Relevance of Homage in Hindi Cinema: The Purpose, The Populace and The Provenance

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Abstract

In cinema, homage is a tribute to filmmakers, films, or styles, integrating elements from existing works. In recent years, it has emerged as a sub-genre in Hindi films, notably through filmmakers like Sriram Raghavan, who draws inspiration from Western auteurs like Alfred Hitchcock. By investigating the incorporation of Western cinematic elements, using a qualitative approach- analysing literature, films, and interviews with film journalists, researchers, and industry experts- the study explores how and why filmmakers pay tribute to their influences while simultaneously adapting these elements to resonate with Indian audiences. The findings indicate that audience familiarity with Western cinema enhances their engagement with Hindi films, as references and Easter eggs create a shared cultural experience. Furthermore, the commercial dynamics of the film industry drive this convergence, as producers leverage popular Western tropes to attract diverse audiences. The research concludes by highlighting the significance of homage as a mechanism for cultural exchange, illustrating how the blending of Indian and Western media reflects cultural globalisation and also fosters a deeper understanding of cinematic art across borders.

Key Words: Homage, Hindi films, Cultural Exchange, Western Cinema, Globalisation.

Introduction:

Homage, as defined by Leitch (1990), is akin to a remake but serves primarily as a tribute to earlier films, rather than an appropriation of their relevance. Unlike adaptations or remakes that focus on faithful reproduction, a true homage pays tribute to its source while at risk of being lost in the background or fading into obscurity. This practice is particularly relevant in the Hindi Film Industry or (commonly) Bollywood, where filmmakers often incorporate elements from Western cinema, creating a unique blend of Eastern and Western influences. Homage allows filmmakers to honour the original works while infusing them with local cultural nuances, thus fostering a convergence between Hollywood and Bollywood.

Rahul Desai (2024) regards Homage as a cunning genre being developed and propagated by Sriram Raghavan, an Indian filmmaker and screenwriter who is regarded as an auteur of the neo-noir genre in Hindi films. His works are rich with homages to classic Hollywood films, especially Alfred Hitchcock's. It is widely known among the Indian cinephile community that Alfred Hitchcock is always lingering somewhere in a Raghavan film. By integrating these Western cinematic elements into his films, Raghavan pays tribute to his inspirations and reinterprets them within an Indian context, contributing to a cross-cultural dialogue between East and West. The poster of Pinnochio in Merry Christmas (2024), the motif of rats in Ek Hasina Thi (2004) or Simi's Character from Andhadhun (2018) being referred to as Lady Macbeth, owing to the actor, Tabu's role as Nimmi in Maqbool (2004), the Shakespearean adaptation of Macbeth, are the few examples of Homages that the filmmaker has given in the films mentioned.

Research Objectives

1. Explore the role of homage in facilitating cross-cultural exchange in Hindi cinema.
2. Examine the points of convergence between Hollywood and Bollywood through the lens of homage.
3. Investigate audience reception towards these cross-cultural homages.

Significance and Research Gaps

While Homage is widely spoken about in film discourse, its role in serving as a cultural mitigator across cinematic borders remains academically unexplored. Bollywood is the second-largest producer of films in the world. Imagining the number of references or the influences through which they were made is impossible, yet an interesting subject, waiting to be tapped on. Sriram Raghavan, revered as a cinephile's director, is lauded on film analysis platforms, social media and private film discourse groups. But his films are yet to be studied academically for the value they bestow in their homages and their impact on cross-cultural cinematic exchange.

Theoretical Framework

Remake Theory, as outlined by scholars like Thomas Leitch (1990), highlights the unique nature of remakes and homages, focusing on how these practices engage with and reinterpret original works. Each film adaptation is characterised by its authorised utilisation of content from a preceding model, for which the producers typically acquire adaptation rights. Leitch (1990) introduces a triangular relationship between the remake, its original film, and the source material that brings forth two primary concerns within the rhetoric of remakes: the connection with the audience, their understanding and amusement based on the film's prescribed terms. Remakes can adopt two strategies: either honouring the original text's authority by appreciating its terms or redefining it to suit contemporary audience preferences. The former approach, known as homage, primarily seeks to pay tribute to an earlier film without replacing its significance. For example, Werner Herzog's Nosferatu the Vampyre (1982) is a homage that honours the original rather than supplanting it. In Hindi cinema, Sriram Raghavan's Johnny Gaddaar (2007) is a novel concept but also a tribute to numerous films, such as Vijay Anand's cinema and the 80s' Angry Young Man trope.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory proposes that individuals are not passive recipients of media messages but actively seek out and engage with media to fulfil specific needs and desires. It offers valuable insights into why audiences are drawn to films that incorporate homage elements. Some viewers may enjoy spotting references to classic films as a form of entertainment or nostalgia, while others may appreciate the intellectual challenge of deciphering intertextual connections. Additionally, the theory highlights the active role of

audiences in interpreting and deriving meaning from media content, emphasising the importance of individual preferences and subjective experiences in shaping media consumption patterns. Overall, incorporating the Uses and Gratifications Theory into my research framework allows for a nuanced exploration of audience engagement with homage in Hindi cinema, revealing the diverse motivations and gratifications driving viewer behaviour.

Literature Review

The literature on homage and cross-cultural influences in cinema provides a rich foundation for understanding the convergence of Eastern and Western film traditions, particularly in the context of Hindi cinema. Gohar Siddiqui (2019) explores how Johnny Gaddaar (2007) by Sriram Raghavan exemplifies the blending of local and global cinematic conventions. Siddiqui highlights the film's homage to both Hollywood and Bollywood, demonstrating the ability of Bombay cinema to contribute uniquely to the global neo-noir genre. This blending is further emphasised by the acquisition of the film's remake rights by a Los Angeles-based company, illustrating the transnational marketability of localised narratives.

K. E. Høglid (2013) adds to this discussion by examining the cultural exchange between Hollywood and Bollywood, focusing on how Indian filmmakers have adapted Western genres and narrative structures to fit the Indian context. Høglid's analysis reveals the complexities of this adaptation process, where Hindi filmmakers reinterpret Western influences while negotiating cultural boundaries, reflecting the broader implications of globalisation and cultural identity in Indian cinema.

Neelam Sidhar Wright (2009) further examines Bollywood's increasing experimentation with Western influences, attributing this trend to the industry's desire to appeal to a global audience and the Indian diaspora. She adds how Indian remakes of Western works are a more approachable form of foreign text to the average Indian viewer, driven by motives of exploitation, profit, and social commentary.

Tejaswini Ganti (2002) offers a critical perspective on the Indianization of Hollywood in Bollywood remakes. Ganti discusses the scepticism of Indian filmmakers in adapting Western works, for their economic motives and the need to cater to the particular tastes of audiences. The Indianization of Foreign films is also understood as a way for Indian filmmakers to heighten their frustrations towards the audience. It highlights the challenges of introducing novel ideas within the constraints of popular cinema.

Rahul Desai (2024) expands on the concept of homage in the context of Sriram Raghavan's work, noting the filmmaker's recurring use of homage to both Hollywood and Bollywood. The article discusses Raghavan's meticulous attention to detail, his use of references and Easter eggs, and his ability to infuse his films with a sense of self-awareness and nostalgia. Overall, Desai celebrates Raghavan's contribution to cinema and his skill in crafting original narratives within the framework of homage.

Bridgette Wessels (2023) explores the audience's relationship with film, emphasising the importance of understanding how audiences engage with and interpret films. Wessels' findings suggest that audiences are relational and interactive, engaging with films in diverse ways that contribute to a dynamic film culture. This perspective is relevant to understanding how audiences perceive and engage with homage in cinema, particularly in the context of globalised film culture.

Sohni Kaur (2021) investigates the role of nostalgia in film, particularly in the context of comfort films. Kaur's study reveals the psychological mechanisms behind audience engagement with nostalgic films, which is closely related to the appeal of homage in cinema. The study's findings suggest that nostalgia and homage in films serve as coping mechanisms, providing audiences with a sense of comfort and familiarity.

Jenna Ng (2005) explores the relationship between cinephilia, homage, and transcultural fusion in Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill. Ng's analysis underscores the significance of homage as a strategy driven by love and reverence for cinema, blending cross-cultural references to reflect the fluidity of globalised film expressions. Ng's work aligns with the broader

discussion of how homage facilitates the convergence of Eastern and Western cinematic traditions.

Finally, Constantine Verevis (2004) delves into the creative and cultural significance of remakes and homages, emphasising their role in celebrating cinematic heritage. Verevis highlights the intertextual nature of these practices, showcasing how filmmakers engage with past works to reinterpret them for contemporary audiences. His analysis underscores the importance of homage as an integral component of cinematic expression and artistic tribute.

Together, these works contribute to a nuanced understanding of how homage functions as a bridge between Eastern and Western film traditions, fostering a dynamic exchange of cultural influences in the global cinematic landscape.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the intersection of media and culture in Hindi cinema, focusing on homage. This approach was the most suitable for this paper because a panoramic study of multiple aspects of the working of the Hindi film industry and the psyche of the common Indian audience is required to understand the research questions and objectives at hand. A combination of secondary data analysis and primary data collection through interviews was used.
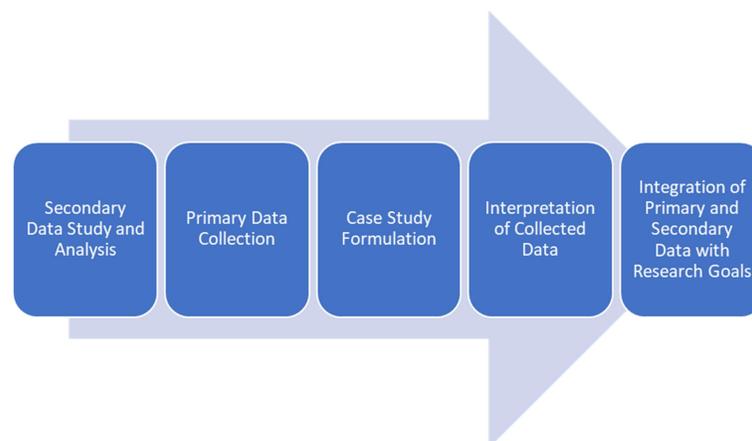

Figure 1: Steps of research conduct

Data Collection

Secondary Data

Firstly, secondary or existing data was inspected, including published library sources, interviews of relevant filmmakers on digital platforms, online documents and academic records. The interpretations of homage by industry experts and film scholars were studied.

Primary Data

The primary method of qualitative data collection selected is the Interview. It involved a total of 10 questions, all of which represent the research aims. The interview followed a semi-structured approach in the case of a written interview and oral-verbal interviews. The interviews were conducted based on the convenience of the interviewees, through either an email, a questionnaire or a telephone.

Respondents were selected using purposive and convenience sampling. Six experts—two filmmakers, two critics, a film editor, and a content creator—were chosen for their relevant expertise and accessibility. These individuals, who have significant industry knowledge and digital influence, provided valuable insights for the study. Given the emerging concept of homage in Indian cinema, these selected respondents were uniquely qualified to address the research objectives, making them ideal for the study despite the challenges in accessing mainstream filmmakers.

Table 1: Background of the respondents

Name	Designation	Background
Rahul Desai	Film Critic, Journalist and Writer.	Features on multiple respected platforms, notably Film Companion and OTT Play. Possesses a vast film knowledge and craft sensitivity, displayed through written content. His article, *Sriram Raghavan and the Original Art of Cinephilia* also proves his awareness about the theme of the study.
Hindol Hazra	Filmmaker and	His YouTube content and contribution to the film

	Host at @ChalchitraTalks on Youtube	channel are a testament to his vast knowledge about homage and the Indian Film Scene.
Sarthak Bhasin	Film Director and Screenwriter	He is an alumnus of Film & Television Institute of India (FTII, Pune) and hold significant film knowledge. His diploma film "EKAANT" was awarded the Best Short Fiction Film Award at the Tbilisi International Student Film Festival- Amirani, Georgia in 2018 & the Special Jury Award (Rajat Kamal) for its Art Direction at the 66th National Film Awards of India.
Mimansa Shekhar	Film Journalist and Copy Editor	She is affiliated with the entertainment section of The Indian Express and is an alumnus of the AJK MCRC Jamia Millia Islamia.
Akshay Jakhotiya	Editor and YouTuber @Strokes on Silver Screen	His video essay titled *Johnny Gaddaar	Sriram Raghavan's Homage to Cinema* is an examination of how Sriram Raghavan uses elements of Homage to present his appreciation for the films that influenced Raghavan.
Aditya Kriplani	Filmmaker	A screenwriter and novelist from the Film and Television Institute of India. His film, *Tikli and Lakshmi Bomb,* received distribution by Netflix.

Data Analysis

Inductive coding was used to identify key themes and patterns within the interview responses. Next, Thematic analysis was conducted to uncover patterns, while content analysis focused on identifying correlations and variations in the data. Furthermore, a Case Study on the film Merry Christmas (2024) by Sriram Raghavan was prepared by analysing it for its homages, supplemented by insights from the filmmaker's interviews.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis in this research was conducted by first thoroughly familiarising with the collected data, followed by systematically identifying significant aspects and organising them

under specific in-vivo codes, i.e. exactly extracted from the responses of each individual interviewed (Table 2).

Table 2: In-vivo codes of the respondents

Name	Codes
Hindol Hazra	Easter Egg, Cameos, Reference, Influence, Building Block, Dissecting, Nostalgia, Reels, Particular Audience, Medley, Material, Self-Awareness, 4th Wall Breaking, Rehashed, Cash Grab, Saturation, Western, Popular Consciousness, Zeitgeist, Lack of Originality, Current, Topical
Aditya Kriplani	Adoration, Cinematic Technique, Effect, Premise, All genres, Reminiscent, Aesthetics, Imitation
Sarthak Bhasin	Plagiarism, Recent, Blatant Copy, Closed, Cinema Literacy, Ode, Appreciation, Nod, Original, Used, Joke, Subtext, Clever, Sensorial Value, Economic Forces, Western, Playful
Akshay Jakhotiya	Easter Eggs, Mainstream, Tribute, Inspired, Fanboy, Replicate, Recreate, Peaks, Cloning, Personal Touch, Imitation, Acknowledgement, Spotting, Rewarding, Discussion, Favourite, Clapback, Intelligent
Rahul Desai	Cinephilia, Adoration, Retro Lens, Influence, Nostalgia, Escape, Vintage, Flaunt, Show-Off, Easter eggs, Treasure Hunt, Spot-The-Tribute Game, Personal Expression, Westerns, Inspired, Cinema Literate Makers, Gimmicky, Self-Reverential Odes, Subconscious, Packaging, Attention
Mimansa Shekhar	Style, Influence, Reminder, Depth, Easter Eggs, Excite, Connection, Love Letters, Parallels, Undertones, Metaphors, Subtle, Remake, Raise A Toast, Shared Voice, Commercial

These codes were then categorised into the relevant research questions of the study (Table 3). They were then separately, based on their categories, grouped into potential themes, which were carefully assessed to ensure they aligned with the coded excerpts (Tables 4, 5 and 6). The themes were refined for clarity, and illustrative examples were selected to enhance

understanding. Finally, a comprehensive analysis was conducted, linking the findings to the research questions and existing literature, culminating in a scholarly report.

Table 3: Categorization of codes based on research areas

Interviewees	Origins	Audience Reception	Purposes
Hindol Hazra	Influence, Western, Popular Consciousness	Reels, Dissecting every frame, Particular Audience	Easter Egg, Cameos, Reference, Building Block, Nostalgia, Cash Grab, Saturation, Zeitgeist, Lack of Originality, Current, Topical
Aditya Kriplani	Western, Old cult films	(unanswered)	Adoration, Reminiscent, Aesthetics
Sarthak Bhasin	Recent, Western,	Closed, Cinema Literacy, Clever, No Sensorial Value	Ode, Appreciation, Nod, Joke, Economic Forces
Akshay Jakhotiya	Inspired, Fanboy,	Spotting, Rewarding, Discussion, Favourite, Intelligent	Easter Eggs, Tribute, Recreate, Peaks, Acknowledgement
Rahul Desai	Cinephilia, Influence, personal expression, westerns, inspired, self-reverential odes, subconscious	Cinema literate makers, treasure hunt, spot-the-tribute game, attention	Adoration, retro lens, Nostalgia, escape, Flaunt, show off, Easter eggs, packaging
Mimansa Shekhar	Style, influence	Excite, Connect, Realise Undertones and Metaphors, Raise a Toast, Shared Voice, Drawing Parallels	Reminder, Easter Eggs, Subtle

Table 4: Thematic division of codes based on the Purpose of Homage

Theme	Codes
References	Easter Eggs, Cameos, Reference, Building Block, Self-Awareness, Retro Lens
Nostalgia	Nostalgia, Escape, Reminiscent
Commercialization	Cash Grab, Saturation, Economic Forces, Packaging
Contemporary	Zeitgeist, Current, Topical
Appreciation	Ode, Appreciation, Nod, Joke, Tribute, Acknowledgement, Adoration
Presentation	Flaunt, Show Off, Packaging, Aesthetics, 4th Wall Breaking, Medleys
Reminders	Reminder, Subtle
Unoriginality	Imitation, Rehashed, saturation, Lack of Originality, Plagiarism

Table 5: Thematic division of codes based on the Audience Reception of Homage

Theme	Codes
Film Analysis	Reels, Discussion, Dissecting Every Frame, Drawing Parallels
Audience Participation	Spotting, Rewarding, Seeing Favourite Elements, Intelligent, Treasure Hunt, Spot-the-Tribute Game, Realise Undertones and Metaphors
Awareness	Closed, Cinema Literate, Clever, Grabbing Attention
Emotional Connection	Excite, Connect, Raise a Toast, Shared voice, Nostalgic

Table 6: Thematic division of codes based on the Origins of Homage

Theme	Recurring Codes
Cultural Influence	Influence, Popular Consciousness
Western Influence	Western, Old Cult Films, Recent
Personal Expression	Cinephilia, Personal Expression, Inspired, Self-Reverential Odes, Subconscious

Findings

Purposes

Regarding the motivations behind homage-giving in Hindi films, the interviews revealed a set of purposes pertaining to a homage's Cultural engagement and its role in the Market dynamics. It was observed that all interviewees agreed that Homages are essentially References to existing media texts. They may be packaged as Easter Eggs or Cameos[1] as explained by Hindol Hazra, to nudge at the psyche of the audience and their awareness of the reference. The example of Subhash Ghai's filmography is discussed by Hazra to illustrate how Ghai would make a short appearance in all of his films and eventually made it a recurring theme, formerly and fundamentally seen in Alfred Hitchcock films as well. This relates to the Self-Aware element of a film's screenplay whilst doing a Homage. Explained by the context of the Superhero genre, Hazra uses Deadpool (2016) to elaborate on how films indulge in playfulness with the audience with their self-awareness of their tropes, plots and the collective genre. Filmmakers may use influential arts as Building Blocks to create something of a differing value, whilst also using their inspiration as a Homage. Recent makers have also cleverly used their Homages as a Retro Lens, to seize the attention of particular audiences and to also portray a certain time in the film. This was referenced by Hazra, using Animal (2023), a Sandeep Vanga Reddy film, that uses the instrumental versions of the songs Dil Hai Chotta Sa and Roja from the film Roja (1992) to indicate the 90s period in the film. Owing to the Retro Lens, Nostalgia was also understood as a powerful tool that motivated filmmakers to include Homages in films. Rahul Desai added how it serves as a license for many to practise an Escape. Cinematic Escapism is a well-traced phenomenon in entertainment production. Kaur (2021) describes how nostalgia is now manifested in media with little to no personal connection required. She adds how 'modern nostalgia' can be manipulated to stir the feeling of a connection to eras that we may never have been a part of. On its capitalization, Kaur has observed that Nostalgia operates differently in contemporary times compared to the past. While traditional nostalgia persists, advancements in digital technology allow for

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[1] A short appearance by a publicly known person who is instantly recognizable, which makes them harder to accept as a character than as the public person they are. (Mathijs, 2013, p. 146)

the fabrication of nostalgic experiences without the need for the actual passage of time. Images can be instantly aged digitally, altering our perception of time from decades to mere minutes. Moreover, the rapid pace of modern life, driven by fast capitalism, accelerates the turnover of trends and cultural phenomena, giving rise to what is termed "modern nostalgia". This intense sentimentality taps into deep emotions and sensory experiences, making it highly enticing and susceptible to commercial exploitation. Filmmaker Aditya Kriplani remembers a feeling of Reminiscence while watching Sholay (1975) towards the shot division style of directors Sergio Leone, John Ford and Butch Cassidy. The instance highlights how such an emotion is evoked by the inclusion of Homage from art that the viewer may have already witnessed. Yet, every respondent agreed that Homage begins with a place of Adoration for most filmmakers. Sarthak Bhasin thinks that it can be employed as a Nod or an Ode to the original creators if the filmmaker desires. Mimansa Shekhar even contrasts Homage to imitation, with the former being a Subtle Reminder while the latter being a rip-off. Akshay Jakhotiya classifies Homage as a Tribute by filmmakers to the films that inspired them or those that they grew up with. He also mentions the necessity of directors to add Acknowledgements of such inspiration in their films to not promote silent plagiarism.

As for how it contributes to the market of the film and partakes in its attraction to the audience, it was interesting to note several commercial components that encourage Homages in Hindi films. Especially noticed in the Superhero Fiction genre, Hazra highlights how certain Homage elements are big Cash-grabbing forces for the films. Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021), a film of The Marvel Cinematic Universe, is one of the biggest examples of using Homage as one of its primary attractions and eventually cashing the most on it. The film, through its meta-universal (metaverse[2]) approach to storytelling, pays Homage to pre-existing Spider-Man films and characters by actively incorporating both in the film. Hazra describes how it exploits the nostalgia of the audiences who grew up with different Spider-Man films and actors by including the

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[2] The metaverse world will open a new interactive narrative context. In the illusion where the boundary between virtual and reality is broken, the user behavior in real time and space will interact with the film and television works in virtual time and space, so as to build a new form of art in the narrative space where virtual and real coexist. (Shang, Shi, 2022, p.. 2)

significant elements of those in the Marvel film. Such Packaging can attract different sections of the viewership. This metaverse concept is also making its place in Hindi Cinema like The Maddock Supernatural Universe with films like Stree (2018) and Bhediya (2022) or The Cop-Universe of filmmaker Rohit Shetty with films Singham (2011), Simmba (2018), Sooryavanshi (2021). Bhasin, when asked on the patterns of the Hindi film industry in giving Homages, said that using tried and tested film formulas, often involving similar tropes and concepts, is a work of the Economic Forces behind. With the newness and popularisation of Homage with globalisation, he adds, blatant copying has been given an ethical segue. Providing Homage to films that producers know have worked economically well with the Indian population before, incentivises the practice. Another phenomenon that contemporary filmmakers have recently picked up on is that of using Homage to seem more Topical. Hazra reports how films, like Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya (2024), have begun using meme references to garner that side of the internet audience and seem more in tune with the Current Zeitgeist. This practice not only helps the film feel current but also helps a sizable chunk of the audience relate to the film.

Audience Reception

The way the audience receives a Homage also has a lot to do with what kind, how and when a Homage is put in a film. The interviews helped reach a few major themes of how the audience's reception towards homage work. Audience participation was agreed upon as a major theme in how homages are made viewer-oriented. Jakhotiya, in his interview, talks about how Spotting homages in a film can feel Rewarding for a viewer, especially for an audience that holds that knowledge power of being aware of the references. He adds that for a viewer to see a homage that corresponds to their Favourite from before, the viewer is likely to have high regard for the overall film as well. The clever placement of homages in the film's backdrop, without explicit mentions, is often received as Intelligent. Desai, while suggesting how an audience is kept in mind while conceptualising homage, presents a contrast between what might be a good homage film versus a bad one. He argues that many homage-laden films "misinterpret the viewing experience as a Treasure Hunt." Delighting a niche audience who enjoys picking up Easter Eggs comes with this

characteristic. Desai suggests that good homage films cater to all, while homage-dependent films end up just being Spot-The-Tribute films, where the sole purpose of the film is the activity or seeming intellectual. Wessels (2023) in their report, 'Beyond the Multiplex' developed a set of 'meta-concepts' that are key aspects in the formation of audiences. The meta-concept of Lived film culture emphasises that film is not just a form of entertainment, but a significant part of people's lived experiences and cultural activities. This concept highlights how film becomes a part of everyday discourse and sensemaking, transforming it into a cultural form that is lived and experienced within the social and cultural context of individuals and communities.

This finding is in keeping with the theme of Film Analysis, where Hazra has smartly noticed that Particular Audiences make their appreciation for a Homage felt over Social Media, further popularising the homage and the film, benefiting the makers. With the example of the homage to instrumental music of a yesteryear film present in the film Animal (2023), he mentions how he is certain that people liked it due to the homage music's usage and popularity on Instagram Reels. He also talks about how Sriram Raghavan's films cater to a niche, cinema-literate audience. With this recognition, it makes sure to involve elements in the films that enable such a subcategory of the viewership to Dissect every frame and break down the themes for hidden cinema concepts. Shekhar also talks about how audiences today like to dig deeper, beyond just what meets the eye. They are equipped to point out the Undertones and Metaphors, which in turn encourages filmmakers to place them more strikingly. Drawing parallels between and within films and genres wasn't something the audience engaged in earlier, which they now do. But such a power of analysis comes only from awareness of film knowledge and the glossary. Bhasin says that the Indian Audience used to be almost completely closed off to Western Cinema, which made it easier for domestic makers to steal and present it as their own. But with growing awareness and globalisation, the film industry also saw a rise in cinema-literate makers, starting from the late 1990s and 2000s, as seen by Desai. He feels the practice was most popularised by makers like Sriram Raghavan and Anurag Kashyap, who came with a background in film academia from institutes like the Film and Television Institute of India. They displayed an affection for world cinema as well as Bollywood classics. This

affection could be vividly felt in their contributions. This literacy reached the viewers who used the film terms actively to describe how they felt after their viewing experience. Jakhotiya also feels that people with an understanding of homages and references are inclined to indulge in Discussions and discourse over them with fellow viewers. Homages may also act as Item Songs[3] in films, in terms of grabbing the Attention of the audience, with the way it's packaged. While homage may not be the primary point of the film, Desai puts it, it can hope to trigger a subliminal appreciation in the watchers that may feel cheeky to them, or get them invested. Primarily, homages ignite several emotions, if done right, a weighty one of them being Nostalgia. It is a guaranteed homage refuge when the Excitement of viewers is concerned. Desai says that music from the 1970s-80s Bollywood being used in contemporary films was a regular homage-giving activity, especially in the last decade. This has seen a considerable shift to the music of 1990s Bollywood now, illustrated best in the film Dum Laga Ke Haisha (2015). The 1990s represent the final decade before the digital age, allowing long-form shows such as Guns & Gulaabs (2023) to craft premises free from the influence of modern technology and surveillance and tirelessly transporting the millennial audience to their times. A similar observation is presented by Shekhar, with the example of the director duo Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K, popularly regarded as Raj&DK, and how they entice and Connect viewers with music from the bygones.

Origin

The source of a homage by theory can be anything pre-existing. In an attempt to find what categories of sources the Hindi filmmakers resort to for their homage, the following findings were determined. Most directors and writers seek and have sought for a while, inspiration from Western cinema. Hazra mentions how the founding figures of Hindi cinema, filmmakers like Guru Dutt and Vijay Anand were predominantly inspired by the West, where the film scene had existed for a considerable amount of time, unlike India.

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[3] Item songs are sensuous, over-sexualized, dances performed to the tunes of catchy Bollywood songs. The specific use of the term 'item number' was first associated with Malaika Arora for her song Chaiya Chaiya in the movie Dil Se in 1998 and Shilpa Shetty's performance in Shool in 1999 (Jain, P., Roy, E., Garud, N., & Mazid, I., 2019, p.

This influence also gave birth to genres like the Mumbai noir. Bhasin, Desai and Kriplani support this claim. Kriplani even mentions directors Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver (1976) and Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather (1972) as important sources used extensively. These films pertain to Popular Consciousness, the films that everyone knows about more or less and can comfortably be hinted at in films. Hazra feels that there are usually 5-6 films that are common knowledge that people keep going back to. As examples, he mentions Sholay (1975) and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) which if referenced, would be understood by the mass audience. Self-referential homages also exist, particularly in the most popular Hindi film productions, that have been operating for a long time and have produced innumerable movies. The Dharma Productions and The Yash Raj Films indulge in self-referencing from their older films in their new ones, as detected by Desai.

Case Study: Merry Christmas (2024)

Dir. Sriram Raghavan

"You're waiting for something to happen. Everything is loaded….A lot of people think a lot of things….That participation is what makes this kind of movie (Merry Christmas) work" (Film Companion Studios, 2024)

Merry Christmas is the latest directorial work of Indian filmmaker and screenwriter Sriram Raghavan, released in 2024. A neo-noir mystery thriller is produced under Tips Films and Matchbox Films.

The film is the latest best example of an adaptive cinematic project laden with homages. However, beyond the diverse intertextual references in Merry Christmas lies a profound sense of love that motivates them. Raghavan is ethically and considerably expressive about this love in all of his films, and Merry Christmas is no exception. Besides being a tribute to Hindi film director Shakti Samanta (shown as an acknowledgement right at the beginning of the film), closely following his style of movie-making and standing on the support of several other references, Merry Christmas never feels imitated or stolen. If not anything else, it certainly is a cinephilic filmmaker's offering to a cinephilic audience.

The film is an adaptation to begin with of Frédéric Dard's French Novel, Le Monte-charge or Bird in a Cage, an element which is also used as a motif in the film. The novel has also been adapted into a French film, Paris Pick-up (1962). Raghavan has a history of adapting French works in Hindi and being a master at it. His former cinematic genius, Andhadhun (2018) was loosely inspired by the French short film, L'Accordeur or The Piano Tuner (2010). When asked whether he would ever remake a vintage Hindi film, he replied:

"I love Teesri Manzil and Jewel Thief. My worry is that I Love them so much, I know them so well that it will be foolish for me to just try and remake (them)…Then I'm just doing it for I don't know what… I'm not trying to better it, nor do I have an interpretation of it. They're great as it is…. If I do have to remake, gun to the head, I'll think of some movie where the film has got an interesting idea but it didn't do good. Then I would consider that. Or that the film has got a premise and you can tweak the premise and change the setting, change something, maybe change the gender also and do something with that. But to…replicate another great movie… I don't see the point of that." (Film Companion Studios, 2024)

This assures his loyal audience that Raghavan takes his homages seriously as they come from a place of genuine affection and not a capitalist-exploitative motive.

The Music

After the Shakti Samanta acknowledging tribute, a John Lennon lyric from the song Happy Xmas also strikes the screen, symbolising the overall theme of the film before its inception: "So this is Christmas

 And what have you done?"

This is just the first of the many musical references to come in the film that further the plot in their own capacity. Jab Andhera Hota Hai from Raja Rani (1973) plays in the backdrop when a man, Albert, enters the house of the woman he had met that night, Maria. Another retro song, Kai Baar Yuh Bhi Dekha Hai from Rajnigandha(1974) plays when the

characters are travelling in a cab, similar to the scene in the original film, being a direct homage. The film never mentions the time it is set in, which gives the music used another purpose in the film than to suggest a situation in the plot. Raghavan uses Western Classical music for dramatic effect. In The Hall of the Mountain King by Edvard Grieg ascends into a jarring crescendo, in tune with the awkward events unfolding in the scene. Raghavan also keeps Vivaldi's Winter from The Four Seasons to mark the end of the film, along with the twist that unfolds abruptly, evoking an almost pitying feeling in the viewer. Sriram, when talking about the crescendo music inspiration:

"We decided we'll put an instrumental or a classical piece…That was sort of our idea from The Man Who Knew Too Much…where…the symbols clash. In fact, I even .. when we were scripting, doing the shots and all that, we used to play that Hitchcock sound that is so well shot and so well cut…" (Film Companion Studios, 2024)

The Easter Eggs

With a watchful eye, one can point out many interesting easter eggs in the mise-en-scenes of the film. In the early half of the film, a scene takes place around a Regal cinema theatre, where the posters of films like Steve Barron's The Adventures of Pinnochio (1996) and Alfred Hitchcock's Rebecca (1940) can be identified. The former almost insinuates the deceiving nature of both the protagonists of the film, while the latter is another romance-thriller that Raghavan seeks stylistic inspiration from, owing to his Master, Hitchcock.

Conversations feature film names that fit well in the dialogue of the situations. In one scene, a character Ronnie uses the title Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyoon Aata Hai (1980) to address an agitated Albert. In the same conversation, Ronnie asks Albert if he has seen the film The Merry Widow (1934) when debating the whereabouts of the husband of Maria. The reference reappears on the side of a bus later in the film. The Ernst Lubitsch film has provided a significant impact on the neo-noir movement overall. In another scene, when inquired about his life, Albert quotes the title Dil Diya Dard Liya (1996), which was itself an adaptation of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights.

Several motifs and references are also meticulously placed in the living room of Maria, where the film's most important sequences are shot. Albert hangs an ornament of a Bird in a cage on Maria's Christmas tree which could be a homage to the novel that the film is adapted from, by the same English name. Albert's habit of creating origami birds is also a homage to a Hitchcockian character, of the police officer, E. Gaff from The Blade Runner (1982) who had a similar habit. The paper swans play significant roles in both films.

Conclusion

Homage was understood to be an interplay of several underlying factors. It was observed that they enhance cultural engagement by referencing iconic works, appealing to audiences with Easter eggs and nostalgia. Filmmakers use them to acknowledge past influences, reinterpret tropes, and evoke a sense of familiarity. Homages can serve commercial purposes by attracting viewers and capitalising on popular references. Economic factors and the desire to appear topical also drive filmmakers to include homages, which help them connect with contemporary audiences while paying tribute to cinematic history.

Hindi filmmakers often draw from Western cinema, with figures like Guru Dutt and Vijay Anand shaping genres like Mumbai noir. Films such as Taxi Driver and The Godfather are commonly referenced due to their iconic status, similar to how Indian classics like Sholay and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge connect with audiences. Bollywood also pays homage to its own history, with studios like Dharma and Yash Raj often self-referencing. International and pop culture influences further enrich Hindi films, making them resonate with global and younger audiences.

Audience engagement with homages in films is significant, with viewers enjoying the challenge of spotting references, especially when linked to their favourite works. Cleverly placed homages are seen as intelligent and enhance film appreciation. While homage-heavy films cater to niche audiences, they also fuel social media discussions, increasing a film's popularity. The rise of cinema-literate viewers encourages filmmakers to include more intertextual references, evoking nostalgia and enhancing the viewing experience through these familiar, attention-grabbing elements.

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