

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

Manifestation of Remix Culture in Bollywood Songs: A Postmodern Analysis

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Abstract

Bollywood songs have been enjoying their popularity not only in India but throughout the world. With the increase in royalty payment and sinking sales, Indian music industries have taken it to remix songs to survive in the market. This paper will use Fredric Jameson's idea of "Postmodernism" to argue that the Indian music industry has become a showcase of style and effects, with less emphasis on its content. In the current scenario, the real touch is lost and what remains is a pastiche, which has led to Jameson's "deconstruction of expression". By adding a cosmetic touch to super hit old songs, history is undermined, while using people's nostalgia for old songs as a tool of promotion or late capitalism. Similarly, Steve Conner (1989) talks about the "elastic saleability" of the cultural past, with its regular recycling of its own history, which leads to successful capitalism. In this process, viewers are hegemonised by the big music industries. On the other hand, artists and directors seem to have either lost their ability to create original content or surrendered to the tempting profits earned from making copies of the real.

Keywords: Bollywood, pastiche, deconstruction of expression, depthlessness, historicism, nostalgia, postmodernism, hegemony.

I. Introduction

Indian music is rich owing to its diverse cultures, encompassing numerous genres and forms. The Indian music industry has been flourishing since its inception, gradually gaining popularity all over the world. Bollywood soundtracks dominate the industry by earning a large share of India's music revenue. Crossing the barriers of geography, Bollywood songs have even carved niches for themselves on international platforms.

Bollywood songs have trumped other music industries in India and remain one of the most popular musical forms of this era. Some of the bestselling soundtracks from the past include "Dil Tou Pagal Hai", "Raja Hindustani", "Hum Aap Ke Hai Kon", "Kaho Na Pyar Hai" and "Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jaenge". While its popularity is yet to see a significant downfall, the content, composition, and instrumentation are in question. Over the past few years, Bollywood seems to be more focused on creating remixes than original soundtracks which has caused the loss of richness of its content.

II. Remix Culture in the Bollywood Songs

In the current world, the term 'remix' has become familiar among the consumer world while being an important part of modern music. A remix is an alternate version of a song where a composition is being altered and modified – usually with a different balance of instruments. Its emergence can be traced back to the late 1960s with dancehall, a new music movement in Jamaica. Producers like King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry remixed existing multitrack recordings to make them palatable to the developing taste of the people in their times.

Over the years, many Indian artists have embraced the remix culture, and now it has become democratised due to the development of technology and the expansion of video platforms and social media. Since Bollywood songs have changed gear towards remix versions, an apparent loss or absence of richness and character is evident.

Showing concerns over Bollywood's music industry, Manj Musik, a British Indian composer, and singer, remarks

We made some pretty big hits in Bollywood that changed Bollywood forever, but we were very selective. I am very careful in what I create for Bollywood as I feel the market has changed so much to going for remixes rather than (the) original. I made songs that have (a) shelf life, now they create songs to work for a few months or a year and they disappear. I believe in quality over quantity.
(Sugandha Rawal)

Similarly, veteran singer Lata Mangeshkar (2017) has criticized remix songs on various occasions. Even when her classic "Ni Main Yaar Manana Ni Chahe Log Boliyan Bole" was given a cosmetic touch, she vehemently criticized it, as she said,

I haven't heard this new version. Nor would I want to hear it. So, I wouldn't want to comment on it. But in principle, I've always been opposed to remixes and cover versions of classics. They shouldn't be touched. So many of Pancham's, Madan Mohan's and Laxmikant-Pyarelal's songs have been tampered with; beats and lyrics are modified. It's like rooms being added or removed from the Taj Mahal. These composers knew what they were doing. I don't think their efforts need any boosting. ("I don't want to hear it: Lata Mangeshkar on Vaani Kapoor's version of iconic 'Ni Main Yaar Manana Ni' song")

The creation of original content requires time and effort. Contemporary Indian artists, like Arjit Singh, A. R. Rahman, and Shreya Ghosal have become popular with the masses by mostly crooning original songs which demanded time and dedication.

However, artists and record labels seem to have adopted a timesaving approach by reproducing songs. Remix, a reinterpretation of an already existing song, spares the composers

of arduous work and is economic with time. Since original content does not always guarantee success in the market, it has also become risky to devote full attention to it. Such a preference for remix songs mostly boils down to a capitalistic motive. It is even more important to hold on to its sustainability due to the looming increase in the royalty payment, sinking sales, and rising popularity of K-pop bands. With a proven potential of catapulting artists and producers to stardom, remixes create new markets and promise an increase in revenues. “Kaala Chashma”, “The Humma Song”, “Dilbar Dilbar”, “Cheez Badi”, “Mere Rashke Qamar”, “Tip Tip Barsa Paani”, “Aankh Marey”, “Laila Main Laila” and “Tamma Tamma Again” are few of the many remixes that have amassed hefty benefits to artists and producers.

This untoward shift towards remix songs serves both the producers and consumers. Choosing an already famous song for a remix makes it accessible to a broader public. Thus, the producers hunt for original tracks that have stood the test of time and stamp their own style onto those songs. Such fast-paced, up-tempo tracks are more palatable as party songs to feed the desires of the audience. However, it has shown a lack of effort in all the departments of music. Software-generated beats, rhythm, and loops have not been able to overcome the shortcomings, thus showcasing “depthlessness” in such works.

III. Bollywood Remixes as Expressions of Postmodernism

Postmodernism has resulted in a shift of perspective in art, architecture, literature, and creative thinking in the late twentieth century by employing concepts like repetition, pastiche, hyperreality, and simulacrum. Fredric Jameson (1911), a Marxist critic characterizes postmodernism as a “cultural dominant” (64). He provides an influential criticism of postmodernism in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by showing it as a manifestation of the modern economic frame.

I have already established that the increasing preference for remixes among artists and producers of Bollywood is largely due to their economic interests. The remix culture of Bollywood songs can also be viewed in light of Jameson's (1991) *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. "Late capitalism", in other words, consumer capitalism, is what drives postmodernism, and therefore, "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally" (65). It has become possible due to changes in cultural values, where profit is favoured over the loss of art. The consumers, on the other hand, seem not to be interested in the process but in the final product, and tend to live in the now, collapsing time and space into search, as Eduardo Navas (2013) argues. Increased production, digitalization, and technological development have paved the way for the same. Jameson (1991) does not see postmodernism "as a style but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (64).

In the wake of his criticism of postmodernism, Jameson (1991) begins with "the deconstruction of expression" (66). In order to grasp the symbolic meaning of a form of art, a two-stage process is required – to find out both the surface meaning in a reified end-product and the deeper meaning stressing the raw materials or the initial contents. However, with the advent of postmodernism, Jameson (1991) thinks that the artworks do not "really speak to us at all" (68) and are centered around commodification, as he calls them "commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital" (68). Such art forms give rise to "flatness" (68) or "depthlessness" (68) which compromise the quality of work, reducing it to "simulacra" (69). This, in turn, produces "the waning of affect" (69), where meaningless materiality translates into the loss of subjectivity. Such an effect has been existing in the current Bollywood music industry. Early Bollywood music finds its roots in the raga (melodic) and tala (rhythmic) of Indian classical

music following its conventions consistently. With time, the music has been streamlined by cutting off such conventions, which attracted popularity using a simplified process.

Music from the 1990s to 2000s showcases stylistic variability, yet most of them adhere to the formal elements followed by their precursors. However, Beaster-Jones (2009) thinks that in “contradistinction to the older generation of vocalists, many of the newer singers have only minimal training in Indian classical music and their performances increasingly reflect the styles of international pop musicians” (430). Referring to the “evergreen” (425) period of the industry, he suggests that contemporary songs “lack the depth and staying power of older film songs” (433). Contemporary remix songs are depthless in that sense with no originality. Borrowing elements from already existing songs, remixes remain their copies which are polished according to the needs of the market. This, in turn, creates “the waning of affect” (69) with the deconstruction of the subject matter of a piece of music.

While bringing in the past in accordance with postmodernism, Jameson formulates Thomas Mann’s concept – of “pastiche” (73). Even when compared to parody, pastiche appears blank, like “a statue with blind eyeballs” (74). While imitating the work of an artist might help with some monetary benefit, it also leads to “historicism” (74), which Jameson (1991) sees as “the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” (74). With no apparent connection of such copies with the past, it identifies with Jean Baudrillard’s concept of “simulacra” in *Simulacra and Simulation*. This cannibalistic pastiche is apparent in Bollywood remixes where old songs are represented through pastiche, and the past stays at a distance as a glimmering mirage. For instance, *The Disco Song* of Karan Johar’s “Student of the Year” (2012) features three youngsters dancing to the catchy phrase “Disco Deewane”. Before the launching of the movie, it was placed in numerous marketing clips. Sung by Benny Dayal and Sunidhi Chauhan, this well-packed song exploits the hook line of Nazia Hassan’s “Disco Deewane”, released in 1981. The new remix turned out to be a great hit, with little attribution to artist Nazia Hassan,

whose own voice has been minimized in the new track. While the remix has over 200 million views on YouTube, the original track has even less than 0.3 million views on the same platform. Thus, along with Nazia Hassan's voice, history has also been subdued.

I have already demonstrated that remixes demand little effort and can be created in less time. Their acceptance among the mass is undeniable. According to Jameson (1991), pastiche manifests itself into art forms by applying them to times of the past, giving it a cultural significance with the use of "nostalgia", which is, again, a feature prominent in postmodernism (75). In Bollywood, apart from the modified beats, rhythm, loops, and lyrics, nostalgia plays a determining role in ensuring a remix's success. While it might seem like Bollywood music is serving nostalgia, it is nostalgia, in action, that is serving Bollywood music. Remixes allow audiences to reminisce about their love for the original songs. Beaster-Jones (2009) states that "While music labels have attempted to make the most of their catalog through repackaging old film songs, the continued sale of these albums does seem to indicate a real desire by fans to paint these (old) film in nostalgic shades" (434).

Steve Conner (1989), a British literary scholar in "Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary", provides an example of the "elastic saleability" (206) of the cultural past which regularly recycles its own history in the form of rivals and remakes, comebacks, and cover-versions. Such expressions of heterogeneous cultural experience are because of "the negotiation of mixed or transitional cultural identities" (Cut 'N' Mix, 159).

Nostalgic tunes along with modern costume and set design not only bring about a blend of the past and the present, but it ensures that the success of the original song in the past is being transported to the present successfully. The ultimate result is capitalist success stories. Thus, in this way, the capitalists are hegemonizing the viewers who readily accept the governing policies of such opportunists.

IV. Case Studies of two Bollywood Remix Songs

“Dilbar Dilbar”, featuring Sushmita Sen and Sanjay Kapoor, was originally released for the movie, *Sirf Tum* in 1999 as a part of its soundtrack. Mesmersing dance moves and captivating expressions of Sushmita Sen along with the solo voice of Alka Yagnik made it an instant hit. However, in 2018, “Dilbar Dilbar” went through an Arabic makeover in *Satyameva Jayate*, featuring Nora Fatehi and John Abraham.

The remix of “Dilbar Dilbar” is nowhere close to the original one. While it lacks “originality” of content, it has also overshadowed the original lyrics by Sameer with the new ones by Shabbir Ahmed. The original song was largely benefited due to its hook-worthy rhythm; the reprised version has ensured its inclusion by employing electronic claps, oud, and drums around it. Artist Neha Kakkar’s sensual and sumptuous vocals add to the solid foundation of the original track of Alka, so it reaches the top 3 on Billboard’s YouTube chart. Alka Yagnik’s voice, however, is just restricted to the chorus, like Nazia Hassan’s voice in “Disco Deewane”.

The original version used a blend of natural and urban settings around a waterfall and a pond, with hills and high-rise buildings in the background. With traditional camera shots and angles, plain pace, and eye-catching free dance moves of Shushmita, it became a favourite among people in no time. However, the remix has been tapered to an item song in a typical gangster movie. The setting is that of a nightclub with sand, fire, and a pool in the interior. The set is well decorated with vintage furniture, artificial lighting, decorative chandeliers, antique lamps, and other ornamentations, making it visually appealing. While lighting sets the visual effects, mixing sets and props, varying frame rates as well as editing and jumbling complement the backdrop of beautiful sets. Some added action can also be seen on John Abraham’s part. The distinction is clear in both the versions – the first one being void of any cosmetic touch and the second one being an assortment of visual and auditory enhancements with the sole

purpose of earning large revenues. This song has shown the postmodern tendency of copying, creating in turn the deconstruction of the original expressions. Producer Bhushan Kumar's revelation, "I remember how the song was an instant hit when it (was) released (in) 1999. I have been wanting to recreate it with modern notes for a long time. The song is part of an important sequence in the film and the Arabic theme has lent it a magical feel.", goes along the same line of imitation and simulacra.

"Tip Tip Barsa" of *Mohra* (1994), similarly, has been rehashed in Rohit Shetty's *Sooryavanshi* (2022). The former features Raveena Tandon and Akshay Kumar while the recreated version features Katrina Kaif and much older Akshay Kumar.

Although the premises of the two songs are different, the voices of the original singers are retained. So, the audience can still listen to the playback singers, Udit Narayan and Alka Yagnik, in their original voices with just the addition of *dholak* and *tabla*. The set designs are simple, yet different, with the first one being set in an under-construction building, and the other one on a fairground. The chemistry between the couples in both versions is passionate, however, there are changes in camera angles, cuts, and edits. Thus, retaining the original voices of the singers, the producers have made the remaking easy with some scintillating additions, making it both effortless and time-saving. However, a lack of original content and depth is evident as well.

The remixed version, however, received criticism from fans and critics for its remaking. "Aankh Marey", another song featured in his film, *Simmba* received similar criticism. Rohit Shetty on this occasion acknowledged the sentiments of the mass, as he said:

Dekhiye main maanta hoon ki kuch log jo die hard fan hai, jinko lagta hai remake nahi karna chaiye tha, woh apni jagah sahi hai. (I agree that there are some die-hard fans who believe that there shouldn't be a remake at all, and

they're right in their own way). ("Rohit Shetty responds to Tip Tip Barsa Pani backlash: 'They're right in their own way'")

He also added that:

Kai baar hota hai ki it backfires also. Tip Tip ek cult song hai, I agree, but new generation ke liye bhi revive ho jaata hai. Woh yeh gaana dekh ke bhi purana gaana wapas dekhenge. (Sometimes it backfires as well. I agree that Tip Tip is a cult song, but this might revive interest in it for a new generation. When they see this new song, they'll go back to the original). ("Rohit Shetty responds to Tip Tip Barsa Pani backlash: 'They're right in their own way'")

Such an ideology leads to Jameson's (1991) notion of exploitation of "nostalgia". The reprised version of "Tip Tip Barsa" amassed huge success despite its criticisms.

V. Conclusion

Currently, every good movie includes one or two songs that have been super hit in the past. It is evident that remix versions of old super-hits make use of the audience's nostalgia, especially those of earlier generations. It can be related to Jameson's (1991) notion of "nostalgia" used by capitalists. At the same time, it caters to the new generation by adding techno beats to the older version. Steven Connor (1989) talks about the recyclings of history as is the case with Bollywood songs now. These are complemented with a visually appealing video. However, it sees a decrease in original content, as artists and producers seem to run after something easy and less time-consuming. It might also mean that they have lost their ability to create something new and original, highlighting their inefficiency. In the same way, it is possible that they have surrendered to the hefty profits earned from such pastiches. As it seems, from the viewpoint of postmodernism, capitalism has taken over the Indian music industry and viewers' acceptance of this culture has made them hegemonized.

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