

Soviet cinema

Literature



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The USSR had a rich tradition of producing movies. A vibrant film culture thrived in the Soviet Union. Films were an ideal propaganda tool to educate the masses and increase the popularity of the Communist Party. Men and women played various roles in the movies produced in the USSR. These roles were according to the political conditions and time period of the USSR. This paper describes the history of the gender roles in Soviet Union from the Russian Revolution to the final dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The release of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in 1925 saw the rise of Soviet cinema [1]. The film was a fictionalized account of real events. It was basically a propaganda film which showed how sailors on the battleship had revolted against the oppressive Tsar regime. Like all Soviet movies of the era the roles of the actors were as heroes fighting against oppressive capitalist systems.

Another popular movie of the time period was *Circus* which was released in the 1930s. The movie showed how racism was rampant in the United States. The USSR on the other hand embraced people of all races according to the movie. Lubov Orlova played an American circus performer who suffered racism after giving birth to a black baby. She eventually migrates to the USSR where her child is respected by the Soviet Union. The female title role proved that the USSR was not a racist society.

Earth was released in 1930[2]. The movie was directed by Alexander Dovzhenko. It was concerned about an uprising by farmers and hostile takeover by landowners. Death, destruction and poverty were the main themes of the movie. A uniform film style was implemented in the 1930s

which was known as Socialist Realism. The film style was adopted to become suited for a broad audience. Other guidelines were added to the doctrine. Heroes of movies became role models. There were many lessons for good citizenship and support for the decisions of the Communist Party. The most successful movie of the era Chapayev was directed by Sergei and Grigori Vasiliev. The movie was based on a martyred Red Army commander. The movie was a model of Socialist Realism. It was a tale of heroism and valor for the revolutionary cause.

The title character was also given a sense of humor and a peasant charm. The movie was so popular that it was periodically re-released for subsequent generations. Chapayev glorified the Red Army with its actors portrayed as heroic and humorous soldiers who died defending the fatherland. Okraina was a movie released in 1933. The actors in the movie were peaceful farmers who unite after their collective farm is sold. They track down the offenders one by one. The 1930s was an era which portrayed men in Soviet movies as being peaceful farmers, sailors and workers who rise up against oppressive capitalist systems. Stalinism played an important role in gender roles in Soviet Cinema during the 1930s.

The New Gulliver released in 1935 was a Soviet version of the popular novel Gulliver's Travels. The lead role was about a young boy who dreams himself as Gulliver who frees Lilliput from capitalist exploitation. Stalin had embarked on a program of anti capitalist propaganda in the 1930s. Movies like The New Gulliver were attempts to reinterpret Western stories in the light of the Russian Revolution.

Musical comedies in the 1930s also were used effectively to support Stalin's policies. *Volga-Volga* was a brilliant success in 1938. The actors and actresses in the movie were a group of singers who perform on a steamboat. The villain a bureaucrat is removed and reported to the authorities by the performers. The performers also sing and tell the audience that reporting such people is the duty of the Soviet citizens. This movie essentially was used to justify Stalin's purge of opponents. The release of "The Shining Path" was another movie which was a story about a servant girl who quickly rises through the ranks of the Soviet industrial leadership. The role of the title character was both a mix between Cinderella and the value of workplace efficiency. Both these movies showed women played a leading role as guardians of the Communist revolution and supporters of Stalin's policies. The German invasion of the Soviet Union created a national crisis for the Soviet population. Major industries were pressed into emergency service. Leningrad and Moscow which were two movie production centers were under constant threat from German bombers. Many factories sustained damage in the city. The era saw the rise of propaganda documentaries[3].

Raduga was a drama in which a Russian peasant girl is captured but does not betray her country. Soviet films of the era mostly concentrated on the war effort against the Nazis. Patriotism, heroism and valor were the main themes of these stories. The characters were also examples of heroism and bravery as they fought against the Nazi aggressors. Films were an enormous propaganda tool for the communist regime in its war efforts against the Nazis. *The Battle for Soviet Ukraine* was a popular Soviet documentary which dealt with the Battle of Kharkov. Footage captured from the Germans was

used in the movie. The Great Patriotic war saw men and women being portrayed as heroes who fight for their fatherland. They are also ready to die for their cause and to defeat the Nazi aggressors.

Ivan the Terrible was a famous movie of this time period. Stalin admired Ivan as a brilliant and decisive leader. The movie showed Ivan as a brilliant and ruthless leader who struggles for the unification of Russia and tries to overcome the resistance of the boyar run government. This movie was released in three parts. However only Part I was allowed to be showed under Stalin. The title character is similar to Stalin as he uses ruthlessness and brilliance in unifying Russia and overcoming internal and external threats.

Secret Agent released in 1947 was the first Soviet spy movie. The role of the title characters was about Soviet agents who had infiltrated behind German enemy lines. The movie became the standard for all Soviet spy movies. It was a brilliant movie about the Soviet intelligence and it enlightened the Soviet public about the sacrifices and efforts by the Soviet intelligence in the Great Patriotic War.

The German surrender finally led the Soviet film industry to rebuilding. The war had caused staggering losses to the Soviet Union. The movie industry was also particularly hard hit. Much of the infrastructure lay in ruins. Half of the Soviet movie theatres were out of order. Soviet post war planning supported the rebuilding of the cinema industry. New personnel were trained and recruited. By the 1950s the cinema industry had exceeded pre war levels[4]. The Carnival Night was a big screen success of the 1950s. The lead characters are members of an economics institute. A new director disapproves of the entertainment schedule.

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The employees begin to use tricks to trap the new director and at the same time perform their entertainment schedule on New Year. The movie was a contrast from early Soviet movies which were mostly used for promoting the virtues of communism and highlighting the evils of capitalism. The characters in the movies dance, sing, joke and humor. The Burning Miles released in 1957 was one of the earliest Red Western movies made in the USSR. It was a drama focused on the Russian civil war. The characters progress in the movie characterizes their problem resolution and transitions in their relationships.

The 1960s were a time period in which science fiction movies became highly popular. The Amphibian Man released in 1962 was a science fiction and romance film which starred Vladimir Korenev. The roles given to actors and actresses in such movies were a combination of science fiction and love. Ivan's Childhood released in 1962 portrayed a young boy who fights for the Soviets as a partisan behind the enemy lines. He mostly acts as a scout for the Red Army. Ivan's family has been murdered by the Germans. The movie also featured the lives of other soldiers with whom Ivan interacts. The story was a fantastic mix of childhood innocence and patriotism. The lead role is played by a young child.

Movies like I Am Cuba were an example of cooperation between the USSR and Cuba. The roles given to men and women in this movie were the reaction of Cubans towards the oppressive pre Castro system[5]. The poverty of the Cuban masses in contrast to the US run gambling and casino dens were contrasted. The characters each give various responses to the oppressive system from passive aggression to joining the guerillas. Although <https://assignbuster.com/soviet-cinema/>

the movie was not well received in both Cuba and USSR it was still considered a brilliant justification for the Cuban revolution. The 1960s were a period of international communist revolutions in countries like Cuba. Movies released in that era portrayed actors and actresses as young revolutionaries ready to fight against capitalism.

Adventures of a dentist released in 1965 showed how society eventually confines brilliant people to the margins of society. The movie was a dark comedy. The title role was different from other movies in that time period. White Sun of the Desert released in 1969 achieved the status of a cult film in Soviet culture. It was remarkable blend of action, music and drama. The lead role was a Red army soldier who is trapped in Turkestan and has to fight the Basmachi rebels[6]. This movie was a popular Red Western and it reinforced the Soviet propaganda of how they brought civilization to backward areas like Turkestan.

The 1960s was a time of revolution and transition in the USSR. While there were some movies which saw actors and actresses being given roles as patriotic defenders of communism, science fiction also gained popularity in the decade. Love stories and dark comedies were also very popular in this time period. Restrictions were once more renewed in the late 1960s. The movie Komissar was banned because it dealt with anti-Semitism. Popular science and documentary movies were very popular in the 1970s. “ From Lift-off to Lift-off” was a popular movie which detailed the experiences of Soviet cosmonauts. The movie was presented to Soviet audiences as to the strength and value of the Soviet space program. It also aimed to show socialist progress to further heights.

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The 1970s were a time period of innovation in movie making. Some roles given to actors and actresses were different than the roles in the previous decades. *Dauria* a movie release in 1971 portrayed the Cossacks in Siberia[7]. The movie portrays Siberia in the aftermath of the Soviet revolution. Traditional life is destroyed and crime is rampant in Siberia. The old traditions are destroyed. The gender role in this movie was different than other movies. It showed how communism had destroyed the traditional system of Siberia.

There were also comedy roles for Soviet actors and actresses in the 1970s. *Gentlemen of Fortune* are one of the best known comedy movies of that time period. The lead character looks like a criminal who has stolen an artifact. The lead character must play the criminal to find the missing artifact. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* released in 1972 was a movie which was reminiscent of the Great Patriotic War era movies. It portrayed a band of heroic soldiers who fight against heavily armed and numerically superior German forces. The movie showed women as title characters who sacrifice their lives and manage to kill all the Germans before being killed. The movie showed the contribution of Soviet women in the struggle against the Nazis. Actors and actresses were also given science fiction roles in the 1970s. Mikhail Bulgakov's *Back to the Future* was a popular movie of the 1970s. The movie was about time travel. It was also a brilliant movie showing Soviet scientific progress in space technology[8]. *At Home among Strangers* was a popular movie released in 1974. The title character plays a demobilized Russian civil war era soldier who is engaged in a game of deception and fraud. The title character was a hero who battled greed and corruption.

The 1980s were a time period of glasnost and perestroika. Mikhail Gorbachev had become the new Soviet leader. The Soviet Union was undergoing a serious economic crisis and social problem. There were a need for reform and restructuring of the Soviet system. Gorbachev's policies allowed cinema to become more open about issues which had been banned under previous regimes. It was Gorbachev's desire that by opening up society the Soviet people would support his reforms.

Dead Man's Letters released in 1986 saw the lead role being portrayed as a scientist who tries to fight against the errors of science[9]. An entire town has been destroyed because of a computer error causing a nuclear missile launched on it. The main character is disappointed at the failure of science. The movie paralleled the Chernobyl Disaster. It also was a criticism of the failure of the Soviet government to publicly release the details about the disaster. Soviet cinema in this time period openly talked the issues and problems faced by the Soviet Union.

Little Vera released in 1988 was one of the first Soviet movies which showed sex scenes[10]. The title role is that of a teenage girl who feels a pessimistic view of Soviet society. The movie was one of the many films which were called "Black Stuff" in the time period of perestroika. Gender roles in the 1980s were mostly characters who criticized the Soviet government and its policies in this time period. This was due to the influence of perestroika and glasnost initiated by the Gorbachev administration.

Soviet cinema had a rich history and tradition of roles for men and women. The start of the Bolshevik revolution saw propaganda movies released which

depicted men and women as fighting oppressive capitalist systems. A film is a social document which reflects the finest details of society. The movies produced under the Stalinist era reflected the problems and issues of Soviet Union. Stalinist cinema idealized the new Soviet man. Movies were produced which saw men and women as patriots and freedom fighters against the Nazi invaders. War movies were an essential tool in mobilizing public opinion in the fight against Germany.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time period which saw diversified roles for men and women. The usual war and patriotic movies were produced along with science fiction, romantic and comedy movies. The characters were full of humor, love and patriotism. The communist revolutions of the 1960s were also portrayed in movies. The movie I Am Cuba showed the poor conditions of the Cuban people and their response to this from passive aggression to joining the Cuban guerillas.

The 1980s were a time period of change and openness. Soviet cinema in this time period saw actors and actresses being given roles as men and women who criticized the pessimism and cynicism of the Soviet system. Soviet cinema has a rich history and tradition. The roles given to Soviet actors and actresses have reflected the issues at stake for the Soviet Union under various regimes and time periods.

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