

THE CULTURE OF “CHUTNEY MUSIC” IN INDIAN HINDI CINEMA: READING SELECT TEXTS

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Abstract

It is seen that popular culture is getting popular in almost every form of art, literature and culture. The context of globalization has accelerated the pace of mixing cultures, and in this process there is an interesting expansion of popular culture. The experiments are seen in almost every form of expression -art, culture and literature. The “neoliberal phase” in sync with the remnants of deconstruction offer varied patterns of creations and criticism. In this context, it is pertinent to study and analyze different sub cultures associated with art and human life. Chutney Music is one such artifact to consider. It is a cross cultural fusion in the genre of Music. In a way, Chutney music is a byproduct of Caribbean English. The amalgamation of Indian linguistic cultures (Hindi, Bhojpuri etc.) and its subsequent blend with English syntax and words, give shapes to Chutney Music. At the initial stage, the lyrics in the chutney genre comprised folk, classical, and sacred music. With the passage of time it incorporated the songs and tones of the new/newly emerging cultures dilly dallying with the popular culture and different sub cultures. The contemporary structure of Chutney music has branched into many a subgenre like Chutney Bhangra, Chutney Hip-Hop, Chutney Soca, Raga Chutney etc. It may be seen as a counter response to the unipolar and fascistic patterns in music industry, and gives way to pluralism and polyphony.

Keywords: Chutney Music, Indian Cinema, Indian Culture, Gangs of Wasseypur, Aankhen

The postmodern phase has claimed major shifts in the patterns of human behavior and its socio-cultural manifestation. Be it the representation through literatures or other performing arts, the changing geo-cultural constructs and representations are clearly visible. In ethnic

negotiations and cultural scattering, the post 1980's phase has seen a flood of impacts. Sometimes the process itself becomes form, and also there are instances that the carnival of identities creates a visible pattern of collage. The cross cultural interface of people, and more frequent intercontinental movements of masses is airing the trend. This overlapping of cultures is new experience, and it is being observed so closely and continuously during the last two decades. There are lot many causes, observed, unseen, canonized, and undercurrent factors. These emerging power centres, new networks and conflicts in a global world, unpredictable trends in power equation and threatening forms of new economic colonialism to the satellite networking and super expanding world trade generally emerge as significant contexts and causes for the trend in question. As a result different cultures show intermixing patterns. Singularity and purity are losing their grips, trajectories of hybridity, heterogeneity and unmonolithic vision are perceptible. If any culture retains something of its own identity, its own flavour, its distinctness, it is generally seen only in sub cultural practices and folk elements that creates a unique blend, sometimes a pattern of pop culture.

It is within this context that cultural take in chutney music has secured a space of its own in human sciences. The interface of cultures has also set the tone of a hybrid pattern worthy to be called 'glocalization'. Nowhere is this phenomenon better articulated than in the literatures of the different people and regions. A sudden acceleration in the pace of growing popular culture under the impact of globalization is giving way to experiments in almost every form of art, culture and literature.

The experiments are seen in almost every form of expression -art, culture and literature. The "neoliberal phase" in sync with the remnants of deconstruction offer varied patterns of creations and criticism. In this context, it is pertinent to study and analyze music in cinema. With the emergence of Indian economy, technology and human resources, there has been an increased interest of the world into 'Indian' cultural products, and market. Indian culture shows a complex relevance to the globalizing world of today. Indian culture has been quite inclusive, and the same is the nature of its culture and art forms. A continuous process of inclusion and synthesis remains there in Indian air. On the one hand it retains its basic features and on the other does not hesitate to glean goodness from other parallel tradition. Chutney music also comes up as a parallel pattern in the same trend. It is a cross cultural

fusion in the domain of music. I understand Chutney Music as a counter response to the unipolar and fascistic patterns in music industry, and gives way to pluralism and polyphony.

Chutney Music is created and popularized by Indo-Caribbean people whose ancestors were rooted in Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and some other in South India, especially from around Madras. Indian Hindi cinema has, interestingly shown the trend of such music and performances in select cinematic texts. TIDCO, the official tourist development company of Trinidad, offers the following explanatory note on Chutney music:

Chutney is an up-tempo, rhythmic song, accompanied by the Dholak, the harmonium and the *dhantal*. Originally, chutney songs made reference to deities and were offensive to religious leaders. Within recent times, the chutney has become extremely popular and new compositions are being written. Some of these contain calypso and soca rhythms. There is also some extemporaneous composition and accompaniment (especially in the growing number of competitions) may be provided by bands which include Indian, Western and African instruments. (TIDCO 1996, 16).

Chutney music shows several patterns of connotations. Its forms are suggestive in nature. Traces of symbols create an interesting touch of popular entertainment. Citing Aisha Mohammed, we can state that “race, gender and sexuality are deeply implicated in the development and expression of both chutney and soca.” (Aisha, 176-77). In a Chutney song the pattern of music shows a pattern of an up-tempo song.

The singers and the associates work with the drum machine, bass guitar, electric guitar and synthesizer like musical equipments. Traditional musical instruments like harmonium, Dholak, [Dhantal](#), Tassa etc. are used to give it a musical synthesis. These indigenous musical coherence is blended with the rhythmic patterns of ‘soca’, ‘calypso’ and other imported patterns. The tradition of Chutney song started in Trinidad and Tobago. Initially, the women, there, used it as a popular form of music for religious songs. In the course of its development, Chutney music became gender neutral, and also secular in tone and performance. From an artifact of folk culture Chutney music has come into popular culture, becoming a medium of popular entertainment.

Moreover, ironically, in the contemporary Bollywood cinema tradition, in many cases, it is used for rather erotic and double meaning performances. On the nature of Chutney music, Peter Manuel's views are cited by Aisha Mohammad:

Chutney, like "jam and wine" soca, generally functions as dance music rather than listening music, and its lyrics tend to be light and insignificant. If soca song texts are generally unimportant because of their brevity and triviality, most "classical" chutney lyrics are semantically insignificant because of their conventionality and, more obviously, because of the fact that they are sung in a language (Bhojpuri Hindi) that is largely unintelligible to most Indo-Trinidadians and Guyanese. (Aisha, 176-77).

As far as linguistic construct is concerned, Chutney music is a byproduct of Caribbean English, and shows an amalgamation of Indian linguistic cultures (Hindi, Bhojpuri etc.) and their subsequent blend with English syntax and words. At the initial stage, the lyrics in the chutney genre comprised the folk, classical, and sacred music. With the passage of time it has incorporated the songs and tones of the new cultural take in popular genre, and different subgenres. The contemporary structure of Chutney music has branched into many a subgenre like Chutney Bhangra, Chutney Hip-Hop, Chutney Soca, Raga Chutney etc.

Chutney Music in Indian Cinema is a kind of simulation. While discussing at the Indian Cinematic representation of Chutney Music for its trends and reception, the following statement of Stephen Greenblatt draws my attention. Greenblatt observes:

Many of the traces have little resonance, though everyone, even the most trivial or serious, contains some fragment of lost life; others seem uncannily full of the evil to be heard. It is paradoxical, of course, to seek the living will of the dead in fictions, in places where there was no live bodily being to begin with. But those who love literature tend to find more intensity in simulations—in the formal, self-conscious miming of life—than in any of the other textual traces left by the dead, for simulations are undertaken in full awareness of the absence of the life they contrive to represent, and hence they may skillfully anticipate and compensate for the vanishing of the actual life that has empowered them. (Greenblatt, Stephen, cit by Lodge and Wood, 496)

In this context, the present paper offers an analysis of the select popular songs from Indian cinema. The 'Hunter song' in the *Gangs of Wasseypur*, sung by Vedesh Sookoo, Rajneesh, Shyamoo and Munna offers a perfect representation of Chutney music. The words of the song carry double meaning, and it is well tucked and contextualized with the politics of ambiguity. The first verse paragraph of three lines gives a proclamation of a hunter. What kind of a hunter he is, becomes clear in the next stanza of eight lines where the narrator presents a description of his act of displaying his gun at some unidentified receiver mentioned here as 'she'. Stanza three shows the anxiety and coyness of the audience mentioned here as 'she'. The lines show that the receiver- 'she', is very keen to have the feel of the 'gun' but cannot muster courage enough to see it face to face.

By reaching the fourth stanza, the narrator offers the girl for going on a game, i.e. the game of passion. The narrator is shown making her comfortable for thinking through his mind. It appears at this point that there are several receivers, and the narrator poses to be a passionate profligate, willing to satiate the curiosity and passion of several youthful damsels around. Again the narrator boasts of his stature, and presents himself as a notorious figure in the art of 'gunmanship', i.e. the indication of his art in the game of lust. The next little verse paragraph comprises the refrain like lines, and again chutnifying¹ the style he uses a Hindi expression,

"Hum hain sikaari, paackit mein lambi gun

Dhaayen se jochhoote tan-mannhowemagan." (Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

In the simple English translation, it means, "I am a hunter, carrying gun in my pocket. If it bursts with a sound, gives pleasure to even nerves." The use of the word 'shikari' for three times emphasizes the intent, and boasts his stature.

In the sixth stanza of the hunter song, the narrator repeats his stature, and the urges for the audience. Boasting his manhood, he says that the receiving party gets too fascinated to resist. The word 'Tan', used twenty three times, here, oozes out eroticism.

The following stanza gives the implied meaning of the act of sex:

"Hum hain sikari sikari sikari

I am a hunter and she want to see my gun.

When I pull it out, the women start to run

Tan tan tantan...

Daily goli nikle, automatic tan-tan." (Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

By reaching the seventh stanza, the narrator realizes that he is becoming too much vocal, explicit and even obscene by making such overt and carnal comments. Therefore, he tries to divert the attention of the audience towards the real guns that he carries, two in numbers, one in his hand, and the other around his waist:

With one gun in my hand and

the next one around my waist.

If you see this young girl

with the rude look on her face

I say as a hunter

I must be brave and strong.

She says that she finds

that my gun extremely long. (Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

The inbuilt passion in the narrator's behaviour forces him to present a picaresque description of a young girl, whom he finds complaining at the size of his gun. The code switching and pastiche is visible. The next stanza comes in Hindi:

Hum hain sikari,

paaket mein lambi gun!

dhayein se jo chhute

tan man hue magan... .

Hum hainsikari

paket mein lambi gun

dhayein se jo chhute

tan man hue magan... . (Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

To translate it into English, we find, "I am a hunter, and I carry a big gun in my pocket. When it fires boomeranging, a pleasant feel comes to mind and body". Again the refrain of "I am a hunter...in my pocket" and the same repetition again. Now the narrator in the next

stanza shows the receiver as a girl eager and anxious for him. Showing a false sense of carelessness towards her, he in the tone of a profligate says:

Again he tells the pompous nature of the girl:

Oowo...o...

This girl harasses me!

She won't leave me alone

but that kind a behavior

I really can't condone.

Hai bahut bhokali

Na kabhi ho khali (Hello..)

Hai bahut bhokali

Na kabhi ho khali(Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

In the following stanza the narrator adds to the manner and behaviour of the girl ,suggesting that she is quite aggressive and flaunting . Rocking on the axis of 'to do or not to do' of passion the narrator sets a mood where the act of passion takes the form of fun .It is visible as given here:

This girl harasses me,

she won't leave me alone,

but that kind a behavior

I really can't condone.

She says that she's sorry,

she just wants to have fun.

Then she asks me kindly

if she can hold my gun.

(Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

In the next stanza, the narrator repeats his earlier statements, convictions and presumptions, and shrewdly comments on the behavior of the fair sex around. The next eight line stanza appears in Hindi .

Door tak hai famous , kar de sab ko bebas

Door tak hai famous, kar de sab ko bebas

Usko milta darsan, jisko maan mein hai lagan

Usko milta darshan, jisko maan mein hai lagan

Laagi lagan laagi lagan... . (Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song'.)

To translate it into English ,we see, "it (gun) is famous far and wide, and makes impatient one and all. But only they can find a chance for its glance who stand fully devoted to the job concerned. The patterns of emphasis and repetition are visible .These are the devices of the narrator's self glorification .The last stanza, completely in hybrid style, presents musical chutney, and shows the glorification of the narrator's gun.

Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan,

Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan!

She begs with me to see it (Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan)

She begs with me to show it (Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan)

but when I reveal it (Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan)

she wants to run n hide... (Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan, Lagi lagan).

(Grover, Varun. 'Hunter Song')

The lines of the hunter song, in fact, offer a very subtle double meaning. A close observation of the lyrics and music shows the visible patterns of chutney music, and suggest the influence of Indo-Caribbean music form in such contexts. The song shows an explicit sexual imagery. Its subtle connotations warrant the attention of cultural critics towards interpreting the meaning and inferences. The following expression is quite explicit in guessing the male genitalia."I am a hunter; she wants to see my GUN. /When I pull it out boy, the women start to run." (Varun Grover, 'Hunter Song'). Here, GUN denotes the image of human phallus.

To conclude, it can be said that Chutney music, in the contemporary phase of pastiche and overlapping, is not a lightweight thing. It is a part of innovative discourse. For a longer time in cultural history, it was associated only with the marginal; but in the postmodernist plurality virtue of its 'de-doxifying' nature, it is looming large over the set patterns of

‘grand’, ‘authoritative’ and ‘canonical’. I see it quite counter-hegemonic and anti-authoritarian. Sometimes, it provides an alternative mode of looking at things. There are the voices coming down the margin or what Bakhtin calls ‘centrifugal forces contesting or fragmenting the centripetal or monologic forces’ (‘From the Prehistory...’,110). In one of my surveys (Endnote 1), I have noticed that the minds of the readers are already acculturated to sustain pleasure from something easy, titillating and familiar.

On a parallel note the Chutney Music may be seen and heard as the restless and prevalent discourses in the societies with their ideological, physiological, political, whimsical, cynical, patriarchal, ecological, radical and many more unheard and raw tones and voices persisting in a national culture, twitched with influences and cultures that condition it from all around. It leaves for an open ended space that invites readers to have their own jump and swim across, challenging the received structures of the text for one and all. It is for the takers to decide the pain or the pleasure, or both to be extracted excerpts. The succumbed minds of the Chutney Music have much to sooth and therapeutically treat heart and soul of scholars and common folk.

Endnote

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