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UNCONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN HINDI FILMS FOCUS ON AVANT-GARDE GENRE

Subhendu Bose, Pursuing Masters of Arts (Journalism and Mass Communication), Amity School of Communication, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh - 201313, India

Dr Janardhan Juvvigunta, Assistant Professor-III, Amity School of Communication, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh - 201313, India

Abstract: Hindi film industry, since its inception in the early 1930s, has evolved into the largest film industry in the world with over 1000 films being rolled out every year but at the same time it has always been criticized by the western film scholars for its conventional narrative structures that are very divergent from American or European structures. India has had its fair share of auteurs such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and others who ushered in the 'Indian New Cinema' also known as 'Parallel Cinema' however, it is the avant garde genre in Hindi cinema that hasn't quite got the attention it deserves. While avant garde movement in films started way back in 1920s and 30s in Europe and America but it is not until the 1960s and 70s that Indian filmmakers tried their hands at this art form. It is interesting to note that the American and European avant garde films greatly differ from their conventionally structured counterparts which in turn are different from the conventional narrative structures that mainstream Hindi films follow. Therefore, it merits that research is carried out to analyse the unconventional narrative structures in Hindi films known for their experimental or avant garde genre.

Keywords: Avant Garde, Experimental, Innovation, Cinematography, Bollywood, Hindi Films, Unconventional.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in the early 1900s, Hindi cinema has attracted criticism from film critics worldwide for its unique narrative structure that deviates from the Western understanding and philosophies of conventional cinema. It needs to be understood that civilizations evolve in their unique ways in which traditional art forms, culture, and religious beliefs play a vital role in shaping people's perspectives and therefore developing societal expectations.

Over the years, conventional Hindi cinema evolved through various socio-economic phases in the nation's march that guided in shaping its narratives on the paradigms of 'good versus evil, virtues of righteousness, songs, and dances, music to elicit moods, and all of this framed in linear timelines for ease of assimilation. While conventional cinema was spreading its wings, around the same time, avant-garde films were slowly gripping film creators' imaginations starting with the creation of "Un Chien Andalou" (1929) by auteur Luis Bunuel and artist Salvatore Dali. Hindi cinema was not to be left far behind in the avant-garde genre even though the avant-garde movement didn't have a major impact during the Indian New Wave, there have been attempts at Hindi avant-garde by the likes of Indian pioneers such as Mani Kaul, Kamal Swaroop, etc. since the 1960s.

While mainstream Hindi cinema went on to become highly commercialized and has always been patronized by the Indian audience, it is the avant-garde genre with the unconventional narrative structure that has kept film critics and enthusiasts interested in taking experimental and innovative films to new levels. To understand the unconventional narrative structure in Hindi films with a focus on avant-garde genre it becomes imperative that an understanding is achieved first on the conventional narrative structure of mainstream Hindi films and what makes a Hindi film qualify as avant-garde. This paper will endeavour to explain the basics of the narrative structure of conventional Hindi films and understand the unconventional narrative structure in Hindi films, focusing on the avant-garde genre.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tracing the History of Influences on the Narrative Structure of Hindi Mainstream Cinema.

To begin with, it would be a good idea to define Mainstream Hindi cinema. Mainstream Hindi cinema commonly referred to as “Bollywood Cinema” the world over, defines the production of films in Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) film industry in Hindi or “Hinglish” (a term for a mixture of Hindi and English made popular by journalists); that is essentially commercial and meant to be distributed at a large scale at the national and international levels. Throughout its history, Hindi cinema has undergone an evolutionary process where it has been influenced by other forms of cinema however, it has, from the structural and thematic perspective, retained its peculiar characteristics which it inherited from Indian traditional art forms. (Ciolfi, S., 2012).

From its inception, Hindi films have been inspired by the styles, aesthetics, and semiotics prevalent in a variety of cultural art forms that have evolved in India over a protracted period, often resulting in integrating these art forms into a cultural bouquet as its legacy. That the traditional cultural art forms have had a significant influence is fundamental to the journey of Hindi cinema; from ancient Sanskrit drama to epic religious plays, which emphasized the spectacle element with a concoction of music, dance, and gesture as was evident in the two earliest films *Pundalik* (1912 dir by P. R. Tipnis) and *Raja Harishchandra* (1913 dir by G. D. Phalke). (Dudrah, R. & Desai, J., 2008).

Bombay (now Mumbai) was predominantly the place of origin for Hindi cinema which was the result of the infrastructural support provided by the Parsi theatre groups therefore, the Parsi theatres had a major influence in shaping the narrative nuances of Hindi films in the early days. Another major influence was cast by the indigenous art forms such as Nautanki, Jatra, Tamasha etc which were the predominant art forms before cinema appeared on the horizon. (Rajadhyaksha, A. & Willemen, P., 1999)

From the beginning, Hindi cinema was influenced by a vast and original narrative repertory offered by the authors of Parsi theatre who were motivated and eager to experiment over a wide spectrum ranging from Shakespeare and Victorian melodrama to the epics of Kalidasa. The bouquet that was on offer combined realism, music, dance, fantasy, narrative, and spectacle (Barat, I., 2016).

Aesthetics of Song and Dance Sequences

Song and dance sequences constituted a peculiar signature of Hindi films that were, in all likelihood, inherited from classical theatre and art forms where music, dance, and singing played an inseparable and integral part that was ushered into Hindi films with the advent of talking pictures. Discussing Hindi films is essentially a discussion of song and dance sequences. Song and dance sequences in Hindi cinema are a dichotomy of sorts, being the reason for some of the films not reaching international standards and on the other hand being an important ingredient for some films to be the real dealmakers like in *Lagaan* (2002 dir by Ashutosh Gowariker) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001 dir by Mira Nair) (Gopal, S. & Moorti, S., 2008).

The cropping up of song–dance sequences anywhere in the plot in Hindi films tends to break continuity in space and time. These sequences cause the storyline to briefly digress from the narrative plot and flow of reality, with the main protagonists (hero and the heroine) suddenly and happily engaging in singing and dancing at exotic mountainous locations. The spectacle is created through rapid costume changes, dreamlike locations, and surreal situations that have no connection to the real space and time of the storyline. This is what constitutes the main attraction of the Hindi film. The song and dance sequences in the Hindi films, apart from being for spectacle, are important in narration as well, especially in

performing functions that the film's storyline cannot provide. These sequences introduce the audiences to the innermost feelings through singing and dancing rather than dialogues (Ciolfi, S., 2012).

Song and dance sequences are accepted as integral to the conventional narrative conventions in mainstream Hindi films. They form essential ingredients for making successful Hindi films which allow to showcase a broad spectrum of emotions and thus appeal to a large audience. These sequences may seem to be not syncing or being out of place with the conventional narrative structures mostly based on “linear timelines” however, a detailed observation would reveal distinct yet coherent deployment of song and dance sequences within the film narrative (Shresthova, S., 2007).

Evolution of Conventional Narrative Constructs and Trajectories

As per film scholar Madhav Prasad, “Feudal family romances” was the central theme that dominated Hindi films from the 1950s till about the 70s. This was the dominant form that was characterized by narratives that often revolved around characters from affluent backgrounds, typically belonging to families with a history of feudal or aristocratic status. The stories explore the dynamics, conflicts, and romances within these families, highlighting the social and cultural nuances of a feudal society. This was also the time when the dominant form of “feudal family romances” was challenged by the “socio-economic progress model” of cinema. The criticism and fault finding that was prevalent during the 1950s and 60s, ushered in the “New Indian Cinema” with its characteristic aesthetic sensibility, engagement with political awareness and realities along with a new style of filmmaking (Barat, I., 2016).

1970s was witness to widespread social unrest in India that resulted from unemployment, increasing inflation, rising levels of poverty, shortage of food commodities, and hoarding of supplies resulting in political and social unrest and culminating in the imposition of Emergency in 1975. The focus of the narrative changed from the romantic hero to the ‘angry young man’ who stood up against corruption and class differences *Zanjeer (1973 dir by Prakash Mehra)* and *Deewar (1975 dir by Yash Chopra)* (Prasad, M., 2000).

Conventional narrative structures in Hindi films, at its most stable form, now had a form that included romance as the central theme, a comedy track, a sprinkling of five to six songs, an entourage of familiar character types, and the narrative structure culminating with the threatened situation (moral or social) being restored by the hero. This structure would also be embalmed with certain messages representing the government’s social and public welfare programs. The 1990s were characterized by the entry of satellite TV in India, an alternate source of entertainment, which brought with it stiff competition that forced filmmakers to better the standards of their production value which included the use of digital sound, foreign locations, and lavish and spectacular sets. This was also the time when the NRI was ushered as a central theme in the narrative construct with Hindi films like *Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (1995 dir by Aditya Chopra)*, *Hum Aapke Hai Kaun (1994 dir by Sooraj Barjatya)*, and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (2001 dir by Karan Johar)* which ushered in the transformation of Hindi films that centered around prolific use of foreign locations, extravagant cinematography, designer mise-en-scene, display of economic affluence, enhanced engagement with the West, family issues on separation and detachment. This was in fact greatly influenced by the political environment of increasing global and cultural nationalism prevalent in India during the 1990s. The target audience had switched from local to global (NRIs) (Prasad, M., 2000).

The late 1990s and 2000s saw, other than the NRI and family-centric films, the emergence of three major narratives picking up steam in Hindi cinema. First is the ‘gangster and mafia war’ theme-based films like *Satya (1998 dir by Ram Gopal Verma)*, *Company (2002 dir by Ram Gopal Verma)*, *Shootout at Lokhandwala (2007 dir by Apoorva Lakhia)*, *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai (2010 dir by Milan Luthra)*, etc. The second being the nationalist films like *Border (1997 dir by JP Dutta)*, *Refugee (2000 dir by JP Dutta)*, *(Mission Kashmir (2000 dir by Vidhu Vinod Chopra)* etc, and third is the ‘serious cinema’ like *Black Friday (2004 dir by Anurag Kashyap)*, *Page3 (2005 dir by Madhur Bhandarkar)*, *Door (2006 dir by Nagesh Kukunoor)*. (Kumar, R., 2021).

The decade of the 2010s and onwards witnessed the rise of new-age filmmakers who challenged conventional norms and represented a broader range of social issues in their narrative structures. Gender representation was brought to the fore thus breaking away from the stereotypical representation of women as mothers, wives, lovers and homemakers. Films like *Kahani (2012 dir by Sujoy Ghosh)* and *Piku (2015 dir by Shoojit Sircar)* represented women in powerful and independent lead roles thus providing a nuanced

gender representation. It was also the time when Hindi filmmakers endeavoured to indulge in religious expressions and caste representation in films like *PK* (2014 dir by Rajkumar Hirani), *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015 dir by Kabir Khan and remake of 1986 Malayalam film *Poovinu Puthiya Poonthennal*) and *Article 15* (2019 dir by Anubhav Sinha) (Kumar, R., 2021).

It is asserted that conventional Hindi films 'do not have a story' and this is what confounds many who are not so familiar with the genre but it would be appropriate to say that by no means does conventional Hindi films deviate from the narrative conventions. Irrespective of the complexity of the storylines, and episodic events, Hindi films culminate in extremely neat resolutions. Having 'no story' in this context would mean, predictability of the storyline to the audience being repetitive thematically and that in all likelihood it will be lapped by them for the spectacle and the emotional content. In the conventional Hindi films, the emphasis is on emotion and spectacle rather than the narrative structure, on the 'how' of things rather than 'what' of things, on familiarity and repetition rather than originality and novelty (Thomas, R., 1985).

Conventional Versus Modernist Approach to Narrative Structure

The conventional narrative structure was meant to result in a coherent visual experience without having to suffer any jerks both in temporal as well as spatial realms or experience any other disruption or dissonance while viewing. The essence was to create a cause and effect rationale, a clear subject-object interaction and a perceptible cohesion of audio-visuals with the objective of achieving a smooth and meaningful storytelling. A seamless and linear narrative structure serves to make the audience get used to the classical narration and genre stereotypes. The hegemony of conventional narrative structure was challenged by the Modernist Cinema by disrupting the narrative linearity and converting the principle of continuity into one of simultaneity by way of iteration, frequency and dislocation of representation through time and space. The tools used are the non linear timelines, jump cuts, breaking the narrative conventions, using innovative interplay of verbal and audio-visual narration. (Kuhn, M. & Schmidt, J.N., 2013)

Understanding Avant-Garde Genre in Cinema: A Brief History

What do we mean by 'Avant-Garde'? Avant-Garde is French for experimental or something new akin to an 'advance guard'. When spoken of about defining a work of art it describes the art to be something that has pushed the boundaries of creativity and innovation, aesthetics, and challenges the conventional form with radical and even bordering on bizarre presentation. Avant-garde works have often been condemned and criticized for their deviance from the norm but in the same time they are considered necessary by scholars for the art form to break new grounds (Kench, S., 2022).

Avant-garde films, from its inception, has been a work in progress that has evolved in a more refined fashion over three distinct periods each connected to the one before it by innovative and experimental continuities manifesting as a form of personal expression. The three periods have been generally the periods before and after the World War II and the present. The post-war avant-garde filmmakers considered themselves as 'artistes of cinema', while the pre-war ones were considered as 'lovers of cinema'. Both shared the same opposition to the narrative structure as employed in the conventional films and in their prioritization of personal expression over pecuniary interests (Horak, J. C., n.d.)

The narrative structure plays the all-important role of engaging the audience, captivating the masses with the interplay of various story elements, and giving shape to the story to make it into a plot. Conventional narrative structures often follow the 3 Act Model which segments a film into a beginning, middle, and end representing the Set up, Confrontation, and Resolution. However, filmmakers do, purposefully, deviate from this model and employ alternative narrative techniques, experiment with the narrative structure, use innovative camera and editing techniques thereby pushing the boundaries of cinema. (Jenkins, P., 2023)

Avant-garde cinema symbolizes a particular genre of cinema that encapsulates artistic innovation, experimental filmmaking, and challenges the conventional understanding of film narrative and aesthetics. This cinematic art form varies from the mainstream in terms of unconventional narratives, styles, and techniques that challenge the conventions of the status quo in mainstream cinema that is primarily characterized by non-linear timelines, prioritizing mood and tone, emphasis on visual artistry over dialogues, experimental film techniques that include imaginative camera work, unconventional editing,

innovative lighting, and thought-provoking mise-en-scene while using social, political, abstract concepts as central themes (Deguzman, K., 2023).

It was in 1969 that, the Film Finance Corporation (presently the National Film Development Corporation of India) encouraged a new variant of New Indian Cinema by granting loans for modest but off-beat films developed in India as instruments for the promotion of national culture, education, and healthy entertainment. This initiative brought to the fore India's, first set of, avant-garde filmmakers like Mrinal Sen, Mani Kaul, and others. *Bhuvan Shome* (1969 dir by Mrinal Sen) and *Uski Roti* (dir by Mani Kaul) are considered some of the earliest avant-garde Hindi films in Hindi. (Rajadhyaksha, A., 2016)

Bollywood, in the case of Hindi films, has been witness to campaigns against the dominant form of conventional narrative structure followed by Hindi films. Their argument was stacked in favour of 'realism', a term which was interpreted in a variety of ways which were primarily influenced by Hollywood. These arguments manifested in the form of innovative and experimental films which challenged the conventional narrative structure (Prasad, M. - 2000).

In relatively recent times, *Love, Sex Aur Dhokha* (2010 dir by Dibakar Banerjee) is an apt example of innovative and experimental cinema that employs a narrative structure comprising three stories linked in time to each other and the medium employed are handheld cameras and CCTV. The plot deals with the abstract subject of regressive objectification in a voyeuristic society (Chaturvedi, P. & Kumar, N., 2015)

Avant-garde techniques are employed by filmmakers to create unique documentary films. The uniqueness lies in challenging cinematic conventions and providing new perspectives on real-life issues. Avant-garde documentaries involve abstract plots, non-linear timelines, and experimental audio-visuals which induce the audience to immerse themselves in the narrative and provoke critical thinking (Films, M. 2023)

The avant-garde films and documentaries challenge the hegemonic norms of narration that has always led to artificiality in mainstream culture. It has mainly two forms. One is to innovate in narrative structures, mise-en-scene, style of acting and thematic aspects and is characterised by ambiguity, which might oscillate between disdain and pleasure. The other form, more applicable to documentaries, is commonly known as found footage or assemblage film - has to do with innovations in the materials of the medium, varying allegories of cinema highlighting the materiality of the cinematic signifier. (Decker, C., 1998)

Unconventional narrative structures often have non-linear storytelling that breaks away from the more conventional linear structure that results in challenging the audience's perception of time and reality. It forces the audience to actively engage with the film rather than being a passive observer of the story rolling out. Non-linear narrative can be related to piecing together of pieces from a puzzle, where the concept of time and space has been rearranged or by employing of multiple timelines in a way that manifests in an immersive experience. Non-linear timeline is just not only a technique but an important ingredient of unconventional narrative structure that challenges the traditional norms and opens up the horizon for innovative filmmaking (Johnson, E., 2023)

Sound. When it comes to understanding and analysing the narrative and the aesthetic aspects of sound in a film, the soundtrack film can be categorised into dialogues, music and noises (sound effects). Dialogues are the resource that conveys to the viewer the maximum narrative information, they also serve to build up rising action or dramatic atmosphere which essentially is their narrative use. Music needs to be analyzed from the emotional, rhythmic and dramatic characterization perspectives. The purpose of the piece must be taken into account and also consider whether it is diegetic or non-diegetic, empathic or anempathetic. Noises or sound effects contribute towards making of the sound universe, in terms of its direct relationship with the audio-visual element of the film, that is presented to the audience (Johnier, G.A.S. & Oscar, I.P.R., 2017).

Innovative editing techniques play a very important part in defining the genre of a film as was demonstrated by Lev Kuleshov which is popularly known as the 'Kuleshov Effect'. That editing can shape the perception of the audience was evident from Kuleshov's experiment. Another innovative editing technique, Kuleshov's 'Geographical Experiment' was aimed at demonstrating the relevance of the characters' positions with reference to the frame that would make shots taken in geographically separated

spaces and edited in a way that gives the illusion of having shot at the same location. (Chmil, G. & Pshenichna, K., 2018)

III. METHODOLOGY

Aim. The aim of this dissertation is to study and analyse the unconventional narrative structure employed in selected Hindi films with avant-garde genre being the focus.

Objectives. The study has the following objectives:

- a. To examine the conventional narrative structure employed in mainstream Hindi films.
- b. To study the history of avant-garde films and analyse what sets them apart from the mainstream cinema and examine the evolution of avant-garde genre in Indian Cinema.
- c. To analyse the unconventional narrative structure in Hindi avant-garde films.

Sample and its Selection.

- a. **Sample.** The sample consists of five avant-garde Hindi films, namely:
 - Uski Roti (1969, directed by Mani Kaul).
 - Om Dar Ba Dar (1988, directed by Kamal Swaroop).
 - Love, Sex Aur Dhoka (2010, directed by Dibakar Banerjee)
 - X: Past is Present (2015, directed by Abhinav Shiv Tiwari, Anu Menon, Nalan Kumarasamy, Hemant Gaba, Pratim D. Gupta, Q, Raja Sen, Rajshree Ojha, Sandeep Mohan, Sudhish Kamath and Suparn Verma).
- b. **Selection.** The selection of these films has been based on critical acclaim, abstract genres, different directors, different periods in time, innovation and experimental nature of creative art and production techniques.

Description of Tools Employed.

- a. **Descriptive Analysis Method.** 'Descriptive Analysis Method' adopted will be carried out in two phases.
 - **Phase 1: Obtaining Knowledge About the Film.** Prior to applying analytical parameters that define avant garde genre, it is pertinent to obtain knowledge of the film being analysed. It would include understanding the storyline and the plot, context of the film, the socio-cultural and or political environment prevalent at the time and its adherence to or deviance from it, morality pertaining to good versus evil or the absence of it, clarity or deliberate ambiguity in message delivery.
 - **Phase 2: Analysing the Film on Parameters that Define Narrative Structure of Avant Garde Genre.** Avant Garde genre is characterised by parameters such as;
 - **Non linearity.** Avant Garde films are characterised by non linear storytelling, often in fragments, challenging the established conventionalities of perception of time and space, essentially done to prevent the audience from being passive viewership, examples being the use of circular, parallel, flash forward or flash back timelines.
 - **Visual and Sound Innovation.** Avant Garde films explicitly use innovative visuals and sound elements, employ abstract imagery and semiotics to emphasis emotions and the context.
 - **Experimental Cinematography.** Cinematography has established conventions for conventional films however, avant garde films are characterised by innovative and experimental camera work which contradict the established conventions, examples being use of handheld camera, employing Close Circuit Television Cameras (CCTVs), body cameras (bodycams), innovative camera angles and shots and the likes.
 - **Three Act Structure.** As Godard advocated that a story has a beginning, middle and end but not necessarily in that order similarly avant garde genre disagrees with the traditional 'Three Act Structure'

that stipulates the beginning, middle and end to be strictly in that order or leaves it ambiguous for the audience to decipher.

- **Innovative Editing Techniques.** Similar to other elements that define cinematic language, editing has its own set of conventions in the realms of conventional narratives however, films of avant garde genre often defy conventional editing techniques in their pursuit of experimentation on the edit table. 'Kuleshov Effect' goes a long way in establishing the relationship between the editing techniques, the narrative structure and the audience's perception.

- b. **Maintain Observatory Notes.** Observatory notes shall be maintained in order to archive every minutest detail of the films as a method of data collection. This data would enable the researcher to carry out an in-depth analysis of the film in relation to the established parameters as have been discussed above.

Procedure. The procedure to be followed is enumerated as under:

- a. The selected films shall be watched minimum of three times.
- b. Observatory notes shall be maintained while watching the films.
- c. The films will be evaluated for unconventional narrative structure which shall include non linearity, experimental cinematography, innovative visuals and sound, mise-en-scene, plot structure, and innovation in editing techniques.
- d. The data thus collected shall be analysed to draw out individual patterns those would be then compared to identify a common template.

Analysis.

- a. **'Love Sex Aur Dhokha' (LSD).**

- **Knowledge About the Film.** LSD has been directed by Dibakar Banerjee and was released in 2010. The film is a string of three separate but interlinked plots juxtaposed in time and space with minimal intersectionality. The film's vintage dates back to late 2000s when issues such as 'Honour Killing', 'MMS Scandals' and 'Sting Operations' were prevalent and found prominent coverage in the news media - notable amongst them were the cases of honour killing of Manoj and Babli (2007), DPS MMS Scandal (2004) and Sting Operations by India TV on some actors for alleged 'Casting Couch' (2005).

- **Critical Acclaim.**

- A review by Nikhat Kazmi was carried in the March 23, 2010 edition of Times of India (Hindi Movies Review) dubbed LSD as Indian Cinema's first full blown experimental film.

- Mayank Shekhar in his review, carried in the March 20, 2010 edition of Hindustan Times labeled LSD as truly experimental.

- Rajiv Masand in his review, published in the March 29, 2010 edition of News 18 says that LSD redefines the concept of 'realistic cinema' and opens up new possibilities of shooting films now.

- **Storyline.** The film showcases three separate plots though spatially distant but temporally interlinked. The first story is titled 'Superhit Pyaar' is about a young man in his early 20s who in his endeavour to make a film towards fulfilment of his diploma curriculum auditions a girl, Shruti, of his age and falls in love with her and in due course elopes with her and both them get married. the couple is killed by the girl's brother and his goons as punishment for dishonouring the family's name.

The second story is titled 'Paap Ki Dukaan' is about how a naive girl working in a departmental store gets unwittingly trapped by her male co-workers and is manipulated in consensual sex while the entire proceeding is recorded through security cameras, the footage of which is then sold in the porn market.

The third story titled 'Badnaam Shohrat' is about a photo-journalist, Prabhat, who is in need of money and incidently happens to save an aspiring dancer, Naina, from committing suicide - a victim of 'casting couch' by a renowned music video producer and singer, Loki Local. Both of

them conspire to carry out a sting operation to take revenge on the music producer wherein Naina will trade sex with Loki Local in exchange for an opportunity to be casted in his upcoming music video.

- **Prevailing Socio-Cultural Environment.** Love Sex aur Dhokha deals with issues of social constructs prevailing during the late 2000s and which still finds resonance in today's society. June 24, 2010 Asian Age published an article claiming that almost 1000 lives are lost to Honour Killings in India - which predominantly occur in the North Indian states with a sprinkling in Maharashtra and Gujarat. 1990s witnessed economic liberalisation in India which prompted massive mass migration (mostly young people) from rural to urban areas in search of education and employment that resulted in their widening of exposure and manifested in transcending traditional beliefs and practices. Inter-caste relationships and marriages, which hither-to-fore were far and few, became a reality but in traditional societies were deeply looked down upon and were considered sacrilegious and blasphemous. Inter-caste marriages were a direct challenge to the patriarchal society in which males in a family are in charge of their women and any drastic deviation such as inter-caste relationship or marriage was seen as an affront to that male honour by way of lack of control over their women that was directly linked to a feeling of shame. The community at large and the family name in particular got dishonoured meriting harshest of punitive actions, at times even murder at the hands of own family members. In 2000s many such cases were reported - 'Manoj and Babli' honour killing case of 2007 was one of the notable ones.

This was also the time when internet was new and so was the concept of smart phones. Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) had taken the world by storm and so did sex scandals. MMS gave rise to non-consensual circulation of sex videos that were either recorded on the sly or never meant to be circulated originally. One such case was the 'DPS Sex Scandal' which triggered a debate on ethical usage in cyber domain. Such practices gave rise and contributed in proliferation of web based porn industry - as a source of income.

2000s was also witness to large scale sting operations, 'Teelka' was one of the most notable amongst them for political expose. In 2005, India TV conducted a sting operation which exposed the murkiness of casting couch in the film industry. Casting couch is alleged to have been existing in the entertainment industry and many such incidents came in to prominence in the 'Me Too' campaign of 2005.

- **Message Delivery.** LSD exposes the underbelly of an increasingly sexually explorative middle class that has a wide canvas to paint on with every stroke of brush running the risk of falling prey to honour killings, sex scandals and betrayal in a highly patriarchal and misogynistic society.

Analysis of the Narrative Structure.

- **Non Linearity.** The film has three sub narratives which have linear structure but when taken in its entirety, the film has a non linear timeline. The scene in the third story 'Badnaam Shohrat' where Prabhat gets shot by Loki Local is an incident which is almost at the end of it however, its interlink is fairly early in the timeline of the first plot 'Superhit Pyaar' and very early in the second story 'Paap Ki Dukaan'. But we find, in the overall timelines 'Superhit Pyaar', 'Paap Ki Dukaan' and 'Badnaam Shohrat' sequenced in this order which is non linear.

- **Experimental Cinematography.** The film lends the audience the feeling of watching third party footage. The entire film is shot with a combination of handheld camera, body camera, security camera (CCTV camera), underwater camera - overall it provides the camera's perspective. The camera movements are jerky, sudden and makes a deliberate attempt at realism. In a particular scene in 'Superhit Pyaar' where Rahul and Shruti are boating, Shruti playfully splashes water on Rahul with some droplets falling on the camera lens causing it to blur and yet it continues to record the rest of the scene. In 'Paap ki Dukaan', the entire story is recorded on

security cameras with no lens or camera movement like zooming and panning. The high angle CCTV footage provides the audience with a feeling of voyeuristic dominance over the characters.

- **Visuals.** The film doesn't follow any of the established concepts of framing or perspective. Often the frame goes out of focus, or the subjects go out of frame - lacks artificiality. The camera's perspective throughout the film, especially in 'Paap Ki Dukaan' lends the audience a voyeuristic gaze. Keeping in resonance with realism, the lighting used has been kept natural both in indoor and outdoor shoots. The movie has been majorly shot at outdoor locations with 'Paap Ki Duniya' completely shot in a departmental store.

- **Sound.**

- **Dialogues.** Undramatic, casual conversation with use of regular, non-ornamented colloquial language. Emotions and tempo have been represented with dialogues or the absence of it.

- **Music.** Music is sparsely used and mostly diegetic. Unlike the commercial mainstream cinema that thrives on songs and dance sequences (which may or may not have a bearing on the narrative) but are definitely integral to the narrative structure, LSD mostly lacks such sequences except once in 'Superhit Pyaar'(while shooting a song and dance sequence as part of the narrative).

- **Innovation in Editing Techniques.**

- The film doesn't incorporate any of the classical concepts of editing such as 180 Degree or 30 Degree rules resulting in jerky visuals however, the linearity within the sub narratives is maintained.

- The film is characterised by discontinuous editing due to shots being captured through body cameras, spy cameras and security cameras.

- **Aesthetics.**

- **Perspective.** The film provides the audience with a voyeuristic perspective in the entire film especially in 'Paap Ki Duniya' - present yet invisible.

- **Realism.** Use of handheld cameras, body cameras and CCTV cameras provide a realistic feel to the visuals. Use of natural light, whether indoor or outdoor, lends the visuals authenticity - as human eyes are used to in the natural world.

- **Colour Grading.** The colour grading has been kept close to the natural. The colour grading of the scenes shot with a handheld video camera are distinct from those taken by the security camera and both in turn are distinct from that of the spy camera.

- **Mise-en-Scene.**

- **Settings.** The film has been shot in an urban setting showcasing a diverse and a fast paced environment. An environment which has extremes of opulence as well as mediocrity; locations include ostentatious homes, shopping malls, departmental stores, offices, public places, vanity vans. The lack of stylisation in indoor settings depict the cramped and unorganised private living spaces of the protagonists provides realism to the reel presence.

- **Props.** Props used are minimalistic and routine yet intrinsic to the narrative with most of them being from the natural surroundings such as the single bunk mattress used in 'Paap Ki Duniya' for its seemingly innocuous role in making of the sex tape or the fish net in 'Badnaam Shohrat' depicting the trappings involved in a sting operation.

- **Costumes and Character Design.** The costumes used are unremarkable and ones which are used for routine everyday life by people who remain largely unnoticed in the vast sea of humanity. The lack of flashiness or glamour in the costumes and character design lend realism to the narrative, the only exception being in 'Badnaam Shohrat' where a little glamour is added to Naina when she decides to carry out the sting operation on Loki Local.

b. 'Om-Dar-B-Dar'.

- **Knowledge About the Film.** Om Dar-B-Dar has been directed by Kamal Swaroop in 1988 and was released in theatres in 2014. The film is about a boy named Om who lives in Ajmer, Rajasthan and revolves around his experiences and perceptions of life that weaves through various fantasies and absurdities. Om's father is a government employee turned astrologer and his elder sister displays sparks of feminism who is in a relationship with Jagdish, a good-for-nothing. The film is a social commentary on issues of religion, superstition, bureaucracy and cultural contradictions that blurs the boundaries between reality and the surreal.

- **Critical Acclaim.**

- Amit Gangar, an Indian film scholar and critic, in his article 'Their Experiments with Truth' published in TBIP in June 2013, calls Om Dar-B-Dar as '*Cinema of Prayoga*' - meaning an experimental film.

- Los Angeles Film Forum, in its June 25, 2017 edition publishes its invite for screening of Om Dar-B-Dar at the Spielberg Theatre and calls the event Experimenta India: Om Dar-B-Dar - Kamal Swaroop's Legendary Experimental Feature.

- Om Dar-B-Dar won the Filmfare Critics Award for Best Movie in 1989.

- **Storyline.** Om lives in Ajmer with his father, Veer Shanker, and elder sister, Gayatri. Veer Shanker is a retired government employee turned astrologer and is generally referred to as Babuji, throughout the film. At the time of Om's birth, Babuji discovered that as per astrological charts, Om was destined to die at 18 years of age and to prevent his death, Babuji named the child 'Om' since he believed that the sound of 'Om' was never heard of in *Yamlok* hence it would help the child evade death. Gayatri has a feminist streak in herself and considers herself equivalent to men - she sits in men's section in the movie theatre that catches the eye of Jagdish, a young man who has recently shifted from Jhumritalaya.

Om gets popular in his school for holding his breath for long. Om, on attaining adolescence - his interests are in science, mystics, occult and frogs. Rapidly this breath holding stunt by Om gains popularity and turns in to a movement in which people also hold their breath with him. Om is convinced by his friends that he should breathe inside water once so that he can be a part of the people's movement and dies in this process.

- **Socio-Cultural and Political Environment Prevailing.** Om Dar-B-Dar represents the microcosm of Indian society as was prevalent in the 1960s and till about 80s. It would be prudent to understand what social, cultural and political environment used to be India in during that time. The 1960s and 1970s were crucial decades for India as the country continued to rebuild itself after gaining independence in 1947. The film correctly depicts Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, playing a central role in shaping the socio-cultural and political landscape - signified by emphasis on secularism, socialism, and democratic values.

Indian society in the 1960s and 1970s was predominantly patriarchal, with traditional gender roles deeply ingrained. Women were often confined to domestic spheres, and their roles were primarily defined by family and community expectations. Access to education for women was limited, especially in rural areas. Although efforts were made to improve female literacy, there were still significant disparities between male and female educational attainment.

India has always been the land of mysticism and spirituality. The 1960s and 70s marked the rise of spiritual enlightenment, holistic healing, and alternative lifestyles. India, with its spiritual heritage, became a focal point for individuals seeking new and esoteric experiences. Occult sciences, such as astrology, numerology, and palmistry, continued to be popular during this time and is greatly relevant even today.

While India was trying to come out of its hunger and poverty throes, wars were a bitter reality which directly affected the citizenry. The 1962 Sino-Indian War and the Indo-Pakistan conflicts of 1965 and 1971 had profound political and economic implications for the entire nation,

especially the border States. Rajasthan being a border State has taken the maximum brunt of all Indo-Pakistan wars to date.

One of the most defining events was the declaration of the 'Emergency' by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. Considered a dark period in Indian polity where civil liberties were suspended, and arrests of major political opponents were carried out. The Emergency was lifted in 1977, and the overall experience resulted in a changing the political landscape.

- **Message Delivery.** Om Dar-B-Dar is a satirical representation of society as prevalent in Rajasthan during the 1960s-80s. The society was overly patriarchal, characterised by a conservative outlook, superstition and gender inequality. The film is necessarily a work of satire that provides a critical and unapologetic commentary on various aspects of Indian culture, politics, and society. Om Dar-B-Dar engages with the dynamics of Indian identity, traditions, and their tryst with modernity.

Analysis of the Narrative Structure

- **Non Linearity.** The non-linearity of the film is one of its promising features that challenges the concept of conventional narrative structures and offers a disjointed but an unique viewing experience. The narrative unravels in a fragmented and disjointed manner, with scenes and events not following a chronological order and almost seems like a deliberate attempt at creating chaos in the audience's mind. The film lacks a linear timeline, and scenes are presented in a seemingly random order. For example, sequences from Om's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are intercut without a clear temporal progression. Certain motifs and themes are repeated throughout the film, contributing to a sense of circularity rather than linear progression. For instance, the recurring presence of a red motorcycle becomes a symbolic element that is revisited without adhering to a linear cause-and-effect relationship.

- **Experimental Cinematography.** Cinematography in Om Dar-B-Dar complements the non linearity by its innovation in shots and scenes in a way that reflects the disjointed way of storytelling. The film has been majorly shot using handheld cameras resulting in jerky and blurry images, dynamic and unpredictable camera movements, unconventional pans and tracking shots add in adding tempo to the visuals. The film employs non traditional shots and framing compositions, asymmetrical and out of focus shots almost lending it an amateurish feel. The unconventional framing, distorted angles, and a mix of visual styles create a disorienting effect, enhancing the film's avant-garde nature.

- **Visuals.** The film has a surreal visual appeal that tends to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy. It provides an interplay between dreamlike visuals and imaginative sequences that contributes to the surrealism of the film. Extensive use of semiotics and metaphors characterises the film such as showing an 'Om' sign at the beginning which not only signifies that the film is about the protagonist 'Om' but also that the film has a religious fervour. Shots of clocks and watches are used repetitively as visual metaphors throughout the film. The visuals often challenge traditional norms, creating a unique visual language that integrates Indian middle class culture, folklore, religious beliefs and found footage in order to create a sense of unpredictability and fantastical - that almost borders on absurdity.

- **Dialogues.** The film employs a blend of satirical and metaphorical dialogues that needs audience to be attentive. Almost every dialogue deviates from the convention and is laced with ambiguity, metaphor and at times outright absurdity. The dialogues use satire, through wit and irony, that provide critical commentary on aspects of social, cultural and political Indian society.

- **Music.** The music in "Om Dar-B-Dar" is a vital component that makes the film avant-garde. It is a reflection of the film's obstinacy to adhere to non-conventional norms and experimental compositions. It incorporates acoustic experimentation and innovative sound design. The lyrics of the songs have been specifically chosen to shake up the audience from passivity which seem to be incoherent and metaphorical - which a casual audience may find meaningless. Unconventional sounds and noises become part of the overall auditory experience that contributes to the film's avant-garde genre.

- **Innovation in Editing techniques.** The film doesn't incorporate any of the classical concepts of editing such as 180 Degree or 30 Degree rules resulting in jerky visuals. The editing is discontinuous and disjointed that offers a feeling of randomness - adds to the non linearity of the film. The innovative editing style involves the juxtaposition of disparate images and scenes. This creates a sense of disorientation, forcing the audience to actively engage with the film and try to draw correlations between seemingly unrelated elements. Scenes are often constructed through the rapid assembly of shots (even the unrelated ones), creating visual and metaphoric associations. Certain visual motifs and scenes are repeated throughout the film, contributing to a sense of recurrence and circularity such as the repetitive scene of the clock.
- **Aesthetics.** The film is high on aesthetic value with a blend of diverse and bold visuals entwined with a vibrant colour palette. The dialogues are audacious and metaphoric which raises the ceiling from art and creative perspective. The music is innovative and adds on to the auditory experience with the lyrics complementing the music in their unapologetic expression of satire. The aesthetics create a surreal and dreamlike atmosphere, often toggling between reality and fantasy. The unpredictability of the visuals, sound and innovative editing lends the film a hypnotic effect.
- **Mise-en-Scene.** The mise-en-scène is distinct and contributes significantly towards creating an hallucinatory experience. The salient aspects are as under:
 - **Color Palette.** Use of vibrant and bold colours have been employed deliberately to create contrasting and yet striking visuals that add on to make the overall spectacle a surreal experience.
 - **Costumes and Wardrobe.** Costumes used in the film are a reflection of the cultural elements that is a signifier of the socio-cultural context of the film and of course relevant in the backdrop of the society it tries to represent.
 - **Set Design and Locations.** Majorly the film has been shot in real locations and outdoors with few exceptions that contributes to the realistic feel to the film.
 - **Lighting.** The film relies heavily on lighting and the skillful application of shadows to bring out the emotions and highlight mood of the moment. The film features experimental use of lighting and shadows. Interplay of light and shadow adds depth to the visuals and manifests in the hypnotic effect of the film.
 - **Props.** The bicycle, telephone, Om's mask, Babuji's typewriter are props chosen for their narrative value. The film incorporates props and objects that are visual metaphors within the mise-en-scène.
 - **Character Placement and Movement.** The positioning and movement of characters within the frame are symbolic and represent the social dynamics, for example, in the birthday celebration sequence, the female guests are at a lower roof than their male counterparts which represents the prevalence of patriarchal society. The chase sequence of Jagdish running after the presumed bicycle thief from left to right and then right to left of the frame seem random and against the conventions of direction but it adds up to the momentary rising of tempo and confusion that contributes to the visual innovation of the film.
 - **Semiotics and Metaphors.** The film heavily relies on use of semiotics, visual and verbal metaphors which forces the audience to try and look beyond the obvious. The repetitive use of clocks, the presence of a woman in the men's gallery at the theatre, the mention of man landing on moon and equating a preserved tadpole in formaldehyde solution that with a infant girl's dead body are some examples.

'Uski Roti',

- **Knowledge About the Film.** 'Uski Roti' is a 1969 film directed by Mani Kaul. The film is considered by many film scholars as an antithesis to Indian New Cinema while many find it

stands out in its innovation and experimentation in terms of its minimalistic narrative and visual aesthetics.

- **Critical Acclaim.**

- V.K. Cherian, a prominent author, in his article 'Mani Kaul: The First Rebel of Indian Parallel Cinema' echoes L. Somy Roy, film writer and producer, in stating that 'Uski Roti' is a non narrative experimental film that is complete departure from Indian parallel cinema.

- Cinematographer K. K. Mahajan received the National Film Award for Best Cinematography.

- **Storyline.** The film is about a woman who spends most of her time waiting at the bus stop to deliver her husband (a State transport bus driver) 'roti' (Indian bread). Delivering the husband's 'roti' is the most essential aspect of her life as she believes that it is what makes him come back to her, even if just for a day in a week. The film narrates the loneliness and helplessness of a woman in rural patriarchal setting.

- **Prevailing Socio-Cultural Environment.** In the 1960s, the social structure in India was patriarchal with females being subjugated to males with societal norms that limited their roles primarily to the domestic sphere. Traditional family and marriage norms relegated women to perform the functions of raising family and looking after the household that continued to shape women's lives. Arranged marriages were prevalent, and societal expectations regarding a woman's role as a wife and mother were deeply ingrained.

- **Message Delivery.** "Uski Roti" delves into the intricacies of a woman's life in rural India and the complexities of human relationships that she bears, particularly the dynamics between the husband and wife. The film questions the existence and status of women in a patriarchal society, the suffering she undergoes not only within the close confines of her family but also in the community and society at large.

Analysis of the Narrative Structure.

- **Non Linearity.** The film is temporally disjointed which means that the film comes out in fragments with scenes and sequences not in their chronological order. The narrative doesn't stick to the cause and effect relationship thereby causing the audience to get disoriented. The repetitive long takes and continuous sequences showing 'Bhalo' waiting for her husband represents a cyclic routine - that represents waiting throughout the day, waiting day after day and waiting throughout her life. The

- **Experimental Cinematography.**

- **Long Takes and Static Frames.** The film extensively employs long takes and static frames as uninterrupted shots that allows the audience to engage with the characters and environment without the typical continuity editing found in mainstream cinema. This technique encourages a more immersive and contemplative viewing experience.

- **Minimalist Composition.** The composition of shots is intentionally minimalistic, featuring rural landscapes and characters carefully positioned within framed compositions. Visuals have been kept uncluttered and simple contributing to the film's meditative quality that encourages viewers to focus on subtle details and nuances within the frame.

- **Use of Natural Lighting.** The film uses natural lighting that captures the essence of the rural setting, contributing to a sense of realism. The choice of black and white recording enhances the visual aesthetics. The interplay of light and shadow amplifies minutest of facial emotions, the naturalness of the rural landscape, scariness of the dark, prancing shadows on the walls and the rustic rural settings - emphasising on realism.

- **Visuals.**

- **Semiotics.** The film employs signs and symbolic imagery and to convey deeper meaning. Visual motifs such as the recurring shots of the bus or 'Bhalo' waiting at the bus stop, the preparation of

'roti' for 'Sucha Singh' are captured with a deliberate and poetic sensibility. These images gain significance through their repetitive occurrence, creating a visual language that complements the film's thematic exploration.

- **Varied Interpretation.** The sequences are static and the relentlessly long takes provide a peek into the characters' subjective experiences. The camera follows the characters in a way that reflects their emotional states or perspectives, adding a layer of subjectivity to the visual storytelling.

- **Spatial and Temporal Ambiguity.** The film creates an environment of spatial and temporal ambiguity, with scenes unfolding in a way that blurs the boundaries between timelines. Dreamlike sequences and flash backs are woven into the visual narrative, enhancing the film's subjective interpretation..

- **Engagement with Characters.** The close up visuals engage intimately with the characters, highlighting their expressions and movements in a way that allows the audience to identify and empathize with their emotional states. The visual language becomes a means of conveying the internal lives of the characters.

- **Sound.**

- **Dialogues.** The dialogues in "Uski Roti" are sparse and delivered with a deliberate minimalism to enable the viewer to delve deeper in the emotions and actions. The conversations are interlaced with intentional use of silence that allows for the dialogues to sink in with the audience. This choice also contributes to the unhurried life in the rural setting which also portrays the rustic slowness and loneliness of the protagonists lives.

- **Absence of Music.** The deliberate absence of any musical score allows the audience to rely solely on ambient sounds and natural noises, contributing to a sense of realism. While the music scores help in taking the narrative forward, the absence of it in 'Uski Roti' coupled with sparse dialogues create a carefully crafted unpredictability and ambiguity.

- **Ambient Sound and Motifs.** The film is characterised by distinct ambient sounds of rustling fodder, crickets and insects at night, gurgling water, clanking of cattle bells which perfectly builds up the visuals of a rustic countryside. The sound motifs such as chugging of the bus or the rattling sound of the train have significant symbolism value which establishes the routine monotony of the protagonists' lives.

- **Innovative Editing Technique.** The salient editing aspects that align with the overall experimentation in the film's visual and narrative style are:

- **Experimental Cuts and Transitions.** "Uski Roti" features experimental cuts and transitions that disrupt traditional continuity. Unconventional editing choices, including jump cuts and abrupt transitions between scenes, contribute to the film's avant-garde aesthetic.

- **Repetition and Rhythm.** Certain actions, gestures, and visual motifs are repeated throughout the film, creating a rhythmic quality. This repetition enhances the film's cyclical themes, emphasizing routine and the passage of time.

- **Spatial and Temporal Ambiguity.** The editing introduces spatial and temporal ambiguity, with scenes unfolding in a way that blurs the boundaries between different locations and times. This contributes to the non linearity of the film, enhancing its exploration of subjective experience and psychological states.

- **Aesthetics.**

- **Minimalism and Simplicity.** 'Uski Roti' embraces a minimalist aesthetic - both visually and narratively. The compositions are characterized by visual simplicity, sparse landscapes, frugal set design, and an emphasis on essential audio - visual elements. This minimalism encourages the audience to focus on the fundamental aspects of the narrative and characters.

- **Black and White Cinematography.** The monochromatic presentation contributes to the vintage and classic feel of the film. The varying shades of grey bring out the rustic slowness

of rural life. The choice of monochrome also highlights the loneliness and isolation that results in Bhalo's life actually devoid of colour and aligns with the film's exploration of essential human experiences.

- **Near Realism Through Use of Natural Lighting.** The reliance on natural lighting enhances the film's feel of realism. Day scenes have been captured in natural sunlight and the creative interplay of light and shadows is what enhances the visual appeal of the film. The use of subdued lighting during the scenes in the dark contribute immensely to the authenticity of rural life as depicted.
- **Visual Motifs and Symbolic Imagery.** The film incorporates repetition of visual motifs and symbolic imagery such as the act of 'Bhalo' waiting at the bus stop or the making of 'roti' that creates a rhythmic quality and enhances the symbolic depth of the narrative.
- **Mise-en-Scene.** The mise-en-scène in "Uski Roti," is carefully crafted to contribute to the film's unique visual and thematic appeal. The salient aspects of the film's mise-en-scene are as under:
 - **Minimalist Set Design and Props.** The film incorporates minimalist set design and use of props that borders on being frugal, with an emphasis on essential elements. The rural settings are presented with simplicity which contribute to the film's focus on the core aspects of the narrative. The deliberate choice of minimalism aligns with the film's overall aesthetic. The thatched huts, the 'kolhu' (watermill) driven by a pair of oxen, 'nukkad' (street corner) tea stall all add up to the rustic visuals of the setting.
 - **Traditional Costumes and Wardrobe.** The film portrays life in the patriarchal society of rural Punjab and the characters have been depicted in traditional attire accordingly, reflecting the rural backdrop and the cultural context of the narrative. Costume design contributes to the realistic depiction of characters and establishes the film's connection to the everyday lives of people in rural India.
 - **Character Placement and Movement.** The positioning and movement of characters within the frame are symbolic and represent the social dynamics. Characters are often positioned in ways that emphasize their isolation and distance from each other. The vast landscapes and open spaces contribute to the characters' loneliness, highlighting a sense of vulnerability and insecurity. The intentional use of negative space in the framing enhances this feeling of isolation. The film forces the audiences to contemplate by utilizing long takes, allowing characters to inhabit the frame for extended periods without frequent cuts. The minimalistic setting and frugal props invites viewers to engage with the characters within the composition. The film is slow paced and deliberate wherein the characters are often positioned in moments of contemplation and quiet reflection - that resonates with the viewers thoughts.

d X: Past is Present

Analysis of the Narrative Structure.

- **Non Linearity.**
 - **Anthological Format.** The film closely relates to an anthological structure, a collection of eleven short stories of the same protagonist, each directed, cinematographed and edited by different persons having their own signature styles with none of the segments connected to one another. This format inherently breaks away from a linear narrative, allowing for a diverse range of stories and perspectives.
 - **Absence of Sequential Chronology.** The narrative overall is about 'K', a person who has had varied relationships and each relationship has been represented as a segment in the film. These segments do not follow each other in a chronological sequence but rather as triggered memories in a span of a conversation. Within segments too there are instances of flashbacks connecting with other segment.
 - **Temporal Juxtaposition.** The film is all about temporal juxtaposition, presenting scenes or moments without following chronological order that creates a sense of disorientation, requiring the viewers to actively engage with the narrative in order to re-orient themselves with the narrative.

The audience's faculties are kept busy piecing together the timelines of the overall story. The non sequential temporal arrangement makes the the film's structure complex.

- **Experimental Cinematography.** The film presents a bouquet of different cinematographic styles across the entire spectrum of segments. Some segments have employed innovative techniques such as handheld cameras for a documentary feel, security camera footage, unconventional angles such as refraction through the spectacle lens, dynamic angles or framing techniques to enhance the storytelling. The cinematography explores different visual textures and tones, creating a mosaic of styles that adds to the film's experimental nature.

- **Visuals.**

- **Dreamy and Surreal.** The visuals range from exotic to surreal. The film is a collection of various cinematographic and editing styles that are put together as an anthology. The film has a voyeuristic feel in some of the segments while in some sequences there is a touch of documentary feel. In the segment 'Ice Maid' the visuals border on being dreamy and surreal with haze and blur put to excellent use to give a hallucinatory effect.

- **Use of Visual Motifs and Metaphors.** The film relies extensively on repetitive use of visual motifs and metaphors for connecting between sequences or segments and also aligning them in the temporal plane. such as the watch, the house of cards, the tie, the eight of hearts etc. The film presents the life journey of the main protagonist over a couple of decades which is aptly represented by the vintage Maruti 800 car, an audio cassette, a colour photographic roll which lends authenticity to the narrative.

- **Subjective Interpretation.** The visuals provide a peek into the characters' subjective experiences, reflects their emotional states or perspectives, adding a layer of subjectivity to the visual storytelling.

- **Engagement with Characters.** The close up visuals allows the audience to engage intimately with the characters, their expressions - providing a peek in to their thoughts and emotions.

- **Sound.** 'X: Past and Present' is not only an anthology of segments but also a compilation of sounds and music by different creators .

- **Diverse Soundscapes.** Each segment of the film presents an unique soundscape, reflecting distinct creative vision and narrative tone. The diversity in sound design contributes to the film's experimental format, providing different auditory experiences throughout.

- **Seamless Transition.** The film is laced with memories and requires jumping from one segment to another, the transition is not only in time and space but also in the realms of music which is smooth and seamless. The transitions are discernible and yet soothing.

- **Ambient Sounds.** Every segment has an unique environment that helps create a story. This storytelling relies on ambient sounds to establish atmosphere and mood. Whether it's the sound of a light drizzle on car windshield, or that of an urban night-life ambient sounds contribute to the immersive quality of each story.

- **Voiceovers and Dialogues.** Voiceovers and dialogues are integral to the film's narrative. Dialogues have been used sparingly, allowing non-verbal elements and ambient sounds to carry weight in certain scenes. Voiceovers by the main protagonist helps in stitching the various sub-narratives together.

- **Innovative Editing Techniques.**

- **Non-Linear Editing.** The film employs non-linear editing approach, presenting stories in a non sequential order. This approach leads to intended disorientation of the audience and contributes to the overall experimental nature of the film. The non linear editing approach encourages the audience to remain actively engaged with the overall narrative.

- **Jump Cuts and Interweaving.** The film employs jump cuts to interweave segments. Scenes from one segment have been juxtaposed with those from another, creating connections between the diverse narratives resulting in a hallucinatory effect.
- **Seamless Visual Transition.** The transitions between segments is carried out by using visual motifs and metaphors that establishes a link with the next segment thus making it seem seamless. The overarching innovation is in the transition between the music themes of one segment to the other that makes the edit special. These transitions contribute to the flow of the overall narrative, enhancing the viewing experience.
- **Aesthetics.** 'X: Past and Present' is an aesthetically rich film which has contributions of eleven filmmakers that are both contrasting as well as complementary to each other, The salient aesthetic aspects of the film are:
 - **Visual Diversity.** It is one of the most explicit aesthetic feature of the film. The film has eleven segments with each segment presenting a unique visual style that reflects the unique storytelling signature of the director. Visual styles in the film range from jerky shots due to use of handheld cameras to static frames, use of unconventional angles and shots such as refraction through a spectacle lens, blurring or hazing to depict hallucination etc. This diversity of visuals contributes to the film's overall aesthetic richness.
 - **Colour Palette and Tone.** The film presents a wide range of colour palettes and tones. Some segments have employed subdued tones giving a vintage look while others which are relatively recent on the timeline have embraced more vibrant and saturated colours.
 - **Semiotics.** The film pronouncedly uses semiotics and visual metaphors to connect between segments or to convey deeper meaning. Making of the 'House of Cards', repetitive mention of the watch, the '8 of Hearts' card and so on are some examples.
 - **Mise-en-Scene.**
 - **Set Design and Locations.** The film essentially is an anthology of romantic encounters of the protagonist and has essentially been shot indoors in studio settings with the exception of some sequences in certain segments having outdoor locations. The settings and locations have been deliberately chosen or designed based on the essence of the narrative at that moment. All the stories have an urban backdrop except 'Summer Holiday' which is in rural settings of South India.
 - **Costumes and Makeup.** The film explores various romantic episodes and stages in the protagonist's life, the costumes depict the dressing styles that were in vogue at certain times and represent specific cultures according to the regions depicted.
 - **Props.** Props help in building up a character. The film uses props to provide a peek into the characters' choices and preferences. The oysters, in 'Oyster' were placed to bring in sexuality, the '8 of Hearts' in provides leads on to the next segment 'Eight to Eight', the 'House of Cards' depicted an unique collaboration between two individuals, the audio cassette and the Maruti 800 car used in '17 Presents' refers to a vintage era and so on. Each and every prop has a semiotic value or has a connection to time or space.
 - **Framing and Character Placement.** Each segment has its unique innovative signature by way of character placement and framing. The film dwells in experimental character placement by way of providing the main protagonist's perspective with his back towards the camera or an Over-the-Shoulder shot and mostly highlight the female characters involved. The slant framing in 'Biryani' gives an impression of tension and conflict between 'K' and 'Rija', in '17 Presents' most of the frames have Over-the-Shoulder shots depicting an intimate conversation, in 'Oyster' close ups are used to generate sensuality, and so on.

IV. DISCUSSION

The researcher has taken a sample of four experimental Hindi films to analyse their unconventional narrative structures in the context of avant garde genre, The films were chosen based on critical reviews by film scholars which classified them as experimental or avant garde. These films were analysed for their

unconventional narrative structures that include non linearity, experimental cinematography in use of handheld cameras, body cameras, spy cameras, use of security footage, experimental editing using jump cuts, non chronological sequencing, discontinuity in time and space, non adherence to standard editing conventions, presentation of narratives as an anthology of works by different directors, experimentation with sound both in diegetic and non-diegetic realms, satirical dialogues that border on being absurd, innovative visuals that hinge between reality and dreamlike or surreal sequences, use of visual metaphors and semiotics, innovative and experimental mise-en-scene in terms of choice of sets and props, character placement and framing.

While there is no definitive definition as to 'what all' or 'how much' experimentation make a film qualify to be classified as avant garde, rather it is the unconventionality in the narrative structure that defines the film as avant garde. In this context, 'Om-Dar-B-Dar', 'Love Sex and Dhoka' and 'Uski Roti' would stand out as true avant garde films while 'X: Past is Present' will qualify as an experimental film.

In the 'Review of Literature' covered in Chapter 3 above, conventional narrative structures in Hindi films are guided by the paradigms of 'Good vs Evil' that eulogise societal righteousness, values that are 'traditionally Indian'. They also have a compulsory inclusion of songs and dances that are used to convey emotions and have high entertainment appeal however, the films that form part of the researcher's sample are conspicuous by the absence of classical 'Good vs Evil' or any song and dance sequence in the conventional sense. These films are focussed more on social messaging and abstract themes than mere entertainment appeal.

Another aspect that merits attention is that Hindi cinema is distinctly different from American, European or any other international cinema when it comes to conventional narrative structures and often stand out for undisguised criticism from western critics. Similarly, when it comes to defining experimental and innovative filmmaking in Hindi cinema, especially in the context of avant garde genre, there seems to be a requirement for having a relook at defining what avant garde genre in the context of Hindi cinema would entail. Definitely it is likely to be at a slight deviance from the western connotations of the avant garde genre.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

When cinematic technology and concept came to India, it came along with certain conventions and forms already in-practice or under development elsewhere and were merged with the other indigenous art forms that were already in existence by the founding fathers of Indian cinema. Mythology, song and dance, paradigm of good and evil, feudal systems and patriarchal norms formed the basis on which the foundations were laid. The cinematic evolution was equally affected by the evolving social, cultural and political landscape of the country with the quintessential hero fighting to save the 'damsel in distress' and seeking justice for his blind widowed mother. Spurt in economic growth and internationalisation of Hindi cinema brought the NRI on to the celluloid spectrum and thus the 'Masala films' came in to being that would draw crowds to throng the theatres and is what we see presently as the mainstream Hindi films, a commercial venture dishing out 'value-for-money' entertainment. Since, filmmaking is a seriously costly venture, the success of which is only measured in box office collections, there has been almost negligible efforts put towards making avant garde films. While in the west, there are infrastructure available to encourage investment, production and screening of avant garde films that encourages filmmakers to indulge in creative thinking however, in India it is still a far cry. The researcher, while trying to define the sample and sample size, realised that there are hardly any films in Hindi that qualify as of true avant garde genre, barring a few.

While carrying out an online search of avant garde Hindi films, the researcher did encounter websites that provided a long list of Hindi films having avant garde genre but on closer inspection it was revealed that the films enlisted are regular mainstream films. Which leads us to believe that the common understanding of avant garde genre is misplaced.

In this dissertation, the researcher endeavoured to analyse the sample films that had received critical acclaim for being experimental against the backdrop of avant garde genre in the context of Hindi cinema, keeping in mind how Hindi cinema is narratively and structurally different from American or European cinema. At the end, the researcher recommends that a critical study be undertaken to redefine avant garde genre and contextualise it to Indian cinema.

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