ABSTRACT

Bollywood musicals have emerged as a distinct genre on world cinema long ago (Nelmes 1996: 384). The Bollywood musicals have offered a wide range of music scores that transcended all narrow considerations of politics, divergent societies and geographical boundaries. According to Bhattacharya and Mehta (2010:105), ‘the Bollywood sound tracks, in particular, emergent technologies of music have acquired the power to call into question that national form of belonging, without which the Indian state cannot do’.

As Rajadhyaksha has commented, ‘Bollywood’ does not simply refer to the Hindi or even film industries. Rather it is a ‘more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption of activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio’ (Bhattacharya and Mehta, 2010:106).

Nelmes (1996:384) considers song as even more important factor than the emotions that led to melodrama in India cinema. Nelmes also pointed out that critical study of popular Indian Cinema tend to concentrate on the structural complexities of film plots and often ignore the extra-narrative texts that are provided by the songs. She also pointed out that the plot of film is deliberately engineered so as to provide openings for a song and dance number at regular intervals. The success of the first ever talkie Alam Ara (1931) directed by Ardeshir Irani with its uncountable number of songs resulted in shaping the future form of musical drama that was to occupy both the Indian cinema accompanied by a rapid spread over to the world.

According to Barnouw and Krishnaswamy (1980:69), the Indian sound film, unlike the sound film of any other land, had from its first moment seized exclusively on music-drama forms. In doing so, the film had tapped a powerful current, one that went back some two thousand years.

Though a good number of authors like Bhattacharya and Mehta (2010) had taken a stock of the Bollywood musicals in terms of marketing in music industry, not many authors, either from India or abroad, had done any deep study on the influence of cross cultural communication on national integration through Bollywood musicals. Indeed Nelmes pointed out this great area of importance of study in her book –An Introduction to Film Studies (1996) long ago.
The present study began to take a shape with an observation that the Bollywood musicals can be categorized in to several ways. But one that draws an immense value for the study is a classification of Bollywood musicals into native music and cross cultural music across a spectrum of themes that emerged from our categorization of National Award Winning films since 1954. Whereas native music was initially drawn from mythological and folk traditions and was based on Hindustani and Carnatic classical traditions that inspired the then audience towards consolidating their struggle against the colonial rule, the cross cultural music drawn from light music to western beats in post independent era had tended to reinforce it. Later years the same mythological and folk musical films enabled the Indians to overcome the caste and religious barriers by spreading across different states of India. Thus the first ever emergence of cross cultural migration of music happened more forcefully through Bollywood musicals than any other media.

Further the study deepens by connecting cross cultural communication and its indelible influence on national integration by categorizing singers/technicians from the North singing/doing technical work in the Southern films and vice-versa. The study gets accentuated with further documentation of how music directors/film directors/actors from the North/South offered their expertise for the other side of India.

The operational definition of a musical/song in the present study is inclusive of dance form-traditional or folk—thus extending the scope of the critical study on the influence of cross-cultural communication and national integration. Since musical/song is considered an ‘extended narrative’, the term Bollywood musical here in this study includes narratives of ‘all Indian feature films’ not exclusively films produced by Bombay film industry.

The study is grounded both in historiography and cultural theory (Kracauer 1960, Propp, 1968, Levi-Strauss, 1978) carries out extensive survey of Bollywood musicals as per the above classification and revolves round how these categories of musicals have influenced the national integration. A qualitative communication research per se, the study conducts in depth discussions and interviews comprising both the students and faculty of film making from reputed film institutes’ in India besides drawing upon scholarly articles and allied literary sources (hermeneutics) making it thus a triangulation.
A careful and systematic study of these award winning films under various categories has yielded a number of insights into the cross-cultural flows of Indian films. The awards have been given for the films offering an in depth and incisive dimension of Indian philosophical and religious traditions with which Indian cinema basically began with way back in 1912. Biopics of personalities who fought for national integration under themes such as philosophy, religion and freedom struggle, etc., humanistic films with various angles/dimensions to it, romanticism with sub themes such as revenge, empathy, superstitions, and finally romantic melodramas of ideal family systems in middle class have been the main categories of the films that have been awarded national awards under various categories.

Even the songs of the male and female singers and the songs composed by music directors reflected similar categorization with minor differences either in categories or in sub-themes. When it came to regional films, broader categorization had been accommodated. Themes reflecting domestic realities of middle, lower and upper classes of Indian economic strata, feudalistic themes, feministic themes and romantic themes have taken more precedence. Thus, the whole spectrum of categories of sub-themes of main themes reflected one single agenda---shared ideas, ideologies, beliefs and practices.

Towards these, the cross cultural flows have been at two levels: one is according to the criteria of cross-cultural indices we have formulated as criteria in methodology (p 31), and the other is conceptual or abstract extension of cross-culturalism. In almost all films the cultural symbols have been cross-cultural too. For instance rivers, river waters, sea waters, crescent moon, full moon, white dress for men/women, flowers, idols of gods, flowers decorating women hair, rangolis, bullock carts, singing philosophical tunes by travelling in bullock carts or horse carts, Sun rise and Sun-set, flute music scoring reflecting ragas of morning and evening, etc., have both cultural and cross-cultural significance. All these cross-cultural symbols have enhanced and accentuated the feeling of belongingness which in turn influenced the concept of national integration.

Moving images of these narratives, which included songs as extended narratives, have been very effective in composition with sound music scoring touching the inner hearts of audience in almost all the films we have examined for this study. More so in the film songs sung by male and female singers besides the songs composed by various music directors. As for music directors also we found some music directors exclusively confined to native
music/regional music where as some directors have shown extraordinary talent in offering cross-cultural music either Carnatic-Hindustani or Indian classical with Western music. The combination of awards such as male singers, female singers and music directors has thus aptly brought the music maestros and nightingales of different regions to the national forefront as the songs and their music kept reverberating and echoing in all regions throughout the country. Thus, our findings using triangulation supported all our hypotheses enlisted in our methodology.