



EXPLORING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN PROTEST SONGS: A STUDY OF THEMES AND MESSAGES IN BOLLYWOOD PROTEST SONGS.

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Abstract:

Protest songs have played a crucial role in Indian culture, serving as a powerful medium to raise awareness of social and political issues. These songs aim to express musical opposition to injustice and inspire change. Historically, poets, folk singers, and agitators have composed and performed these songs during significant social movements such as the Bhakti, Independence, and Bhoodan movements.

The Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, has also contributed significantly to this tradition by creating and filming protest songs from the 1940s to the present day. The research paper provides a detailed account of protest songs in Hindi cinema, highlighting their themes and messages that tackle a wide range of social and political issues. The paper aims to understand the ways in which these songs represent and comment on the socio-political realities of India. The paper argues that protest songs of Bollywood provide a unique lens through which to examine the complex issues of social inequality, corruption, censorship, and the struggle for human rights in India.

Keywords:

Bollywood, Hindi Cinema, Protest Songs, Social Issues, Political Issues, Agitation, Movements

MAIN ARTICLE:

Definition of protest song:

A protest song is a song that is associated with a movement for social change and hence part of the broader category of topical songs or songs connected to current events. It may be folk, classical, or commercial in genre [1]. A broad definition, which does not exclude any upcoming form of creativity, defines a protest song as one performed by protesters [2]. Some researchers have argued that protest songs must express opposition or, at the very least, offer some alternative solutions if they are limited to drawing attention to social issues [3].

There is no art without conflict, and there are no protests without anthems. Music is an expression of ourselves, and over the years it has come to become the vehicle of our thoughts, our ideologies and our voices [4].

Protest songs are characterized by lyrics that convey a sense of disagreement, censure, or objection towards a specific social or political matter. Their purpose is to galvanize individuals into taking action or to bring attention to a particular cause. These songs have

a rich heritage that dates back to ancient times, where they were utilized as a means of political expression. They gained particular prominence during the 20th century as part of various social justice movements, including the Civil Rights and anti-war movements.

Jimi Hendrix claims that "If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music". And there is a lot of evidence for how political music has made a difference. The place protest songs have within music is huge. They often have a bigger reach and impact than other means of sharing a political message [5].

India's cultural legacy has been shaped by various movements that have left a lasting impact. One such movement was the Bhakti movement that emerged in the 6th century and greatly influenced Indian society. Eminent poets, including Kabirdas and Tulsidas, used their literary works to propagate the principles of social equality and justice. During the freedom movement, renowned lyricists like Rabindranath Tagore and Subrahmanyam Bharti composed patriotic songs such as "Vande Mataram" and "Jana Gana Mana," which deeply moved the masses and invigorated the freedom fighters.

In a similar vein, the Bhoodan movement launched by Vinoba Bhave in the 1950s motivated affluent farmers to contribute land to the destitute farmers. Folk songs were utilized to encourage people to participate in the movement and conveyed messages of social justice and equality. Due to their folksy music style, these songs gained immense popularity. During the Naxalite movement that began in the 1960s and continued thereafter, protest songs with anti-government slogans, such as "Khoon Se Khelenge Holi" and "Hum Honge Kaamyab," became widespread among the youth and laborers.

In addition to these movements, songs related to human rights and freedom were composed during the Anti-Emergency movement. In more contemporary times, protest music has been a regular feature of movements in India. The Dalit rights movement especially uses music to further its goals. The Kabir Kala Manch is one such well known troupe of singers who used their performances to raise awareness and support for their cause. The widely acclaimed [6].

The documentary movie "Jai Bhim Comrade" shed light on the efforts of Kabir Kala Manch and introduced this genre of protest music to audiences in India and around the world. Although not as renowned, several other Dalit musical groups also operate in various regions of India.

Bollywood, the Hindi film industry, has also been contributing to the protest songs tradition since the 1940s. These songs continue to be composed and filmed even today. This article will discuss the themes and messages related to the social and political issues portrayed in these songs in detail.

1. Social issues:

Protest songs have always been an integral part of Hindi cinema music. Many lyricists and musicians together have openly shown various social issues by using these songs on this huge platform. Bollywood has composed songs that indicated turbulence in society. Bollywood is known for its cheesy songs which contain a lot of romance and some highly nonsensical lyrics. But, this industry has surprised us with songs based on social issues. Sometimes, these songs are composed in a musical way that signifies protest against social issues [7].

For example some major social issues and songs related to them are as follows:

(I) Woman power or empowerment related:

Bharat ki beti (Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl - 2020) - The song portrays the challenges faced by women in a society dominated by men and how they strive to break stereotypes.

(II) Dalit and minority related:

Bismil (Haider - 2014) - The song portrays the anguish and resentment of Kashmiri Muslims who have endured the effects of Indian military occupation.

(III) Social equality and harmony related:

Bolo na (Chittagong - 2022) , The song raises awareness about issues related to social justice and inequality.

(IV) Injustice and discrimination related:

Maula Mere Le Le Meri Jaan (Chak De India - 2007) - The song highlights the issue of religious discrimination and condemns communal violence in India.

Bande Mein Tha Dum (Lage Raho Munna Bhai - 2006) - The song encourages people to stand up against injustice and fight for their rights.

(V) Motivational:

Kholo kholo (Tare Zameen Par-2007) - Through this song, children have been told to promote their creativity and passion.

Zinda (Bhag milkha bhag-2013) - The song is about the struggle of an athlete who overcomes his personal demons to achieve success and how his story can inspire others to never give up.

2. Political issues:

Various songs have been composed, sung and filmed in Hindi cinema on various political issues as well.

(I) Corruption:

Rang de basanti (Rang de basanti-2006) - The song calls upon us to stand up against corruption and injustice. This song is an anthem for young people who want to make a difference in their country and stand up against corruption.

Khalbali (Rang de basanti - 2006) - The song talks about the need for young people to stand up and fight against corruption and injustice.

Halla bol (Halla bol - 2008) - The song is about the power of the common man to fight against corruption and injustice

Janta Rocks (Satyagrah - 2013) - This song was a part of Prakash Jha's movie Satyagrah. The video showed lots of random kinds of stuff like money in blankets, cricket, swiss banks to talk about rampant corruption. The song was quite packed with punch honestly.

Haal Chaal Thik Thak Hai (Mere Apne - 1971) - The humorous but ironic number, written by poet Gulzar, from the movie Mere Apne, which highlights issues of unemployment and corruption.

(II) Terrorism:

Bandeh (Black Friday-2004) - This is a song by the band named the Indian Ocean which still sounds very refreshing and it pictures the 1993 Mumbai blast in the movie "Black Friday". The sheer brutality of the blast was captured in this song.

Zindagi maut na ban jaye (sarfarosh-1999) - This song calls for an end to violence and terrorism.

(III) For communal harmony/against communal riots:

Maula (Delhi 6-2009) - The song deals with the issue of communal harmony and the need for people to come together to fight against communal tensions.

(IV) Patriotic:

Rang de basanti chola (Shaheed-1965 & The Legend of Bhagat Singh-2002) - inspired by the life of bhagat Singh and calls for the end of British rule in India.

Door hato ye duniya walon hindostan hamara hai (Kismat -1945) - With martial beat and inspired rhythm this song became an anthem for a nation that was on the cusp of overthrowing a most crippling colonial power. This is a cleverly masked song that tugged at the nationalist heartstrings of its listeners [8].

Khoon chala (Rang De Basanti-2006) - The song is tribute to the martyrs of the India freedom struggle and a call to the youth to carry forward their legacy and continue their struggle for independence and political rights. Candle Light protest in this movie with this song in the background was epic. Every audience loved this scene and this only made candle march popular all over India.

(V) Other Issues:

Mehengai Daayen (Peepli Live-2010) - Featured in the popular movie of that time Peepli Live which dealt with the harrowing reality of suicide done by farmers, the song goes 'Hai sakhi saiyan toh khoob hi kamaat hai mehangingi dayan, khaye jaat hai'. Instead of anger, the song uses black humor to make its point.

Azaadi (Gully Boy-2019) - The anger and frustration of this song in Zoya Akhtar's movie Gully Boy were epic. Lines like 'Haan mera bhai yeh toh noton ki sarkar hai naa' to call out the roughish political class. And 'Isstemal karr tu zubaan kabhi' signifies how a boy from a poor family fails to use his voice in front of rich people.

Ranaji (Gulal-2009) - The songs in Anurag Kashyup's disturbingly good Gulaal, are sharp combinations of satire, folk, and protest politics. The expert of Piyush Mishra's lyrics lies in correlating love with political analogies. In one verse, it correlates love with the way the US blatantly roosted itself in Iraq.

Takhat Na Hoga Taj Na Hoga (Aaj aur Kal -1963) - Ludhianvi's searing compositions is the gem from the movie Aaj Aur Kal, which again is a brutal denouncement of crony capitalism and feudalism.

Hum Dekhenge (The Kashmir Files-2022) - "Hum Dekhenge" is a renowned Urdu poem that was penned by Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1979 and later adapted into a song. The song gained recent attention when it was featured in the Bollywood film "The Kashmir Files". The poem and song both convey a message of hope and perseverance in the face of oppression and injustice. The central theme of the song is the struggle against tyranny and the eventual triumph of the oppressed. It inspires people to unite and fight against injustice and oppression, with the belief that their struggle will eventually lead to success. The song also emphasizes the importance of faith and courage when facing adversity.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, protest songs have been used as a means of political expression throughout history. They have a rich heritage that dates back to ancient times, where they were utilized to bring attention to specific social or political issues. In India, the tradition of protest music has a long history and has been used to support various social justice movements, including the Bhakti movement, freedom movement, Naxalite movement, Anti-Emergency movement, and the Dalit rights movement. Bollywood has also contributed to this tradition by composing songs that address social and political issues such as injustice, discrimination, and social equality. Music has the power to galvanize individuals into taking action or to bring attention to a particular cause, making protest songs an essential part of the cultural fabric of society.

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