



The role of Hindi films in promoting Indian music with special reference to 'Omkara' and 'Haider'



Gunjan Kapoor

Research Scholar, Department of Performing Arts, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Jalandhar

Abstract

Hindi films have been known for their songs and dance sequences from the time the first talkie film *Alam Ara* was made. It has been an integral part of the Indian film industry since then. Music in Hindi films has come a long way, from using a variety of genres like classical, semi-classical, light, Ghazal, and folk to blending the music with modern instruments and using contemporary styles that engage a wide range of listeners. This paper deals with the role of Hindi films as a medium of promoting Indian music worldwide focusing specifically on the case studies of Vishal Bhardwaj's critically acclaimed films '*Omkara*' (2006) and '*Haider*' (2014). The objective behind this research is to explore the promotional tactics used by the filmmaker including an amalgamation of traditional and modern musical elements, and global promotion of Indian music. This research uses a qualitative approach including content analysis of the film soundtracks and document analysis will be done related to the promotion of the films that include online interviews with the filmmaker, reviews, articles, and research papers. This paper focuses on the critical role of Hindi films as a technological medium in ensuring the international reach of Indian music especially in the case of '*Haider*' and '*Omkara*'.

Key Words: Hindi films, global, promotion, Indian Music, '*Haider*', '*Omkara*'

Research Paper

Introduction

Indian music tradition shows its rich heritage, diverse styles, and artistic expressions that have drawn people's attention worldwide with its melodious compositions. 'In India life begins and ends with music... a newborn baby is greeted into the world by songs... there is a song and dance when he weds and dies' (Dudrah 47), describes the significant position of music in Indian cultural life. It holds an equally central and inevitable role in the Hindi film industry. In this context, Hindi films are a significant medium for entertainment and promotion of Indian music across global. Music is a distinctive element of Hindi films famous for its songs and dance numbers that weave a captivating narrative that fascinates the audience worldwide with their mesmerizing tunes and rhythm and on radio channels dedicated to Asian music. Among the Indian musicians who received worldwide acclaim, the first name readily comes to mind is A.R. Rahman who composed the song *Jai Ho* in 2008 for the British film "*Slumdog Millionaire*" for which he got an Oscar Award. But even before this, many such incidents tell us how Hindi film music rules the hearts of people

outside the country. To give an example, Amitabh Bachchan recollects memories from London's Piccadilly Circus where a group of Kurds started singing songs from the film *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Muquaddar Ka Sikander* ("Netvamsham!" Times of India, July 18, 1999). According to Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, "Bollywood cinema survives for its viewer as a song or the fragments of a song, so we hear of the guide at the Great Wall who hums a tune from *Disco Dancer* or the taxi cab driver in Athens who connects with an Indian passenger over the title song of *Awaara*" (Gopal and Moorti 3). These examples depict the indelible impact of Hindi film music on an international level.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for the paper "The Role of Hindi Films in Promoting Indian Music with Special Reference to '*Omkara*' and '*Haider*'" employs a qualitative approach. The qualitative data collection method uses content analysis of film narratives, lyrics, and musical compositions as well as in-depth interviews with the filmmaker and his associates. This approach aims to explore the intricate relationship between Hindi

cinema and Indian music emphasizing the cultural significance of 'Omkara' and 'Haider' as case studies. Qualitative analysis techniques including thematic coding and narrative interpretation will be applied to extract rich insights into how these films contribute to the promotion of Indian musical traditions.

Research Objective

1. The primary objective behind this research is to explore the promotional tactics used by the filmmaker including an amalgamation of traditional and modern musical elements, and global promotion of Indian music.
2. To evaluate the cultural and artistic relevance of the music in the films 'Omkara' and 'Haider,' with a focus on how it symbolizes diverse aspects of Indian musical legacy and creativity.

Research Gap

The paper clearly deals with the usage of Indian music in Hindi films 'Omkara' and 'Haider', and the promotional strategies to promote it worldwide. Further study can be done to understand how the innovative musical approaches in these films might have inspired or shaped the work of contemporary Indian music composers.

The Study

Hindi Films from a Global Perspective

Hindi films have left an eternal mark on the worldwide cultural landscape and songs in Hindi films are that make them distinguish from any other country's films. However, Due to the placement of music and its somewhat unrealistic nature, Indian films have received global criticism. Satyajit Ray famously expressed his bafflement at Indian commercial cinema having to produce five to six songs for every single film, setting the tone for a critique of the form as extraneous, unrealistic, and ultimately detrimental to the narrative. But his internationally acclaimed film 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' has five songs based on Indian Classical Music, Bengali film 'Hirak Rajar Deshe', features twelve songs for which he won National Film Award for Best Music Direction. Anjum Rajabali, a veteran Indian screenwriter shares, "Whenever I have discussed our scripts with American scriptwriters or screenwriting students, they have been first struck by the presence of songs, and at loss at a loss of comprehend by their use. Oh, You guys make musicals! Only one genre of film, is it? (Rajabali, 27-36)." Lalita Gopalan's Cinema of Interruptions considers the song sequences as "interrupting" the narrative. On the other hand, in the book, Gopal and Moorti describe song and

dance sequences as "the single most enduring feature of popular Hindi cinema, emphasizing their significance and contribution in shaping the very essence of Hindi cinema. Morcom argues that narrative is structured not only by visuals but also through music. Kalinak believes "Music is one of the most powerful emotional prompts in film, encouraging us to empathize with onscreen characters." In addition to this, I present my idea that films proved to be a potent tool for promoting not only the music of rural areas or folk music but also showcasing the rich tapestry of regional cultures across India. When offbeat films like "Maqbool," "Omkara," and "Haider" garner international praise, it's not simply the cinematic creativity that is lauded. These films also contribute to the success and recognition of our rural culture and folk music.

Vishal Bhardwaj is renowned for his Shakespearean adaptations. His understanding and amalgamation of Shakespeare's narrative with Indian socio-political and Indian cultural elements enable him to present fresh perspectives on timeless epics. His films Maqbool (2004), and Omkara (2006) succeeded by Haider (2014), are genuine efforts to adapt Shakespeare's plays into the national spirit and also adjusted easily into the very traditional backdrop of India with all its class differences and current societal levels. By making a trilogy of Shakespeare's plays, he has achieved the title of Indian Shakespeare (Bhatt 142-46). This effort of Bhardwaj not only proved his creative abilities but also established a unique connection between Indian audiences and English literature. At the same time, worldwide audiences were given access to India's cultural variety. Also, his films 'Omkara' and 'Haider' have showcased a unique approach to incorporating music into the narrative. Most Hindi filmmakers still use the traditional style of directing song sequences with background dancers, changes of costumes, and locations. Omkara and Haider's music is integral to the storyline and does not entail any change either in location or costume. Rather has a realistic approach and provides the film with narrative continuity (Heidenberg 87-105). For instance, the song 'Naina Thag Lengy' depicts how the affair between Dolly and Omkara started, and the song 'O Saathi Re' is a romantic number yet reveals the conflict starts - Dolly lost her Kamarbandh gifted by Omkara. The non-diegetic theme song 'Omkara' praises the hero during a fight between Omkara's gang and other gang members. Even the item numbers 'Beedi Jalayi Le' and 'Namak Ishq Ka' are not just for entertainment; they disclosed the plan of Langda Tyagi.

On the other hand, in the film Haider the first song 'Jhelum' describes the inner emotions of a son who lost his father. Jhelum has been addressed to Haider and the place Kashmir, as both are looking for the shores, where there will be peace, and all things will be back to normal. The second song 'Khul Kabhi' shows the deep romantic bond of Haider with Arshia in chaos, offering a respite from the tense atmosphere of Kashmir. The next song 'Bismil' is a play within a play like Shakespeare's Hamlet, portraying his father's murder. According to Stephen Alter, it is "a moment of light entertainment amidst a tale of deceit, intrigue, and murder" (Javed 9) Vishal Bhardwaj has used Kashmiri folk Bhand Pather. Although this song is presented in the film following traditional Hindi film conventions with background dancers, diegetically. But Bhardwaj has taken care of that justification as in the film, the character Haider is a student of literature and practice poetry, he interwove his suspicion and feelings in a poem and sang. The next song 'Aao Na' depicts the graveyard scene of Hamlet that portrays the philosophy that death is the inevitable truth. The song 'Aaj ke Naam' that appears in the last describes the grief, their unheard, unacknowledged pain.

Along with strategically placing songs in his films, his music has an amalgamation of native culture and modernity with local elements and instruments. Also, he focuses on matching lyrics with the character for the genuineness of the film. His mentor and collaborator Gulzar shares, "He acquaints me with the character's language, to some extent. we try to pick up a line from the character itself so that it is spoken like him and in their own language so that things are spoken like them. The way he talks, the songs also get added in the same way (Gulzar)" As in Omkara, the viewers witnessed the dialect of Uttar Pradesh such as the use of 'Jaban pe laga' instead of 'zaban pe laga', 'Namak Isq Ka' instead of 'Ishq' 'Misri ki Pudiya', etc, with the blend of local instruments such as 'dufli' in Omkara, Indian instruments like Dholak, Tabla in 'Beedi'. Madhavi Biswas describes, "It harkens back to a long tradition of Nautanki, which is a form of folk theatre including song, dance, and comedy routines (Biswas 1-11)." The lyrics, song, and performing style all reflect the Nautanki mood and folk elements. Bawdy lyrics like Na Gilaaf, NaLihaaf, Thandi Hawa ke khilaaf, Sasuri, Ja padosi ke chulhe se aag lai le are used that are inherent in the folk tradition.

Bismil has elements of Bhand Pather that combine aspects of embedded story/message, satire, and irony with the use of masks and puppets. Like Bhand pather,

Bismil utilizes the power of masks... dance, theatre, mime, puppetry, and music,' creating an intertwined story in which a falcon-devil appears. The lyrics of the song 'Bismil' has a richness of Urdu language and are a loyal tribute to the Urdu language with Tumbaknari, Rabab, sarangi, and nout, the local instruments played by local musicians in the film (NDTV Movies 2014).

Promotional Strategies

At the time of its release, Omkara was Bhardwaj's most commercial and ambitious venture. Before releasing the film, the name of the film was decided through a contest, for which the general public voted via SMS service (IMDB). The film's theatrical launch was on 28th July 2006 and four weeks later Shemaroo Films presented on 8th August 2006, announced the home video release of DVDs and VCDs with both English and Hindi subtitles. According to Bollywood Hungama, the film collected 42 crores at the worldwide box office, out of which it collected 32.25 crore in India, and overseas it grossed 9.25 crore. Although Omkara could not do well in India due to the use of cuss words families chose to stay away from the film. But according to the records, Omkara was in the UK's top-ten charts and also got success in Australia, South Africa, and the United States. Vishal Bhardwaj is a visionary director who knows that an item number holds commercial value. In an interview, he shares, "For the Beedi... song I told [the lyricist, Gulzar] I wanted an item song bigger than Paan khayo saiyyan hamar and Jhumka gira re. These were mass-oriented songs, but still so classy. Only Gulzar Saab could do it") which balanced his commercial concerns with artistic ambitions. The result of this is "Beedi" received considerable airplay on pop radio stations in Brazil becoming the first Hindi-only song to achieve this. Moreover, the theme tune to a Brazilian TV soap opera called Caminho das Índias, produced by Rede Globo. Also, Omkara won the best-adapted screenplay award at the Sixth Kara Film Festival (Times of India 2006), best Artistic Contribution in Cinema of a Director- for Omkara at the Cairo International Film Festival (Times of India 2006), three National Film Awards, and seven Filmfare Awards. Also, the film was premiered in the Marché du Film section at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival along with a book on the making of Omkara (Kumar 570). Hindi films use song and dance numbers to either express their feelings (happy or sad) or to show fantasy to the audience.

Haider, an adaptation of Shakespeare's play Hamlet, inspired by Basharat Peer's novel "Curfewed Night,"

portrays the tumultuous situation in Kashmir during 1995. worldwide. Haider was released worldwide and the total collection of the film Haider was 91.79 crore. Out of which 77.9 crore was from India and 13.89 crore was from overseas. Although the film was released on October 2, its promotion had been building for quite some time before its official release as various engaging promotional events were organized before the final release to build curiosity among the audience. From the trailer launched on 8th July at PVR cinema in Mumbai, various dialogue promos were uploaded on various websites such as Dailymotion, Bollywood Hungama, etc. Press meets were organized at the Disney UTV office in Mumbai, Press conferences at Grand Hyatt in Dubai for the promotion, and even visited Umang College in Maharashtra and Chancery Pavilion in Bangalore for the same. Apart from this, Shahid and Shraddha promoted the film on various reality shows such as Cine Star ki Khoj (September 2014), India's Raw Star (September 2014), and Big Boss 8. A special screening was organized at a studio in Juhu, Mumbai on 1st October one day before the final release. Also, it was screened at the 19th Busan International Film Festival. Also, Haider became the first Indian film to win People's Choice in the main category at the 9th Rome Film Festival (Bollywood 'Haider', 'Finding Fanny' to Screen at Busan Film Fest). Vishal Bhardwaj also won the Best Music Direction and Best Dialog award at the 62nd National Film Awards. 'Bismil' is a play within a play like Shakespeare's Hamlet. In this song, Haider is enacting the whole incident of the murder of his father by his uncle Khurram. According to Stephen Alter, it is "a moment of light entertainment amidst a tale of deceit, intrigue, and murder" (Javed 9). Vishal Bhardwaj has used Kashmiri folk Bhand Pather (Chatterji 234).

On the other hand, the song 'Bismil' was studied by various international researchers and critics and was appreciated. McCahill in his review wrote, that there's a surprising sense in staging the Mousetrap and gravedigger scenes as musical numbers, and something compelling in how this backdrop forces the characters to adopt explicitly political positions (McCahill). Bismil is a crucial component of satire and mimicry as according to Sushma Jatoo and Sudhir Lall the song 'Bismil' exploits the punitive power of 'masks... dance, drama, mime, puppetry and music', spinning an interwoven narrative in which a falcon-devil (the two-faced puppet suggests a 'smiling damned villain' [1.5.106]) invades the 'palace' of a 'simple... nightingale', consigning the bird to a 'watery grave' (Burnett 2019).

Findings

'Omkara' and 'Haider' resonated with audiences worldwide, as the filmmaker skilfully blended classic and modern cinematic elements while seamlessly incorporating music into their narratives. These films showcased the vibrant culture of India by infusing local instruments and regional flavors into their musical compositions. Their marketing strategies, including international film festival screenings, promotional events, and online advertising via social media platforms, effectively reached a global audience. Acting as cultural ambassadors, these cinematic gems unveiled an authentic part of India's rich musical and creative legacy to the world. This fusion not only garnered praise but also exemplified the enduring global appeal of Indian cinema.

Conclusion

Indian folk music has an unwritten history that spans centuries, its origins shrouded in the mists of time. It is not only ancient, but it also has an astounding diversity. India has different states, languages, and cultures, which is what actually creates our musical legacy. Despite its richness, folk music has rarely reached a global platform because of many issues one of which includes widespread illiteracy among folk groups. As a result, folk music is mostly unknown to the general public. Vishal Bhardwaj, a notable figure, is among many who have attempted to bridge this gap. He portrays rural culture to life through his films like Omkara and Haider, giving insight to the audiences into the authentic appeal of local traditions. Omkara and Haider are adaptations of William Shakespeare's plays Othello and Hamlet respectively are excellent instances of how adaptation, true depiction, and deliberate promotion can bring Indian folk music and culture to the forefront of worldwide attention. His films not only paid tribute to literary treasures but also with rigorous promotional strategies Omkara and Haider got accolades for making this folk music see the light of world recognition.

References

- Bhatt, Dr. Janki. "A Study of Film Adaptation as a Process of Cultural Glocalization with Reference to Othello and Omkara." *International Journal of All Research Writings*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2020, pp. 142-146.
- Bhopatkar, Tejasree. "From Silent Era to Heavy Special Effects, Here's How Indian Cinema Has Evolved Over the Years." *The Times of India*, 16 December 2020.
- Biswas, Madhavi. "Light Your Cigarette with My Heart's Fire, My Love": Raunchy Dances and a Golden-hearted Prostitute in Bhardwaj's Omkara (2006)." 2017.

- Nagdev, Kritika. "Integrated Marketing Communication in Indian Film Industry - Its Application and Impact." National Conference on Business Rethinking and Innovative Solutions Together for Reinventing Management, Delhi, 2014.
- Moorti, Sangita Gopal. Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance. Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2008.
- Kalinak, Kathryn. Film Music: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2010
- Javed, Fatimah. "Shakespeare's Hamlet and Vishal Bhardwaj's Haider: A Comparative Analysis." Cogent Arts & Humanities, 2021, p. 9.
- Kumar, D. G. "Omkara: The Adaptation of William Shakespeare's Tragedy Othello." International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 2015, p. 570
- Heidenberg, Mike. "2014." In No Country for Young Women: Empowering Emilia in Vishal Bhardwaj's Omkara, edited by Barbara Shakespeare.
- Chatterjee, Koel. Bollywood Shakespeare from Gulzar to Bhardwaj: Adapting, Assimilating, and Culturizing the Bard. London: Royal Holloway University, 2017.
- Burnett, Mark Thornton. "Hamlet and Indian Cinemas: Regional Paradigms." Hamlet and World Cinema, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett, 2019, p. 176.
- Rajabali, A. "A Song and Dance About Everything." Sangeet Kala Vihar, 2000-2001.
- Shemaroo Film. "Press Release." August 2006.
- Posters, Bollywood Movie. "Old Indian Movie Posters for Sale - Omkara."
- Times, Hindustan. "Omkara Honoured at Kara Film Festival." 2006.
- Times, Hindustan. "Awards Galore for Omkara." Mumbai: Indo-Asian News Service, 2006.
- Gulzar, interview by Gunjan Kapoor, 9/09/2021

