawa's own daughter received threats from kidnappers.

In 1965, Akira Kurosawa's 'Red Beard' was released and it is considered to be the best of Akira Kurosawa's work in terms of technicality and social responsibility.

In 1963, he started to produce 'Runaway Train' in which he tried three things for the first time: 1. To shoot a film abroad, 2. To shoot in English, 3. To shoot in color. But, the film was dropped in 1965.

In 1968, he started writing the script for a Hollywood movie 'Tora Tora Tora'- a film on the Japanese attack on The Pearl Harbor. After completing the script, Akira Kurosawa worked for only three weeks as its director and left the project, unable to cope up with the American team.

To come out of the painful experience he had in the Hollywood, Akira Kurosawa started a production company in 1969 called 'The Club of the Four Knights' along with three of his friends and famous Japanese directors.

In 1970, the company produced 'Dodesukaden' which became a failure in the local market but succeeded abroad.

In 1973, Akira Kurosawa went to Russia to produce *Dersu Uzala*, an autobiography of a Russian explorer. The film was a box office hit in the local market and abroad. The film won the Golden Prize award at the 9<sup>th</sup> Moscow International Film Festival.

Hollywood film director George Lucas, a great fan of Akira Kurosawa, was shocked to know that Akira Kurosawa couldn't find a producer for his next movie. He immediately talked to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox to produce 'Kagemusha'. Hollywood Film Director Francis Ford Coppola worked as a co-producer for this movie.

The film was released in 1980 and became a massive hit in Japan and abroad. It won a prestigious award in Cannes Film Festival.

French producer Serge Silberman agreed to produce Akira Kurosawa's 'Ran' in 1983. In January 1985, the production of the film was stopped since his wife became ill and died a month later. The film was completed in May 1985 and released in the Tokyo Film Festival.

Though the film was not nominated for Oscar by the Japan Film Academy, the Hollywood director Sidney Lumet convinced the Oscar committee to nominate Akira Kurosawa for the Best Director category. Though Akira Kurosawa could not win the award, his costume designer won an Oscar for the movie.

Hollywood film director Steven Spielberg talked to Warner Bros to finance Akira Kurosawa's next movie 'Dreams'. This film participated in Cannes Film Festival but was not as successful as his previous movies.

Akira Kurosawa's next movie 'Rhapsody' was released in 1991 in which Hollywood Film Star

Richard Gere played a small role. This film was again a failure.

Akira Kurosawa's next movie 'Not Yet' was released in 1993, which met the same fate as his previous movie.

Unable to find producers to direct a film, Akira Kurosawa turned to his original role of script writing for others. He wrote 'The Sea is Watching' in 1993 and 'After the Rain' in 1995.

Before giving final touches to his script 'After the Rain', Akira Kurosawa met with an accident and was confined to a wheelchair. As his health went on deteriorating every day, Akira Kurosawa died in 1998.

## RESULT

- Akira Kurosawa took immense pain and care in creating his sets.
- Unlike other directors, Akira Kurosawa conducted rehearsal for the actors before commencing the actual shooting, a practice he continued from his theatrical days.
- Hollywood block buster movie 'A Fistful of Dollars' was a virtual (unauthorized) scene-by-scene remake of Kurosawa's 'Yojimbo' ('The Bodyguard').
- South Indian Film Director Mani Ratnam has used many scenes from Akira Kurosawa's movies in his movies including his Tamil film 'Thalapathy' in which he showed the Tamil Superstar Rajinikanth as a Samurai riding on a horse.
- Tamil Director Balachandar was also influenced by Akira Kurosawa's movie 'Roshamaan' and this is reflected in his Tamil movie 'Noothuku Nooru'.

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