UNIT 16 REPRESENTATION AND MUSIC VIDEOS

Structure

16.0 Introduction

16.1 Learning Outcomes

16.2 Music and Indian Society

16.3 Reach and Popularity of Music Videos

16.4 Elements of a Music Video

- 16.4.1 Audio Elements
- 16.4.2 Visual Elements
- 16.4.3 Content

16.5 Representation of Various Segments

- 16.5.1 Gender
- 16.5.2 Race
- 16.5.3 Sexuality

16.6 Impact of Music Videos

- 16.6.1 On Producers
- 16.6.2 On Consumers

16.7 Alternative Music Industry

16.8 Analysing Music Videos

16.9 Pedagogical Approaches

16.10 Let Us Sum Up

16.11 Further Readings

16.12 Keywords

16.13 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

16.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to the world of music videos, their reach and their impact on society. To begin with, you will learn about how music videos are produced and consumed. We will explore various music video elements and analyse how they impact the final product. Then, we will discuss the content of these videos and examine their representation of different segments of society. We will then analyse the impact of these videos on consumers and producers. Lastly, you will be introduced to analysing music videos by yourself and discover an alternate music industry.

16.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the expanse of the Indian music video industry;
- identify various elements of music video production;

- ascertain the representation of different social segments in music videos;
- distinguish between the mainstream and alternative music industry; and
- analyse music videos.

16.2 MUSIC AND INDIAN SOCIETY

Music has been an integral part of Indian culture. With classical Indian music devoting ragas to different times of the day and seasons, to musical narratives in folk tales, music is not only the thread and glue between the vast heterogeneous cultures in India, but it is also a meter for the cultural and language and religious diversity in the subcontinent. Music has been an inseparable part of life, from lullabies to newborn babies, songs sung during crop harvesting, and mourning songs accompanying funeral rites. *Bhakti* and *Sufi* movements utilised music to spread religion, and *nritya nati*ons were a popular form of entertainment before the advent of mass media. The films from the Indian subcontinent are uniformly classified under the musical genre due to the inseparable song and dance routine.

The music industry in India started in the early twentieth century with the production and sales of music records played on gramophones. You may recall seeing one in a period film. Gradually, the records were replaced by magnetic audio cassettes, which could be played on a tape recorder, and then compact discs (CDs), which needed a CD player to run. Today, the Internet has become the most popular medium for listening to music. With the rising popularity of song streaming services, the industry's value is estimated to be 23 billion INR by the end of 2023. The industry thrives 70 per cent on film music, 30 per cent on the Indi-pop genre, and a minuscule percentage on other formats.

Music videos are short videos, around 5 minutes long, featuring the picturisation of a song track. You may think of them as advertisements for the film or the artist, and like any other advertising method, they aim to increase film sales or the music album. On the Internet, music videos ensure hits and views on the songs.

16.3 REACH AND POPULARITY OF MUSIC VIDEOS

As Indian cinema thrives on music, it has been a practice in the film industry for the songs to be picturised elaborately and lavishly, packed with eye-catching choreography, opulent sets or picturesque locations and beautiful costumes. These videos may or may not have relevance to the story and plot. The origin of music videos can be traced to *Awara*(1951), which had a nine-minute-long song shot as a dream sequence. As discussed earlier, music videos are also seen as an excellent vehicle for film publicity. They efficiently give a brief peek into the film's lead pair's chemistry, are packed with catchy lyrics set to hummable tunes and are choreographed with imitable signature steps.

If you ask your parents, they would fondly remember the days of *Chitrahaar*, a program on the National Television Channel *Doordarshan* in the 80s that played videos of popular songs from films. Globalisation in the '90s saw the rise of channels explicitly dedicated to music and played music videos all day long, such as MTV and Channel V. These channels had programming catering to various genres of music videos and

were not only seen as platforms for film publicity but was also instrumental in promoting the Indi pop music, which otherwise had very few platforms for reaching to the target audience. Singers like Alisha Chenoy, Biddu, Daler Mehndi, etc., gained popularity due to these channels during this era. Coming to the public eye with their music videos, these artists made their way to the popular film industry in no time.

Stills from the dream sequence of the movie Awaara (Courtesy: Shemaroo Youtube)

Today, these music videos comprise a major portion of the media production industry. Budget allocations and, thus, production standards are high, and the videos are shot especially at foreign locations. At times, local artists and talents are also hired to give an exotic look to the video, and costumes, make-up, and hair also set trends across the country.

Activity - 1

You must have seen short reels on social media of people, including celebrities, dancing to the tunes of a popular song. What do you think is the purpose of this? Why are people shooting and uploading these videos? What does this signify?

Check Your Progress: 1

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. What is a music video?

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2. How do you think globalisation affected the music industry in India?

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16.4 ELEMENTS OF A MUSIC VIDEO

While enjoying a music video, one does not consider the elements used in its making. But the basic elements and their composition create an impactful music video. Music videos are also produced like any other audio-visual media production. While the audio track is the primary product, the video becomes inseparable as it makes them more engaging, entertaining, relatable and shareable across many social media platforms driven by visuals. Not only are these videos broadcast on television and shared on social media, but they also inspire a lot of dance routines. The following are the elements of a music video:

16.4.1 Audio Elements

The first and most important component is the audio track. The audio track comprises a lyrical song complimented by a combination of musical instruments. The songwriter first writes the song and then sings by a couple of singers, mostly a solo or a duet backed with a choir if needed. At times, the writer and singer are the same. Then, the music producer records the singing and the orchestra's instruments, simultaneously or separately, to be mixed during post-production.

Post-production of the track includes sweetening the audio, where the human voice is treated with various filters to sound better. Think of it as using photo editing software on photographs. After treating all sounds separately, they are mixed to form one track. Today, much music is also produced electronically or digitally and mixed along. Lastly, copies of the soundtrack are made and shared with the producers to create a supplementing video.

16.4.2 Visual Elements

The video production team listens to the song and decides on a storyline and treatment for the video. Sometimes, the song narrates a story, making it easier to picture it for the shoot. For example, a song about a sportsperson's struggle, time spent in practice, and gradual road to victory can be easily shot. Sometimes, the song is theme-based, but the video contains a storyline. For example, a romantic song can be pictured with a simple love story. Lastly, the song could be thematic, and the video could be a dance routine or a montage that does not necessarily narrate a story.

The video producers start looking for locations, actors and crew for the shoot. A video might be shot at a distant foreign location or in front of a green screen within an indoor studio. The green screen is replaced with graphics or required scenery in post-production. The indoor studio would facilitate ease of handling equipment and lighting, while location shoot poses challenges as one may need to lug the equipment to the top of the mountain or at a beach.

When the storyline and cast are finalised, a choreographer is hired to teach the actors or dancers the dance steps. If the song is of the hip-hop genre, one would need to hire a hip-hop-trained dancer as a choreographer, and if the song is a Rajasthani folk song,

one would need a dancer trained as a folk dance artist. The choreographer and director plan and rehearse the entire video before going to the location to save the rehearsing time. On the other hand, make-up artists, costume designers, art directors, etc., are also planned simultaneously. After all this planning, the team shoots at the location.

Post-production of a video involves editing the shot footage set to the audio track. While editing a music video, the editors need to keep the beats or flow of the music in mind to achieve a rhythm in the video edit. The edit could be fast and energetic or slow, depending on the mood of the music. Special effects and graphics are added to the video if necessary for the narrative.

16.4.3 Content

Music videos are generally of three types:

1. Performance-based: These types of music videos have the artist performing the song, and this includes singing, playing an instrument and, at times, dancing as well. The band or background dancers could support them. These videos are usually used to showcase the artists' skills.
2. Narrative-based: These music videos are based on a story performed by actors or, sometimes, with the artist. These are usually short stories based on the theme of romance. To add a bit of variety, these videos could be shot in exotic locations or with many close-ups.
3. Abstract: These videos are based on an idea and use abstract imagery and symbolism to show the concept. Philosophical in nature, these videos depend on the audience for interpretation.

Have you ever wondered why most of the popular songs and videos are focused on themes of romance?

While the target audience for any segment of the entertainment sector is vast, spanning a vast population, the youth has the buying capacity to spend on film tickets or music albums and time to devote to leisurely entertainment. Keeping this target audience in mind, the songwriters usually write songs about issues and themes popular with the youth. This is why romance is the most popular, ranging from love at first sight to heartbreak. Other popular genres are life struggle/ inspirational songs, patriotic songs, and songs based on other relationships, such as friendship, sibling love, etc.

16.5 REPRESENTATION OF VARIOUS SEGMENTS

We have discussed the content of the music videos and their broad categories. Like any other media text, music videos are also a way of representing various segments of society. Representation is basically how these segments are portrayed on screen vis-a-vis their counterparts. Let us see how music videos in India represent gender, race and sexuality.

16.5.1 Gender

Picture this: a peppy song about the beauty of a woman, how the boy/man is mesmerised seeing her for the first time and falls in love with her. Towards the end, they dance their way into the sunset. Sounds familiar? Do you see the stereotypical roles associated

with gender? How is a man supposed to woo, and a woman is supposed to be so beautiful that she needs to be wooed? Music videos pick this formula and rehash it with many permutations and combinations by adding more narrative elements.

Examples of hypersexualisation and de-individualisation (Source: YRF Youtube)

The videos usually hypersexualise, de-individualise and show women as the subordinates of men. You would wonder, but you would easily recall seeing a male singer crooning away in an exotic location and female dancers prancing around skimpily clothed. There would be more women than men, all synchronised to the lyrics and beats. The female background dancers don't have individual identities, nor is their presence in any way important for the narrative in the video. Thus, women appear as a mass, and men appear as individuals. Also, the men would lead the dance or the narrative, and women would be the aides to the plot. They are usually shown as passive participants. Of course, exceptions exist, but they would touch upon these themes, even if distantly.

All actors would be shown in a sexualised light with skimpy clothing, erotic dance steps and lascivious expressions. Moreover, the camera would also shoot their bodies in close-up shots, emphasising certain body parts to entice the audience further. While this applies to men, it is more commonly the women who have to bear the brunt of catering to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989). This makes the actors on the screen appear highly sexualised. At times, music videos from films are also known as Item songs. The term 'item' is associated with a beautiful woman in Mumbai slang, thus underlining the objectification of women. These songs rarely directly relate to the film's story or plot.

Several researchers doing a content analysis of music videos from the West or regional Indian music industries throw further light on this matter.

16.5.2 Race

The issue of race in India is not upfront like in the West. There is no clear distinction between the population, like the Black and the White communities. But our colonial past affects our perception of race to a great extent. Being ruled by the British for over two centuries has instilled in our society an awe of white skin or fairness. So much so that fairness creams found a huge market in the South Asian subcontinent.

Society accepts the Western standards of beauty, that is, light skin, brown eyes, and straight brown hair, and these standards find reinforcement in the popular media. Try to picture a male or female actor from your favourite music videos. You would recall them as having an almost Caucasian complexion, regardless of the language the video is in.

But moving ahead, the representation of communities is a huge issue in films, music videos and other popular media platforms. The year was 2007, and one of the most prominent actresses of her heyday, Madhuri Dikshit, was returning with the film '*Aaja Nachle'* after a hiatus of several years. Film publicity began with a music video for a song with the same name, as Dikshit is a renowned dancer. The lyrics mentioned the word *'teli'* (Hindu caste which makes/sells oil) in a line. A considerable uproar followed as protests erupted nationwide against using this word. A particular community that felt the song was portraying them poorly objected to the film's release altogether. The song had to be rerecorded by editing out that specific word and was rereleased following the furore. This is one of the many examples where a community in India has been hurt or offended by their representation in the lyrics/video of a song. Several songs must be re-edited and reshot to appease the hurt communities.

16.5.3 Sexuality

Following the Supreme Court's landmark judgement of decriminalising homosexuality in 2018, much popular media started seeing depictions of the third gender. The OTT industry has further created niches of audiences that can access specific content, and the inclusion of homosexual characters in narratives on the web has increased quite a manifold over the years. But music videos have yet to witness this revolution. About 100 per cent of videos have narratives focused on heterosexual romance.

Yet, surprisingly, in the background dancers, one may see women touching each other provocatively, signifying a nod to lesbian relationships. Still, the opposite, that is, gay or male-to-male inclination, is rarely ever seen in the video. This could be because most producers are male and create content to cater to the male gaze. Popular content, especially music videos, has a long way to go to attain a fair representation of people from all sexualities on screen.

Activity - 2

Pick up a popular music video in your native language. Watch it and check if the points mentioned above regarding the depiction of gender, race, and sexuality hold in its case.

16.6 IMPACT OF MUSIC VIDEOS

16.6.1 On Producers

As discussed earlier, music videos also act as a vehicle for publicity. When a part of a film, these videos help publicise the film, and when shot for a pop artist, these videos become a method of carrying the audio track to the television screens and thus to a larger audience. A video has a far greater capacity to hook the audience than an audio track as it interacts with the sense of sight and hearing. The producers spend a lot of money shooting these songs, which are often credited with the film's success.

The popularity of these music videos has always led to a steep rise in ticket sales or album sales for the songs, translating today to YouTube hits. Such has been the success of these music videos. T Series, a company that used to be in the music production business and later into music video production, is the YouTube channel with the most significant number of subscribers worldwide. Several singers who could not find opportunities to sing in films started their careers with independent music albums, e.g., Sonu Nigam, Sona Mohapatra, Kailash Kher, etc. Moving ahead of the singers, many dancers have made their careers by dancing in these music videos, starting from Helen to Nora Fatehi.

These music videos help make money by attracting viewers to films or YouTube channels and brand placements. Brands associated with luxury items are seen endorsed by celebrities in these music videos, and thus, they also manage to reach their target audience base. The companies very selectively associate with artists who make music related to the mood/theme of the brand. Many tourist resorts allow shooting these music videos on their premises to attract more tourists yearly.

16.6.2 On Consumers

When one media product can be used to advertise so many other products, it won't be far-reaching to say that its impact would also be multipronged. To begin with, it is a common sight to see family members and friends dancing away to popular music tracks during weddings and other social events. A few years ago, parents used to enrol their kids in dance classes to learn dance steps so that they could perform on stage, in social gatherings, and, if lucky, on a TV talent show. Today, several YouTube channels host video tutorials of dance or teach Zumba, thus institutionalising the acceptance and popularity of these music videos. Parents videotape their kids, upload them on social media platforms, and share them in family groups. Thus it would not be a long shot to say that the audience interacts with these music videos much beyond just watching them or humming later. But how this affects the audience subliminally has been a matter of research in the past decade.

Studies suggest that music plays a vital role in identity formation in young people. Adolescents choose their music based on age, culture, peer exposure and mental status. Many people have reported listening to music to elevate their mood and create an ambience. These facts highlight the importance of music and music videos on the psychology of individuals. We have now discussed the music videos' content in earlier segments. What do you think happens when youth are exposed to such content?

Research on the impact of music videos establishes that the youth is more likely to pick up habits of smoking, drinking and indulging in substance abuse if they are exposed to music videos showing the same. You would easily recall songs and videos about alcohol, partying and getting 'high'. More often than not, these songs and videos advocate indulging in 'risky' behaviour to appear cool.

Moving further, young people are also likely to view gender in the manner showcased in the video. This implies that men view women in a sexualised, subordinate light, while women have reported lesser self-esteem in the case of higher exposure to music videos. Self-esteem is directly related to them comparing their bodies with the ones shown in these videos. These videos build up a lot of expectations in teenagers about their romantic lives and personas. When these expectations are not met, it results in low self-confidence and, at times, other related mental health issues.

Lastly, with due research, these videos have also been held responsible for sexualising children from a very young age due to their reach through TV channels, the Internet on Smartphones and last but not least, endorsement by elders in family gatherings. Most research has been conducted in Western countries with few Indian counterparts, but the effects have resounded everywhere.

Check Your Progress: 2

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. Name the audio-visual elements of a music video.

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2. How is the female gender represented in the music videos?

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16.7 ALTERNATIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

While film music has always comprised the famous school of music in India, Independent music artists have always coexisted on the fringes of the mainstream music industry. Artists who could not get enough funding to produce the music they like, or those who did not cater to the mass audience, lie in this segment. Many genres of music, ranging from *Ghazal* classical to devotional music, belong to this alternative music industry. With time, technology has simplified music recording and made the process less expensive, helping the Alternative music industry. The decade of the 90s brought many indie pop bands to the limelight. A few *Gazhal* artists, such as Jagjit Singh and Pankaj Udhas, have also made their way to the parallel film movement. In contrast, Indie pop singers such as Mohit Chauhan and Hariharan also made a name for themselves in mainstream cinema.

Artists from the alternative music industry (Courtesy: IMDb, Rakeshkonni, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons)

Technologies like Bluetooth file sharing, seen as a threat to piracy by the mainstream industry, became responsible for spreading the popularity of alternate music. Many

singers who lacked methods to reach a mass audience became popular with the help of discreet file sharing. Today, song streaming services and low-budget OTT or YouTube productions have become excellent launch vehicles for independent music artists. With internet penetration rising by the day, indie artists like Prateek Kuhad and Shirley Setia are also becoming household names and breaking the hegemony of the popular music industry.

16.8 ANALYSING MUSIC VIDEOS

Having discussed the wide usage of music videos by music producers and the heavy impact on consumers, viewing them wisely becomes a matter of great concern. Like any other media content, music videos must be analysed before consumption. When the impact is profound, it implies the importance of the content.

To analyse a music video, start by watching the video track and listening to the audio track separately. Here are a few questions that you might want to raise by yourself while analysing the music videos:

- Are the song and video based on the same theme? When you first heard the song, how did you picture its video would be?
- What is the narrative of the video? Can you describe it in one line?
- Is the narrative biased or uses any stereotypes?
- Does the narrative occur in the real world or a make-believe fantasy world? Why did the director choose this setting?
- Look at the way people are dressed, the actors and the singer. Do they dress up similarly in real life?
- Observe their actions. Would they be doing these things in actuality?
- If their dress and behaviour are not life-like, why or to what benefit has it been portrayed?
- How has it been shot? Do you see a lot of close-ups? If yes, of what?
- What emotions does the music video induce in you? Would you want to see the video again?
- Who do you think the video is targeted at? How are they catering to that particular audience group?

Activity - 3

Think of your favourite music video. Analyse it with the help of factors and processes shared in this segment. Discuss the results with your family and friends.

Check Your Progress: 3

Note: 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. What is the alternative music industry?

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2. What is the need for analysing music videos?

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16.9 PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

(Instructions for the course counsellers)

This unit has emphasised music videos from the vantage point of the elements as well as the impact of the elements on users and producers. The pedagogical interventions for learners can be determined on three levels- production, representation and interpretation. Some approaches are:

1. Production and Representation
    - Examine the content of the lyrics, including a description of how the images in the video relate to the lyrics and melody of the song and the teacher's interpretation of the lyrics.
    - Examine the technical components of the video, considering the use of colour, lighting, editing (pace, juxtaposition, cutting on the beat), special effects, and the connection between audio and video components.
    - Examine the social issues dealt with in the video, with consideration given to how those messages might change if people of a different social class or race were included or if the male and female characters switched roles.
2. Interpretation: Interpret the ideological and value messages being presented in a video using the following questions as a guide:
    - Does the video present the beliefs of one particular group?
    - Describe the representations of men and women in the video. Are any stereotypes used? If so, to what effect?
    - Who is in a position of power? Who is not? Who benefits as a result?
    - Does the video exclude any groups of people or their beliefs?
    - What definitions of happiness, success, or morality are applied?

16.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you were introduced to music videos in a new light. You were taken through various elements comprising these videos, their uses and their impacts on consumers and producers. We also discussed the representation and inclusion of multiple sectors of society in these music videos and explored their repercussions on consumers and producers. We also learned to analyse these music videos for better consumption and understanding. Finally, we explored India's music industry, including alternative music.

16.11 KEYWORDS

Nritya Natika	:	Traditional theatre format with music and dance
Chitrahar	:	A weekly program on *Doordarshan* in the 1980s–90s, which played videos of songs from popular films.
Hypersexualised	:	A person whose mannerisms, costume, and picturisation are all in a very sexual light.
Bluetooth	:	A technology that allows for the short-range wireless exchange of files
***Sufi* and *Bhakti* Movements**	:	Religious movements in Islam and Hinduism that preached through music.

16.12 FURTHER READINGS

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16.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress: 1

1. Music videos are audio-visual productions based on a song. They usually have a song and dance routine.
2. Globalisation in the ’90s saw the rise of channels explicitly dedicated to music videos, such as MTV and Channel V, which had programming catering to various genres of music videos.

Check Your Progress: 2

1. Lyrics, human voices, and music tracks (accompaniment of various instruments) are audio elements of a music video.

2. The videos usually hypersexualise, de-individualise and make women the subordinates of men.

Check Your Progress: 3

1. The alternative music industry consists of independent artists who still need to produce music that would become popular with many people.
2. Given the impact of music videos on people's psychology and personal development, one should analyse music videos like any other media message.

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