

Literariness Journal

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly
Journal of Literature and Cultural
Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

Vol. 1, Issue. 3 June 2026

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A Literariness.org Project

Shaping the Collective Cultural Consciousness Through Music Videos: A Case Study on Music Videos of Hyderabad City

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Abstract: When music videos featuring a specific city as their emphasis get viral on social media, they end up becoming an anthem of that city. The effect that music videos bring along with them is huge. They transform the content consumers into cultural ambassadors. As music videos are gaining grounds because of their thematic approach in representation, they grab the attention of the consumers very easily. Stuart Hall in *Encoding and Decoding* in the television discourse suggests that the meanings and messages in the discursive production are systematised through the operation of 'codes' within the framework of language. Apart from the lyrics, all units/ textual elements that contribute to meaning making and hold the power of signification are relevant in creating an impact that they intend to.

This is an attempt to investigate the representation of people, places, culture and food in music videos of 'Hyderabad Song - Girl in the City', 'Hyderabad Poradu' and 'V6 Special Song On Hyderabad City & Culture' whose main focus is the cityscape of Hyderabad, and to explore the capacity of these texts as dynamic modes of imaginative articulation. By adopting different semantic theoretical approaches, this paper tries to explore the ability of the texts as lively entities that have a narrative that needs to be tackled by the consumer by the syntagms structure and order of signs.

However, this paper goes in a complete contradiction to the concept of the Flaneur and sees how instrumental these music videos are in shaping the collective cultural consciousness of the consumers and make them the cultural ambassadors of the cityscape. It tries to comment on how these music videos can be used as the softpower to enhance the representation of a city in the global village.

Keywords: *Music Videos, Popular Culture, Semiotics, Cityscapes, Representation*

Introduction

With time, the music videos have now become a centre of commercial, popular and artistic interest. Music videos are making their way at film festivals throughout the world and even claiming their independence by their excessively high viewership on platforms like YouTube. Music video is a commercial video featuring a performance of a popular song often through a stylized dramatisation by the performers with lip-syncing and special effects.

Song is considered to be a system of communication with other people using sounds to express a feeling, sense, idea, emotion or thought. Whereas lyrics can be considered as the words of a song or a short poem which expresses the personal thoughts and feelings of a person who wrote it. Lyrics of the song represent the composers' emotions and intention to describe their feelings such as love, struggle, trouble, peace etc.

Semiotic approach is the study of sign processes, which is any form of activity, conduct or any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. The semiotic tradition explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communication.

Literature Review

Considerable amount of research has been done on music, lyrics, songs and music videos. Researchers like Norman Fairclough(1989) and Van Dijk(1998) were very instrumental in formulating methodologies that make Critical Discourse Analysis quite reliable. With the rise of film studies, critical analysis of songs, lyrics and background music grabbed the attention of researchers . It has now emerged into a new field of analysis called Musical Discourse Analysis where researchers are concentrating on social, linguistic, psychological, visual, gestural and musicological aspects (De Nora 2000). Genre analysis has been one of the most preoccupied questions in music discourse analysis.

In Cultural Studies the scope of musical discourse analysis looms large because of the growing accessibility to all means of content. Taking personal life into consideration, "critical exploration of celebrity, stardom and fame" led to the foundation of *Celebrity Studies* journal in 2010. *Taking Taylor Seriously* published by Routledge makes an appeal to take the musicians' personal life into consideration while analysing their works.

Contemporary musical discourse is of utmost research interest due to the global status of the English language, which has been adopted as a new 'lingua franca' in contemporary musical art (Aleshinskaya 2013). From the perspective of English language teaching, many language teachers and educational researchers are analysing lyrics of the songs from the perspective of idioms and phrases, clauses,

phraseology etc. Rainey & Larsen (2002) state that many adults who ever heard a melody, can recall the lyrics from a song that they heard repeatedly as adolescents, despite the fact that they had not heard the lyrics for years.

When it comes to literature and the city, there are a good number of noteworthy books written with a special focus on one particular city in the recent past. Cities have been understood in literature as the complex areas that are embedded with a wealth of conceptual and symbolic meanings. At times when theorists are theorising on the spaces that are beyond physical human description, the cities like Hyderabad which can be easily described are ascribing new meanings and layered understandings. The critic Doreen Massey developed a progressive concept of space by making her point that places are not static concepts in her article, “A Global Sense of Place” (1991). She explains, “If places can be conceptualized in terms of social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time. They are the processes.”(154)

Cities have nurtured narratives which give us the taste of the region described. Cities carry with them a humongous amount of innovative scholarship with respect to the politics, culture and social structures. *Maximum City : Bombay Lost and Found* by Suketu Mehta, *City Adrift : A Short Biography of Bombay* by Naresh Fernandes, *Aimless in Banaras : Wanderings in India's Holiest City* by Bishwanath Ghosh stand as the most admirable ones. With respect to the music videos, nowadays one can notice them even for tier two cities as visibility on the internet has become a matter of prestige in the present day society. *Amme Bhubaneswariya* on Bhubaneswar, the title songs from the popular Malayalam films *Angamaly Diaries*(2017), *Punyalan Agarbatties* (2013), *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016), *Annayum Rasoolum* (2013) and *Goodalochana* (2017) on Angamaly, Thrissur, Idukki, Kochi, and Kozhikode respectively celebrate the culture and essence of the cities.

The data of this study were the lyrics of ‘*Hyderabad Song - Girl in the City*’, ‘*Hyderabad Poradu*’ and ‘*V6 Special Song On Hyderabad City & Culture*’, and their respective official music videos uploaded on YouTube by Mic TV, Boss Productions, and V6 News Telugu. The following questions derive the present study. 1) How does the semiotic analysis of the music video help us in interpreting the minute implications embedded in the music video? 2) How far can music videos be used as a tool for shaping collective cultural consciousness?

Representation of Hyderabad in the Select Music Videos

Hyderabad is a city that has a lot to offer to the world. Right from history to culture, it is a treasure house of a lot of memorable incidents. The main purpose of these music videos should have been to represent all of this rich heritage to the rest of the world.

V6 Special Song On Hyderabad City & Culture was officially released on March 05, 2015. This song is a wholesome rendition of the city in all its glory. It begins detailing the origin of the name of Hyderabad. It features the metropolitan nature of the city by connecting all the various aspects in the city like the food, culture, people and places.

V6 Special Song on Hyderabad is a clear plea to explore the culture of Hyderabad. It has received positive reviews from the viewers. The other two videos give a positive vibe about the city. *Hyderabadi Poradu* is a rap song that was shot in the streets of Hyderabad with a mix of Telugu and Hindi words. *The Girl in the City* too has a rap portion in the song but it is a smooth going soft beat and pumps in confidence among girls to explore the city with ease.

Though music videos are considered to be self contained texts and sometimes vague, there is a high possibility for unlimited interpretations and open to deciphering. So these are lively entities having a clear narrative that needs to be tackled by the viewer.

Hyderabad history is worth taking note of and those incidents like the Million March, movement for the formation of Telangana state, Gokul chat blasts were represented as something that shaped Hyderabad city. Historical monuments like Charminar, Golconda Fort were repeatedly shown. In order to portray that Hyderabad is also modern there were repeated references to ring roads, over bridges and Necklace Road etc Street photography and graffiti, night clubs and DJ shows were the signs which represent that Hyderabad is a space that caters to the needs of different cultural orientations.

Some of the signature aspects like Hyderabadi Biryani, Osmania Biscuit, Charminar bangles, chai, perfumes, Meetha Pan etc were quite common in the three videos. Tolerance towards all the religions is mentioned as a quality of Hyderabad in all the songs. However special attention is paid to Ganesh festival and Bonalu festival which has gained more popularity after the formation of Telangana state.

The ordering of signs in specific ways like the fast beat of music is accompanied by the time lapse version of the video represents the pace with which life in a city goes and it can be interpreted that it intends to be the actual nature of a city life. Even the backward moment of the video can be interpreted as the welcoming nature of the city - you can always come back to the city.

There are numerous elements in an image such as camera angle, lighting, props etc which can be varied to obtain a totally different image. There is a paradigm behind each of these elements. *Hyderabadi Poradu* is shot in the lanes of Hyderabad and it goes well with it because most of the song has references to friendship and street fights. Adding to that, in ethnomusicology, there is a

constant association of rap music with the streets, and this is reflected in both the songs where there is a rap portion. But *The Girl in the City* was shot in hotspots of Hyderabad city like Necklace Road, Liberty Chaurasta, because it is more about the city. The introductory part of the song has so many things that are quite optimistic. The kite with a happy face, rising sun amidst the towering buildings, 'Be Positive' tag, happy faces of kids and old men, childish deeds, reverse screenplay in some instances, flying a kite at the end of the song are all the visual cues to enhance the collective understanding of the city life.

The vehicles used for commutation in three videos are different and they reflect a lot with respect to the video. In *Hyderabadi Poradu*, an auto is constantly seen at the backdrop and it is the very sign that auto is a vehicle that is mostly used by the middle class. It also reflects the way they use the vehicle to convey some aspects like groupism in the lanes, gossip at leisure time, etc. The joke which refers to buying petrol for Rs 100 irrespective of the fluctuations in the price of petrol is a typical joke the floated in most of the middle class families. In *V6 Special Song On Hyderabad City & Culture*, the vehicle used for commutation is a cycle. As they go with the classic mode of portraying Hyderabad, a cycle makes an appropriate choice. In *The Girl in the City*, the vehicle used for commuting is a high end bike. It is a mark of grandiosity and goes well with the magnificent city that they portray in the video.

The bombardment of visuals that keep changing in the three videos appeal to the vastness of the exploring capacity of Hyderabad city. Each video makes references to one or the other new thing like *Hyderabadi Poradu* makes reference to Marfa dance, Teenmaar dance and the recent Jimpak Chimpak dance. The rap portion in *The Girl in the City* mentions Patabasti, Koti Chowrasta etc. The fast paced songs incorporated people who are cheerful, gloomy and chill to express all the emotions of the city. Not just the posh areas but also the lanes were portrayed which opine that the real life is in "Behind Banjara."

Witnessing the clear markers of culture like Ganesh puja, the handicrafts, teenmaar dance, rides on Necklace Road, constantly moving to the beats of these highly infectious songs is a sign of rich culture and heritage. Those music videos are to signify the relevance of showcasing the metropolitan nature of the city to the world.

Contrasting With the Flaneur

Baudelaire identified the Flaneur as 'the dilettante observer'. He carried a set of rich associations like the man of leisure, the idler, the urban explorer, the connoisseur of the street. ("Flâneur"). However, the idea or the imaginative concept of the Flaneur was contested. Some associated Flaneur with the

idea of wanderlust but restricting it to the cities. Others saw Flaneur as the privileged few who enjoy every part of the place he visits. Finding the parallels, the Flaneur among women is the Flaneuse. The Flaneur came into being because of Baudelaire's fascination with Poe's story. The protagonist in the story is observing a mundane urban street from inside the glass window of a cafe until he decides to walk out and engage a man of the crowd.

According to Benjamin, the Flaneur is the person that ignores the rush hour, hanging around to observe the crowds. The Flaneur is the person who removes themselves from the process of production to see the life happening around them. (Idnany). But when these music videos are concerned, all those who were portrayed are from the city and they live and survive in the city. So, the authenticity of the content, the feelings they had towards the city, their associations with the city life is unquestionable.

Benjamin's Flaneur emblem is to a large extent a construct - a collection of attributes, real and imagined around a 'vanished historical entity.' (Birkets 166). This attribute to 'a vanished historical entity' is in contrast to one of the most prospering and culturally vibrant cities, Hyderabad. As one can examine, the nature of the Flaneur and the attributes he was associated with don't completely resonate with the ever enchanting Hyderabad city.

Conclusion

All these can be seen as visual cues that are familiar to the general public which forms the basic cultural significance of the city. Places gain their significance and specificities in relation to the wider social relations and each city is a unique product of relations in which it happens to be enmeshed from time to time. Though cities like Hyderabad are imbued with a sense of rigidity, fixity and rootedness in a geographical sense, in actuality, they can never be divorced from the more fluid social forces and cultural representations that are attached to them. The very act of sticking to symbols and motives that only remind us of the positive aspects of the city is to evoke close affinity towards the culture of Hyderabad. These familiar signs will have profound implications on our mind and they reflect in most of the day to day conversations and that is how these music videos transform the normal consumers into cultural ambassadors. This seems to be a pattern where in the collective cultural consciousness is formed, framed and shaped among the people who occupy the city scape. Furthermore, it acts as a tool of nostalgia for all those who shared the same space and left for better avenues.

The fact that the selected songs are in the regional language, which is Telugu, would have been a reason for their not so impressive viewership. It is a positive sign that Hyderabad city has got three music videos among which one is a wholesome depiction of the city and the other two have gendered perspectives. The song and music video of *V6 Special Song On Hyderabad City & Culture* has a huge

potential as a teaching aid in schools where they can showcase the culture and heritage of Hyderabad city. It is a good gesture to promote these music videos so that they draw some attention and give some crisp idea of the cities. One drawback in all these three videos is that none of them showcased the higher educational institutions, except for Osmania University in Hyderabad, when it was blessed with NALSAR, IIT, IIIT, TISS, ISB, University of Hyderabad etc and Nehru Zoological Park.

Urban Historian, Mumford in *The Culture of Cities (1938)* declared “The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: It is the seat of temple, the market, and hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order...” So, in modern society, representation is quite important and these music videos are avenues to let the world know about this magnificent city, Hyderabad.

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