

## NARRATION THROUGH SONGS IN VISHAL BHARDWAJ'S FILMS- OMKARA

**Gunjan Kapoor<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Smriti Bhardwaj<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Prem Sagar<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Saguna<sup>4</sup>, Rasman Prem Archana<sup>5</sup>**

1. Research Scholar, School of liberal and creative arts (Theatre and Music), Lovely Professional University, E-mail: [-gunjan.kapoor43@gmail.com](mailto:-gunjan.kapoor43@gmail.com)
2. Assistant Professor, C.O.D, School of liberal and creative arts (Theatre and Music), Lovely Professional University, E-mail: [-smriti.23748@lpu.co.in](mailto:-smriti.23748@lpu.co.in)
3. Assistant Professor and Head of Department, Music Vocal, Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya, Jalandhar Punjab E-mail: [-prem.sadhanasadan@gmail.com](mailto:-prem.sadhanasadan@gmail.com)
4. Research Scholar, School of liberal and creative arts (Theatre and Music), Lovely Professional University [sagunasharma01@gmail.com](mailto:sagunasharma01@gmail.com)
5. Research Scholar, Department of Journalism, Lovely Professional University [premrasmn.archana@gmail.com](mailto:premrasmn.archana@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author – Gunjan Kapoor , Research Scholar School of liberal and Creative Arts (Theatre and Music), Lovely Professional University [gunjan.kapoor43@gmail.com](mailto:gunjan.kapoor43@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Music is integral to Indian culture and customs and is effectively used in numerous Indian performance styles to enhance storytelling such as Parsi theatre, Marathi tamasha, Bengali music drama, etc. Gregory D. Booth states that “Parsi theatre, *Marathi tamasha*, *Bengali music drama*, *Jatra*, *Nautanki*, the *Rajasthani Khayal*, the *Manch* (stage), and *Gujarati Bhavani*; all accentuated music and dance” (Booth, 1995). This paper suggests music has successfully strengthened narratives since its beginning in 1931 and is a strong link between music and story-telling, in Hindi Films. In films, a director’s constant effort is to create a film that the audience can relate to themselves. Each director has his way of conveying the story to his audience, primarily known as Narrative structure. For visual impact, adding the atmosphere of particular customs, places, dialogues in the language of a particular place, clothes/costumes according to the story, and the language of a native place plays an important role in narrating the story. But, including music can enhance and expand the meaning of visual images. The music has the potential to highlight specific emotions, develop the narrative situation, and give insights into the characters in a particular scene. This paper attempts to analyze Vishal Bhardwaj’s film songs as an important element in narrative structure. The study explores that audio-visual together provide a wholesome experience in narrating the story. The paper discusses a film named *Omkara* directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, which is the second film in the trilogy of Shakespeare’s play *Othello*. The other two

are *Maqbool* and *Haider* based on Shakespeare's plays i.e., *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* respectively. This paper will see the film *Omkara* through the lyrics of songs, i.e., what role songs play in taking the story further, the impact of these songs in ornamenting the visuals, musical meanings constructed for a particular scene, song as a significant element of a film and, also, the reason of placing them in a particular situation.

Key words – Omkara , Othello.

### **Introduction**

A story is explored through various phases such as introduction, build-up, conflict, climax, and end in any film. The director decides how he wants to narrate it to the audience excitingly and interestingly to involve the viewers. The visual metaphor is the potential ability of shots or images taken to convey a meaning that is way above the straightforward visible reality (Brown, 2011). It is an instrument that induces insights. According to Noel Carrol, “With the use of visual metaphors, the filmmaker proposes fuel for thought without stating any conform or certain meaning, then it becomes the task of the viewer to understand the image and correlate it with an intuitive meaning” (Damle,2020) But with visuals, the most important element of films is music, whether as background music or as a prime focus for a scene, making the viewers believe that music and film are not apart. “Narrative is not constructed by visual means alone. ... music works as part of the process that transmits narrative information to the spectator, ... it functions as a narrative agent. Mood, emotion, characterization, point of view, even the action itself are constructed in film in a complex visual and aural interaction in which music is an important component” (Kalinak,1992) There are many reasons for using songs in a film. Some use it as an entertainment source, for some, it may be a promotional tool. “In popular parlance, the presence of a song is seen as a shorthand for a film being ‘commercial’ and its absence is seen as meaning that the film is an example of ‘serious’ cinema” (Magazine,2019) In the history of Hindi films, songs had various roles to play. The paper attempts to provide an analysis of the songs in Vishal Bhardwaj's films as a significant element in the narrative that lets the audience know where the story is leading them.

### **Film Music as a Narrative Device**

The film is a medium that requires the contribution of screenwriters, directors, special effects engineers, actors, music directors, and many others to make it successful. This paper will discuss how film music/songs play a significant role, add value to the film scene, and help the audience perceive the meaning of what and how a filmmaker wants to convey. Filmmaker Bernard Herman remarks that “music on the screen can seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters. It can invest a scene with terror, grandeur, gaiety, or misery [ . . . ] it is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience” (Berthold Hoeckner, E. W. (2011).” According to Gorbman (1987), “It (music) guides the spectators’ vision both literally and figuratively.” It can be said that whatever we see on screen to a large degree depends on what we hear. Film music, unlike these other four media channels—scenographic, textual, sound effects, or speech—has a direct route to the audience’s “heart and feelings” (Cohen,2013). So, it is clear from the above statements that film music is important for a film to add value to the scene and help the audience to perceive the message a filmmaker wants

to convey. Talking about the presence of songs in Hindi films has been an imperative part. According to Anna Morcom, songs have also become the focus of what makes a film 'commercial', appealing to the largely uneducated 'masses', as opposed to 'art', which appeals to the urban elite and intelligentsia where Prasad describes the commercial film as 'unrealistic' with the story being 'interrupted' by the songs and the other elements (Morcom, 2016). There are different opinions of different scholars, according to Anjum Rajabali, "There is a clear grammar of narrative in Hindi film script if followed correctly can offer writer nice song situation and if the placement of song is done intelligently, they can greatly enhance the value of a film, making its impact on viewer aesthetically more pleasing and involving (Rajabali, 2001)." The broad purpose of the song in Hindi films is to enhance the emotional effect of a situation. Film music has the full potential to keep the expression of emotions dominant and plays an important role as film music is used with moving images on the screen. In all these definitions, all the experts have tried to establish the interrelation between films and music describing that music is an essential part of the film to build the scene that suggests the mood and emotion being displayed on the screen and a person feels more connected when understands the emotion of the character or event as the music takes the audience nearer to the reality.

## Omkara

The story is about the love story of *Omkara* and *Dolly*. *Omkara* is a general of a political chief who is called '*Bhayisaab*'. Chief depends on *Omkara* who handles his corrupt political rivals. *Omkara* appointed *Kesu* his right-hand man which upsets the other character of the story named '*Langda Tyagi*' who makes a plot against *Omkara* and *Dolly*, making *Omkara* believe that *Dolly* is having an affair with *Kesu*. The filmmaker has tried to interpret his thoughts into what already is known and has given another vision to the thoughts of Shakespeare which he re-established in the form of music, which is his expertise. He composes music not only to convey the emotions and mood of the particular character but also to use music as a part of the narration that suits the situation. It has deeper meanings that directly relate to the story. This paper will discuss the meaning and relevance of the song, the motive for placing each song in that particular situation, and how the melody is helping to take the story ahead.

The film is set in the village of Uttar Pradesh. The scene opens with *Langda Tyagi*, a sharpshooter of *Bhayisaab*'s political party sitting with *Raju* whose marriage was fixed with *Dolly*. *Langda Tyagi* is poisoning him against *Omkara*, telling him that *Omkara* is going to take away his girl and he is there to attack his marriage procession. *Raju* tried to reach his in-law's place where *Dolly*'s father was worried because *Baraat* (people from the groom's side) didn't reach him. *Raju* tries to reach there but fails and marriage doesn't take place. *Dolly*'s father is *Bhayisaab*'s lawyer. When *Raju* informed him that *Omkara* has kidnapped *Dolly*, he immediately visited the place where *Langda* is playing *kanche* with *Kesu*. Here, *Omkara* is introduced first time to who lawyer called '*Adha Brahmin*' (half-breed) and asks about his daughter. *Bhayisaab* called and stopped the lawyer. The lawyer cries in front of *Bhayisaab* and requests him to get his daughter back as he

believes that his daughter is innocent and cannot love a gangster. Listening to this, *Bhayisaab* calls *Omkara* who claims that *Dolly* loves him and has come of her own free will which *Dolly* confirms. That is when the first composed song of the film appears i.e. '*Naina Thag Lenge*'.

### **The Song '*Naina Thag Lenge*'**

*Dolly* admits her love for *Omkara* and cries in front of his father and *Bhayisaab*. The camera slowly zooms out taking back the memories of how *Dolly* fell in love with *Omkara*. She remembers how wounded *Omkara* once came to her house, she took care of him. The song is used as a background score. The line '*Naino ki mat maniyo*' starts and *Dolly* is opening the door, feels like the narrator is warning them that the situation is going to be tough. She opens the door, and *Omkara* tries to come inside, but due to his wound, he starts to falter. *Dolly* holds him, and that is when the lines come '*Naina Thag Lenge*'. The director has used this song to narrate *Dolly*'s infatuation with *Omi*, both simultaneously presenting and critiquing this unfolding of love, the forewarning of the tragedy to come (Jackson,2020). In the following scenes, *Dolly* is taking care of *Omkara*. She keeps her hand on his forehead, he holds her hand. She gets frightened as if anybody is watching. On the line '*Ninde banjar kardengy*', *Dolly* is holding his hand and she is sleeping beside him on the floor. This shows that she knows that this relationship is not possible, but she finds peace with him. The song is playing in the background along with *Dolly*'s narration that she was totally in love with him but she further explains that she was engaged to *Raja* before she could understand how much she loves *Omkara*. Further with the lines, *Bhala manda dekhe na paraya na saga ve, naino ko to dasne ka chaska laga re*', the narrator is saying that in love, a person forgets what is right or wrong as in the scene also, *Dolly* is trying to convey her love to *Omkara* while being engaged to *Raja*. While the line '*Naino ka zehar nashila*' is playing, *Dolly* explains that she didn't understand what to do, so, she decided to die. Here, the narrator may want to say that a person in this situation can go far and take any harmful step. The director has explained the flashback of *Dolly* and *Omkara*'s love story, suffering just in a song with visuals. Although there is a full song in the album, in the film, the song has been used till the love story needs to be explained. After the song is over, *Dolly*'s father warns *Omkara* not to trust his daughter by saying, "*Jo apne baap ko thag sakti hai, woh kisi aur ki sagi kya hogi?*" According to Bhardwaj Ranjan in *Omkara*'s review suggests that the motivation for the song comes after the number plays itself out; it's like the musical equivalent of a New Wave Cinema jump cut that cheerfully mixes chronologies and messes up linearity (Rangan,2006).

### **Omkara**

A little office is made on a moving truck where *Omkara* is sitting trying to convince a person named *Captaan* (captain) who works for *Bhayisaab*'s opponent named '*Indore Bhayisaab*' to take his name back from his Lok Sabha seat but he refuses by insulting him. *Omkara* also smiled and said nothing. Soon, Kesu reached the MMS of *Indori Bhayisaab*, embarrassed that person as Kesu threatened him that he would leak it on every channel. But *Captaan* didn't give up and he was taunted about his and *Dolly*'s situation. This calls for a fight in which the director has used the song '*Omkara*'. The lyrics, '*Sabse bade ladaiya re Omkara*' describe the heroic nature of the character '*Omkara*'. Instead of using the song as the introduction of the character in the first scene

when *Omkara* was introduced to the audience, the director has placed the song in the fight scene as the background score with the original sounds of a fight. With the song, the message the audience is receiving is that he is powerful. The whole song is about praising *Omkara*'s body structure and strong appearance. After the song, the dialogue '*Shart ghodon pe lagate hain, sheron pe nahi*', explains the personality of '*Omkara*'.

In the next scenes, it is seen that *Omkara* is elected as a member of the legislative assembly, so the new *Bahubali* needs to be selected, for which *Omkara* chooses *Kesu* who is educated and famous as a youngster which will be helpful for the party. First *Raju* showed *Langda Tyagi* the dream of becoming *Bahubali* and when that dream didn't come true, he started to instigate *Langda Tyagi* over this. *Langda* Started finding ways to take his revenge on *Omkara*. On his son's birthday, he saw the friendship of *Kesu* and *Dolly*. He was smiling like he had some idea that would be revealed in the future. One more love story is shown in the film i.e., of *Kesu* and *Billo* who is a prostitute and plays an important role in the story. On the other hand, *Omkara* is spending his moments with *Dolly*, telling him about his background and why he is called *half-bhramin*. To which *Dolly* consoles him by saying, '*Chand jab adha ho jave hai na, tab bhi chand hi kehlavehai ji bas*'. This shows that she is fully devoted to his love and ignores any flaws. *Omkara* gifted her '*Kamarband*' which is his family heirloom.

### **Beedi Jalayi Le**

*Langda Tyagi* is not leaving any chance to insult the new *Bahubali Kesu* or find any weakness against him that he found very soon, i.e., alcohol he cannot handle. *Tyagi* instigates him to have it. As soon as he drinks, he starts singing the song and dancing madly followed by *Tyagi* who is repeating *Kesu*'s lines. *Kesu* is singing and dancing for enjoyment but on the other hand, *Tyagi* seems to enjoy but he is planning and plotting against him. The first lines, '*Na lihaf na gilaf thandi hawa bhi khilaf sasuri, Itni sardi hai kisi ka lihaf leyi le, ja padosi ke chulhe se aag leyi le*' describes the cold weather of North India. The lyrics of the song are bold. The song is not just the dance number of the film. It can be seen *Tyagi* is up to something as he signals something to *Raju*. The line '*Ja padosi ke chulhe se aag leyi le*' seems to have some hidden meaning as *Tyagi* every time repeats it, giving a signal to *Raju*. *Tyagi* is furious but is hiding his pain. In the next paragraph, '*Na kasoore na fatoon, bina jurram ke hajus marr gaye*'..... angithi jalayi le jigar se piya ye, jigar maa badi aag hai' is romance, flirtation going on between *Billo* and *Kesu*. After showing the romance of both, the scene is interspersed with the romance of *Omkara* and *Dolly* in which *Dolly* is wearing '*Kamarband*' on *Omkara*'s demand which further in the story will take turn to violence and murder. The celebration is going outside the building where *Dolly* and *Omkara* are spending time together. The sound can be heard in the song. The song uses sensual expressions such as the lyricist *Gulzar* claims that the song is about the zamindar system. In which the phrase "*Aisa Kaate ke . . .*" he points out, "is where I compare zamindars to Alsatian dogs who leave bite marks (Biswas,2017). Towards the end of the song, the game of *Tyagi* is clear. *Raju*

ignites the cigarette in front of *Billo* which *Kesu* didn't like. He tried to stop *Raju* politely but nothing worked. So, as he was drunk, he couldn't control it and hit *Raju*. This incident made *Kesu* fall in the eyes of *Omkara*.

### **O Saathi Re**

*Kesu* is scared that *Omkara* will never forgive him. On *Tyagi's* suggestion, he went to *Dolly* for help in the absence of *Omkara*. *Tyagi* sizes the opportunity and creates suspicion in *Omkara's* heart about the relationship between *Kesu* and *Dolly*. *Omkara* confronts *Dolly* about why *Kesu* was there and why he ran away seeing *Omkara* coming. *Dolly*, instead of answering starts singing an English song that he learned from *Kesu*. The expression of *Omkara* seems like he will be angry. But he started laughing instead forgetting about his suspicion and calling her either a fool or a witch. Listening to this, she feels insulted and starts chasing *Omkara*, throwing things at him. Here is a romantic song, '*O Saathi Re*' is placed in the background. *Dolly* is seen wearing '*Kamar bandh*' in the first line sung by a female singer, she lost it on the roof while running behind *Omkara* in the whole house. The whole *sthai* sung by both female and male singers is captured in one shot where both are running in the house upstairs and down. With this trick, the director may try to involve the audience with both lovers. According to Bhardwaj Rangan, "*O saathi re*, where one uninterrupted camera movement follows them through their house; it's as gorgeous a piece of technical showboating as I've seen". The song expresses the love between two lovers. It shows the feeling of people who are in love in lines, '*o saathi re din doobe ne*'. They just want to be with each other and they don't want to the day come to an end. In the film, *Omkara* is so in love with *Dolly* that he forgets about the whole *Kesu* incident. Further, it is seen, that *Indu* the wife of *Tyagi* is holding the *kamar band* of *Dolly* which she lost while running, thinking if she did the right thing by stealing the *kamar band* at the behest of her husband. The next paragraph is full of romance and shows the power of love. The lines, "*Kabhi kabhi yun karna, main daantu or tum darna*" describe an innocent girl wishing her dominance over a male. These lines match the visuals where both are playing with each other where *Omkara* accidentally hits her hard and when *Dolly* screams a little, *Omkara* holds her hand politely and kisses her. In lines, '*Ugal pade aankho se meeethy pani jharna*, both are lost in each other's love and *Dolly* has tears in her eyes. Now that *Omkara* is happy, she requests *Omkara* to forgive *Kesu*. *Omkara* first says no in anger, then agrees to forgive him after their marriage.

### **Namak Ishq Ka**

*Bhayisaab* was shot by an opponent's gang member. *Omkara* orders *Tyagi* and other gang members to take revenge and distribute the work but says nothing to *Kesu* as he is still upset. *Tyagi* seeks an opportunity to create misunderstandings between *Omkara* and *Kesu*. He advises *Kesu* to do his work with the help of *Billo* (his girlfriend). To which *Kesu* agrees and gives *kamar bandh* to *Billo* which was again *Tyagi's* idea. *Billo* accepts his proposal and agrees to help *Omkara's* gang and is sent as a lure to the police station to trap the members of a rival gang who are plotting against *Bhayisaab*. The song is set up in the police station where *Billo* is performing for them. All

the policemen are drunk and are enjoying her performance. The images are beyond the context of the song. The song here is placed to distract the attention of cops so that *Omkara* can kill *Kichlu* (a member of the opponent gang). The music piece of the song is used not to show the elaborated staged choreography, rather, it is seen that *Omkara* and *Tyagi* are in police dress, loaded their gun, and are heading towards the police station. *Billo* is wearing a *Kamar bandh*, which *Kesu* gave her, and is recognized by *Omkara* and *Tyagi*. *Tyagi* uses this situation and plays his psychological game with *Omkara* which takes the story toward the murder of *Dolly*, her belief, and love.

### Laakad

*Laakad* is used again by the narrator to comment on a situation where *Omkara* has doubts about *Dolly* and he hurts her. *Dolly* is unable to understand the reason for his anger and cries. The narrator here just used just two lines where *Dolly* is thinking about what she got wrong. The narrator is talking to the audience when he comments that when a person's heart gets burnt, it is not visible outside but inside, the person keeps getting hurt. In the last line, he is suggesting not to fall in love.

### Conclusion

"I want the audience not to go out during the song so that they do not lose any part of the film."- Vishal Bhardwaj (Hindustan,2000). Vishal Bhardwaj has been making efforts to present the stories in their music in a better way. In a personal interview, Vishal admits his love to use songs as a background to narrate a story. He says, "When I and my contemporaries Anurag, etc. came in limelight, we started using music in a way where the moment of reality was there, underlines a musical emotion or guides you to feel something for the character the way you want as a narrator (Personal interview)". In the film, it can be seen that except for two item songs, '*Beedi Jalayi Le*' and '*Namak Ishq Ka*' all the other songs are used as a background. The first songs '*Naino Ki Mat Maniyo Re*' and '*Lakad*' are the narrator's comments on a situation as stated by Vishal Bhardwaj in a personal interview. In the very first song, the narrator may be trying to convey to the audience not to believe what is happening on the screen. The narrator establishes his connection with the viewers by describing to them that this love is not going to be an easy affair. To prove the point, he uses the song again in the last scene as a leitmotif where *Omkara* kills *Dolly* reminding the audience about what he conveyed earlier. The song *Omkara* describes the power of the character to the viewer where he is seen as violent, whereas in another song '*O Saathi re*', the same character is shown losing his power for love. '*Laakad*' song is again used to convey the message through the narrator about what being hurt means. It can be observed that all the songs are placed in a way that does not create an interruption in the story rather while each song is being played there is something that is being carried. Like in *Beedi Jalayi Le*, *Tyagi* is plotting a trap for *Kesu*, in *Namak Isaq ka*, *Tyagi's* planning worked and he finally succeeded in arousing suspicion in *Omkara's* mind after many attempts. Even in the love song '*O Saathi re*' there is a small moment where *Dolly* loses her *Kamarband*. If you miss the song the viewer will never come to know how that happened.

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