

An Analysis Of Songs Depicting Banaras In The Mainstream

Hindi Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Songs are an integral part of a Bollywood movie. Since the very beginning of the Hindi Film Industry, these have been extensively used to bring out the underlying emotion of the movie in a more efficient manner. A song is a major element of the entertainment industry, and plays a major role in shaping up the mass opinion about a place. Many a time Bollywood sticks to a certain stereotype about a particular place, and this in turn creates an image of the place in the minds of the viewers that might not be completely true from the factual point of view. Over the time, Bollywood has produced various songs that are based on Banaras, its culture, its historic relevance, and the people of Banaras. However, these song are not necessarily a true representation of various aspects of Banaras. For the people who have not had the opportunity to visit Banaras, their idea of Banaras is largely dependent on what they see or hear about it in mass media. Films are one of the most effective forms of mass media in India with a large viewership based across all social and economic strata.

The study aims at analyzing the manner in which Bollywood has presented Banaras through the songs of main stream Hindi Cinema. A total of ten representative songs have been selected for the study.

Keywords: *Bollywood, Banaras, representation, stereotype, songs*

INTRODUCTION

“What is ‘out there’ is, in part, constituted by how it is represented” – (Stuart Hall, 1992)

Aforementioned quote by Stuart Hall is applicable on films produced as well as it applies on songs too because songs too are constructed and represented.

No mainstream Bollywood movie is complete without songs, they are a major part of the entertainment industry. The viewers may not have the time or access to watch a two or three hour long movie, but they can easily spare five minutes for a song. Listening to songs is also very important way of relaxation and one of the favourite leisure activities of the millennials. No social gathering, festival, or wedding function in India is complete without Bollywood songs. They have become an integral part of our day to day life. Frequent and prolonged exposure to a particular type of song subconsciously becomes our frame of reference. One tend to look at a particular place or phenomena in the same way that it is represented in the song. It shapes very efficiently our views and opinion. It can be said that in a way that even without a first-hand experience, One build up a solid opinion about a place purely based on what the songs, the movies, and the mass media as a whole feeds us.

Bollywood has since long been fascinated with Banaras, its culture, its historic relevance, and the life in Banaras. There are many Bollywood songs based on these factors. Some of these songs are blockbuster hits and are heard and loved by people even after years since they were first released. They have also been remixed and remade from time to time.

The songs about Banaras are mostly stereotypical in their approach towards the city. They simply follow the age old pattern and the manner in which Banaras has been portrayed. Be it the Paan, the Ghats, the narrow lanes or the Shiva temples, every aspect of Banaras has repeatedly been described in a very similar manner since decades. A person who has never

been to Banaras or has no links with Banaras is bound to frame his opinion about the city based on what he sees and listens about it in multiple songs. It very often creates a made-up image about the city and its people among the common public.

METHODOLOGY

Choice of cultural representation:

The author chose to analyse mainstream Bollywood songs made around Banaras city that depicts cultural aspects of Banaras. Representation of culture was chosen for the purpose of this research paper for the following reasons:

- Many mainstream Bollywood songs were made around Banaras in comparison of any other tier two cities (other than metro cities);
- Memory of movies eventually get faded but lyrics of the songs stay in human cognition for long time; and
- Till now, songs that represent Banaras have not been discussed in detail by critics or analysts.

Choice of songs for analysis:

Songs for the study has been selected by *purposive sampling* method using non-probability technique. (Author has selected total ten songs that immediately came to his mind that fulfils the criteria required for the study keeping in mind the limitation of study)

Following criteria were applied to select songs:

- Song should be part of Bollywood movie (no music album or regional language film song);

- The lyrics should be primarily in Hindi language; and
- Song must have any distinctive aspect representing Banaras in any cultural form.

Keeping the above three criteria in mind ten songs were finalized:

- *KhaikePaan Banaras wala*(Don), (1978)
- *BanareBambaiya Banaras KaBhaiya* (BanarasiBabu), (1997)
- *Hum hai Banaras k bhaiya*(Kohram), (1999)
- *Ye ladkinahi ye Banaras kapaanhai*(KhullamKhullaPyarKarein), (2005)
- *Ye hai sham Banaras ki*(Banaras: A Mystic Love Story), (2006)
- *Banarsiya*(Raanjhanaa), (2013)
- *Meri subah Banaras laihai*(Welcome to Karachi), (2015)
- *Tubanjalali Banaras ki*(Shaadi Mein ZaroorAana), (2017)
- *Prem Me Tohre*(Begum Jaan), (2017)
- *Bum bumbolrahahaiKaashi* (Kashi, (2018)

ANALYSIS

The author watched the songs and took notes on the following aspects:

- Cultural Uniqueness
- Shooting Locations
- Attire
- Message conveyed by the song

FINDINGS

The analysis carried out by the author are given below of each of the selected songs:

1. Khaike Paan Banaras Wala (1978)

This song is a part of the movie *Don* that came in the year 1978. This song is filmed on Amitabh Bacchan. The theme of the song is based around the description of how the very famous Paan of Banaras is the source of enlightenment for “chora Ganga kinarewala” that is a typical boy living in Banaras. The song further talks about how the people in Banaras, especially the boys, are very naïve and uneducated. For someone who is not very familiar with Banaras, the song portrays the city and the people of city in a very orthodox manner. It shows, speaks of how the people in Banaras, who are uneducated and unaware, can be easily fooled and misguided by the educated folks. This may not be the case in real life. Banaras is the home of some of the finest and oldest educational institutions in India. The people here may be old fashioned but are definitely not dumb. The song in no way is a correct representation of Banaras or its people. In the song the actor is seen wearing a red “Gamcha” around his head indicative of the way the people of Banaras dress. He has his mouth full of “Paan” while he sings and dances throughout the song. The visual image of people of Banaras is presented by this song. The image is loud, flamboyant, and an uneducated person which is totally inappropriate.

2. Banare Bambaiya Banaras Ka Bhaiya (1997)

The song is a part of the movie *BanarsiBabu* released in the year 1997, Filmed on Govinda. The song talks about the journey of a man from Banaras to Bombay. The song does not have any visual representation of Banaras. It only talks about how the protagonist has turned into an “Englishman” after moving to Bombay. The song in a way implies that the people of Banaras are less manner, uneducated who do not have any status in the society. So in order to transform himself, the protagonist had to move out of Banaras. The song is a straight up mockery of Banaras, its culture and its people. It completely disregards the fact that Banaras is one of the oldest living cities of the world, and a hub of spirituality and learning since generations. The protagonist has been shown in a funny attire indicative of the fact that a boy from small town of Banaras is trying hard to match the standard of those living in Bombay. The overall image of Banaras as conveyed by the song is that of a very rural and rustic place where the people have a very uncultured lifestyle. Such portrayal of the city by this song is totally incorrect.

3. Hum Hai Banaras KeBhaiya(1999)

The song is a part of the movie *Kohram* that released in the year 1999. Filmed on Amitabh Bacchan and Nana Patekar. The main aspect of Banaras that this song talks about is how the people of Banaras are full of life and have a sense of superiority in them. It has not been shot in Banaras and has no visuals image of it. The song shows a middle aged man who is boasting about how he is superior and far more knowledgeable than the rest of the people there just because he hails from Banaras. He is dressed in a rugged attire with a “Gamcha” hanging around his neck, it corroborates the stereotypical image of Banarasi people created by the mass media. The song also stresses upon the fact how the people of Banaras can efficiently source and identify the highest quality of intoxicants. This is a very negative picture to put up about any place. The culture of Banaras ha since long been associated with

different type of intoxicants such as bhaang and weed. It creates a vision in the minds of the viewers that such intoxicants are openly consumed by the people there which is not entirely true. The overall manner in which the song talks about Banaras and its people is false on many grounds. The attire, the food habits and the attitude of a Banarasi cannot be generalized.

4. YehLadkiNahi Ye Banaras KaPaan Hai (2005)

The song is a part of the movie *KhullamKhullaPyaarKarein* released in the year 2005. Song was filmed on Govinda and priteeZinta. The song objectifies a woman by comparing her to a Paan of Banaras. The song uses adjectives like bold, beautiful, seductive, and desirable to describe both the woman and the Paan of Banaras. It has not been shot in Banaras and has no visuals image of it. The only reference of Banaras made in the song is through the Paan, and how the woman dressed in bright coloured and shiny attire resembles a Paan. Apart from it, the song does not mention any other aspect of Banaras. Banaras and its food is much more than just the Paan. Moreover comparing a woman to a Paan is highly demeaning and speaks badly of the city and its culture. It is a very irresponsible way of representing facts about a city and its food. Songs are very catchy and can be engraved in the minds of the listeners for a long period of time and such irresponsible use of reference about a place tarnishes the image of the place.

5. YehHai ShaanBanaras Ki (2006)

The song is a part of a movie *Banaras: A Mystic Love Story* released in the year 2006. The song is totally based on the city of Banaras. The song plays during the opening credit of the movie. It shows beautiful visual images of the city and its Ghats. It captures the essence of

the city by describing various elements of the city such as the temples, the Ghats, the beautiful sunrise at the Ganges. Unlike the other songs that focus mainly on one or two aspects of Banaras, this song is an amalgamation of all things that gives Banaras its unique identity.

The song also talks about the cultural and historical significance of the city and how it has played an important part in shaping the cultural identity of the nation. It purely shows Banaras as a city and does not focus on its people. It has shown Banaras not just as a holy place for Hindus but for other religions such as Buddhism as well. The song has visual images of the Sarnath, a Buddhist pilgrim and the place where Gautam Buddha gave his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. The song creates an overall image of the city that looks intriguing and inviting and at the same time creates a positive image about the city in the minds of the listeners and viewers.

6. Banarsiya (2013)

The song is a part of the movie *Raanjhanaa* released in the year 2013, filmed on Dhanush, Sonam Kapoor and SwaraBhaskar. The song is a description of a typical Banarasi boy. It goes in depth describing his character, his lifestyle, his food habits, his intelligence and his faith. The song is entirely shot in Banaras but it is not so much about Banaras as it is about a person belonging to Banaras. Through his description the song aims to establish a generalized image of the people of Banaras. It shows them as smart but simple people who have their own way of life and are not very aware of the evil and cunning ways of the world.

It also establishes that every Banarasi is an adamant follower of lord Shiva which is not true in reality. Banaras has a homogenous population of people from numerous different religions living together and not just Hindus. The Banarasi boy who plays the male protagonist of the movie is always dressed in rugged clothes and carries a “Gamcha “ around his neck indicative of the manner in which people of Banaras usually dress, which again is not true.

The song overall gives a message that the people of Banaras are blissfully unaware of everything that does not concern Banaras, their life and exposure is limited to the city and its Ghats, this does not create a very positive image of the city or its people in the minds of the audience.

7. Meri Subah Banaras Lai Hai (2015)

The song is a part of the movie *Welcome to Karachi* released in the year 2015. The song does not have much connection with Banaras. It is not shot in Banaras and neither has any visual images of it. It just mentions Banaras in context with its beautiful mornings. Mornings in Banaras are considered very peaceful and serene. Many tourists from around the world visit Banaras just to admire the early morning sunrise on the banks (Ghats) of river Ganges also known as "*subah-e-banaras*". The song re-establishes this fact about Banaras.

8. Tu Banja Gali Banaras Ki (2017)

The song is a part of the movie *Shaadi Mein Zaroor Aana* released in the year 2017, filmed on Rajkumar Rao and Kirti Kharbanda. The song describes Banaras and its beauty from a lover's point of view and how he sees his beloved in the form of Banaras. Some parts of the song are shot in Banaras but not the entire song. The song captures the essence of Banaras through visual representation of its Ghats, its temples, the religious and cultural gatherings of Banaras, banks of river the Ganges, and its narrow lanes. The narrow lanes are a major part of the description of Banaras in this song which is true to some extent. A large part of Banaras consists of these narrow and congested lanes. It also mentions the famous food of Banaras

that is the “Chaats”. The attire of the characters in the song is mostly Indian and is not very specific about how the people of Banaras dress. Overall the song is in a way romanticizing the city and its various aspects. It is quite different from the other songs who portray only the cultural and religious aspect of Banaras.

9. Prem Me Tohre (2017)

The song is a part of the movie *Begum Jaan* released in the year 2017, filmed on VidyaBalan. The song does not have much relevance with Banaras, neither does it have any visual images of the city. The song mentions Banaras in one of its lines where it personifies the mornings of Banaras in the form of a women’s lips. This in a way speaks of the natural beauty that Banaras beholds in itself. Banaras is well known for its peaceful mornings and the beautiful view of sunrise as seen from the Ganga Ghats, is one of the favorites among visitors.

10. Bam Bam Bole Kaashi (2018)

The song is a part of the movie *Kaashi: In Search Of Ganga* released in the year 2018, filmed on Sharman Joshi. The original name of Banaras was 'Kaashi,' derived from the word 'Kasha,' meaning brightness. The song shows the celebration of the festival of Holi in Banaras. It is filmed on the Ghats of the Banaras and has visuals of the Ganges as well the temples around it. The song is a description of how the people of Banaras are devotees of Lord Shiva and consider him to be their creator and protector. People are dressed in bright and colourful Indian clothes with “Gamcha” around their neck. The message conveyed by this song about Banaras and its people is that it is home to only Hindus and everyone there is a devotee of

lord Shiva, aggression and consumption of “Bhaang” is their characteristic trait. Such representation is both negative and dishonest.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it can be said that Bollywood has a deep influence of Banaras. Since decades it has been portraying Banaras through various movies and songs which are completely or partially based on the city. The sad reality is that through all these decades, the way in which Banaras has been portrayed in mainstream Hindi songs, has not changed. The context or the reference of Banaras remains more or less the same. The elements of Banaras that the songs focus on, has not shown any considerable change. They mainly revolve around the Ganges, the Ghats, the narrow lanes, the Paan, the Shiva temples and the stereotypical people of Banaras. The songs have always shown Banaras as some backward place good for only cultural and religious activities. It fails to acknowledge the fact that with time Banaras has evolved as a hub for trade and commerce in just not the state of Uttar Pradesh, but also in North India. They have created image for the viewers that is only limited to the cultural and historic importance of the city.

The songs show the people of Banaras as uneducated and orthodox, who do not have any aspirations about their career, but the fact is that Banaras has some of the oldest and finest educational institutions in India. Every year a large number of students from all over the country migrate to Banaras to study in these Institutions. The attire, the food, the language

and everything about Banaras has so conveniently been typecast by these mainstream Bollywood songs that it has created such a perception about Banaras that is not completely true. The perception has not changed with time as a result of which, people continue to see Banaras as a place far from the touch of development and modernity, where people are uneducated and unaware.

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