

COMMENT ON “CULTURAL THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS OF SINGING AND DANCING IN INDIAN FILMS”


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Indian films are renowned for their song and dance sequences, which have become prominent ethnic symbols and distinct markers that differentiate them from films of other countries. Yang and Zhang (2023) explore the cultural aspects of song and dance scenes in Indian films and analyze the underlying philosophical and cultural factors associated with them.

Yang and Zhang (2023) argue that the overwhelming emphasis on song and dance content in traditional Indian films is a disadvantageous factor. Indeed, in recent years, India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing film markets alongside Russia and mainland China. The film industry of India has experienced rapid growth due to its vast domestic market. Consequently, Indian filmmakers do not necessarily need to consider the international market or the recognition of Indian films by overseas audiences. They can focus solely

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on creating entertaining films based on the standards set by Indian viewers. As a result, when Indian audiences continue to exhibit a strong enthusiasm for music and dance sequences in films, filmmakers often insert unrelated song and dance numbers into various film genres. However, these sequences may need clarification to audiences from other countries. An Indian film director once remarked that Indian films are, to some extent, synonymous with song and dance films, and good Indian films feature captivating songs and dances. Therefore, if the song and dance elements are well executed, the film is already halfway to success. Music is a vital component of Indian cinema, and, in India, there is a legend that states: “Dance is brought to Earth by the gods.” Excellent song and dance performances constitute the essence of the script of a film.

Indian dance has a long and profound history beyond mere physical display. It involves imitating the laws and processes of the universe, and dancing is considered the fundamental means through which Indians create their world. The importance of dance can be understood by referencing the primary deity in Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva. Indians worship and fear Lord Shiva, the god of destruction who possesses the power of creation and destruction. Lord Shiva exhibits various unusual appearances, including the Linga form, the Nataraja (King of Dance) one and the Trimurti (Three-faced), among others. The Nataraja form is the most influential on the elements of song and dance. In Hinduism, dance is believed to have originated from Lord Shiva’s creation, and she is regarded as the embodiment of dance and the master of the cyclical process of the world. When Lord Shiva dances, her hair whirls chaotically in rhythm with her movements, and her right hand, holding an hourglass-shaped small drum, moves in sync with the rhythm. This rhythm represents the heartbeat of the universe (Mejaz) generated through the benevolent act of the dance of creation. Thus, her dance symbolizes both destruction and regeneration. Consequently, Indians translate their reverence for Lord Shiva into a profound love for dance reality. In a sense, just as the cross symbolizes Christianity and the crescent moon symbolizes Islam, Lord Shiva’s dance represents Indian culture. This aligns perfectly with the legend that “dance is brought to Earth by the gods” in India.

The Indian people believe that the universe undergoes a continuous cycle of birth, destruction and rebirth, characterized by rhythmic patterns manifested in Lord Shiva’s dance, the King of Dance. Lord Shiva’s dance represents the dance of the universe. The diversity of dance also stems from

the Indian people's reference to the diversity of the universe. Lord Shiva is said to perform 108 different dances as the originator of dance. The number 108 is considered sacred in Indian culture, symbolizing an infinite "multiplicity" and a concise representation of infinity. The highest state of dance is bliss. Therefore, the Indian population's admiration for dance is not only due to its aesthetic appeal but also because dance carries a sense of belief and worship of the divine. Through dance, one achieves the truth of "becoming human." The dance takes various forms in Indian society, whether in social gatherings, welcoming guests, weddings, childbirth, coronations, festivals, religious processions, or harvest seasons. Moments worth celebrating, big or small, are accompanied by dance.

The author also highlights the element of sensuality in Indian song and dance films. Due to societal and cultural norms, explicit scenes of desire are rare in Indian films. However, films can artfully depict sensuality through song and dance, such as close-up shots of the waist in Indian song and dance films. The focus on the waist is derived from classical Indian dance and traditional ethnic costumes. Classical dance forms incorporate several waist movements to showcase the gracefulness of female figures, and these movements, infused with popular elements, have become a part of Bollywood dance. Similarly, the design of ethnic costumes exposes the skin of the waist, making it a visual focal point. In the film "Satyameva Jayate," the composition of shots progresses from a close-up of the female lead's body to medium and wide shots showcasing her entire figure, followed by a close-up of her waist, and finally a close-up or medium shot of her face. This sequence of shots creates a visual narrative that starts with a focus on specific body parts, creates a sense of mystery, presents the female figure from a bottom-up visual angle, and ends with a visual freeze on the female lead's face, completing her introduction. Throughout the entire process, the visual focus never leaves the female figure, and the alluring dance movements, performed by the body, create a visually stimulating experience of sensuality.

As feminism became one of the focal points in Hollywood, revealing attire worn by women came to be seen as objectifying them and treating women as commodities for male consumption. After 2010, Hollywood song and dance films intentionally avoided showcasing women's bodies and took a different path from the classic Hollywood approach of creating sexy female stars. However, in India, the display of the female body is considered a way to showcase female charm and is part of the Indian national aesthetic. Therefore,

in terms of shot composition, Indian films never shy away from displaying the female body and consistently employ this technique as a common language in Indian song and dance sequences. This is a prominent characteristic of contemporary Indian cinema.

In Indian films, the rhetorical use of song and dance also serves the narrative function of storytelling and carries the plot. The film incorporates the story within the song and dance sequences, presenting the development of events through fast-paced editing and even using the lyrics of the songs to directly narrate the content and plot, reflecting the plot of the film. The artistic presentation of the story through song and dance breaks away from the monotony of everyday life.

Contemporary Indian films predominantly focus on shaping and disseminating national and cultural images as narrative themes, employing various artistic forms of expression to overcome barriers of perception and acceptance by others. One significant artistic form is song and dance. To make Indian culture accessible to international audiences, Indian films have borrowed and transformed styles in song and dance. This transformation encompasses rhythm, electronic music, jazz, Latin influences, actions, costumes and emotions. The change in song and dance scenes showcases the artistic innovation and breakthroughs of Indian films in addressing traditional and global issues and the efforts made in shaping and identifying with national images.

Song and dance in Indian films start with the secular, presenting reality while simultaneously transcending it, achieving an artistic transcendence from the concrete to the abstract. Moreover, the entertainment function of song and dance highlights its powerful role in cultural representation. Indian song and dance have gained international acclaim and are associated with national faces, national costumes, national music and national dance. The cultural imagery of nationalization is repeatedly expressed and solidified through song and dance, making it an excellent platform for expressing national cultural imagery.

REFERENCE

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