Sketching the Relation of Sound Technology with Emotions: An Experimental Amalgamation of Two Distinctive Facets in Road Movies

Anju PS, Shreya S. Nair, S. Shilpa Nair

Abstract: Road movie, as a cinematic genre is a relatively new concept. In contrast to established cinematic styles, road movies explore a person’s journey—both literally and figuratively—from one point to another. Usually the movie also focuses on the character’s growth as a result of self-introspection during the course of the journey. The growth might be resultant of the characters or incidents on the way or even a resultant of the experience itself. Hollywood has experimented the possibilities through a handful of road movies, like Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara, Highway, Piku, Finding Fanny, Karwaan, Kabul Express, etc. creating a charismatic impression on the audience through an unusual association of sound technology and emotional vibrations. Being an avant-garde variety of film, road movies usually count on sound effects and songs to convey the internal evolution of the characters. This paper attempts to investigate the extent of contribution made by sound and music in portraying the varied emotions thereby the metamorphosis showcased in a road movie with special reference to the Bollywood movie Zoya Akhtar’s Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara, released in 2011.

Key words: Road movies, Technology, Sound, Music, Self transfiguration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mapping The Roots

Cinema is a kind of a fantasy created by a series of images; a dynamic optical medium that explores life and projects verity with a collaborative, and high-cost artistic expressions. From its advent till present, cinema has ordered and reordered expanse, time and motion to disentangle the countless spectacle of its dynamism and stipulated as the most modern face of the technological world. Fashioned in the late nineteenth century, cinema is a relatively new genre in the field of entertainment which signifies the momentous expansion in the domain of cinema as an initiation of electronic sound recording technologies. The emergence of modern technical apparatus made possible the assimilation of various technological ingredients like music, sound and visual effects in the domain of cinema. The infusions of music with moving pictures were conceived since the very beginning of movies.

The phonograph, invented by Francois Dussaud in 1899, was used initially for this purpose of integration but dependable synchronization was almost unattainable with the amplification and recording quality of sound-on-disc system. For several critics, the establishment of movies is very much an exploration of novel and idiosyncratic articulations that are so distinguishing that one hardly finds oneself contemplating the exact stripe of expressions alone, as Raynold Humphries in the films of Jean-Luc Godard. “What Values and ides are already contained in an image from the fact of its mere presence?” (Humphries 1975:13). Revolution in the area of sound films resulted in the commercial screening of short motion pictures, which in turn led to manipulating the mechanics of sound that eventually supervened in 1923. The outcome was originally termed as talkies, segregating itself from the silent movies. The Jazz Singer, was the first feature film to be premiered as a talkie in 1927 October. Considered as a hit, the movie was a product of the then famous brand of sound-on-film viz. Vitaphone and served as a basis for the future enhancement and modifications in the field of sound movies.

A road movie is a previous sort of travel documentary, serving as an investigational ethnographic film. Travelogues are contemplated to be a manifestation of virtual tourism or travel documentary dispensed as presentation accompanying images. They frequently exhibit the cinematic apparatus and have no open narration. As cinema advances, the standard film program delivered by most theaters comprised of a feature-length film followed by a newsreel and at least one supplementary short and brief subject, which might take the form of a travelogue. Travelogue further advanced to subsume movie rides which were incorporated systematized sounds, motion pictures, and mechanical movements to invigorate virtual travel. Thus, the road movie can be considered as an evasive and ambivalent film genre. It is predominantly contemplated as the subgenre of “travel film”. Devin Orgeron states that: “The road movie genre developed from a 'constellation of solid' modernity, combining 'locomotion and media-motion' to get away from the sedentarising forces of modernity and produce contingency.” (Devin Orgeron, 2007)

In cinema, the earliest experiments in the road movie genre had for their theme, the discovery of new lands or expanding frontiers. Later on, they also started to explore the concept of identity in the backdrop of changing nations and mindsets. Some of the examples of the earliest road movies include John Ford’s Searchers, Edgar Ulmer’s Detour and Dennis Hopper’s Easy Rider.

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II. METHODOLOGY

This investigative study establishes exploratory methodology to identify the organized ways in applying sound technology with human emotions with reference to the Bollywood film Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara. Along with the primary data, secondary materials regarding the invention and application of sound technology in films, evolution of road movies and its purpose of metamorphosis etc. are collected and applied in this study.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara: An Analytic Overview

The supreme focus in the earliest road movies includes the augmentation in geographical space or the construction of a new one. One of such modern road movies in Bollywood is Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara (2011), directed by Zoya Akhtar and produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani of Excel Entertainment. As any other road movie, this film begins from the geographical point A, (India), and ends at the geographical point B, (Spain), by which it tends to explicit the self-transfiguration of the characters during the journey. The film’s story is based on the friends, Arjun (Hritik Roshan), Kabir (Abhay Deol), and Imraan (Farhan Akhtar), who reunite for their long-postponed road trip. Arjun, a financial broker in London, Kabir, a businessman and Imran, an aspiring writer, all have their own clandestine reasons for this vacation. Arjun’s workaholic self has to be coerced into joining the trip organized by his friends, which Arjun eventually accepts believing it to be a salve on his broken relationship. Imran’s secret agenda is to find his biological father and the famous painter- Salman Habib, who lives in Spain and Kabir is torn over his decision to get married. Their journey through Spain leads each of them to confront their true self leading to self-realization. Arjun understands that the best things in the world can’t be brought by money; Imran gets the idea that blood is not always thicker than water and Kabir realizes that love should come with happiness and that neither should be sacrificed for the other- thus opening new vistas into one’s true self.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Technical Study in Integration of Sound and Moods

Shankar, Ehsaan and Loy, the three music composers of this movie, have used music and sound to mirror the mental ordeals faced by the characters, especially the absence of heavy sound effects during the scenes of skydiving and underwater diving.

In the skydiving scenes, the only element of sound used is the sound of wind, which succeeds in giving the viewers a feel of the freedom enjoyed by the characters. Towards the end of the bull running scene, the trio decide a transition from the chaotic background score to simple single melodic strain that bares the complete internal transition of the lead characters. Along with the music and background score, the poetry by Javed Akhtar is also to be applauded which beautifully captures the essence of the characters and their feelings in verse. The sounds used in the movie also reflect the culture and lifestyle of Spain as portrayed in the song ‘serenita’, which captures the soul of flamenco dance form. As a road movie, the composer has opted for simple, rustic and minimalistic sounds thus enhancing the viewer’s experience. At the end of the movie, the ultimate outcome of the varied obstructions accomplished by the characters resulted in the transfiguration of their inner-self. Even though this film, Zindagi Na milegi Dobara, deals with all the characteristic features of a road movie followed by highly technical advancements, ‘why this film is underrated as an impertinent one for discussions?’ has always been an unavoidable question in the present days.

Sound is an omnipotent presence; even silence can be defined as the absence of sound. So, it does not come as a surprise that films too have found a constant companion in sound, particularly in road movies. Sound technology and innovative sound techniques are signs that sound is one of the crucial elements of film making to establish the characters’ emotions. The identity of actors began to be intricately entwined with their voices as well. This stepping stones of advancement in sound were laid back in the 1920s and1930s, which introduced the potential of the sound to become a medium of socio-political and personal expressions. The development of sound as an integral component of cinema has fuelled debates in the past and continues to drive on-going discussions on technology and its impact on the integrity of cinema. Sound invention reflects on-going debates on technology and inventions. The predominant personality behind the film Nanook of the North, Robert J. Flaherty, established the road movies as a victorious form of artistic and visual communications; but the history of the travel movies can be traced back to the Odyssey, an epic by Homer which describes the voyage of Odysseus in the sea for ten long years. This theme of travel narrative served as an inspiration for a gamut to the writers and directors including the director of Paris, Texas, Wim Wenders.

According to Wenders, "The dawn of road movies lay even further back in history-in our nomadic roots, in mankind’s primal need to leave an account of its passage on earth if you accept this vision, the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira are the true first accounts of life movement."(Walter Salles, 2007)

V. CONCLUSION: MOTION PICTURES AND CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGY AS A CULTURAL BOON

Cinema is largely seen as a medium to explore something new and creative. Through the funny and exciting elements, a road movie explicates an outward journey of a protagonist in search of his or her identity resulting in a final inward transformation as the three friends in Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara. Road movie, like a bildungsroman, sketches the character’s journey and alteration resulting in the complete or partial remodeling of their identity. The central characters are outlaws from conventional society and thereby they fight against the established norms and values by leaving their familiar environment and established commence on an aimless, unpredictable journey. Thus, road movies selves of the main characters and their final discovery of something new and demanding. Here, resonates the words of Amy Villarejo in her work Film Studies: The Basics:
“The changing nature of college and university curricula and disciplinary division’s lands film studies in a number of department, a communications school, an art division, or a cultural studies classroom. Film studies as a discourse thus finds itself in conversation with a number of broader critical endeavors, and theories of film converse with them as well. Psychoanalysis, ideology critique and cultural studies, postmodernism, feminism, queer theory: all of these projects extended across the humanities and help us to think about the future of studying film in the context of a changing world.” (Amy Villarejo, 2007)

Film has grown to encompass so much more than screen space and run time, so much so that it has come to be a major part of human life. In lieu of this, Film Studies have been included as a major paper in various university curricula. The art behind the light and shadow game of cinema is being analyzed and experimented on by several agencies simultaneously increasing the critical approach and crucial understanding to cinema. Apart from other art forms, cinema has an unquestionable potential to install new concepts and beliefs among the society. It has spread around the world, crossed the barriers of languages and communities, and has traversed into the depths of social arena.

The tool which caused an impact in the ethos, throughout the history is nothing but the new notions portrayed by the filmmakers. Cinema Borders and showed its power towards internationalism which it turns has caught the attention of the viewers worldwide.

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