Online Dating in Films: A study of *Qarib Qarib Singlle* and *Her*

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Abstract

In the contemporary scenario, Hindi cinema has witnessed a lot of transformation and people from all the age groups are glued to their respective screens whether cinema halls, television, Laptop, Tablets and smartphones etc. India is a country of diverse cultures and it takes its influence from different countries due to globalization. Similarly, we have other countries taking cultural exchange to the hilt nowadays. There is a sudden iclination to witness the films in different forms as people have a lot of options nowadays. In the same ways, online dating has become a common phenomenon in the west and India is not lagging behind. Through my paper, I will try to unpack the sensibilities of the Indian audience through a film like *Qarib Qarib Single* (Tanuja Chandra, 2017) which deals with a new domain of online dating in Hindi films. On the other hand, we have *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) which deals with the love and affection of a person with the operating system of a computer. Through, these two films, I delve deeper into the idea of love in the contemporary times which looks at the films of different cultural dynamics. Therefore, this paper tries to assess love in the times of technological transformation.

INTRODUCTION

India being one of the most culturally rich nations of the world relies on its culture for the stories in the films which is emblematic of the fact that the films are based on its culture and its different manifestations. But the technology and its different tools are being used in the narrative of current Hindi films and the films of the west so as to justify its significance in the narratives. What is "New" media and what is not "New" media, the question raised by the noted author Lev Manovich in his book, *The Language of New Media* is of the utmost importance if we try to assess the technology and its expansion in contemporary scenario. There has been much scholarship on new media and there have been so many interventions through which people can assess new media and its different facets. If we try to relate it with the newer forms of new media and its interface with Hindi films it boils down to a situation where we can see a lot of usage of new media in Hindi films. One of the most prominent among them is the use of social media sites and online dating sites in the contemporary Hindi films. In his influential writings, Lev Manovich has

argued that "the term new media should be used for the Internet, multi-media platforms, computer games and virtual reality. The popular perception of new media for Manovich is linked to the use of the computer for distribution and exhibition, rather than with production. Therefore, texts distributed on a computer (websites and electronic books) are considered to be new media; texts distributed on paper are not. Similarly, photographs which are put on a CD-ROM and require a computer to view them are considered new media; the same photographs printed as a book are not" (Manovich, 2001). The relationship between new media and cinema has not been adequately discussed in the Indian context. The most substantial engagement has come from Amit Rai who explores cinema's multiplicities across different technologies and sites such as the disappearing cinema hall, satellite television, DJ culture etc. In doing this, Rai moves the discourse away from what he refers to as a "representational frame where image, discourse, narrative, signifier, and ideal are all in various ways master tropes that produce a linear causal relation to consciousness and identity" (Rai, 2010, 3) In Aswin Punathambekar's work we have seen some engagement with new media in the proliferation of a global imaginary. He explores, "how relations between state institutions, the Indian diaspora, circuits of capital and new media technologies and industries have re-configured the Bombay-based industry's geographic reach". Further he argues that the functioning of media companies and professionals in the post-colonial world has made the global a site to be claimed" (Punathambekar, 2013, 23). These are some of the academic debates which is at the core of the films which have new media and its different hues in the contemporary times.

Qarib Qarib Singlle (Tanuja Chandra, 2017)

This is one of the most prominent films which is quite relevant in terms of the narrative as it deals with the issue of the online dating in the current times. The story is of a middle-aged woman played by Parvathy who was earlier married but her passed away few years back. She has a travel agency and tries the online dating site on the insistence by her friend. She meets a guy called Jogi played by Irrfan Khan on a dating site and agrees to meet him for coffee. There is a camaraderie which develops between them after few initial hiccups. Irrfan tells her that he had had a few girlfriends in his life and would like to meet them in real life. After a prompt no, she agrees to meet his girlfriends and visits places like Rishikesh, Jaipur and Shillong. During constant interaction with him, both of them fall in love with each other but are not able to tell each other until the end of the film when the actress reveals that she wants to meet one of the crushes of her college life. There is a constant entertainment quotient attached with the film but one of things which binds the whole narrative together is the usage of the internet in the film. The different aspects of the internet usually attract the audiences and, in this film, the usage of the online dating site and the video calling sites becomes prominent which is in the major portion of the film. It is to be noted that the film deals with the dating sites which is very much in the usage in the contemporary times.

Her (Spike Jonze, 2013)

Spike Jonze directed a film *Her* which had a released in 2013 and 2014 in India. The story of the film centres around Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) who is a lonely man and is undergoing problems in his marriage and facing divorce. When he's not working as a letter writer, his leisure is spent playing video games and seldom hanging out with friends. He decides to purchase the new operating system, OS1, which is promoted as the world's first artificially intelligent operating system, "It's not just an operating system, it's a consciousness," the ad states. Theodore gets attracted to the voice of the operating system i.e. Samantha (Scarlett Johansson), the voice behind his OS1. As they start bonding over the numerous calls, they grow closer and closer and finally find themselves in love. Theodre falls in love with his OS, and starts dealing with feelings of both happiness and doubt. As an operating system, Samantha has sharp intelligence that she uses to help Theodore in ways others could not. His inner conflict of being in love with an operating system makes him realize the significance of virtual life but at the same time, it is very difficult to see the longevity

Figure 1: Posters from the films: *Qarib Qarib Singlle* and *Her*

Posters from the films: *Qarib Qarib Singlle* and *Her*

I have attempted to conduct the content analysis of the films *Qarib Qarib Singlle* and *Her (Figure 1)*. Through the emphasis on the use of technologies in these films and its relevance in the contemporary scenario, I make an attempt in understanding the dating sites and the use of artificial intelligence in some of the films released in the recent past. This in a way tries to consolidate the role of new media especially social media in the films of the current generation. Some of the films like *Teri Baaton Me Uljha Jiya* (Amit Joshi and Aradhana Sah, 2024), *Kho Gaye Ham Khan* (Arjun Varain Singh, 2023) Ctrl (Vikramaditya Motwane, 2024) have proved the point that such trends will continue in the times to come.

of such relationship. Anne Friedberg elaborates on the impact of new media to show how the moment is marked by a proliferation of screens. In this new moment, "the window metaphor is important because the spectator/audience is now looking through multiple frames whether on the computer screen or otherwise. This multiplicity of screens, she argues, is central to the new media moment" (Friedberg, 2006). David Rodowick offers another kind of argument where celluloid's demise needn't necessarily be seen as the death of cinema. Instead, Rodowick argues that "cinema was always virtual and should therefore not be seen as medium specific. Digital technologies have reconfigured the infrastructural system through which cinema now operates" (Rodowick, 2001). If Rodowick is interested primarily in the ontological status of cinema and what happens to it with the digital, Friedberg traces the notion of the virtual to pre-cinematic practices of the 19th century which is now more widespread. These are some of the academic debates which is quite central to the idea of love and dating in the contemporary times and the role of screens especially multiple screens in the age of internet.

Conclusion

With the digital transformation and the advent of artificial intelligence and several platforms related with it, there will be tremendous development in this regard in the contemporary films of India and the world. The films *Qarib Qarib Singlle* and *Her* are not only an attempt in this direction but a prelude to a new series of films and web series based on such technologies and its different manifestations.

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