

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is an integral part of a research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every operational step. It helps in establishing the theoretical roots of a study, the synthesis of existing ideas and arguments further leads to the identification of gaps in the current research and helps develop a research methodology which the proposed study attempts to address. After a thorough survey of the literature, findings can be integrated with the existing body of knowledge thereby positioning the research in the broader academic community. This chapter deals with a detailed review of literature related to the various aspects of the research and is divided into three main sections that explore the relevant literature in a systematic manner pertaining to all the significant areas focused in the study.

The first section positions biopics among other film genres and traces the growth and development of the genre of biopics from a category of historical films to a genre with its own conventions; with a special focus on biopics in Hindi cinema. It explores the tenets that make a genre different and tries to understand how film scholars have dealt with various questions of film genres and their distinctive features. Surveying the existing literature, this section thus establishes the need to carry out a study of biographical films in the Indian context, due to a lack of systematic research in this area.

The second section discusses the filmic or cinematic narration, visual elements of narration and the importance of film style or stylistic devices in the overall narrative structure or film form. Review of the studies related to these areas leads to the identification of elements selected for analysis.

The third and the last section explores the technique of analysis i.e. Statistical Style Analysis in detail, with an emphasis on the method and the different studies undertaken in this area. This section emphasizes the need and importance of empirical approaches to film studies.

2.1 Biopic as a Film Genre

Friedman et.al (2014) while tracing the Genre History in *An Introduction to Film Genres*, mention that genre remains the oldest categorization system used by producers, distributors, and consumers to examine and to classify almost all realms of creative work. The foundations of genre construction stretch as far back as Aristotle's formal differentiation among the various internal properties of imitative modes (epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry) in his *Poetics* (335 BCE). Contemporary scholars like Austin Warren and Rene Welleck's *Theory of Literature* (1948) argue that literary works should be grouped on the basis of their "outer form" (structural and formal elements) and "inner form" (attitude, tone, purpose), a strategy Ed Buscombe revived in 1970's by adapting these terms to define film genres. Northrop Frye's in *Anatomy of Criticism* attempted to categorise literary works by their underlying narrative patterns and mythic structure. The contemporary scholars and popular critics such as Rick Altman, Berry Keith Grant, and Andrew Tudor continue to spar vigorously over various aspects of genre study. A number of perennial doubts plague genre theory like "Are genres really out there in the world, or are they merely the constructions of analysts? Is there a finite taxonomy of genres or are they in principle infinite? Are genres timeless Platonic essences or ephemeral, time-bound entities? Are genres culture-bound or transcultural? Should genre analysis be descriptive or prescriptive?" (Stam and Miller, 1999, p.14).

Despite its long history, critical consensus rarely exists about even the most basic issues concerning genres, such as how to define the concept itself (Friedman et.al, 2014). The word *genre* comes from the French (and originally Latin) word for 'kind' or 'class'. The term is

widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of text. There is often considerable theoretical disagreement about the definition of specific genres. “A genre is ultimately an abstract conception rather than something that exists empirically in the world,” notes Jane Feuer (1992, p. 144). Despite its widespread popularity and usage, genre’s seemingly solid definitions and practical utilities slip through our outstretched fingers when we try to pin the concept down too rigidly. This fluidity comes as no surprise as many classification systems that organise a large number of items often prove quite ambiguous upon deeper reflection. Film genres often skid and slide into each other in much the same way (Freidman et al, 2014).

Defining genres might be problematic, but even if theorists have to abandon the concept, in everyday life people would continue to categorize texts. John Swales (1990) says that “a discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight” (p. 54), though like many academic theorists he later adds that such genre names “typically need further validation” (*ibid.*, 58). For Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress (1988), “genres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them” (p. 7).

Outlining a fundamental problem of genre identification in relation to films, Robert Stam identifies four key problems with generic labels (in relation to film): *extension* (the breadth or narrowness of labels); *normativism* (having preconceived ideas of criteria for genre membership); *monolithic* definitions (as if an item belonged to only one genre); *biologism* (a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a standardized life cycle) (Stam and Miller, 1999, pp. 128-129)

Grant (2003) observes that, as film study developed in the 1970s, interest in the narrative film, nurtured a decade earlier by auteurism’s enthusiasm for popular American movies, began to wane in favour of more formal concerns. Critical interest shifted from the signified of films to the practice of signification, from what a film “means” to how it produces

meaning. This emphasis on signification and ideology brought about a renewed interest in the classical narrative film and genre films, in particular, became an important site of inquiry. Genre filmmaking developed early, with producers seeking maximum acceptance at the box office through the repetition and variation of commercially successful formulas. Seeking to balance standardisation and differentiation, filmmakers combined similarities and dissimilarities. The formulaic qualities of genre films meant that studios could turn them out quickly, and audiences could understand them just as quickly. In their catalogues, producers loosely grouped films in generic categories.

Traditionally, genres (particularly literary genres) tended to be regarded as fixed forms, but contemporary theory emphasizes that both their forms and functions are dynamic. David Buckingham argues that “genre is not simply given by the culture: rather, it is in a constant process of negotiation and change” (Buckingham, 1993, p. 137). Each new work within a genre has the potential to influence changes within the genre or perhaps the emergence of new sub-genres (which may later blossom into fully-fledged genres).

Despite the historical evidence, however, many a film critics still hesitate to acknowledge the biographical film as a genre today, let alone appreciate it. As Steve Neale (2000) points out, the biopic lacked critical- rather than industrial esteem and it has rarely been a focus of serious analysis. Robert A. Rosenstone (2007) gives voice to a very similar view, commenting on the high-brow prejudice against the biopic as an allegedly low-quality popular product: “Nobody ever has everything good to say about the biographical- a form usually dismissed with a kind of sneer as the ‘biopic’” (p. 89). Dennis Bingham (2010) in his work *Whose Lives are They Anyway: the Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre* not only feels bound, in the introduction, to rescue the ill- fame of the biopic- which he refers to as a “respectable genre of very low repute” (p. 3) but he insists that “it is a genre in its own right,

one that has evolved dramatically, and continues to change through its long history” (p. 22). Steve Neale (2000) too identifies biopic as a genre and “a fairly uncontentious one” (p. 51).

The constant process of negotiation that affects category systems, such as genres, has been redefining the borders of the biopic at the turn of the century, regenerating it, as Carolyn Anderson and Jonathan Lupo (2002) point out, through the overlapping “with other genres to create gangster biopics, musical biopics, sports biopics, Afro-American biopics and so forth”. The considerable elasticity of the genre is what makes it more than alive and kicking today and yet elasticity must have its limits if the genre wants to keep its identifiability. (pp. 91-92).

What has prevailed in the debate on the biopic is a sort of genealogical claim each specific medium, literary or cinematic made to the original creation of the genre itself. When Custen (1992) defines the biopic as a film “which depicts the life of a historical person, past or present” (p. 5), his usage of the verb ‘depict’ automatically associates the biopic to the visual arts, instead of the literary tradition of biography. Rick Altman in *Film/Genre* (1999) acknowledges the biopic as one of the earliest film genres, together with the musical and the western, and he states that Hollywood producers did not seem to draw inspiration from any pre-existing literary biographical genre hence it would be wrong to go back to literary prototypes to explain the origin of cinematic forms. But the consensus on its origin still hangs in uncertainty and scholars like Rosenstone (2007) writes that “to begin to understand biographical film- its shape and structure, the way it handles data, the way in which it creates the world in which its subject thinks, feels and acts, one must attempt to see the form within the larger issues of biography” (p. 89). He also points out what he clearly sees as the literary genealogy of the biopic and says that it belongs to a long tradition, which means that the written biography and the biographical film are less different than they may appear to be.

2.1.1 Historical Accuracy of Biopics

Apart from the debates over the origin of the genre and its contiguity to literary biography, other significant aspects around which arguments revolve are the questionable status of biopics as historical documents and the authenticity of the screen portrayal of the real lives. Biopic research in the initial years majorly addressed the problems of biographical films and their much debated historical accuracy. Although theorists have long decried the tendency to understand history in terms of the way an individual story reflects a collective historical event, Robert Rosenstone estimates that 80 percent of Hollywood historical films belong to the subgenre of the biographical film. In recent years, the biographical film has seen an impressive return to popularity, with several serious and ambitious films. (as cited in Burgoyne, 2008, p. 102)

For hundreds of years, written history has been considered a form of scholarship. Using professional discipline, skills, and research techniques, historians are able to unearth facts and attempt to tell history accurately. For traditional historians, only written and published history is accepted (Lee, 2011, p.1). To a postmodern historian like Rosenstone (1995), however, “history need not be done on the page. It can be a mode of thinking that utilizes elements other than the written words: sound, vision, feeling, montage” (p.11). Historians have been debating for long over film’s ability as a medium to capture history. Siegfried Kracauer (as cited in Rosenstone, 1988), a theoretician of both film and history, dismiss the historical feature as stagey and theatrical, in part because modern actors look unconvincing in period costumes, but in larger measure because everyone knows that what is on the screen is not the past but only an imitation of it. On the other hand, historians like R. J. Raack (as cited in Rosenstone, 1988), who have been involved in the production of several documentaries, are a strong advocate of putting history onto film. Indeed, in his view, the film is possibly a more appropriate medium for history than the written word. "Traditional

written history," he argues, is too linear and too narrow in focus to render the fullness of the complex, multi-dimensional world in which humans live. Only film, with its ability to juxtapose images and sounds, with its "quick cuts to new sequences, dissolves, fades, speed-ups, [and] slow motion," can ever hope to approximate real life, the daily experience of "ideas, words, images, preoccupations, distractions, sensory deceptions, conscious and unconscious motives and emotions" (p. 1174). Philosopher Ian Jarvie (1978), expresses his concern saying that a "historian could embody his view in a film, just as he could embody it in a play," the real question is this: "how could he defend it, footnote it, rebut objections and criticize the opposition?" (p.378). We can thus understand that some works of history are important chiefly for the information they create and deliver, others for their evocation of people and events of a vanished time and place. Some historical works are noted for their arguments while others are significant for raising new questions about the past or for raising old questions for a new generation.

An important question now is not whether a film can carry enough information but whether that information can be absorbed from quickly moving images, is worth knowing, and can add up to "history." And it is true that each and every work of history takes its place in a discourse that consists of preexisting debates, and the very meaning of any new work is in part created by those debates, even if they are not acknowledged within the work itself. And even if they are unable to "debate", we all know that many excellent narrative histories and biographies mute (or even moot) debates by ignoring them, or relegating them to appendices, or burying them deep within the storyline, and are still considered history, surely an inability to "debate" issues cannot rule out the possibilities of history on film. (Rosenstone, 1988)

The attempt at actual historicity in the genre of historical films can be found in the subgenre known as the biopic or *eventpic*. The biopic or *eventpic* attempts to accurately portray the

history of a specific person(s) and event(s). But for the questions like, does the film fall in line with its intention of portraying history, or does the film disguise false history as true history, "there are no true 'rules' for fabricating popular docudramas and thus the most controversial issue in constructing cinematic history is *invention*" (Bisson, 2010, p. 55). Roland Barthes (as cited in Burgoyne, 2008) calls biography "the fiction that dare not speak its name," effectively capturing the sense of illegitimacy that seems to hover over projects that render history in terms of the trajectory of an individual life, an individual life which has been plotted and embellished according to the demands of storytelling. The individual is said to stand in for the many, and through their lives, one sees the broad social changes of history. The solution of their personal problems tends to substitute itself for the solution of historical problems (p. 40). The issue has been long debated whether or not the film can properly capture characters' inner lives and it is always a matter of great concern how a well-filmed biography can properly capture real lives on screen. When people's lives are adapted for cinematic viewing, they are subject to the same appraisals and complaints that beset any form of film adaptation in the sense that the viewer can feel let down and betrayed by the film's lack of similarity to its source text. Moreover, according to Naremore, "when we are confronted with someone else's phantasy, we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the source text, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of bad object" (as cited in Dogan, 2008, p.23)

All biographical and most historical films seek in one way or another to establish their authenticity in the eyes of the audience by means of a number of devices. These include "voiceovers, the referencing of witnesses' accounts, and the engagement of historians as consultants, also the insertion of documentary footage in the narrative flow is a common device to assert authenticity along with montages of news headlines" (Ebbrecht, 2010, p. 210). They also bring a 'news' flavour to the proceedings that reassures spectators that they

are watching events that really happened. “Newsreel material is also employed in the diegesis of the film to establish a given character’s point of view” (Gundle, 2013, p.183). Gundle (2013), while discussing *Mussolini*, says, despite efforts to ensure authenticity in the reconstruction of locations, events, and people, there was a notable emphasis on the private and personal dimensions of the dictator’s life, a sphere in which screenplays had to indulge in invention in keeping with the practices of all biopics. The resulting ‘screen Mussolini’ is more human and potentially more sympathetic than the Mussolini of historiography.

Custen (1992), cautions us against viewing biopics as yardsticks of accuracy or truth. To do so is to overlook the social functions that might be performed by the differential structuring of the historical discourse. The pattern of these lives, the narrative and other devices used to construct these lives as parts of an institutional machinery of making film narrative, have been of greater interest than the distortion of a single film, book, or folk tale.

2.1.2 Academic Research on Biopics: An Overview

This section gives an overview of the trend of research on biopics in the recent years. After reviewing book-length studies, research papers and Ph.D. dissertations, an attempt has been made to understand different approaches that have been adopted by scholars to study the genre of biopics.

Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History by George F. Custen (1992), is the first comprehensive study of the genre of biographical film. Using previously unavailable archival materials from some major studios like MGM and Warner Bros., as well as the censorship files from the Production Code Administration, Custen argues that through these films, Hollywood manufactured a nearly monochromatic view of history that was systematically distorted in regard to race, nationality, gender, and profession. He selected a sample of 291 films produced during the studio era (1927-1960) and examined the production practices which revealed that Hollywood’s model of history was derived from

recycled plots played out on its back lots and sound stages, and not from the world outside the studio walls. His analysis of the roles played by star personae, legal considerations, censorship practices, and the producer's own ideologies has brought the world of the biopic alive. Biopic research gained momentum after this and one can witness some works of serious academic interest in the area.

Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives are They Anyway: the Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre*, is a significant attempt to provide a major scholarly study on the biopic after George F. Custen's seminal work. Whereas Custen's study focused on the variety of biopics released solely during the studio era Hollywood cinema (1927-1960), Bingham in a comprehensive discussion looks at various forms of biopics including theatrical releases, made-for-television and short films. There are innumerable ways to categorise and study the biopics, including the type of protagonist, period of release, narrative theme, and aesthetics. He studies the evolution and life-cycle changes of the genre and also the significant differences between male and female biopics treating them as separate genres.

Different aspects of an autobiography and a biopic have been taken into consideration by Thomas Doherty (2000) in his essay *Malcolm X: in Print, on Screen*, where he compares the autobiography of Malcolm X with the biopic and tries to prove that the former is better and has more impact on the public. He proves that even in the age of the moving image where what is seen on the screen tends to erase what is read on the page, a portrait in literature can outlive a depiction through the film.

Molly Brost (2008), in her Ph. D Dissertation, *Mining the past: Performing authenticity in the country music biopic*, studies the genres of country music and the biographical film in terms of the questions of authenticity. She posits that although both the genres are evaluated by strict (yet constantly changing) standards of authenticity, yet authenticity means different things when applied to both genres; in country music, it refers to the artist's respect for

tradition and ability to relate to their audience, while in the biographical film, the term typically denotes factual accuracy and the filmmaker's ability to emphasize the correct aspects of the subject's life. She says that if the subject of the film is female, the standard for living an authentic life and having an authentic career changes drastically and, for the artist, is a constant negotiation. Through an analysis of four films chronicling the lives of female country musicians, this dissertation examines the ways in which the films (and their heroines) negotiate genre- and medium-specific standards of authenticity.

Laura Mason (2008) in *Looking at a Life: Biography on film*, deals with two contemporary biographical films, *Crumb* and *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, and explores how these two films suggests new possibilities for reconceiving the genre of biography in a post-literate society, revealing how visual media may enhance scholarship and storytelling in biography and history alike. She asserts that although the films treat very different kinds of subjects, they underscore the uncertainty and imagination that are a necessary part of the biography. Furthermore, these films suggest that we must abandon the traditional notion that the only proper way to represent history is through writing; writing is only one possibility out of many different ways to represent the past.

Bastin and Bastin (2009) in their essay about the biopics of the British royal family opine that the most consistent tropes of the royal biopic are “the tension between the public duty and private life of the monarch” with a special focus on periods of “instability for the monarchy”. The advent of the media in the twentieth century gave rise to a new relationship between the Royal Family and the public and ushered in a period of re-negotiation on the part of the family who framed and projected the Windsor public image. As the royal biopic perpetuates a range of framing devices common to the genre as a whole, such as an emphasis on verisimilitude in costuming and setting, and on the productions' “truth value”, they try to

study these aspects with special reference to the various biopics made on Princess Diana and Prince Charles.

Penny Spirou's (2009), *Cinematic Perspective: Decoding and Interpreting the Life Story Of Héctor Lavoe from The Musical Biopic El Cantante*, through decoding and interpreting Lavoe's life story through the film, argues that *El Cantante*, amongst contemporary Hollywood musical biopics, is a self-reflexive film in terms of how the biopic represents multiple perspectives of the salsa singer. The film creators acknowledge and audio-visually reflect that *El Cantante* is a dramatic, not an accurate portrayal of Héctor Lavoe's life. Exploring the issues of authenticity, the paper simultaneously deals with the aspects of star status of the singer/actor, narrative construction and audience interpretation; and audio-visual representation of musical numbers and the function of subtitles.

William Epstein (2011), in his work, enmeshes his study of biopics with 'American National Identity'. He opines that all Hollywood films are about American national identity as Hollywood is an important American industry, one of the "main instrument[s] of the ideological super-structure" of the nation. Moreover, the biographical narrative of whatever kind has traditionally been an ally of dominant structures of socio-economic authority. In this essay, he writes about some influential conceptual practices associated with "National Identity" and how those practices have intersected cinema studies, especially where this conjuncture is concerned with film history and American national consciousness.

Armida de la Garza's (2012), *Painting Lives with Light: the Kahlo and the Pollock Biopics* investigates how due to their subject matter, biopics on painters have the opportunity to highlight questions on the social role of art, and to foreground some of the concerns that are common to cinema and painting. The paper briefly compares how these crucial issues are explored in films on two of the most important painters of the twentieth century Kahlo (1907-1955), and Pollock (1912-1956).

Derek Johnston (2012), in *Re-Envisioning the Artist Hero through Two Cole Porter Biopics*, examines the representation of changing concepts of the artist and the act of creativity through Hollywood film. It also considers how these changing conceptions and representations connect to shifts in American society. He studies the two biopics based on the life of Cole Porter; *Night and Day* (1946) and *De-Lovely* (2004). He identifies the differences in the treatment of the character of Cole Porter between the films and finds them striking as they indicate a change in the way the society envisions its artists and the very act of creativity.

Joel Gordon (2013), in his work on Egyptian biopics, tries to trace the development of biopics from *Mustafa Kamil* (1951) to *Naseer 56* (1996). Gordon tries to answer some intriguing questions about biopics regarding public memory, public perceptions and artistic depictions of fame, historical accuracy in the dramatic cinematic reenactment, and the relative roles of big and small screens, historical and market factors involved in filmmaking and political factors during production and screening of the film biography, etc. He attempts to evaluate the potential significance of the genre to public culture in Egypt over the course of five decades.

Stephen Gundle's (2013) article explores the portrayal of Mussolini in film and television drama. It considers the contexts in which films and mini-series were made from the 1970s and the problems faced in bringing the Duce to the screen, mostly in dramas that stressed the final phase of his rule. Despite efforts to ensure authenticity in the reconstruction of locations, events, and people, there is a notable emphasis on the private and personal dimensions of the dictator's life, a sphere in which screenplays have to indulge in the invention in keeping with the practices of all biopics. The article assesses, using textual analysis, the meanings of the different representational solutions deployed in the films and considers some of the issues involved in playing Mussolini.

With her work, *Projected Art History*, Doris Berger (2014), brings critical attention to a film genre that powerfully shapes cultural attitudes about artistic production but has been largely unacknowledged in the disciplines of art history and film studies. Artist biopics reinforce myths about artistic creativity, elevating the typically male painter's struggle and genius. Berger analyses two paradigmatic examples, *Pollock* (2000, dir. Ed Harris) and *Basquiat* (1996, dir. Julian Schnabel), enriching her account with research-based insights about their production and reception. *Projected Art History* makes a strong contribution to the still-limited literature on an important form of popular art history, adding nuance to our understanding of celebrity as constructed in both film and art. This work points directly to the center of why, and how, the history of art matters to our culture.

Ellen Cheshire's (2014), *Bio-pics: A Life in Pictures*, offers a series of case studies which throw light on this most unique of the genres. It addresses questions like; is the bio-pic a genre in its own right? Or are such films merely footnotes in other more traditional genres such as the western or costume drama, depending on the historical figure under scrutiny. Unlike other genre forms, biopics seemingly share no familiar iconography, codes or conventions. They can be set anywhere and at any time. What links them is quite simply that the films depict the life of an 'important' person. Through a carefully selected range of thematically linked (English-language) biopics released since 1990, this book explores key issues surrounding their resurgence, narrative structure, production, subject representation or misrepresentation, and critical response. The films under discussion are grouped around a profession (writers, singers, politicians, sportsmen, criminals, artists) allowing for comparisons to be drawn in approaches to the similar subject matter.

In a collection of critical essays, *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, edited by Tom Brown and Belen Vidal (2014), the articles examine the place of the biopic within ongoing debates about how cinema can and should represent the history and "real lives". Contributors

discuss the biopic's grounding in the conventions of the historical and explore the genre's defining traits as well as its potential for innovation. It expands the critical boundaries of this evolving versatile genre. New theoretical approaches combine with specifically commissioned chapters on contemporary biographical film production in India, Italy, South Korea, France, Russia, Great Britain and the US in order to present a selective and well-rounded portrait of the biopic's place in film culture. The fourteen contributions in the volume attempt to examine the distinctive visual and narrative strategies deployed in the representation of historical lives.

David Bovey's Ph. D thesis (2015), *The artist biopic: a historical analysis of narrative cinema, 1934- 2010*, provides a historical overview of the artist biopic that has emerged as a distinct sub-genre of the biopic as a whole. The sub-genre's development is explored via the grouping of films with associated themes and the use of case studies. These examples can then be used as models for exploring similar sets of data from other countries. He has argued that the artist biopic overall has survived the bad press which some individual productions have received and can even be said to have matured under the influence of directors producing a quality product for the art house, festival, and avant-garde distribution circuits. As a genre, it has proved extremely adaptable and has reflected the changing attitudes towards art and artists within the wider community.

Robert Burgoyne & John Trafton (2015), in *Haunting in the historical biopic: Lincoln* explore the unsettling, disturbing moments in Lincoln in terms of the scenes and images that do not readily resolve into the frames of the biopic or the conventions of the historical film.

John W. Cones (2015), in his book-length study of *Motion Pictures Biographies: The Hollywood Spin on Historical Figures*, opines that, one body of films that provide an excellent opportunity to explore the question of whether Hollywood movies exhibit certain patterns of bias is the entire body of work referred to as 'biopics'. He studies a sample of

films to examine if there is a Hollywood preference for certain type of people, e.g., political liberals as opposed to conservatives, Europeans as opposed from other parts of the globe, recent immigrants to the U.S versus those whose families have been there for longer periods of time, people with a Jewish heritage as opposed to those who do not have a Jewish heritage, and so forth. Building upon the work of Custen, the study includes synopses or reviews for 443 such films released from 1912 to 1994.

Mathew Robinson (2016) in his Ph.D. thesis, *Mapping the British biopic: Evolution, conventions, reception, and masculinities*, offers a reevaluation of the British biopic, which has often been subsumed into the broader 'historical film' category, identifying a critical neglect despite its successful presence throughout the history of the British film industry. It argues that the biopic is a necessary category because producers, reviewers, and cinemagoers have significant investments in biographical subjects and because biopics construct a 'public history' for a broad audience. This thesis provides a timeline of British biopics released from 1900 to 2014, constructing a historical overview of the continuities and shifts the genre has undergone. It also constructs an assessment of the representation of masculinity in the biopic, including detailed textual readings of representations of masculinity in biopics released between 2005 and 2014. This rectifies the critical neglect of masculinity in the biopic, despite the majority of biopics being about men.

Marta Frago in *Facing the Global Financial Crisis and the Great Recession: The Biopic as a Socio-Cultural Response to the Collapse* studies that through lives of real people, films may project images of what is happening today, what could have been avoided or what may occur later. In addition, there are biopics that portray not only individuals but also a whole period of time. Today, the popularity of biopics in the mainstream cinema also seems connected to the present and global crisis. To verify this hypothesis, this work analyses biopics that contain some socio-cultural responses to the crisis situation. The research takes into account

the kind of the biopic in which it inscribes, the hagiographic tone, the realistic or ironic-satiric view, the origin of the protagonist's fame, the chosen segment of the character's life, and the adapted narrative perspective.

Michael Bentham (2016), in an interesting study *From fact to fiction: authoring a modern biopic* offers a practice-based analysis of how screenwriter and subject intersect in the transformative process of authoring a modern biopic. There is a well-documented disconnect between theory and practice on the subject of biopics. This research addresses the lack of alignment between industry and academia by taking a fresh look at the genre from a screenwriter's perspective.

After going through the above-mentioned studies it can be deduced that the major areas or approaches to biographical studies in cinema mainly include: growth and development of the genre of biopics in Hollywood and other film industries; studying the sub-genre/categories of biopics like musical biopics, royal biopics, artists' biopics, sports biopics etc.; various economic, political, social and cultural aspects related to biopic filmmaking; issues of authenticity and historical accuracy, adaptations from literary biographies and biopics and national identity creation, etc. Research with an orientation to study the narrative film form which explores the internal structuring of narrative sequences of biopics or the stylistic techniques used for narration can hardly be traced.

2.1.3 Biopics in Hindi Cinema

Rachel Dwyer (2012), in *The Biopic in Hindi Cinema*, explores the current interest in biopics, locating it in major shifts in Indian Cinema and society in the last decade. She briefly traces the development of the genre in Indian cinema discussing its various forms, old Hindi biopics, new Hindi biopics, quasi-biopics and the issues in making Hindi biopics.

Cinematic biography started enjoying growing popularity over the years with the “realist strand in Indian cinema producing many biopics, notably on the leaders of the Freedom Struggle. Critical writing on Indian cinema frequently dwells on how Indian films are continually concerned with the questions of national identity and history” (Gopalan, 1996, p. 381). The Independence Struggle, cinematically identified with the lives of its leaders, has become a national frame of reference, a meta-narrative influencing collective identity, and filmmakers have either affirmed or deconstructed the mythology surrounding national leaders. One of the prime motives of the biopic is “constructing the nation which can be seen from the fact that the basis of the movie is usually dramatic than historical/ factual” (Preeti Kumar, 2013, p. 2).

Whatever the common features involved in the politics of historicals and biopics, as Chakravarty (2011), notes, each national cinema operates under its own particular constraints and guidelines. In India, a multi-lingual nation with a multi-lingual film industry, "the commercial Bombay cinema has sought to stay clear of controversy by converting history into pageantry and spectacle and developing a repertoire of characters who are presented over and over again in forms firmly lodged in the public memory" (p. 158).

There are only a few studies that can be traced which focus on the Hindi biopics. An overview of these is given below:

Preeti Kumar (2013), in *Retelling the Nation: Narrating the Nation through Biopics*, asserts that cinema plays a pivotal role in the negotiation and construction of national identity, selectively appropriating history, attempting to forge a sense of commonality in a set of people by evoking a sense of a shared past and one of the means of constructing a nation is through the biopic. She researches on how great men biopics chronicle heroic deeds, sacrifice, and lofty moral virtues and either fabricate, or rediscover, and authenticate the myths of the founding fathers and celebrated men. She examines how Biopics disseminate

the "myth of nationhood" by the use of various narrative strategies –and attempts to deconstruct how the nation is simulated, and meanings, such as national pride and national idealism, are mediated to the audience in selected Indian biopics - *Sardar, The Legend of Bhagat Singh, Mangal Pandey -The Rising and Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*.

Rachel Dwyer (2014), examines the biopic in the cultural context of Hindi Cinema. She argues that the contemporary Hindi biopic needs to be understood as a reflection of the desires and the aspirations of the new middle class, whose tastes the biopics about performers, entrepreneurs, and sports people cater to. She identifies the thriving online celebrity culture and the potential of legal liability as factors that shape these semi-fictionalized stories, alongside Bollywood's formal traditions. Valorizing upward mobility along gender lines, the Hindi biopic powerfully reflects the changes in the values of new India.

Gregory D. Booth (1995) tries to look into the reasons as to why the commercial Hindi cinema has been subjected to domestic and foreign criticism for its exceptionally formulaic and stereotypical feature productions. He traces their origin in the oral and written epics and the popular dramatic genres of traditional Indian culture. He attempts to justify his assertion through an analysis of the characters, story types, and plots of Hindi films, demonstrating the functional similarities of content and narrative structure with traditional Indian epics. He argues that the Hindi cinema has played an important role in the decline and even extinction of many of the traditional dramatic forms and in the process, however, the commercial cinema has absorbed many of the themes and textual conventions of traditional drama, utilizing them as a structural and thematic basis for countless Hindi films. These attributes, as he notes, have provoked much criticism, but according to him, they may actually be among the most "Indian" aspects of Hindi films.

Sabrina Ciolfi (2012), in the paper *Popular Hindi Cinema: Narrative Structure and Points of Continuity with the tradition* deals with the issue as to why Hindi cinema is often being accused of offering a patchy sort of narration with total lack of realism, repetitive plots and the typical song and dance sequences constantly cropping up and interrupting the narrative flow. These are according to her, the fundamental characteristics peculiar to Hindi Cinema and should be analysed in the light of that tradition; as from its very beginnings, Indian cinema has drawn inspiration from the styles, aesthetics, and semiotics of a great variety of cultural form.

The dearth of studies and that too with limited perspective is evident from the above review which clearly indicates that Hindi biopics as a research area has barely caught any attention of the scholars. The existing studies are more concerned with the preliminary understanding of the genre development and the problems of Hindi film form rather than focusing specifically on the elements of film style or narrative structure of biopics. In order to understand the generic conventions of biopics, it is important to explore the form of these films.

2.2 Cinematic Narration and Film Style

One of the important ways we perceive our environment is by anticipating and telling ourselves mini stories about the environment based on stories already told. Making narratives is a strategy for making our world of experiences and desires intelligible (Branigan, 1992). The study of narratives unveils fundamental culture-specific opinions about reality and mankind, which are narrativized in stories and novels. According to Stam et.al, “Narrative can be understood as the recounting of two or more events (or a situation and an event) that are logically connected, occur over time, and are linked by a consistent subject into a whole” (2005, p. 69).

The narrative analysis of the film is the most recent branch of semiotic inquiry to emerge from the critical initiatives which redefined film theory in the 1970s. Film narrative theory draws its basic concepts from the two primary sources of semiotic thought: Structuralism and Russian Formalism. Like all semiotic inquiry, narrative analysis seeks to peel away the seemingly “motivated” and “natural” relationship between the signifier and the story-world in order to reveal the deeper system of cultural associations and relationships that are expressed through narrative form. Viewed through the prism of semiotic methodology, the conventional elements of narrative structure—characters, plot patterning, setting, point-of-view and temporality—can be regarded as systems of signs which are structured and organized according to different codes (Stam et. al 2005). The study of narrative structures and the activity of narrative comprehension is the subject of narrative analysis. Different types of approaches that have been used for narrative analysis are discussed below.

2.2.1 Formalist Approaches

One of the founding principles of narrative analysis is the distinction introduced by the Russian Formalists between the fabula and the syuzhet. In Victor Shklovsky’s¹ original formulation, the fabula, sometimes translated as story, is understood as the “pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order”. According to Mieke Bal², “A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.... Events, actors, time and location together constitute the material of a fabula”. It is usually understood as the raw material or basic outline of the story, prior to its artistic organization. Theorists such as Rimmon-Kenan³ and Seymour Chatman⁴, have stressed the structured nature of the fabula, focussing on the network of internal relations, the “immanent story structure” formed within it. This

¹ In “Poetry and Prose in cinema” in *Poetica Kino*, 1927. Also in *The Poetics of Cinema* edited by Richard Taylor, 1982.

² In *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 1985.

³ In *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 1983.

⁴ In *Story and Discourse: Narrative structure in Fiction and Film*, 1978.

immanent story structure is expanded in the syuzhet, which is often translated as plot. Shklovsky emphasized the strong link between the syuzhet and the level of story, or fabula. He wrote that the emphasis in films on either formal resolutions or story actions could define the difference between film genres.

David Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), provides a detailed description of the way in which the syuzhet relates to the fabula. The primary role of the syuzhet is to present the fabula. The function of the syuzhet is the elaboration—and complication—of narrative logic, narrative time and narrative space. The concrete particularity of this description of syuzhet patterning is a valuable contribution to film analysis.

2.2.2 The Structuralist Analysis of Narrative

While the first discussions of narrative structure in film were conducted by the Russian Formalists in the late 1920s, the two most important influences on the development of film narrative analysis in the 1970s were the structuralist theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss⁵ and the folklore studies of Vladimir Propp⁶. Here, although the terminology is different, we find a debate that nearly replicates the Formalist discussion of the relative importance of fabula or style in syuzhet patterning. While Lévi-Strauss had an enormous impact on all branches of semiotic inquiry, his influence on early film narrative theory was especially pronounced, inspiring an approach which used the methodology of linguistics to provide wide-ranging cultural readings of certain film genres, notably the Western and the musical. The work of Propp, on the other hand, was influential primarily for its usefulness in analyzing the plot structure of individual films. These two influences led to two different schools of narrative inquiry, which are largely distinct even today; semantic- which deals with the relation of the signs and messages produced by narrative to the larger cultural system which gives it

⁵ In *Structural Anthropology*, 1967, translated by Claire Jakobson and Brooke Grundfest Scheopf

⁶ In *Morphology of the Folktale*, 1968

meaning; and syntactical- the study of the syntagmatic ordering of plot events for narrative progress and development.

Lévi-Strauss' influence was extremely widespread, however, and the methods of structural analysis were often adopted by writers who simply employed binary oppositions as a formal tool. Raymond Bellour⁷, for example, found that the formal level of the text—the level of shot sizes, framing and movement—could be analyzed in terms of binary oppositions, and that variation and repetition among the oppositions provide the narrative sequence its central thrust and impetus. Rather than emphasizing story events, Bellour's work stresses on the pattern of binary oppositions, including framing, point-of-view, and movement, which link and disrupt a given series of shots - Bellour sought to chart the trajectory of narrative development in terms of certain cinema-specific codes. His analysis of the *Bodega Bay* sequence in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1952) is characteristic; it stresses the organization of oppositions within three codes: point-of-view (seeing/seen); framing (close/distant), and camera movement (still/moving).

Another early approach to narrative form in films can be found in the 'Grand Syntagmatique'⁸ of Christian Metz. Metz argued that the organization of images into a narrative was one of the most important reasons to establish film as a language. The Grand Syntagmatique sought to designate and classify the specific narrative segments of film language, which Metz understood in terms of sequences of shots, called syntagmas. These eight syntagmas, which were distinguished primarily through editing, expressed the spatial, temporal and logical connections that form the universe of the fabula. True to structuralist methods, Metz broke the eight syntagmas down into sets of binary oppositions.

⁷ In *Hitchcock: The Enunciator*, 1977, *L'Analyse du Film*, 1979 and *Le Cinema Americain: Analyses de Films*, 1980.

⁸ In *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, 1974

At the same time when Lévi-Strauss' influence was being felt in film theory, an alternative method to the structuralist approach emerged guided by the work of Vladimir Propp. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* was first published in 1928 but the reception of his work was shaped primarily by questions of narrative form which arose within the structuralist debates of the 1970s. Emphasizing story events and temporal sequence, the Proppian method stressed the conjunctural logic of plot development in a way that directly contradicted Lévi-Strauss' assertion that plot events merely formed a surface structure which concealed the deeper logic and meaning. The Proppian analysis thus focusses on a very different level of the narrative artifact than did Lévi-Strauss', attempting to disclose the structural syntax of the narrative work rather than the semantic messages conveyed through patterns of contradiction and opposition. Plot analysis, though not developed as a research area yet, remains one of the founding gestures of narratological inquiry. Theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis, working in feminist theory, have sometimes used Proppian categories as a way of defining gender codes in the film, suggesting that plot analysis can inform some of the most difficult areas in contemporary theory.

The merging of syntactic and semantic approaches to film narrative structure is characteristic of a later phase of development in narrative theory, which can be generally associated with the work of Roland Barthes in literature. In the mid-1970s, the work of Barthes exerted an increasing influence on film analysis. It is in *S/Z*⁹ that we find the most important model for film analysis. The model Barthes constructs in *S/Z* is an elegant fusion of semantic and syntactical approaches, for it demonstrates how the general semantic system of cultural meanings and the causal logic governing the plot—interact and support one another.

⁹ *S/Z*, published in 1970, is Roland Barthes's structuralist analysis of "Sarrasine", the short story by Honoré de Balzac. Barthes methodically moves through the text of the story, denoting where and how different codes of meaning function.

Almost all narratologists agree to this point that there are no stories without a storytelling instance and this very instance can be understood as narration. “Narration refers to the techniques, strategies, and signals by which the presence of a narrator can be inferred, which in literature takes the form of certain pronouns and verb tenses. In the film, however, the category of narration is associated with both voice-over or character-narration, and with the more elusive concept of general cinematic narration involving all the codes of the cinema” (Stam et.al, 2005, p. 96) The study of cinematic narration has been considered through many different approaches in different periods of film theory but it is with the wide dissemination of Genette’s Narrative Discourse, that the elements of cinematic narration have begun to be addressed in a rigorous and systematic fashion. Gerard Genette has adopted a tripartite model, consisting of the *récit*, (narrative); the *histoire* (story); and narration, or narrating. The *recit* is the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, i.e. the verbal or cinematic discourse that conveys the story-world to the spectator, for example, the actual shot patterning in a film. The *récit* has both a material substance and a form. *Histoire* by contrast is the signified or narrative content of the *récit*, i.e. the story-world or fabula. Narration, therefore, refers not to the events recounted, nor to the text itself, but to the act of recounting, i.e. the act of utterance or presentation “producing narrative action, and by extension, the whole real or fictional situation in which the act takes place” (Gerard Genette, 1980). Confirming to the Formalist notion of narrative inquiry, Bordwell considers three dimensions of film narrative. The first dimension is the story world: its agents, circumstances, and surroundings; second is the plot structure, the arrangement of the parts of the narrative as we have it and the third is narration which is the moment-by-moment flow of information about the story world. He opines that “the story world is similar to the semantic dimension of language, the plot structure is comparable to grammatical or syntactic structure, and narration is comparable to verbal style, as governed by pragmatic context” (Bordwell, 2007, p. 90).

A comprehensive and synthetic view of filmic narration is offered by Tom Gunning. He argues that it is precisely the channeling and organizing of the mimetic dimension of the film-text that defines the role of cinematic narration. This is accomplished through a process Gunning calls narrativization, a concept derived from Stephen Heath, which refers to the binding of a film's wealth of mimetic details in the direction of narrative coherence. According to Gunning, in film, narrative discourse is especially complex in that it functions at three distinct levels simultaneously. These three levels are pro-filmic—the physical material of the scene prior to the act of filming, the enframed image, and the process of editing. The second level of filmic discourse is the enframed image. This entails composition and spatial relations. He includes camera movement and optical devices such as split screens, superimpositions, and matte shots in this category. The third level of narrative inscription consists of editing. The three levels, working in concert, are seen as the means by which films “tell” stories, and thus are said to constitute the cinematic narrator (Gunning, 1991).

2.2.3 Stylistic Features or Cinematic/Film techniques

In the debates of the Russian Formalists, this question took the form of arguments over the relative importance of style or story in film narrative construction.

The theory of narration has to include matters of film style. All the presentational tactics such as cinematography, mise-en-scene, and editing are stylistic choices, but they're inevitably narrational choices as well. They shape what information we get and how we get it. The way given items are organised coaxes us to build that story world in a particular way. If we go by a very apt definition of narration by Bordwell (1985), according to which it is “the process by which the film prompts the viewer to construct the ongoing fabula on the basis of syuzhet organization and stylistic patterning”, the stylistic patterning/filmic style or the cinematic techniques which are employed to narrate the story are a complex area of

enquiry. Here style simply means the systematic use of cinematic devices and unlike syuzhet patterning which is independent of the medium, style is wholly ingredient to the medium.

But how important is style or what significance it holds individually is again a matter of few agreements and disagreements. Bordwell (1985) opines that film technique is customarily used to perform syuzhet tasks- providing information, cueing hypotheses, and so forth. Normally, the syuzhet system controls the stylistic system and the film's style is wholly a vehicle for the syuzhet. The style is thus a notable factor in its own right, even when it is only supporting the syuzhet. Bordwell also talks about the "style centred" narration and terms it as 'Parametric narration'. In parametric narration "the film's stylistic system creates patterns distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system. Stylistic patterns are present for their own sake and not because they serve a narrational purpose. Malcolm Turvey claims that, while Bordwell is correct to maintain that in some films stylistic patterns serve no narrational purpose, it does not follow that they, therefore, exist for their own sake. Rather, using the example of Jacques Tati's *Play Time* (1967), which Bordwell and Kristin Thompson view as a quintessential parametric film, he suggests that stylistic patterns can serve other, non-narrational purposes. This does not mean, however, that there are no films in which stylistic patterning exists for its own sake. Bordwell and Thompson are right that sometimes, as in the films of Yasujirō Ozu, stylistic patterns exist purely so that the viewer can appreciate the patterned repetition and variation of stylistic technique (Turvey, 2015). Peter Verstarten (2009) in line with this discusses the concept of 'Filmic excess' in "*Filmic Excess: When style drowns the plot*", and he says that it is not a well-defined characteristics but a matter of interpretation and defines it according to Kristin Thompson who opines that excess manifests itself only when the style remains self-directed and is emphatically not compensated for by the content. The colours, shot compositions, framing and music magnify the story's sentimentality so strongly that a paradoxically inverted effect takes place. In such

cases stylistic techniques which are used to convey the story elements dominate the story thus drowning the plot.

Such views are strongly challenged by the work of Barry Salt (1992), *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*. He traces the history of film style through the statistical style analysis in this very comprehensive work. His work emphasises the importance of film techniques and a need for some serious research in this area. In his another article, *The Shape of 1999: The Stylistics of American Movies at the End of the Century*, he analyses the resulting data and compares it to the data he collected on the previous decades of American filmmaking. He concludes that contemporary American films are made according to an increasingly restricted stylistic norm, characterised mainly by faster cutting and closer shooting (with more close-ups). This is indeed a very different kind of approach which has not been considered seriously by many theorists but Salt's work enables us to think of film style/techniques more than a mere supporting vehicle for the syuzhet patterning.

In any art form or medium, conventions are frequently-used stylistic techniques or narrative devices are typical of (but not necessarily unique to) particular generic traditions. Bits of dialogue, musical figures or styles and patterns of *mise-en-scene* are all aspects of movies that gets repeated from film to film within a genre and become established as conventions. Conventions function as an implied agreement between makers and consumers to accept certain artificialities, but such artificialities work in specific contexts (Grant, 2007, p. 10). Therefore to study the conventions of the narrative form of the biopic, the present thesis examines the stylistic choices made by the biopic filmmakers. The study thus tries to identify if there exists any patterned usage of these elements across the selected sample of biopics.

Suzanne Speidel (2007) in *Film Form and Narrative*, examines both the techniques which make up the cinematic narration, and the structures which combine to make a narrative. She has discussed the aspects of narration of conventional Hollywood cinema and art and avant-

garde cinema at the level of plot and story and cinematic codes, broadly dividing the visual codes of cinema into mise-en-scene and editing and the audio codes into speech, music, and noise.

In *Film Narratology*, Peter Verstraten (2009) makes film narratives his primary focus, while noting the unexplored and essentially different narrative effects that film can produce with mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing. Reworking the theory of narration given by literary scholar Mieke Bal, he examines cinematic techniques such as external and internal narration, visual and auditive focalization, the narrative force of sound and the ambiguities caused by voice-overs and flashbacks. He illustrates these narrative principles with a broad range of examples drawn from avant-garde cinema, golden- age Hollywood, blockbusters and European art cinema.

The diverse critical approaches to the study of the film make it a complex area of inquiry. Irrespective of the approach, it is now generally accepted that the film text is a plural, complex, simultaneously static and changing even, produced by the filmmakers who put it together and the audience who view it. It is unified by certain established ways in which shots are made and edited together. These structures are as conventionalized as the stories they create. By examining the internal structure of the film narrative, the way images are made and put together in order to tell us stories, we can discover a great deal of information about what films expect of us and vice-versa. Analysis of the form of the cinematic text concentrates on two basic building blocks of film, the shot and the cut, and the structure that comes into being when the film is being assembled, the combination of the shot and the cut that is the finished film. The first element, the shot, is the photographic record made when the film is exposed to light. The second comes into being when the shot is interrupted, when the camera is shut off, or when one piece of film is cut and fastened to another through the process of editing. The third element is the complicated structure of image and editing that

communicates the narrative. It is the initializing constituent of the text; the complex interaction of film and audience, structure, content, context, and culture. (John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, 2011)

As evident from the literature survey, it can be inferred that individual shots and how these shots are put together largely define the style of a film. Therefore, to carry out the analysis of narrative form and structure, the study takes up the smallest unit (after frame) of a filmic text, i.e., a shot and the transition from one shot to another, i.e., a cut, to analyse the overall film form of biopics.

2.3. Statistical Style Analysis

2.3.1 Theory

In their work *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis*, Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland, (pp. 101-16) describe the theory and method of Statistical Style Analysis as propounded by Barry Salt. The statistical style analysis of motion pictures is primarily a systematic version of *mise en scène* criticism – or, more accurately, *mise en shot* criticism. Eisenstein invented the term *mise en shot* to focus attention on the way shots are staged – that is, the way the parameters of the shot translate the actions and events into the film. The advantage of statistical style analysis over *mise en scène/shot* criticism is that it offers a more detached, systematic, and explicit mode of analysis. Statistical style analysis characterizes style in a numerical, systematic manner – that is, it analyzes style by measuring and quantifying it. At its simplest, the process of measuring involves counting elements, or variables, that reflect a film's style, and then performing statistical tests on those variables. More specifically, there are three standard aims of statistical style analysis: (1) to offer a quantitative analysis of style, usually, for the purpose of recognizing patterns, a task now made feasible with the use of computer technology. (2) for the purposes of authorship attribution, in cases of disputed authorship of anonymous or pseudonymous texts and (3) for

purposes of identifying the chronology of works, when the sequence of the composition is unknown or disputed. The first aim, the quantitative analysis of style, involves descriptive statistics, and the second and third (authorship attribution and chronology) involve both descriptive and inferential statistics. As its name implies, descriptive statistics simply describes a text as it is, by measuring and quantifying it in terms of its numerical characteristics. The result is a detailed, internal, molecular description of a text's (or group of texts') formal variables. Inferential statistics then employs this formal description to make predictions. That is, it uses this data as an index, primarily an index of an author's style, or to put the author's work into chronological order on the basis of measured changes in the style of their work over time. Whereas descriptive statistics produces data with complete certainty, inferential statistics is based on assumptions the statistician makes on the basis of the descriptive data. The assumptions the inferential statistician makes only have degrees of probability rather than certainty.

2.3.2 The Quantitative Analysis of Style

Like those who have brought structuralism, psychoanalysis, formalism or semiotics to film study, Barry Salt introduces a methodology using statistics that can contribute fruitfully to the analysis of the film. In his essay 'Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures' (Salt 1974), and later in his book *Film Style and Technology* (Salt 1992), Salt describes the individual style of directors by systematically collecting data on the formal parameters of their films. Salt then represents the quantity and frequency of these formal parameters in bar graphs, percentages, and average shot lengths. When he compares and contrasts the form of the films of different directors, he moves into the realm of stylistic analysis. Style in this sense designates a set of measurable patterns that significantly deviate from contextual norms. As just one example, Barry Salt calculated that the average shot length of a film in the 1940s is around 9-10 seconds. A 1940s film with an average shot length of 30 seconds

therefore significantly deviates from the norm and is, therefore, a significant indicator of style.

2.3.3 Method

In his *Film Quarterly* essay ‘Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures’ (Salt 1974), Barry Salt aimed to identify the individual style of a director by systematically collecting data on the formal parameters of films, particularly those formal parameters that are most directly under the director’s control, including: duration of the shot (including the calculation of average shot length, or ASL), shot scale, camera movement, angle of shot, strength of the cut (measured in terms of the spatio-temporal displacement from one shot to the next). Salt collected data from these parameters by laboriously going through the film shot by shot. For most of his analyses, he in fact collected data on all the shots that appear in the first 30 minutes of each film, because this is a representative sample from the film. Salt is also interested in combining the results of each parameter. For example, he argues that it would be useful to combine ‘duration of the shot’ with ‘shot scale’ for each film (or indeed, a director’s entire output), in order to determine ‘the relative total times spent in each type of shot’ (Salt, 1974, p.15), “giving an indication of the director’s preference for the use of that type of shot” (p.15). So, a director may use close-ups for a total of 20 minutes during a film, long shots for 30 minutes, and so on. After analyzing a sample of films from four directors, Salt finds that both shot scale and ASL are significant and defining characteristics of a director’s style. (Calculating the ASL involves dividing the duration of the film by the number of shots.) However, the distribution of shot scale is similar for the four directors he analyses.

2.3.4 Academic Research on Style Analysis: An Overview

Barry Salt’s (1974), *Statistical style Analysis of Motion Pictures*, lends some objectivity to the area of directorial style in terms of formal elements and also in emulation of the

statistical analyses of features of literary and musical style that had been in progress since the thirties, and thus he reports his preliminary work in the paper. According to him, though there is a wide acceptance that individual styles can be recognized for at least some film directors in the formal aspects of their films as many directors have sharply different styles that are easily recognized but he asserts that what constitutes these individualities of style has up to now been more of a matter of loose assertion than demonstration. He considers those variables that are most directly under the director's control and also to a certain extent those that are easiest to quantify like; shot length, shot scale, shot angle, camera movement, and nature and strength of shot transitions. He uses a particular sample in this study for comparison with the group of early thirties Jean Renoir films.

Christine E. Nothelfer et.al (2009), in their work *Shot Structure in Hollywood Film*, analyse how cuts have increased in frequency since the beginning of cinema and how their arrangement forms structure across groups of shots is the focus of this study. In order to examine this, films are obtained from three genres (action, comedy, drama) and four years (1945, 1965, 1985, 2005). The results show that mean shot length has decreased over the years. Auto-correlation computation of shot length pairs shows that shot pairs are positively correlated, across both variables of genre and year; this reveals that structure is present across groups of shots in the same pattern of shot length sequences. This finding suggests that there is much more structure to narratives and to seemingly intuitively-placed cuts than one may think.

Nick Redfern's (2010) *Statistical analysis of shot types in the films of Alfred Hitchcock*, analyses the changing use of shot scales and shot types in the films of Alfred Hitchcock from *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) to *The Birds* (1963) in the context of the introduction of sound technology to British cinema in 1929 and the director's move from Britain to Hollywood in 1939. A sample of 42 films was divided into three subgroups and was analysed using linear

regression of rank-frequency plots and non-parametric analysis of variance. Overall the results indicate that the introduction of sound technology did not have an impact on Hitchcock's film style, but that the move to Hollywood did result in specific changes in the style of Hitchcock's films.

James E. Cutting et.al. (2011) in their paper *How Act Structure Sculpted Shot Lengths and Shot Transitions in Hollywood*, explore a sample of 150 Hollywood style films from 1935 to 2005, to demonstrate that acts shape shot lengths and transitions. Dividing films into quarters (four acts of generally equal length—the setup, the complicating action, the development, and the climax), and using statistical style analysis they found that shots are longer at quarter boundaries and generally shorter near the middle of each quarter. Moreover, aside from the beginnings and ends of films, the paper shows that fades, dissolves, and other non-cut transitions are more common in the third and less common in the fourth quarters of films. This proves that these acts are not just based on the structure of the narrative, but they do have a physical manifestation in shots and transitions.

Cutting et.al (2011), in their work *Quicker, faster, darker: Changes in Hollywood film over 75 years*, examined 160 English-language films released from 1935 to 2010 and found four changes after doing a style analysis. First, shot lengths have gotten shorter, a trend also reported by others. Second, contemporary films have more motion and movement than earlier films. Third, in contemporary films, shorter shots also have proportionately more motion than longer shots, whereas there is no such relation in older films. And finally, films have gotten darker. That is, the mean luminance value of frames across the length of a film has decreased over time. They also discuss psychological effects associated with these four changes and suggest that all four linear trends have a single cause: Filmmakers have incrementally tried to exercise more control over the attention of filmgoers. They suggest

these changes to be the signatures of the evolution of popular film which do not reflect changes in film style.

Cutting et.al (2011), in the paper, *The Changing Poetics of the Dissolve in Hollywood Film*, tracked the usage of dissolves in 150 films released from 1935 to 2005. They found: (a) that after a lull between 1970 and 1990, dissolves have become more numerous, although not nearly so common as during the studio era; (b) that shots surrounding single dissolves are fairly long compared to the median shot lengths of a given film, suggesting visual preparation for scene change before a dissolve, and a re-acceleration after; and (c) dissolves have increasingly reappeared in clusters reflecting a rebirth of the Hollywood montage.

Nick Redfern (2012) in his paper, *Exploratory Data Analysis and Film Form: The editing structure of Slasher films*, analyses the dynamic editing structure of four Slasher films released between 1978 and 1983 with simple ordinal time series methods. He shows that the order structure matrix is a useful exploratory data analytical method for revealing the editing structure of motion pictures without requiring priori assumptions about the objectives of a film. By comparing the order structure matrices of the four films, he finds that Slasher films share a common editing pattern, closely comprising of multiple editing regimes with change points between editing patterns occurring with large changes in mood and localised clusters of shorter and longer takes are associated with specific narrative events.

Mike Baxter (2012) in *Picturing the pictures: Hitchcock, statistics, and films*, inspired by Barry Salt's work, takes one facet of the statistical analysis of film style and applied an alternative approach that shows his results rather more clearly. Though he claims no new interpretative insights, but the analysis illustrates, rather neatly and efficiently, results that otherwise require a certain amount of effort to obtain and comprehend. He compares the directorial style of some great directors like Josef von Sternberg, Cecil B. DeMille's, Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock.

Nick Redfern (2015), in his work, *The log-normal distribution is not an appropriate parametric model for shot length distributions of Hollywood films*, examines the assertion that the two-parameter log-normal distribution is an appropriate parametric model for the shot length distributions of Hollywood films. He examined a total of 134 Hollywood films from 1935 to 2005, and concludes that there is no justification for claiming the log-normal distribution as an adequate parametric model of shot length data for Hollywood films and recommends the use of robust statistics that do not require underlying parametric models for the analysis of film style.

Nick Redfern (2013), in *Film style and narration in Rashomon*, analyses the use of film style in *Rashomon* (Kurosawa Akira, 1950) to determine whether the different accounts of the rape and murder provided by the bandit, the wife, the husband and the woodcutter are formally distinct by comparing shot length data and using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to look for relationships between shot scale, camera movement, camera angle and the use of point-of-view (POV) shots, reverse-angle (RA) cuts and axial cuts. The results show that the four accounts of the rape and the murder in *Rashomon* differ not only in their content but also in the way they are narrated through these cinematic techniques. Editing pace and the type of shots used to create the narrative perspectives of different characters mark them out as either active or passive narrators reflecting their level of narrative agency within the film.

Nick Redfern (2013) in *Time series clustering and the analysis of film style*, describes a method for applying time series clustering to the shot length data of motion pictures based on the standardized shot density for a normalized point process. Providing a brief overview of cluster analysis, and explaining how Shot length data must be prepared prior to cluster analysis he demonstrates the application of time series clustering to the analysis of shot length data. He quotes (Jain, Murty, & Flynn 1999) and uses Cluster analysis as it is used to

segment large databases into homogenous groups and to visualize the structure of large databases in order to aid analysts in identifying meaningful groups and subgroups based on the similarities between data objects (Jain, Murty, & Flynn 1999).

The paper *Film Studies and Statistical Literacy* by Nick Redfern (2013), establishes the relevance of statistical literacy to Film Studies in higher education. He argues that statistical literacy comprises a set of skills and attitudes necessary for all film scholars and that it is a significant failure of film education in the UK that these skills and attitudes do not form a part of the curriculum for film students with negative consequences for their understanding of research on cinema.

Nick Redfern (2014), in his invited talk in University of Glasgow, on *Quantitative methods and the study of film*, addresses the analysis of film – its texts, its audiences, its political economy – in higher education, arguing for the abandonment of Film Studies as either a subject or a discipline and approaching the cinema as a complex object of inquiry that demands an ecumenical methodological perspective in order that its numerous and various dimensions are fully comprehended. He states that quantitative methods are at present underused by film scholars and further argues that there is much to be gained from the application of quantitative methods in studying film and its audiences, and he illustrates this claim by drawing on a range of empirical studies.

Jeremy Butler (2014), in *Statistical Analysis of Television Style: What Can Numbers Tell Us about TV Editing?*, explores the value of splicing together a humanities-based analysis of television style with digitally generated statistical data. Studying the editing style of the situation comedy *Happy Days* (1974–1984) this article measures the cutting rates correlated with each mode of production and finds a statistically significant difference between the two. Additionally, the article examines the general acceleration of cutting rates on American

television since 1951 and comes to a perhaps surprising conclusion about the impact of individual editors on television style.

Jonathan Olliver (2015), in his paper *Poetics of early Hammer horror films: a statistical style analysis*, investigates the construction of the first seven horror films produced by British film Studio, Hammer, in the years 1957–1960. It is a poetic study using statistical stylistic analysis. The Hammer films are compared with a control sample of seven independently produced British horror films from the same period. Each of the fourteen films is analysed shot-by-shot and data recorded for a range of formal technical aspects, each considered to be ‘under the control of the director’: average shot length, shot size, camera movement, and shot angle. Inferences are then drawn from this data to address the problem: on a formal level, what constitutes a Hammer horror film?

Nick Redfern (2015), in *Exploratory data analysis and the editing structure of Friday the Thirteenth (1980)*, analyses the dynamic editing structure of the film using the time series of the ranks of the shot lengths as an exploratory data analytical method for revealing the editing structure of motion pictures without requiring *a priori* assumptions about the functions of film style. He finds that *Friday the Thirteenth* comprises multiple editing regimes with change points between editing patterns occurring with large changes in mood and localised clusters of shorter and longer takes are associated with specific narrative events. The multiple editing regimes create different types of frightening experiences for the viewer with slower edited passages creating a pervading sense of foreboding and rapid editing linked to the frenzied violence of body horror.

A review of the ongoing research in the area of statistical style analysis suggests that empirical methods are the current trend to approach the analysis of a filmic text and can help us to closely observe the underlying style and internal structure of film narratives. The literature review simultaneously suggests that the genre of biopics has never been studied

from this perspective where the narrative form is analyzed using statistical techniques, especially no such study could be traced in Indian context focusing the Hindi Biopics.

2.3.5 Identification of Variables

The present study attempts an empirical investigation of film style and structure, and therefore the technique used for analysis is statistical style analysis. Drawing from the review of the literature, the parameters or variables, most suitable and significant for such analysis are identified as: shot duration, shot scale, shot angle and camera movement (see Appendix 1 for definitions). These variables are studied to find out the pattern in the narrative style and structure of the selected films. The detailed description of the techniques and levels of analysis are discussed in chapter three, Research Methodology.

2.4 Research Gap

After an extensive and systematic review of literature the following gap has been identified which endorses the need and significance to carry out a study of Hindi Biopics with an aim to understand their stylistic features and narrative structure.

1. There is a considerable and evident lack of research on Hindi biopics. It can be clearly observed that these films have hardly been addressed as a distinct genre and no study has been traced which tries to understand the underlying similarities or dissimilarities between films which belong to the same category.
2. Narrative film form (style/structure) of biopics has not been studied, especially in Indian context.
3. Statistical style analysis as a technique of film analysis has not been used to explore generic conventions of biopics. This further establishes that empirical approaches to biopic research remains largely unexplored.

The thesis is thus an attempt to work on the identified research gap, by performing a statistical style analysis of selected Hindi biopics, to explore the narrative structure and style of biopics. The detailed procedure of how the research is being conducted is discussed in the following chapter, Research Methodology.

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