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6.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand what are book reviews and movie reviews.
- Awareness of the steps to write a review over a book / movie.
- To learn to write an impressive review over a book / movie.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading a book / watching a movie is an easy task but writing a review for a book / movie is a difficult task. We have to critically evaluate a book / movie by making an argument over it rather than just making a summary out of it. By writing a review we discuss the creator's work with the audience / readers. One should keep in mind that a piece of art is never created by a writer / director / artist for the people to critically evaluate it BUT people criticize / appreciate it depending on their level of comprehension over the subject.

6.2 WHAT IS A BOOK REVIEW?

As a student you must be aware of the fact that writing a review for a book is very different from writing a summary / report on a book. To define it:

“A book review is a critical analysis of a work that is published by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the work.”

6.3 TYPES OF BOOK REVIEWS

There are two types of book reviews:

1. Critical reviews

This is written to evaluate a work according to its literary standards.

2. Descriptive / Informative reviews

This is written to provide information / describe a story of a book. The review thus written is published in periodicals or posted on websites.

These two types have different names but are the same at heart. The only difference is that one can be less formal while writing a descriptive / informative review.

6.4 STEPS TO WRITE A BOOK REVIEW

To write a book review it is mandatory for the reviewer to read the book. If one writes a review without reading the book, the book loses its credibility.

6.4.1 Include basic information

Every book review must begin with details like title of the book, the name of the author and publication, the number of pages and price of the book.

6.4.2 Explore the theme

One must tell the reader what is the book about. If the book is a non-fictional one, examine the issue that is touched upon and its relevance in the present time. If the book is a fictional one, exploring the thematic concern will arouse interest of the reader in the book.

6.4.3 Discuss the plot

Any fictional work is bound by its plots and sub plots. While writing the review make the readers feel the main plot of the book along with its sub plots. A unified fusion of all plots and sub plots makes a good structure of a book / novel. A reviewer who talks about the structure of the work and helps the reader sustain an interest in the book is an able reviewer.

6.4.4 Introduce the characters

A fictional book becomes phenomenal owing to the skills through which the writer sculpts the characters. A character that is well developed and rounded gives the reader an experience of delight and wonder. When judging a character, analyze if the character is convincing and authentic as the writer has created it. The appropriateness of a character in the given context can also be discussed by the reviewer as the characters derive their conviction from the milieu where they are created in.

6.4.5 Evaluate language and stylistic features

Finally, the worth of a book is known through the language and style of the book. A reviewer must comment on the stylistic devices used by the writer. Writers may use analogies, symbols, metaphors, images, concise expressions etc. to give a poetic and literary elegance to the book. When written in a good style, a theme on a mundane issue becomes appealing whereas a book with a noteworthy theme may not appeal to the readers because of its poor style. It is the style that holds the key to the reader's heart regardless of being a book that is non fictional / fictional.

6.4.6 Significance of the book

A book becomes a classic because of its incessant significance over the years. Temporal books lose their relevance and are forgotten by people as years go by. A reviewer must evaluate a book on the crucible of its relevance in the existing time i.e. the present and the coming future.

Remember that books which focus on some political / social issue will be discarded by the readers / audience once the issue is solved. Whereas books that portray the human predicament will be successful to sustain the reader's / audience's interest for ages. If a book has autobiographical elements / the author's viewpoint on a particular issue; the reviewer must make the readers aware of it by giving a hint about it.

6.4.7 Include testimonial of others

The testimonials given by others over a book can be included in the review to grab the interest and trigger the curiosity of the reader. These testimonials benefit the reviewer by heightening the impact and significance of our own review of the book that is being discussed.

6.4.8 Sample Book Review.

Book	The White Tiger
Author	Arvind Adiga
Country	India
Language	English
Genre	Fiction
Publication	Atlantic Books (UK) 2008, Harper Collins (India)
ISBN	1 – 4165 -6259 -1
Pages	318

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English**

The White Tiger is the debut novel written by Arvind Adiga. This novel was awarded the desired Man Booker Prize in 2008 owing to the ripples which it created in the literary world. It is a story of Balram, a ‘tea boy’ who is from a small village which has been ignored by his country. Balram comes to Delhi to find employment as he is extremely poor and takes up a job as a chauffeur. As time passes, he is successful in winning the trust of his master Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. But one day he kills his master, steals away his money and elopes to Bangalore.

The novel has an epistolary form and presents an honest and frank onslaught on the complexity of the Indian society which has its roots in the ages old feudal system and its hierarchy. Balram has uniquely written to the premier of China and exposed the social set up of India which is discriminating and lopsided. The novel has discussed the seminal issues of poverty, darkness, corruption, politics of caste system, feudalism, recurrent social exploitation etc. Negotiating through such filth in the sociopolitical scenario, Balram transforms himself by shunning off his origin and putting away the label of ‘tea boy’ into a successful entrepreneur of his own taxi service.

Adiga through an imaginative layered texture has narrated the life of Balram, beginning from his childhood till how he became a successful man. Balram was a wanted criminal since his childhood because of his misdeeds. Adiga has successfully captured his bohemian spirit which he was raised with in his small town Laxmangarh. His suffering through the discrimination and the way he plans to get free from its tyrannical clutches and begins to write his own destiny. Balram marks the herald of a new ‘tomorrow’ when the quite voices from the ‘Darkness’ will be heard, albeit tragically.

Adiga has composed the whole novel in poetic elegance by offering it a confluence of rich literary feast along with its thematic intensity and concerns. The writer has used imageries, symbols, metaphors and analogies between the human world and the animal world. These have been stylistically interwoven in the novel. Most of the characters have some animal equivalent of themselves in the novel. Balram holds resemblance to the White Tiger by surviving the stark dark reality on his own terms.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. Define a Book Review.
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2. State the steps to write a book review.
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3. Write a Book Review of a book of your choice.
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6.5 INTRODUCTION TO MOVIE REVIEWS

Watching movies is fun but writing a review for a movie more than just narrating the story. To write a movie review one needs to understand the theme of the movie, analyze the content and form from a cinematic and a literary perspective. The aim of writing a movie review is just to tell the reader whether the movie is worth watching or not. It also gives practice to the reviewer in writing effective paragraphs for a review.

6.6 WHAT IS A MOVIE REVIEW?

Definition – A movie review is an expression of your personal views towards a particular movie, film or documentary.

To write a review for a movie one needs to watch it with rapt attention. Watching it once may not give you a complete idea and this makes it mandatory to watch it twice to notice the key points one has missed out and try to get more details about the movie.

6.7 STEPS TO WRITE A MOVIE REVIEW

As discussed previously – one watch is never enough to review a movie. A second or a third time watch will definitely prove beneficial to write a review.

6.7.1 Discuss – theme, dialogues, script and characters

Look at the movie thematically and try to understand the style. Evaluate the theme with its reference to the current time, i. e. the present. This is fruitful when one is critically evaluating a movie that is artistic or has a social theme compared to the ones that are meant for entertainment purpose only. Influential issues like rich – poor discrimination, child labor, untouchability, woman liberation, menace of dowry system and corruption – political / financial have always been dealt with in movies. Explore the philosophical attitude of the film maker to do justice to the review.

The script has to be strong and captivating enough. The dialogues must give a conversational flow to the movie. The rest of the part depends on the performance of the actors. The reviewer must talk about the character, whether it is flat / round, fully developed or not and even look for a character that develops as the spokesperson for the film maker’s viewpoint on a specific issue.

6.7.2 The Mise-en-Scene elements

Making any movie a visual delight requires the support of visual elements like the settings, lighting, costumes, props, acting, colors, background score, the camera movements, focus angles, distance and height. They need to be minutely analyzed.

Setting and location:

Every director mandatorily shoots a movie at a credible location. For e.g. movies that portray the pain and anguish of the Indian diaspora are shot in the agrarian beauty of Punjab; romantic movies in natural settings; underworld movies in narrow and crowded streets; movies on dacoits in rural Rajasthan

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deserts to create the impact of a make-believe world, while horror movies require to be shot in the night. Talking about the credibility of setting and location, the movies that come to mind are *Ankur*, *Company*, *Lagaan*, *Namaste London*, *Raat*, *Sholay*, *Fashion* etc.

Props and colours:

Props hold a prominent position in making a storyline plausible. Different props are chosen for different movies. For e.g. when we think of the detective Sherlock Holmes, the image of a man with a hat on his head comes to our mind. Due to this whenever we see an actor playing the role of a detective, we look for the hat on his head because to imagine a detective without a hat is impossible to imagine. Many small and insignificant props like a violin, a notebook, a suitcase or a smoking cigarette convey the socio-economic status of the character. Thus, to characterize the work one must minutely observe these small yet important details.

Costumes, makeup and hairstyle:

These play a vital role to create an appropriate mood in a movie. Recall the costumes which the male actors in *Mughal-e-Azam* wore – it was a dress where armory was an essential part of the costume. In movies like *Do Beegha Zameen* and *Upkar*, we see actors dressed as farmers. In *Border*, actors are dressed as soldiers. Thus, costumes add to the credibility of the plot / story / drama that is presented to us on the screen. Hairstyle and appearance also matter a lot; take for example the movie *Chachi 420* where Kamal Hassan played a double role - one of the main lead actor and other of the governess aka *Chachi*.

Lights:

To build an environment that suits a particular mood, the director uses a variety of lighting and shades. There are two types of lighting – high key and low key. When light is evenly diffused across the shot, the result is the lower contrast between the darker and brighter areas. If the lighting is low key there is a higher contrast between the darker and brightest areas. Moods like optimism are conveyed through high key lighting whereas a mood of anxiety, danger, uncertainty and evil are conveyed through low key lighting. To emphasize an appropriate mood and to acquire conclusive meaning, directors use under lighting, top lighting, back lighting and side lighting. The best example is Guru Dutt's movie *Pyaasa* where the different patterns of lighting and shades add to the message of the movie.

Background sound and Music:

A movie becomes significant in worth through its background sound and music. It is through the background score that we come to know about a movie. Recall the time when a horror movie which you saw was successful to arouse a hair-raising fear in you and in the audience through the background music. What if the horror movie does not have any music at all? Would it create the same impact? A reviewer must always pay heed to the background score and music while watching a movie.

Camera work:

A camera holds the central position in making a movie. To watch a movie as a reviewer, one must pay heed to nuances like angle, distance, focus, height and movement. Movies give us an interplay of long shots, medium long shots, medium shots, medium close up and close up shots. These variety of shots help to create the relative size of an object. For e.g. in the shots in Titanic, the relative tininess of a huge ship compared to the expansive Atlantic Ocean has been marvelously captured through the cameras. Similarly, to emphasize a point of view, an artistic use of heights, angle and level of camera can be very effective. Due to this we find high angle, straight-on angle and low angle shots in movies which vary in their mood, content and shades.

Acting:

It holds the most decisive and crucial position amidst the mechanic maneuvering. There are movies that have become immortal due to the memorable acting by legendary actors whereas there are movies which have been rendered useless because the acting was not good. When it comes to acting, we focus on the facial expressions, gestures, hand and eye movements, positioning and dialogue delivery of the actor on screen. Actors who are considered to be best have always given a convincing portrayal of the characters which they are playing.

6.7.3 Be objective

- While writing a review keep in mind the following points:
- Do not personally attack on the actor / director.
- Do not be biased or prejudiced while writing a review.
- Give impartial details in order to allow the reader to have his / her opinion over an issue.
- Be objective and impartial.

If one follows these points and is objective, it will suggest that the reviewer is morally upright and the review becomes critically appealing.

6.7.4 Proper documentation of the Review

Write like an expert as writing a review is a professional exercise. Be careful about the mechanics used in writing.

- Write the title of the movie in italics, e. g. *Bahubali*.
- Cite the dialogue (if required) in inverted commas.
- Make an outline of the review -mention title, names of the actors, director, producer, music composer and then move over to the theme and stylistic devices.
- Do not be a spoiler by giving out the vital details / suspense of the movie.

6.7.5 Final proof reading and editing

Read, reread and reread the entire review to find out errors – grammatical, spellings, structure of sentences and paragraphs. Do a proofreading to make

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the review flawless. Revise the review in order to present it to the reader / audience.

6.7.6 Sample Movie Review

Movie	<i>The Namesake</i>
Director	Mira Nair
Based on	<i>The Namesake</i> by Jhumpa Lahiri
Language	English
Year	2007
Cast	Tabu, Irrfan Khan, Kal Penn, Jacinda Barret, Zuleika Robinson Sahira Nair

After amazing movies like *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) and *Mississippi Masala* (1991), the versatile Mira Nair has come up with the poetically surcharged *The Namesake*. This is a story of a Bengali couple Ashima (Tabu) and Ashok (Irrfan) who have an arranged marriage in Calcutta and migrate to New York where they struggle to keep their country and its roots alive in a foreign land. The movie shifts its focus on their son Gogol (Kal Penn). The movie based on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* speaks of the plight of two generations of immigrants who have settled in America. The parents have settled there to fulfill their dream whereas the children are torn apart between two diverse cultures and face an inner conflict.

Nair cleverly handles the struggle of culture which is weighing on Gogol. The movie focuses on his anger without degenerating into emotions and any sort of melodrama. She has highlighted the struggle of Ashima and Ashok who feel like aliens in a foreign land. The vacuum that Gogol suffers through the struggle by which he is torn apart on a cultural and existential plane is visible in his relationship with Maxine (Jacinda), who is an American. Gogol fails to fit into her culture due to his own conflict and turmoil over two different cultures and characteristic in-betweenness. One feels sympathetic for him when he tries to change his name from Gogol to Nikhil as he is not able to shrug off the cultural appendage.

The death of his father leaves him with the responsibility of balancing both the cultures – Eastern and Western throughout his life. During this phase he breaks up with Maxine and gets married to a Bengali immigrant Moushmi (Zuleika). The marriage turns out to be a total fiasco as both have a fractured identity because of being torn apart by two cultures where they do not fit in any one. The feelings of Gogol's sister Sonia (Sahira) and her conflict is portrayed in lighter shades by Nair.

The movie is remarkable due to its profound thematic concerns and technical richness. The names of the characters, scenes and sequences have symbolic connotations. The movie is a spectacle owing to its poetic elegance. Scenes on the tender lovemaking between Ashima and Ashok in contrast to the pitched passionate love making between Gogol and his girlfriend, Ashima's slipping into alien shoes, barrenness of the frozen snow and reminiscent silences add to the poetically canvas of the movie.

A period spanning over 25 – 30 years is portrayed in the movie. Powerful and subtle performances given by Irrfan, Tabu and Kal Penn holds this long story together. Ashima’s vulnerability, Ashok’s silence and Kal’s conflicted psyche leave an everlasting effect over the audience. Over all the movie is an artistic cinematic delight which is independent of its fictional moorings.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

1. Define a Movie Review.
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2. State the Mise -en- Scene elements to be reviewed while writing a movie review.
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3. Write a Movie Review of any movie of your choice.
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4. Fill in the blanks.
 1. Be _____ and _____ while writing a review.
 2. A _____ holds a central position in making a movie.
 3. _____ is used to build an environment of a particular mood.

6.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you learnt

- how to write a book and movie review.
- you became aware of the various factors to be considered while writing a review for a book / movie.

6.9 KEY WORDS

Critically	: in a way that expresses disapproval
Evaluate	: assess
Criticize	: disapprove
Mandatory	: compulsory
Credibility	: reliability, integrity
Fictional	: imaginary
Phenomenal	: remarkable, outstanding
Authentic	: true, reliable
Conviction	: belief, opinion
Elegance	: sophistication, grace, style
Milieu	: setting, background
Temporal	: time based
Predicament	: dilemma
Testimonial	: reference, recommendation
Seminal	: important, influential

6.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Communication skills: Sanjay Kumar and PushpLata
2. A Practical Course for Developing Writing Skills in English: J. K. Gangal
3. Internet sources
 - <https://twp.duke.edu/sites/twp.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/book-review.original.pdf>
 - https://www.mensaforkids.org/MFK2/assets/File/Teach/Guides/Guide_BookReviews.pdf
 - <https://www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/Smith,Howtodoabookreview.pdf>
 - <https://www.freelancewriting.com/copywriting/writing-riveting-book-reviews/>
 - <https://www.thebalancesmb.com/how-to-write-a-book-review-1360677>
 - <https://www.bookish.com/articles/how-to-write-a-good-book-review/>
 - <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/book-reviews/>
 - https://www.scribendi.com/advice/how_to_write_a_book_review.en.html

ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1. A book review is a critical analysis of a work that is published by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the work.
2. The steps to write a book review are –
 - Include basic information
 - Explore the theme
 - Discuss the plot
 - Introduce the characters
 - Appreciate language and stylistic features
 - Significance of the book
 - Include testimonial of others

Check your progress 2

1. A movie review is an expression of your personal views towards a particular movie, film or documentary.
2. *The Mise-en- Scene elements* – settings and location, props and colour, costume, makeup and hairstyle, lights, background score and music, camera work, acting
3. Blanks
 1. Objective and impartial
 2. Camera
 3. Lighting and shades