

A Reflection of Existentialism in Indian Film Songs: A Study

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Abstract

Every song has its own significance as the philosophy is concerned. The music and the lyrics has deep impact on the human beings. The songs speak more than the words. It gives message through its soothing composition of music and beautifully arrangement of lyrics. Indian cinema also plays a significant role in bringing new music to the music lovers. There are thousands of hindi songs in Bollywood cinema. They are categorized according to its meaning and nature such as romantic songs, sad songs, motivational songs, devotional songs, patriotic songs, songs dedicated to mother father or sisters and teachers etc. but there are certain songs which come in the category of existentialism which will be discussed in this paper. Indian writers of hindi music write about anything from love, relationships, death, politics, religion, etc. They are able to write songs that sound more like poetry than a typical pop song composition. There are certain beautiful songs which are very emotional in nature and they are the clear manifestation of existentialist tendencies. The study aims to validate the theories of existentialism as these are fleshed out from the lyrics of Indian Cinema in a limited selection of Bollywood songs. It seeks to provide an analysis of Hindi film songs set against that of an existentialist philosophical framework which consists of principle concepts such as: individual existence, subjectivity, choice and commitment, absurdity, and alienation.

Keywords: Absurdity, Alienation, Authenticity, Dread, Existentialism, Freedom, Lyric, Song, Sting.

Introduction

The main aim of this research paper is to find out the use of the characteristics of existentialism in Hindi film songs. The basic concern of Existentialism is man's existence concerning his findings of life and creates meaning through freedom of choice and free will. In simpler term existentialism is the study of human beings. "Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that explores the issue of human existence."(Lavrin, 43)

There are various scholars who have spoken about this philosophy of human beings such as Solomon writes,

Existentialist philosophers explore questions related to the meaning, purpose, and value of human existence. Common concepts in existentialist thought include existential crisis, dread, and anxiety in the face of an absurd world (see: human free will), as well as authenticity, courage, and virtue.(Solomon, 2)

After the WWII when the whole world went into depression the existentialist literature emerges as both a crisis of meaning and an ambivalent sense of possibility. The thoughts of the existentialists about life of human beings connect with creative forms of expression, especially those of literary modernism. Existentialist philosophers such as Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus' literary works, as well as modernist authors such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Kafka, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison, broaden the scope of existentialist philosophy.

Existentialism is associated with several 19th- and 20th-century European philosophers who shared an emphasis on the human subject, despite often profound differences in thought.(Crowell)

Objectives- The study endeavored to find out the extent of the use of existentialism in the lyrics of the songs composed by Bollywood Lyricists.

Research Questions- The analysis sought the following underlying questions:

1) What are the characteristics of Existentialism:

- (a) Free will or freedom of choice and responsibility of actions;
- (b) Absurdity of life;
- (c) Dread and Anxiety;
- (d) Alienation; and
- (e) Authenticity?

2) How are the above characteristics of existentialism reflected in the lyrics of Indian Hindi Cinema?

characteristics of Existentialism as Reflected in the Lyrics of Indian Hindi film songs:

1. Free Will or Freedom of Choice and Responsibility of Actions

One of the major characteristics of Existentialism is Freedom and choice. Every human is free to choose in the course of his life. The choice of the alternatives depends on him or her. The free man has primarily the individual power to control himself and acts in accordance to his values, beliefs and conscience. Freedom here does not mean that the individual will use his or her freedom which will disturb the freedom of other human being. In this case the one has to take care of his responsibility. How much responsible he or she is to make use of the freedom. He is also expected to accomplish his role of being the ideal representation of humanity; therefore, he should really be alert with the value he chooses to create. Choice is an act that involves free will and knowledge that is why man is expected to bear the sole responsibility for the decision he makes and the ends he pursues.

Pairon mein bandhan hai, Payal ne machaya shor.
 Sab darwaaze karlo band, Dekho Aaye, aaye chor.
 Pairon mein bandhan hai. Tod de saare bandhan tu,
 Machne de payal ka shor. Dil ke sab darwaaze khol,
 Dekho aaye, aaye chor. Pairon mein bandhan hai. (Mohabbatein)

The lyrics is the existentialistic expression for “the spirit is willing to break the bondage”. The character wants to live in freedom but she is tied by the ‘Bundhan’ and this bundhan or bondage is the rules and laws of the society. The character is a female and in Indian society it is difficult for a female character to live freely. Females have so many restrictions in the society. In the movie *Mohabbatein* this character is willing to live as free life. Thus the writer Anand Abakshi has composed which is deeply connected with the existential theme of Freedom and choice.

Here, the lyric denotes helplessness of the person (female). She says, her feet are tied in chain, and so, she is unable to dance, but the voice of her anklet tells her follow the spirit (to dance anyhow).

Therefore, she feels being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. She is the victim of confused feeling – to dance or not to dance. She's in catch-22 situation. In fact, the lyric is figurative expression denoting the girl's helplessness through "bandhan (bondage) and "payal (anklet).

She feels that she is locked up and speaks of the reality that man cannot be chained nor be kept as a prisoner of somebody else. Man is a subject and never an object. Therefore, she cannot be possessed by another individual or the society. Man's life represents an exercise of the power of choice, and his destiny is determined in a large part by the choices he makes.

2. **Absurdity-** The second major characteristics of existential philosophy is Absurdity. These characteristics also can be seen in the Indian film songs. The human life is ultimately meaningless by the fact of death and the inability of the individual to make rational sense of his experience. Life is meaningless, yet refusing to grant a meaning to life does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it is not worth living. Despite man's irrational desire for unity, for absolutes, for a definite order and meaning to the objective nature, no such meaning exists. Man will die, but he shouldn't allow that fact to inform or constrain all of his actions or decisions. He must be willing to live in spite of death, create meaning in spite of objective meaninglessness, and find value in spite of the tragic, even comic, absurdity of what goes on around him. Absurdity is born out of a confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world and humanity must live in a world that is forever hostile or indifferent towards them.

There are many songs in Hindi cinema which denotes existential absurdity. One of them which the scholar is presenting from movie Dil Apna Aur Preet Parai. This song is written by Shaelendra and sung by Lata Mangeshkar. Music is directed by Shanka Jaikishan.

Ajeeb dastaan hai yeh, Kahan shuru kahan khatam,
 Ye manzilein hai kaunsi, Na woh samajh sake na hum
 Yeh roshni ke saath kyun Dhuaan utha chiraag se
 Yeh khwaab dekhti hoon main Ke jag padi hoon kwaab se.
 (Dil Apna Preet Parayi)

The writer says that the story is very strange no one knows where it starts and where it stops. What destinations are these, Neither they nor we could understand it. In the second couplet he says Why with this light Smoke arose from lamp. He is unable to understand why things happen so. He again says I saw this dream or I woke up from dream.

In this song the writer of the songs tells the confused state of the character. It reflects the unpredictability of death and how fragile the life of man is. This senseless situation is an absurdity and has made people all over the world re-think how valuable and fragile a man's life is.

3. **Dread and Anxiety-** The third important characteristics of existential philosophy is Dread or anxiety. It is a consequence of the meaninglessness of human existence or the emptiness of the universe. Dread may be a means of God to call man to a commitment of a moral and spiritual life. It can also come from the fact that being free individuals we are bound to make choices. The universe does not offer an answer to all questions or a solution to problems. Therefore the only way to deal with this ambiguity is to value the individual's choices and actions. The

feeling of dread should be recognized and felt, but behind the immersion on the emotion the individual has to decide whether he will allow it to dominate him or otherwise.

All the poets and the lyricists are the philosophers who express their views through their works of writings. The Indian cinema has produced such songs which really are melodious as well as meaningful. To show the existential dread and anxiety this song from Mera Naam Joker is depicted here. The lyrics is written by Shalendra the music is given by Shankar Jaikishan and sung by Mukesh.

Jeena yahan marna yahan Iske siva jaana kahan
 Jeena yahan marna yahan Iske siva jaana kahan
 Ji chahe jab humko awaaz do Hum hain wahin hum thhe jahan
 Apne yahin dono jahan Iske siva jana kahan (Mera naam Jokar)

The writer expresses his dread feelings through this song. He says we live here, we die here where else we can go. Further he writes Call out to me whenever you wish You will always find me where I was I belong to this world Where else can I go?

Jeena Yahan Marna Yahan” is the first song of the film, and ultimately the most important. Sung by the Joker Raju (Raj Kapoor) to a circus crowd, as well as his three former loves (Simi Garewal, Kseniya Ryabinkina, and Padmini), it translates in English to “Live here, die here”: the ultimate motto of the showman. In the course of Bollywood history, those four words are among the most important.

4. **Alienation-** According to Existentialist every human being in this world is alone. Alienation is a refusal that is directed against any position or attitude that has become fixed and then imposed on others. It is the refusal to accept objective classification of people and events. When a person refuses to live an authentic life he is alienated. The life becomes worse when the individual gets involved in bad faith that means living an unauthentic life. The Christian existentialists take this situation as estrangement of the individual soul from God.

The movie, Zinda is composed by Amit Trivedi. The existentialism of the song is pronounced clearly in its refrain where the lyricist says “Mujhe chod do mere haal pe, zinda houn yaar kaafi hain”. As an ode to loneliness, the writer says that he wants to be left completely alone and he doesn't mind it because for him, being alive is enough. The philosophy of this song can be seen as existentialistic.

Hawaaon se jo maanga hissa mera To badle main hawa ne saans di
 Akelepan se chhedi jab guftagu Mere dil ne aawaaz di
 Mere haathon, hua jo qissa shuru Usey poora toh karna hai mujhe
 Qabr par mere sar utha ke khadi ho zindagi Aise marna hai mujhe. (Lootera)

The message can be one of the singularities of life where an individual is happy to be alive and does not pay head to any other sadness in life. It can also be seen as a song of frustration where existence feels like a punishment. Loneliness or any other sadness does not hurt the individual for existence itself is too much of a burden to carry.

Authenticity- The meaning of authentic life is taking responsibility for all actions that one freely chooses. The total freedom that man faces often throws him into a state of existential anguish wherein he is burdened by the hardship of having to choose all the time. Man is the master of his life and whatever action he choose he himself becomes responsible. Authentic existence dictates that man has to live according to his own beliefs, meaning he should find meaning into the acts that he does and not from what other people say. Authentic person should not live in regard to what the society dictates because this would mean a life lived in bad faith. Bad faith which means pretending that one is not

free and responsible for his actions; where the individual thinks that he is a mere victim of circumstances and are not accountable for his deeds and choices.

There is a very beautiful song which talk about the life, an authentic life. Ek Pyar Ka Nagma Hai lyrics is from the movie *Shor* (1972) sung by Mukesh and Lata Mangeshkar. This romantic evergreen old song is written by Santosh Anand and music composed by Laxmikant-Pyarelal. Starring Manoj Kumar and Nanda.

Ek Pyaar Kaa Nagma Hai Maujon Ki Ravaani Hai

Zindagi Aur Kuch Bhi Nahi Teri Meri Kahaani Hai

Ek pyaar kaa nagma hai

This song takes the subject of man embracing his true self. Here the writer says that life is a tale of love, Life is the flowing of waves, Life is nothing more than your and my story.

Kuch paakar khona hai Kuch khokar paana hai

Jeevan ka matlab to aana or jaana hai

Do pal ke jeevan se ek umar churaani hai (Shor)

In gaining something, we lose something In losing something, we gain something; The meaning of life is to come and to go From a few moments of existence, we must steal a whole lifetime. The song says that behind the simplicity of man lies a depth of complexities. History cannot characterize a person. It may tell a few things about the individual or may reinforce a person through the lessons derived from it. But it can never impose an identity to the individual. Even the past cannot pre-determine the individual and his nature of being transcendent makes him more complex. Whenever people internalize the objectified identity granted to them by other people or by society, it is tantamount to self-deception.

Tu dhaar hai nadiya ki Main tera kinaara hoon

Tu mera sahaara hai Main tera sahaara hoon

Aankhon mein samandar hai Aashaon ka paani hai

The meaning of the lines are you are the waters of a river I am your shore you are my support, I am your support In my eyes is an ocean, it contains the water of hopes. These lines indicate the authentic life of a person. According to the writer man can also achieve an authentic life by taking “blind leap of faith”. or a “leap in the arms of God”. Authenticity happens when a person lives in the moment and is ready for any outcome with no excuses. After living his life according to the way he desires he must be prepared to have a “leap of faith” which means having a blind, personal commitment to God at every moment of one’s life. The fact that this leap is completely independent of reason is what makes it so strong. It is not an abrupt process because it is based purely on one’s faith and it cannot be immediately achieved through affiliation with any group. It is a lived experience, a journey whose end can only be decided by the individual. This is a song about a dying man’s wish to go back to his Creator. He has lived an inauthentic life and seeks renewal of his faith during the last days of his life.

Toofaan to aana hai Aakar chale jaana hai

Baadal hai yeh kuch pal ka Chaakar dhal jaana hai

Parchaaniyan reh jaati Reh jaati nishaani hai

The meaning of these line is Storms will come But in the end, they will pass; These clouds are only momentary, after rising they will diminish But these shadows remain, these symbols of you remain.

Man must strive to have an authentic existence. Though life has been presented to him as uncertain, unreasonable and sometimes cruel, he needs to experience all of these conflicts in order for him to transcend and go beyond what he is at the moment. He will make use of his subjectivity as he experiences the existential characteristics that comes with life and this long hard climb towards the authentic life is the very thing that will make man whole and true in the end.

Conclusion- These Bollywood songs have been thoroughly analyzed in the reflection of existentialism. Based on the the lyrics of the Indian Hindi Film songs, this research makes the following conclusions. The existential characteristics used in the lyrics of the songs by the lyricists are Freedom and Responsibility, Absurdity, Dread, Alienation and Authenticity; These Existential characteristics were reflected in the lyrics of (5) five songs. Of course, in this research, the focus was on the larger sense of meaning that gives an overall feeling of existential fortitude. The idea that nostalgia has consequences for various levels of meaning-making, even extending to a basic understanding of relationships between experiences and events, is still being researched. There are so many other songs which are related to the existential themes. The objectives of the paper is fulfilled and the core idea of introducing existentialism in the Indian film songs was successfully completed.

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