

In the transition from page to screen, the movie *Gumnaam* showcases a skillful reinterpretation of the suspense and mystery found in Agatha Christie's novel *And Then There Were None*. Both mediums employ techniques to keep the audiences intrigued. While Christie's writing remains to be a benchmark for murder mysteries, it is important to talk about how Raja Nawathe brings a Western novel, puts it in front of the Indian audience and makes it a significant success. The story talks about eight strangers who get stranded on a secluded island, only to find it was all scripted. As night falls, a mysterious letter accuses them of various past crimes, and they begin to be murdered one after another. It comes upon the survivors to identify the killer and escape the island. These strangers are carefully chosen to have professions and classes different from each other differing in class and money, similar to Christie, who ensures that "The people invited to Indian Island represent an array of British professions and class strata... [thus trying to show that] homicidal mania is a democratic phenomenon" (Warren, 53).

The film masterfully blends elements of mystery, suspense, comedy, love, and psychology, creating a gripping narrative with atmospheric tension. Lalita Gopalan, in her book *Cinema of Interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema*, discusses how Indian Cinema's sudden song-and-dance sequences effectively entertain the Indian audiences (Gopalan, 2019). While previous studies, like these, on Christie's work and *Gumnaam* have explored differences of the primary texts or talked about the songs broader appeal, this study tries to delve into how visual aesthetics, background scores, and atmospheric cinematography contribute to shaping a groundbreaking murder mystery, setting new standards for Indian suspense thrillers.

Right from the opening scene, director Raja Nawathe, and producer N.N. Sippy employ cinematic techniques to set the stage for a suspenseful and engaging storyline. The sequence

features a well-composed set of shots incorporating close-ups to intensify the building anxiety and quick crosscuts to increase a sense of urgency and mystery. The lighting, with shadowy and dimly lit settings enhance the ominous tone. They act as supporters of the two murders happening in the first four minutes itself. The combination of these elements communicate the film's theme and immediately capture the audience's attention.

The *mise en scène* masterfully crafts a chilling and mysterious atmosphere. The isolated island, surrounded by jungle and water, symbolizes psychological confinement as characters try to seek an escape. The gradually diminishing lighting, especially during murders, intensifies a sense of impending doom. Brightly lit rooms at the start consistently reduce to give way to a dark climax, reflecting the worsening situation until the characters escape, almost like light symbolizes hope. The lighting accentuates the suspense and serves as a visually compelling backdrop. The inclusion of possible supernatural elements, like a "loose spirit" in the jungle, adds an additional layer to the storyline.

The camera techniques used, like the wide-angle shots that capture the vastness of the isolated island, create a sense of claustrophobia and loneliness. The use of dolly shots, in some scenes, allows for smooth and dynamic movement, intensifying the impending danger. This can be clearly seen during the two murders of Kitty and Barrister Rakesh, played by Helen and Pran. They happen in the jungle where the camera frequently tracks and follows characters, instilling a palpable unease for them and the audience. The emphasis on close-up shots of their eyes captures the fear and tension, while quick cuts during crucial moments intensify suspense. The editing style truly contributes to maintaining the pacing and rhythm.

The movie skillfully uses background scores, music, and sound effects to amp up the suspense thriller vibe. Legendary singers like Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammed Rafi, and Asha Bhonsle, added their iconic voices to the film's diverse musical collection, including the rendition of "Gumnaam Hai Koi" (Mangeshkar) making it a Bollywood standout. The song "Jaan Pehechaan Ho" (Rafi) gained international recognition as well, when it featured in the opening scene of the Hollywood film *Ghost World*. The film stars icons like Steve Buscemi and Scarlett Johansson. It acted as an inclusion to a completely new audience, emphasizing its enduring status as a timeless classic. This cross-cultural appeal demonstrated the song's universal popularity, reaching audiences beyond India and showcasing the global influence of Indian music.

Until the late Nineties... the Indian cinema's use of music was perceived ... as its greatest drawback. But today Bollywood's song sequences are regarded as their one truly unique feature and greatest strength. The Bollywood song-and-dance form is gradually being recognized and admired throughout the world... A few years ago, who would have imagined that an offbeat American film like ... *Ghost World* would open with a delirious clip from the high-Sixties Bombay thriller *Gumnaam*.
(Kabir, 43)

The background music sets the stage for mysterious events to unfold. The film mixes diegetic and non-diegetic sounds to create anticipation, especially wherein characters were about to have a run-in with the murderer. The music's rhythm influences the pace of the story, keeping everyone on their toes. In a research paper by Ashis Nandy named *The Popular Hindi Film: Ideology and First Principles* he notes that Indian film stories are “told through a series of incidents which are interwoven through 'artificial' means such as coincidences, accidents and..... through songs or dance” (Nandy, 90) . We see that the songs, especially “Pike Hum Tum Jo Chale” (Bhosle and Mangeshkar) and “Jaane Chaman Shola Badan” (Rafi and Iyengar) are songs that can be seen

as something the characters use to dance to, enjoy and/or distract themselves as well as to keep the audience entertained.

While the whole story keeps moving towards the death of all characters, we see different plotlines branch outwards. With romantic stories between characters like Anand and Asha, played by Manoj Kumar and Nanda, and Barrister Rakesh and Kitty, played by Pran and Helen, we see some hope of them being saved and getting a happy ending. The conversations between Anand and Asha are full of passion and we see a genuine connection form between them. Barrister Rakesh and Kitty end up announcing that they shall get married when they return to “Bombay”, which shows how certain they are about making it out alive from that island. These parallel love stories make the film more than just a suspense thriller.

Another interesting thing to take into consideration is the inclusion of protagonists and antagonists in the storyline. In a study of the differences and similarities between the two primary texts, we see Narendra Kaushik and Shivam Pathak discuss this as well.

Another major difference could be easily noticed in the characterization. The novel only has one type of character which is the protagonist. On the other hand the movie has both, protagonist and antagonist. (Kaushik and Pathak, 6)

It is important to note that while the character of Anand acts as a clear hero, most of the others take on roles that oppose the protagonist, thus serving as antagonists within the narrative and the villain is only known to the audience as well as the characters by the end. We see that Raja Nawathe focuses on coming up with a killer no one could have guessed similar to “Christie... who was praised in contemporary reviews for skillfully introducing the "least likely suspect" in her works.” (Medawar, 11)

The architecture contributes to the aesthetics as well. The bungalow is designed extravagantly with beautiful architecture which acts as a contrast to the outside settings. Costumes and props further enhance character dynamics, reflecting their vulnerability or mysterious nature. We see the character of Anand, played by Manoj Kumar, always dressed up in bright colors like green and red. The color palette, dominated by dark and muted tones, reinforces the ominous mood. The deep greens of the jungle, in contrast to the bright colors worn by the main character, give a sense of hope in darkness and fear.

Similarly, the women- Kitty and Asha, played by Helen and Nanda are also dressed in bright colors. However, their characters offer a striking contrast in their personalities, costumes, and overall presence. Nanda portrays a silent, scared, and reserved demeanor, which can be reflected in her simple and elegant traditional costumes. She is seen as embodying innocence and vulnerability. In contrast, Helen portrays boldness, with her energetic dance sequences and vibrant, daring costumes. She is seen as a cunning woman, befriending the men for her benefit. The juxtaposition of these two characters act as archetypes of women that could be seen in Bollywood stories of the time.

Mehmood's role as the Butler holds significant importance, for the laughs and for his ability to infuse charm into the film. Around that time, Mehmood was widely recognized for his versatile talent in portraying comedic characters. We also see an entire song featuring him and Helen that goes "Hum kaale hai toh kya hua, Dilwale hai" (Mehmood and Mohammed Rafi) which translates to "So what if we are darkly skinned, our love is all the same". Despite its upbeat music, the song can be viewed as negative by some critics who would want to do a study on black skin perceived in Indian cinema.

One such critic, Vedita Cowaloosur in her research paper *Not Quite Black* mentions how there is a “non-existence of positive representations of black skin in popular Bollywood” (Cowaloosur, 79). She goes on to give the example of Mehmood in *Gumnaam* (1965) and says the song portrays Mehmood as a buffoon... who has to prove his worth by glossing over his appearance and emphasizing the bigness of his heart to the woman he is trying to woo Helen who is an Indian actress of Anglo-Burmese descent, whose whiteness contributes to her beauty. (Cowaloosur, 79) Although the views being portrayed by her may be accurate in this modern age, at the time of its release, the song was well received. It went on to become a very popular song too that the Indian audience related a lot to. The character of the Butler also helps our hero in escaping and taking down the villain, so we see his presence being of extreme importance. In addition to bringing comedic relief to the movie, see his character as much more than just that.

In conclusion, upon a deeper and closer examination of the film, we observe that *Gumnaam* (1965) stands as a testament to the power of cinematic storytelling, where the convergence of various elements transforms a classic thriller into an amazing blend of mystery, love, and comedy. Through meticulous attention to visual aesthetics, masterful cinematography, and immersive sound design, the film captivates audiences with its atmospheric tension and gripping narrative. The exploration of romantic subplots, alongside moments of comedic relief, adds depth and dimension to the storyline, enriching the overall viewing experience. It skillfully navigates themes of justice and revenge, portraying the complexities of human nature and the consequences of past actions. *Gumnaam* (1965) continues to be celebrated for its compelling story, memorable songs, and its status as a classic in Indian cinema's suspense thriller genre.

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