

Otherness and Selfhood in Imtiaz Ali's *Highway*

Athira S Kumar

Lecturer in English, Saintgits College of Applied Sciences, Pathamuttom, Kottayam, Kerala (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 January 2019

Keywords

otherness, selfhood, transformation, conflict, identity

Corresponding Author

Email: athirask.03[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Highway is a 2014 Indian road film written and directed by Imtiaz Ali. It tells the story of a girl (Alia Bhatt) who develops Stockholm syndrome after being kidnapped. Veera, a young bride-to-be, is abducted by a common goon, Mahabir, and his men a day prior to her wedding. Far from being terrified of her abductor, Veera discovers an adventurous and liberating life. Road movies trace the internal transformation of their characters. The conflicts that consume are basically internal ones. Road movies are not about what can be seen or verbalized but about what can be felt about the invisible that complements the visible. Identity crisis of the protagonist mirrors the identity crisis of the culture itself. This paper is an attempt to study how a travel with a goon brings in new identity to the protagonist and how herself is transformed from a fragile girl to a strong lady. The condition transforms from the fear of unknown to identifying the real enemy.

1. Introduction

Highway Screened in the Panorama section of the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival, the film released worldwide on 21 February 2014. The film is based on the episode of the same name from the Zee TV anthology series *Rishtey*, starring Aditya Srivastava and Kartika Rane, which was also written and directed by Imtiaz Ali. It tells the story of a girl (Alia Bhatt) who develops Stockholm syndrome after being kidnapped. Upon release the film met with positive reviews, with Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda's performances praised by both audiences and critics alike. Rich Veera steps from her Monsoon Wedding style arrangements for a break with her reluctant fiancé. Crashing into a foggy Delhi night, Veera ventures out to breathe free and gets hijacked by rough criminal Mahabir Bhaati and his group. Choked, tied-up, slapped and starved, Veera's thrown onto an alarming truck that drives off on an endless highway, leaving established society far behind. Road movies directly challenge the culture of conformity. They are about the journey. They are about what can be learned from the other, from those who are different. In a world that increasingly challenges these ideals, the importance of road movies as a form of resistance can't be dismissed. This research is based on the hypothesis that traveling organizes the protagonists' psychology and lives. Identity crisis of the protagonist mirrors the identity crisis of the culture itself. Veera's disinterest in the wedding leaves the audience perplexed. She is not interested in the traditions of the society and her intention to escape is very apparent from the initial shots. The conversation with her fiancé reinstates the same. An identity crisis prevails in her character. The film is about the discovery of oneself while traveling. The protagonist gets a new way of looking into life.

2. Reinstating identity through travel

Veera Tripathi (Alia Bhatt) is the little girl of a Delhi-based rich business head honcho. One day before her wedding, she is abducted from a petroleum station off a parkway, while her life partner, who she didn't generally adore, sits in the vehicle shook with dread. The person who takes her frenzy when they

discover that her dad has interfaces in the legislature. In any case, Mahabir Bhaati (Randeep Hooda), one of the abductors, is eager to take the necessary steps to oversee this.

The men constantly move Veera through various urban communities, to abstain from being followed by police. As the days pass by, Veera discovers harmony and a recently discovered opportunity, which befuddles and baffles Mahabir. Veera ends up happy with her captors, to the point that she trusts in Mahabir with the revulsion's of her youth, when she was explicitly abused by her own uncle as a nine-year-old. She sees the abduction as a surprisingly beneficial turn of events, since she gets the opportunity to encounter life and find herself.

In the end, when the police compellingly look through the truck, Veera, astounding even herself, covers up. She presumes that she adores the voyage and wouldn't like to return to her family and old life. Gradually, she unwinds Mahabir's story in odds and ends. His dad manhandled both, him when he was a kid, and his mom was used as a sex slave by the rich proprietors. Mahabir got away and has stayed away forever.

Mahabir gradually lets down his guard and starts to think about Veera, and his indignation blurs away gradually. He attempts to abandon her at a police headquarters in one of the little precipitous towns they stop in. In any case, Veera won't and demands remaining with Mahabir. Together, they travel and he begins to experience passionate feelings for her. They remain in a ridge house and Veera uncovers that one of her numerous insane dreams was dependably to have a little home in the mountains. Mahabir ends up passionate seeing the way Veera thinks about him, helping him to remember his mom. Both rest calmly that night, free from their separate frequenting pasts. Be that as it may, the exact next morning, police arrive and, amid the disorder, shoot Mahabir, to which Veera responds sincerely and emphatically.

She later is taken back to her folks' home, where she is encompassed by her relatives, including her life partner. She at long last goes up against her uncle who badgering her as a youngster. The revelation at her family that she was abused by her paternal uncle was not a shock as her mother knew about it. 'Otherness' in the family is very obvious. She was abused by her Uncle from childhood to teenage. The worst part of it is her mother knew and silenced her for the reputation of the family. She hollers and separates as she asks her dad for what good reason he cautioned her just about perils presented by outcasts, while the genuine risk was from insiders, the general population who had encompassed her since youth. She goes out and goes to live in the mountains. She begins her very own factory, purchases a house and lives there. The film closes with Veera taking a gander at the mountains, at that point the sky. Shutting her eyes, she sees her nine-year-old self playing joyfully on the slope. A kid (Mahabir) joins her. She watches them play, making harmony with both the man she adored and their common youth frames.

The conflict of character in Road movie is internal. They have to fight with themselves to get over the untoward events in the life. Veera has an identity crisis when the movie begins but later gains the power to overcome that fear. Mahabir is portrayed as a character who is not happy with his life and frustrated to see any woman. He says that he can't trust any rich man as they exploit the financially weaker section. The two characters rise beyond the situation and learn that their weakness should not subside them. Mahabir gets over his hatred for his father and thinks about a new life. Veera fulfils her dream of living a new life even if it is for a day. Later we see Veera defies her uncle and reveals to her family and fiancé

about her sexual abuse by her uncle. Veera lives a life as she wants and identifies her real enemy.

3. Conclusion

The article centers around the developing and moving structures crosswise over fleeting, topographical and gendered conditions of generation, distinguishing that the street motion picture builds up a nonexistent association with real settings; one that is, in itself, very suggestive as a method for portrayal. With reference to explicit film models, this fanciful measurement to the anecdotal street film, and the idea of classification film as a method of execution, empower it to imagine or extend emotional or quelled settings of car portability; settings that are in this example less open to increasingly target methods of perception and recording. Travelers are not only exiles seeking to find their identity in escaping, but also missionaries waiting to be gunned down by the ignorant hordes in the ruthless outlands. By various portrayals and stylistic choices, road movies create a realm of self-realization and identifying of the other. These places are positioned between the beginning of the journey and the desired final destination. They are demarcated as unimportant because they are neither here nor there, and are thus undesirable to live in. And in these realms, violence and ignorance are not only the norm, but also the singularly accepted law of the land. Veera and Mahabir identifies their real self and also discovers the 'other' in their lives. For a young girl, the escape from abuse in her ivory tower is through another kind of captivity which she begins to love because at least the captor is honest.

References

1. Akerman, James R. 'Twentieth-Century American Road Maps and the Making of a National Motorized Space.' In *Cartographies of Travel and Navigation*, edited by James R.
2. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
3. Hudson, Simon & Wang, Youcheng & Moreno-Gil, Sergio. (2010). *The Influence of a Film on Destination Image and the Desire to Travel: A Cross-Cultural Comparison*. *International Journal of Tourism Research*. 13. 177 - 190. 10.1002/jtr.808.
4. Ismail, Mohd Noor Ismawi & Sumarjan, Norzuwana & Abd Hadi Khan, Nur Farihin & Hanafiah, Mohd. (2017). *Movie Touring: The Influence of Film on Viewers' Travel Intention*. 10.1007/978-981-10-1718-6_11.
5. Mishra, Smrutisikta. (2014). *Travelogues: An Innovative and Creative Genre of Literature*. *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*. 4. 55-60.
6. Sorensen, Eli Park. "Novelistic Interpretation: The Traveling Theory of Lukács's Theory of the Novel." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 39 no. 1, 2009, pp. 57-85. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/jnt.0.0024
7. Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2002.