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Indian Cinema and Music: A Historical Journey

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Abstract

Indian cinema has a very special relationship with music. Our traditional legacy of music motivates our filmmakers to explore this oldest form of art through the young medium of cinema. Indian cinema has a very unique musical character. Songs and dance constitutes a very significant aspect of films made in our country. This research paper is an attempt to look back and trace the historical journey of music in Indian cinema. It focuses on the development of various phases when music flourishes at different levels. The paper studies the introduction and growth of various genres of music as well as the contribution various singers, music composers and lyricists made to flourish these genres. The paper also focuses on the contribution of those filmmakers who explored cinematic medium through music. They thought above the song and dance numbers and tried to learn from music to experiment with the medium of cinema. The focus will also be on the contemporary cinema and the pop music used in it.

Keywords: Main stream Indian Cinema, Indian New Wave Cinema, Musical Genres

Introduction

Music is one among the oldest forms of art. It is a part of every sphere of Indian life such as social, cultural, political, religious, domestic and public. We have a long history of traditional legacy of music. *Rigvedas* (1700-1100 BC) is the richest source of songs and verses. The ancient epic of *Ramayana*, written by Valmiki during 500-100 BC, contained twenty four thousand verses. Another epic *Mahabharata*, written by Vyasa, has one hundred thousand lines of poetry. The Sanskrit Poetic drama of Kalidas was written during 370-450 AD. After Sanskrit, the second greatest language Tamil is as poetic as Sanskrit. *Silappatikaran* and *Manimekhalai*, written during the beginning of the Christian era, are the ancient epics in Tamil language which contained thousands of verses. The Bengali language is no less in this regards. Ancient texts such as *Charyapada* (tenth to twelfth centuries), *Joydeva* (1200 AD) *Vidyapati* (1352-1448 AD) and *Chandidas* (1400 AD) have a mesmerizing poetic diction as part of their context. The Hindi language did not lag behind. The devotional poems written by Kabira, Surdas and Tulsidas have given us the legacy of verses in Hindi language. Apart from it, the Urdu language contributed a lot and made the tradition even richer. The composition of the Hindu as well as the Muslim poets, giving the sense of unity and integrity, contributed immensely in the growth of verse both before and after partition of India in 1947. The contribution of Amir Khusrow (1223-1325), the Hindi classical compositions of Tansen (1506-1589) during the reign of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar, and the devotional songs of Baiju Bawra (1542-1613), are widely remembered in this context.

Musical Beginning

The use of music in Indian cinema, however, is a recent phenomenon traced back to the beginning of 20th century. It is interesting to note that the musical fanfare was already there in our country even before the introduction of sound in cinema. The very first silent film, *Raja Harishchandra*, made by Dadasaheb Phalke, the father of Indian cinema, was released on 3 May 1913 at Coronation Cinema in Bombay, with a song and dance performance. The relationship of Indian cinema with music began with its very first talkie or sound film *Alam Ara* made by Ardeshir Irani in the year 1931. The first song, *De de khuda k naam pe pyaare, taqat hai gar dene ki*, in the history of Indian cinema was composed by Feroze Shah Mistri and was sung by Wazir Mohamad Khan. The film established a musical character of Indian cinema and has as much as seven songs in it.

In 1930s, almost all the film studios had their own song lyricists and music composers. In fact they were recruited on salaried jobs by the studios. Saraswati Devi, the classical singer as well as the first woman music composer in the history of Indian cinema, was found and hired by Himanshu Rai, the owner of Bombay Talkies. She composed, among many others, the iconic song 'main ban ki chidiya' for the film *Achhoot Kanya* (1936). The two studios, The Prabhat Film Company of Pune and The New Theatres of Calcutta, were the most significant among many others. These studios produced many popular films enriched with classical as well as popular music. The Prabhat Film Company had Govindrao Tembe and Master Krishnarao, two very eminent composers. Where Govindrao composed the harmonium based classically tuned compositions like 'chhod aakash ko sitare' in the films such as *Ayodhya Ka Raja* (1932) directed by V. Shantaram, *Maya Machindra* (1932) and *Sairandhiri* (1932), Master Krishnarao tried to soften the classical element with emotional

touch in the *yaman-kalyan* based song ‘*suno suno van k prani*’ in the film *Amar Jyoti* (1936). The New Theatres of Calcutta enjoys an important place in the history of Indian cinema. The brilliant music composers Rai Chand Boral, Pankhaj Kumar Mallick and Timir Baran were associated with it along with iconic singers such as Kundan Lal Saigal and Kanan Devi. These composers and singers heralded a new era in film music. Whereas Rai Chand Boral used Rabindra Sangeet, folk music, thumri and ghazal in a sentimental manner with swadeshi orchestra, Pankhaj experimented with the western instruments like organ and cello. *Chandidas* (1935) and *Devdas* (1935) were the two very famous productions under the new theatres banner. The songs were composed and sung on the spot until Nitin Bose experimented with playback singing in his Hindi film *Dhoop Chhaon*, a remake of Bengali film *Bhagya Chakra* in 1935. This experiment gave birth to a new beginning in the history of Indian cinema.

The Golden Era

From 1940s to the early 1970s, the film music was at the zenith. It was the golden period of cinema. Many films made during this period, especially in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu, captured the attention of the masses due to the music. The 1947, the year of partition of India, brought a disastrous effect to the history of film music. Although it was a big setback for our country, but we were lucky enough to have Naushad Ali and Mohammed Rafi who decided to remain in India. The Hindi cinema had a great moment when the Urdu poet Sahir Ludhianvi decided to come back to India from Pakistan in 1948. Indian cinema is indebted to Sahir Ludhianvi for his enormous contribution. There were many others who enriched the history of film music. In the late 1940s, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh, Lata Mangeshkar, Geeta Dutta and Suraiya were the major playback singers who dominated the film industry in the decades to come too. The music composers S.D. Burman, C. Ramachandra and Shanker Jaikishen and the lyricists Shailendra and Sahir Ludhianvi contributed hugely to make film music an integral part of cinema.

In 1950s, classical music enjoyed the popularity in many unforgettable compositions which I will discuss in detail in the next section. The musical form of *ghazal* was popularized in this decade by the music composer Ghulam Mohhamed. He composed many *ghazals* for the film *Mirza Ghalib* (1954). The popularity of *ghazal* continued in the coming decades too. Apart from classical music and *ghazal*, this decade also saw the influence of western music especially in the compositions of Ramachandra. He composed many popular songs, using western tunes and instruments, such as “*shola jo bhadke*” in the film *Albela* (1951) and “*gore gore, o banke chore*” for the film *Samadhi* (1950).

The popularity of *ghazal* continued in the 1960s in the lyrics of Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri and Shakeel Badayuni. The popular *ghazal* “*tu jahan jahan chalega*” composed by Madan Mohan and sung by Lata Mangeshkar for

the film *Mera Saaya* (1966) is a notable example. In this decade we see a new type of songs where the beats are composed to dance. It was Shammi Kapoor, who for the very first time challenged the image of previous heroes with his dance movements in the song “*chahe koi muje jungleee kahe*” composed by Shanker- Jaikishen for the film *Jungleee*. (1961) The heroines of this decade Asha Parekh, Sharmila Tagore, Vijanthalma and Mumtaz also re-created their image through the seductive and careless moves in the trendy songs. The songs such as “*Main kya karu ram muje budha mil gaya*” starring Vijanthalma in the film *Sangam* (1964) and “*Aaja aaja, main hun pyar tera*” starring Asha Parekh in the film *Teesri Manzil* (1966) are the best examples of the female-centric songs of this era.

In the early 1970s, a new generation of music composers such as Kalayanji- Anandji, Lakshmikanth Pyarelal and R.D. Burman (son of S.D. Burman) took over the film industry and started a new trend of western influenced fusion music. The popularity of Asha Bhonsle as a leading female voice and Kishore Kumar as a leading male voice dominated the film music world in the decade. In this decade, Amitabh Bachan entered the industry with the films such as *Zanjeer* (1973), *Sholay* (1975) and *Deewar* (1975). Bachan’s image of an ‘angry young man’ in these films overshadowed the charming and dancing heroes of the previous decades. According to some critics, it was the end of the golden era of Indian film music in the history of Indian cinema. Though there were some films such as *Aandhi* (1975), *Chitchor* (1976) and *Ghar* (1978), which are still remembered for their music.

These three decades were important for the emergence of alternative trends in cinema and consequently in the film music too. The new wave in cinema, also known as art cinema, alternative cinema or simply new cinema, looked at music quite differently from the main stream cinema. Starting with filmmakers like Raj Kumar, Chetan Anand, K.A. Abbas, Bimal Roy, new wave finds it important to use music more carefully and logically. The songs in the films made by these filmmakers were incorporated in the narrative of the films realistically. For instance, “*main awara hoon*”, the title song of Raj Kumar’s *Awara* is logical part of the story. The song is pasteurized the hero singing the song alone on the road, the idea which rejected the illogical dance number. When Satyajit Ray made *Pathar Pachali*, he made a new contribution. He explored another dimension of film music. He incorporated a song in the film which is an integral part of the film narrative. After Ray, two young new wave filmmakers took this experimentation and exploration to another level. Mani Kaul, along with Kumar Shahani, revived the use of classical music in cinema. They did not include songs in their films. They tried to explore the cinematic medium through the musical idiom. For instance, in Kaul’s film *Siddheshwari* (1989), based on the life of *thumri* singer Siddheshwari Devi, the biographical details of the singer are deliberately avoided as he wanted to explore the essence of her singing through cinema. So he tried to use camera to make musical visuals. The viewers feel as if they are watching

Devi's music on screen. Such films explored new dimensions of this association between cinema and music.

Changing melodies of contemporary period

The decade of 1980s, is considered as quiet unproductive at large as far as film music is concerned. But few films remembered to be exception in this regard. The film *Umrao Jaan* (1981) had many beautiful songs composed by Khyyam. Apart from it, the music of the film *Arth* (1982) composed by Jagjit and Chitra Singh, *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988) composed by Anand Milind and *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) by Ram- Laxman is still remembered even today.

The decade of 1990s revived the melody of Indian film music. This decade produced a new generation of young composers such as Nadeem Sharavan, Anand-Milind and Anu Malik, playback singers such as Kumar Shanu, Anuradha Paudwal and Alka Yagnik and lyricists such as Anand Bakshi. With new stars such as Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Akshaya Kumar, Amir Khan, Kajol, Karishma Kapoor, Juhi Chawla, Madhuri Dixit and many others, love and romance became the main focus of songs. The songs of the films like *Hum Aap Ke hain Kaun* (1994), *Hum Sath Sath Hain* (1999), *Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) are still enjoyed by the young generation of our country. Films made after 2000 lacked that melody of last decade. The western influence of drums, rap and pub culture found to be very dominant. With

the inventions of digital techniques, the music is created on computers. The lyrics and melody fades away among the high pitch of beats and drums.

Conclusion

Music played a very significant role in the growth of Indian cinema. It not only gave a very unique character to Indian cinema but also bestowed it a different identity in world cinema. Talented lyricists, music composers, dynamic singers enriched Indian cinema with different musical genres.

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