From Life in a Metro to Ludo- Anurag Basu’s Hyper-Narrative Growth

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Hyper narrative or hyper-link cinema is style of cinema which employs multi linear narrative structures. The term was coined by author Alissa Quart, who used it in her review of the film Happy Endings (2005) for a film journal Film Comment in 2005. Film critic Roger Ebert popularized the term when reviewing the film Syriana in 2005. This paper aims to apply the term to Indian hyper-link cinema. From multitude of hyper-linked cinema, paper will focus on works of Anurag Basu, who has produced two hyper-linked films over lapse of 13 years, Life in a Metro (LIM) in 2007 and Ludo in 2020. Researcher will attempt to assess several aspects of the genre in the comparative study.

Talking about the characters in the film Basu has repeated several character types from LIM to Ludo. Character of Shruti meeting Monty in a cafe is the repeated in Ludo through the characters of Ahana and Ayush. Both women are in a search of a perfect match, fulfilling all their requirements. In the journey of finding this match gradually both of them come to terms with their own definition of right. Society had fed them with a set formula of a husband which they had accepted up to an extend until they realize that they need their own unique formulas.

Although the characters are repeated, there are seminal changes made in the later type. Shruti’s journey is simple in a manner that she falls for a wrong man, a gay man in particular. This betrayal leads her to discover genuine honesty in Bittu. Here one need to criticize the helpless state of gay men portrayed in a very negative light. Thus the realisation is coming through external factors. In comparison Ahana’s story begins with her being engaged to the type of person who she has dreamt of marrying since childhood. Until she finds a sex tape with an ex going viral on internet. But on realizing this truth her husband not only accepts her but even understand her predicaments in searching for the tape. But ultimately she ends up with the person she had never wanted to be with in the first place. This realization of her own definition of perfect comes from within, rather than from without.
Secondly, characters of estranged married couple and husband cheating on wife is the similar narrative pattern appearing in both the movies. Even after revelation of the cheating behaviour of the husband, Shikha’s character is portrayed as a submissive wife returning back to husband. On the other hand Arsuhi’s character in Ludo is a way more progressive compared to Shikha. Although in the entire movie she is trying to save her husband but in the end it is only through her character that the husband is killed. When police was unable to give any justice, it is apt that it comes through the character who was faulted. Positive progression in a women character is commendable on Basu’s part.

Husband character in the equation in both the movies are drawn as extremely insensitive individuals. Back story of husband’s affair is elaborated in LIM, but not in Ludo. Extra-marital girlfriend played by Neha is a developed character in the movie. But she sails the same boat as Shikha, as Ranjeet is attached to none. As the result Neha even attempts to take her life. In Ludo girlfriend played by Sambhvi’s character along with her husband as well as Arushi’s husband are utterly selfish people who can commit anything for their personal gain.

Thus in both the narratives it is the character of women whose journey is the prime focus, men are the helping hands. Women are at the centre and in Ludo this becomes more enhanced, as women start to make their own decisions. As not just the primary wife character, even the girlfriend character is more powerful in Ludo. She need not try to commit suicide anymore, her helplessness is altered to bravery.

Another common character in both the narration is wanna be character. New comer in the city who wants to make a his-her mark. Rahul in LIM is using his flat as a means to rise up the ladder, similarly Rahul (sharing the same name as the characteristics) and Sheeja of Ludo, carry and run with the bag of money in the entire movie, in an attempt to come out their middle class life. These characters have a dreams in their lives which ultimately does reach to its culmination by the end of the movie.

Apart from these three similar character types, new characters introduced in Ludo are police-chor pair common to many other hyper-narrations like Super Deluxe, Mannagram, Mumbai Meri Jaan etc. Thus even though this character type is not introduced in LIM, it is quite common in hyper-narrative genre. Another new pair of characters introduced are father-daughter relationship, handled in quite a sensitive manner. To balance the addition of father-daughter pair another pair omitted from the formula is that of old couple re-visiting their love played by Rucha and Anmol.

Hyper- linked cinema is known for its unique narrative style as it is links characters from different vogues of life in seamless whole. Narrative of this kind propounds the idea of organism-as-a-whole-in-environments, given by General Semantics. In Science and Sanity Korzybski elucidates on interrelatedness of events:

The structure of the actual world is such that it is impossible entirely to isolate an object…..we must accept the Einstien-Minkowski four dimensional language, for ‘space’ and ‘time’ cannot be separated imperially, and so we must have a language of similar structure and consider the fact of the world as series of interrelated ordered events, to which, as above explained, we must ascribe ‘structure’. (Korzybski 57)

Super Deluxe, prime example of hyper-linked cinema also concludes on similar lines, that how actions-inactions of individuals are affected by as well as affecting other individuals.

That everything is just one, man and women, soil and stone, dog and cat, even you and me. You know, every cell in your body behaves like it’s an individual, put those cells put together makes you one individual. Similarly, all of us are tiny bits of the one.

In a world where so much good exists, why does evil co-exist? It is because they are one and the same. For instance if i tell you it is night time now, it is true for the half of the world, and lie for the other half. That shows that how even the truth is limited. What is considered taboo today will be considered tomorrow. That is the way of world.
Linking of narratives becomes more refined in Basu’s second hyper-lined *Ludo*. In LIM most of the characters are connected either through personal relationships or professional. Shruti, Shikha and Ranjeet are related personally, as Shikha and Shruti are sisters while Shikha and Ranjeet are the unhappy married couple. On the other hand Ranjeet, Neha and Rahul works in a multinational, in which Ranjeet is physically linked with Neha while Rahul emotionally. Ranjeet is the common element in both the spheres. These worlds collide as Neha is Shruti’s roommate. Older generation love portrayed through Anmol and Rucha doesn’t affect the narrative. Thus linking of world apart narratives becomes more refined in *Ludo*.

In *Ludo* narratives of green and blue stories are entirely changed by just being in vicinity of Sattu bhaiya. Rahul, sheltering under a roof where the murder happens is swept under Sattu Bhaiya’s wave of new changes. Similarly Pinky’s husband’s car being at the crime scene makes him the suspect for murder. This murder scene changes the course of a narrative people in a moment. Several examples of narratives colliding during the course of the movie are: mall scene where green and blue stories collide as Rahul is being scolded, Pinky complaining about husband and Sheeja is escalating down. In another crossroads scene, blue-yellow-red stories cross each other’s paths as blue is chased by goons, red chased by police while yellow is crossing by. Yellow and green story sharing the hotel when yellow is searching for the camera and green is putting up a deception to gather money. Later all the stories gather the Rainbow Inn, combing all the colours of a *Ludo* board.

Basu’s progression from combining professional sphere with personal sphere in LIM to linking characters through a goon binds the narrative in more complex manner. Connecting individuals from extended spheres in *Ludo* can also be portrayed through connecting languages, as Shejja’s Malyali.

Along with interactive narrative progression in Basu, there is evolution in the conceptualization of theme that binds the narrative. LIM has the theme love running through it stories. Various aspects of love are pondered upon: married love, extra marital love, gay love, unexpected love, old love etc. In *Ludo* theme is of debate between paap and punya. As mentioned in Super Deluxe, that paap and punya are just perceptions, *Ludo* follows the same philosophy. Narrators in the form of Chitragupta and Yamraj (played by Basu himself) puts though provoking dialogue on good vs evil, and comes to conclusion that there is no demarcation.

Talking about the symbols of the film, *Ludo* as the name suggests uses the Ludo board as its marker. Four different stories are coloured (red, green, yellow, blue) according the colours on the board. Background, costume, props, are set according to the colour coding. Alissa Quart in her review ‘HAPPY ENDINGS: The post nuclear family according to Don Roos’ speaks about the use of split screen by hyper narrators in order to showcase the linking. it is aptly used in both the movie. Ludo board itself is divided into sections, rightly imitating the style hyper narrative.

In LIM metro itself is the symbol of hot pot where people from all vogues of life come together. As Kiran Rao another hyper narrator in context of her film Dhobi Ghat says that:

Set in Mumbai, one of the biggest melting pots of the country, where people from every part of India come to try their luck, *Dhobi Ghat* tries to portray the city in its true colours through four people who come from very different backgrounds. When their worlds intersect, this leaves them forever altered.

Many other hyper-narratives like *Managram, Mumbai Meri Jaan, Dhobi Ghat* are located in such mega cities. Public transport in such mega cities is another symbol used by hyper-narrations. In *Managram* meeting in the bus, taxi etc are the symbols of linking characters. LIM has only one character not related to any public or private spheres, that of Aakash. Aakash and Sheekha meeting place are either buses or trains. All the stories are associated in the end on a railway station. Thus
public transport is the means of association. Although Ludo doesn’t have public transport as a character in the movie, but trains appear in background.

LIM makes you feel part of the cities chaos, as it begins with the famous Bombay rains. Ludo in comparison has unearthly feeling of outer world. In the orange glow of the film we feel inhibiting in another world.

By comparing characters, narratives and symbols in detail in both the films we can draw conclusions that Basu has greatly progressed in context of women developing his women characters. Also exploring their internal landscape has added in layering the character. In narrative aspect moving from personal and professional spheres writer broadens his horizon in exploring the characters from different arenas. Another major leap is in the developing of visuals of the film such as split screen, colour coding, thematic narrators etc. Thus comparing and contrasting the genres creator by a same individual over a period of time adds nuisances to the genre and makes us aware about the directorial development.

References