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MONTAGE OF A JOKE IN A DIALOGUE-LESS FILM

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Thesis supervisor - Martin Čihák

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PRAHA, AUGUST 2023

DECLARATION

I declare that I have elaborated the Master's thesis entitled

MONTAGE OF A JOKE IN A DIALOGUE-LESS FILM

independently, under the expert supervision of my thesis supervisor, and using only the literature and sources cited therein, and that the thesis was not used within the scope of a different university programme of study or to obtain the same degree or a different degree. I consent to the publication of the thesis in accordance with legislation and with AMU internal regulations.

Prague, August 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anagha', with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

ANAGHA ANAND

KEYWORDS

Comedy, Dialogue-less, Montage of Attractions, Sergei Eisenstein, Visual humour, Gag, Joke, Indian cinema

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Komedie, bez dialogů, montáž atrakcí, vizuální humor, gag, vtip, Indická kinematografie

ABSTRACT

PUSHPAKA VIMANA was a completely dialogue-less Indian film made in 1987. This text is a study of the film that uses different aspects of filmmaking by the editor to execute a joke visually, without dialogue. The thesis intends to understand what makes a good joke and how the editor can work with the footage to create the intended comedy. For this purpose, we will be focusing on analysing various gags from *Pushpaka Vimana*. This text is to present the editor with a holistic approach to editing and to be aware and use all aspects of filmmaking- not just editing at the cutting table, as comedy starts way before that.

ABSTRAKT

PUSHPAKA VIMANA je indický film z roku 1987, natočen kompletně bez dialogů. Tento text je studie zmíněného filmu, který využívá různé aspekty filmového umění k vytvoření vtipů vizuálně, bez pomoci dialogů. Práce si klade za cíl prozkoumat co tvoří dobrý vtip a jak nejlépe může střihač pracovat s daným materiálem aby vytvořil zamýšlenou komedii. Proto budeme analyzovat různorodé gagy z *Pushpaka Vimana*. Tento text by měl střihači osvětlit holistický přístup k montáži a k ostatním dostupným prostředkům kinematografie, ne pouze k práci za střihačským stolem, protože komedie začíná dlouho před ním.

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Kamal Haasan in Pushpaka Vimana

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INTRODUCTION

Pushpaka Vimana is a 1987 comedy-drama film produced in India. It was directed by Singeetam Sreenivasa Rao and edited by D Vasu. The most notable thing about this film is that it is dialogue-less. Although it is not to be mistaken as a silent film It does use sound as well as music. I have chosen to write about this film as it is a rare gem of an Indian film and a good balance of comedy, drama and romance. Unlike a stereotypical Indian film from the 80s, there is no singing or dancing. The great Satyajit Ray has been known to appreciate the performance of the protagonist, played by Kamal Haasan, as well as the film stating - "Singeetam Srinivasa Rao has created a love scene around a dead body"¹.

This film is filled with a lot of nuanced humorous moments. I choose to write about this special movie as I am from India, where the film was made and I enjoy comedy films. The art of comedy is something that has appealed to me and it is my mission in this thesis to decipher the editing strategies used to land a joke. How does one edit a comedic moment effectively?

Through analysing the chosen scenes from the film, I will unfold the theories that I believe constitute a solid humorous moment from setup to execution to the payoff. I would also like to dive into the differences between Western and Indian sensibilities in terms of films and how it affects the way our films are made and what we find humorous as compared to the West.

We will then go into the plot, characters and spaces and understand the world of the film. Here as well we compare the Indian film structure to the Western one. From there, I will go into the specific analysis of the scenes and moments I've chosen from the film that I think will best represent each of the "theories" I have conceptualised. Afterwards, we will look into Soviet Montage, specifically the Theory of Attractions from Sergei Eisenstein and see how it will apply to *Pushpaka Vimana*. At the end of that chapter, I intend to bring all my conceptualised theories together and present them through the lens of the old master.

For the purpose of the thesis, I wanted to speak to the creators of *Pushpaka Vimana* themselves so I can understand from their perspective how they worked with comedic moments in the film. Unfortunately, I could not contact the editor himself as he passed away in the 90s. So I interviewed the director, Mr Singeetam, who is 93 years old but a

¹ According to IMDB TRIVIA – <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0251355/trivia/>

man young at heart. He enthusiastically has shared with me all about his workflow with his editor Mr Vasu. This working relationship as well as the reception of the Indian audience to the film back when it was released will be the ending chapter of the thesis. Did the audience find it funny? Did it work?

My aim in writing this thesis is to bring light to this underrated and unspoken film. From my research, I have not found much literature or theses written about this film (especially from the editing standpoint) and neither particularly about a dialogue-less comedy. Even finding writings about editing comedic dialogue is very hard to come by. I believe it is because it is quite a tough topic to pin down. Humour is not for everybody and it can be incredibly subjective but through my research, I have found that several patterns arise in the construction of comedic scenes. This is what I would like to explore in this thesis and try to theorise. I believe there are some universal concepts that, if used properly, can be very useful to an editor when we edit comedy.

The analysis of the chosen scenes will be from the editing point of view. I will attempt to look at the precise moment of cutting to then see what larger feeling it provides to the humour. I will also look at Mise-en-scene as I believe everything in front of the camera will bring forth the comedy. So it is important to go through each element of the mise-en-scene to find out how it is used effectively in this film. Editing is far more than just piecing shots together. Editors also work closely with sound and music as well, to reach the desired comedy out of the footage.

I will also compare scenes in *Pushpaka Vimana* to certain scenes in Eisenstein's films. We will see how he used the montage of attraction theory there and how I can apply it here as well.

The reason why *Pushpaka Vimana* is selected to be analysed in this thesis is because the comedy in the film is very nuanced and subtle. It is not slapstick. It has a very realistic tone and form. The film was shot at a normal speed (probably 25fps) so the movements of the characters are realistic/natural and not exaggerated and fast like in a Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin film. These are perhaps the first people and films you'd think of when I say dialogue-less comedy, but I believe enough text, films, video essays and theses have been written about these wonderful people and films. Instead, I chose to delve into a much lesser-known film and perhaps which was never analysed from the point of view of editing. What makes a good comedy film? What processes does the editor go through to

achieve the intended comedy? What process does an audience go through while watching a comedy? What tools can the editor have in his editor toolbox while he attempts to edit a comedy?

CHAPTER 1

A LOOK INTO INDIAN COMEDIES

To understand *Pushpaka Vimana*, we must first look at the country it was made, by whom it was made and for whom the film was made. India is a vast country with different states and languages. Comedy in India has a very long history going back to Puppetry. Each region in India had its form of puppetry as well.

“Traditional puppet plays in India enact stories of heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses, taken from ancient literary texts such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics and the Puranas (literally “Of Ancient Times”, i.e. stories of various deities), besides local myths and tales. The known stories and simple performances recharge memories of the community and share significant moral and spiritual ideas while also bringing comment on present situations via clowns and other devices”² Eventually, it evolved into folk performances, where people of the community came together, devised funny skits and talked about the current political situations through comedy -



Indian Rod Puppetry

“In mediaeval India, a class of the folk entertainers called Nakkal, Bhands, Bahurupi, Bhagatiya had a peculiar style of entertaining people, thereby mingling wonderful performances full of songs and music. The most popular ones of the medieval India, still prevalent in India are the Bhands. They enact small skits with extempore humour, jokes, criticizing social evils and practices, adding the flavour of their wit and oration. They perform in various social functions like marriages, festivals etc”³

² Ganarajya, B. (2017, April 4). *India*. World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts. <https://wepa.unima.org/en/india/>
³ *Indian comedy and humor*. IndiaNetzone.com. (2013, August 31). https://www.indianetzone.com/5/indian_comedy_humor.htm



Photo - *Dhola Maru* (1982) by *Sutradhar Puppet Theatre* (New Delhi, India), direction and design: Dadi D. Pudumjee, construction of puppets: Dadi Pudumjee and *Sutradhar* puppeteers. Actors featured in the photo (left to right): *Puran Bhatt, Seema Kapoor, Karen Smith*. Large costume puppets. Photo courtesy of Dadi Pudumjee

Each region in India also had their versions of folk entertainment - for example, Koodiyattam in Kerala, Nautanki in Uttar Pradesh, Therukoothu in Tamil Nadu, Jatra in Orissa and Bihar and many more.⁴ There were so many stories coming out of these regions and these mediums were the way to explore those emotions through humour and drama.

It is always much easier to face tough situations with a bit of comedy. It is also the case for the film, *Pushpaka Vimana*, which we will delve into in the next chapter as we explore its plot and themes. Expressing one's tragedies through humour has been a running theme even before the film medium.

"Much before the introduction of film (silent or talkies) three elements were vital in Indian culture *natya* (drama) *nritya* (pantomime) and *nrrita* (pure dance). These three aspects were eventually passed on to Indian cinema."⁵

Theatre was especially a medium that used comedy. Exaggerated body and facial movements, slapstick etc, were added for comic relief. Dance and music were also intertwined with theatre. This art form transferred into film when the medium was first introduced to India - "On July 7th 1896, the Lumière Brothers showcased six films at the Watson Hotel in Mumbai (then Bombay) and this marked the birth of Indian cinema as we know it today. *The Times of India* referred to this event as the "miracle of the century"⁶

4 <https://www.thebetterindia.com/72088/traditional-folk-theatre-india/>

5 July 7 1896 - *Indian cinema is born* - What Happened on This Day in History - Maps of India. (2013, July 7). <https://www.mapsofindia.com/on-this-day/july-7-1896-indian-cinema-is-born#:~:text=On%20July%207th%201896%2C%20the,their%20cinematic%20excellence%20in%20Paris.>

6 July 7 1896 - *Indian cinema is born* - What Happened on This Day in History - Maps of India. (2013,

Comedy has been part of Indian culture since the very beginning.

“The first full-fledged satirical comedy film on the Indian screen, *Bilet Pherat* (London Returned), was produced in 1921 by Dharendra Nath Ganguly in Bengal. The film was a satire on the life of a London returned youth – dealing with the issues of cultural mismatch of those times in a joking manner. Historically, films in the early days became very popular among the people in no time, especially after the talkies (sound) films came.



Bilet Pherat (London Returned) poster, the first feature Indian comedy film

However, comedy took a while to emerge – initially, comedy merely provided the theatrically driven, comic relief. In the post-independence era (after 1947⁷), Hindi films introduced the comedians as a staple, appearing in the main plot at regular intervals. Most of their role was of slapstick variety and artists like Tuntun, Mukri, Asit Sen, Keshto Mukherji, becoming symbols of laughter and humour. Slapstick is a primitive and universal comedy packed with the style of aggressive and physical acts including violent scenes, rough play, and joke with a shared vision, for example, throwing a cake to face, crumbling house, falling into the sea, missing pants, slapping each other”⁸

What does the phrase Indian cinema bring to your imagination? Your first thought is probably Bollywood! Bollywood is mostly a term used for films produced in Bombay and mostly in the Hindi language. Bollywood as defined by Britannica -

Bollywood is the Hindi-language sector of the Indian movie making industry that began in Bombay (now Mumbai) in the 1930s and developed into an enormous film empire. Stars, rather than plots, were often the driving force behind the films.⁹

July7).<https://www.mapsofindia.com/on-this-day/july-7-1896-indian-cinema-is-born#:~:text=On%20July%207th%201896%2C%20the,the%20cinematic%20excellence%20in%20Paris.>

⁷ Date added by the author of the thesis

⁸ Ganjoo, M. (2020, June). *Laughter through the Ages: Role of Comedy Films in Shaping Bollywood*, in Global Media Journal (Indian Edition) 2248 5835 Vol 1, Issue 1 June 2020.

⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (2023, January 6). *Bollywood*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from

Pushpaka Vimana is tough to put into the category of Bollywood. Since it is dialogue-less, the notable cast comes from all over India and has fans from different parts of the country. It is a universal picture. Not having dialogues or lyrical music and dance was and is a wildly uncommon style of filmmaking in mainstream Indian cinema, more so in the late 80s, when the film industry had already left behind the silent era decades ago. Bollywood films are extremely colourful and loud and some would say, intense. *Pushpaka Vimana* challenges the norms of a traditional Bollywood film, without taking away the drama of one.

Perhaps what one does not know about India is that due to the vastness of the country, its different states, its languages, its food, and its life, the films are also vastly different. The subject matters discussed are varied and so is the humour. Cultural context is very important when it comes to comedy. *Pushpaka Vimana* discusses and derives humour from the economic climate of the time. The protagonist is an unemployed youth, there is also several imagery indicating greed, and also the conditions of not so well off youth in the country. The best way to show class differences on screen is by portraying the life of a poor man, unhappy with his status and aspiring for more and in contrast, seeing the life of a wealthy man. Mix these two worlds together, swap places and you've got yourself a very interesting, engaging dramatic plot as well as lots of opportunities for creating humour around the situation, which is just the case for *Pushpaka Vimana*.

The title of the film is important to note here as the film was released under multiple titles because it was going to be watched by audiences from several regions in India.

The regional cinema industries were by then already quite strong, especially in the south of India where Hindi was spoken much less than in the north. The other regional industries are the Malayalam film industry, from the state of Kerala, Kannada film industry, from the state of Karnataka, Telugu film industry from the state of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil film industry from the state of Tamil Nadu - just to name a few prominent ones. It is also important to note that since all these states are in the south and are neighbours, the languages have many similarities. The film was released on the 27th of November 1987 in Telugu, which is the director's native language, it was released as *Pushpaka Vimanam*. Other titles include *Pushpak* (hindi version), *Pushpaka Vimana* (kannada version), *Pushpakavimanam* (malayalam version) and *Pesum Padam* (Tamil version meaning

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bollywood-film-industry-India>

'Talking picture'). The relevance of the title and its importance in the film shall be discussed in the following chapter.

The structure of Indian films is quite different from Western ones. Our films usually have a run time of 2-3 hours. If you're used to watching films in the English language, it will be quite a new experience watching an Indian film. One might think that the run time might make it long and boring, in fact, it is the opposite. The reason why films are so long is mainly because the storytelling supports quite a few subplots. A plot is defined as the main sequence of events. The protagonist (the hero that embarks on the journey), travels through these series of events. The story is focused around their journey and each scene has a consequence, a cause and effect, which leads to the next scene and the next... and so on. This makes a film. A subplot is a secondary string of events running parallel to the main plot line. Either we see the protagonist involved in the subplot or other main characters on their own adventures and the events are loosely connected to the main plot or could be their own adventure. Indian films are very much filled with subplots. This is where most of the comedy lies. It has the most potential for the other characters to shine and also could create comic relief. In *Pushpak* as well, the film has multiple side plots that are loosely connected to the main plot. If we cut all this away, the film will be very short. In Bollywood films, the story is often supplemented with songs and dance sequences. Ever since I was a child and went to the cinema, I remember dance numbers on screen, with people dancing in the cinema during these sequences. It's a sacred place to let loose and go with your family or friends and just have a fun dancey experience. It's unique and special to India (perhaps even Southeast Asia) and I have never experienced this feeling in European cinemas or American cinemas. My theory is that clubs or parties were rare so people used to go to the cinema to let loose and dance to the songs on screen. At that time, typical comedy films were very dialogue based or had exaggerated characters who used slapstick comedy to their advantage. *Pushpak* does not rely on their dance routines or verbal jokes for entertainment. Humour also varies from country to country and also more specifically within the country, and between regions. Understanding this specific kind of humour before we start the editing process is key.

It is important to know what expectations audiences come with while watching this film and what their expectations are, and what they are used to. *Pushpak* must have been an unusual film for the typical filmgoer back then. The reason Kamal Haasan was chosen to play the role of the protagonist was as he was at the peak of his career, well known, and was a great actor. This drew audiences to watch the film, peaking their interest and they

gave the film a chance. That's the secret behind its success. Of course, the film is quite well made and funny, albeit with subtler humorous moments than films from that time,



Pushpaka Vimana 100th running day movie theatre poster

the audience in to experience a different kind indeed an unexpected success and the film ran for 35 weeks in Bangalore, in the state the film was shot in and brought in several awards and critical acclaim. It is now a cult classic.

Syd Field, the author of *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, theorised a 3-act structure for films -1. setup, 2. confrontation, 3. resolution - with several plot points that come in at very specific times in the film, pushing the protagonist to make decisions, thereby pushing the story ahead. These screenwriting theories help keep the story tight and knowing these points help us editors find the right timings for certain events to transpire

through the film. Usually, the 3 act structure works very well to structure a crisp 90 minute film. This also maintains the attention of the audience as it is an optimum length. Indian films on the other hand mostly never follow this structure. We use other methods to grab and keep the attention of the audience like the prolonged dance sequences and bizarre subplots. Or in the case of *Pushpak*, a myriad of gags. In *Pushpak*, it does not stick to Syd Field's 3 act structure exactly as the timings of the plot points come in at very different times, but if several subplots were removed, gags were removed and the film was overall shortened to only follow the main plot-line, then I believe it would have a perfect 3 act structure. For example, the antagonist, an assassin who is out to kill our protagonist is introduced only an hour and 5 minutes into the film. Since he is part of the main plot, one would assume he would be introduced earlier in the film, but not really, and it is not disorienting when he is introduced this late in the film, all the previous gags were entertaining enough and kept the pace up. Another example would be the inciting incident- the turning point , a decision that the protagonist has to make that propels the story forward - which I believe comes in at around 30 minutes, when the protagonist

decides to kidnap a wealthy hotel guest and impersonate him for the rest of the film, eventually facing the consequences of these actions. Although the plot points that Syd Field theorised do not happen at the exact moments, one can pick them out in *Pushpak*; they just occur much later in the film than expected.

So, what made *Pushpak* work as a film? What tools can we have in our tool-belt as editors while undertaking the editing of a dialogue-less comedy?

CHAPTER 2

PUSHPAKA VIMANA- CREATING THE RIGHT SETTING FOR COMEDY

The constructed environment in a comedy film determines all the humour you can take advantage of. This involves characters, spaces one chooses, themes we want to discuss and finally the plot. A strong plot can be created with an interesting setting and thoroughly fleshed-out characters. As is the case in *Pushpak*, the film that I have chosen to discuss in this thesis.



K is an unemployed graduate

2.1 THE PLOT

In *Pushpak*, the audience follows the protagonist, we will henceforth refer to as “K”- an out-of-luck graduate, currently unemployed and looking for work. He is miserly and looking for easier ways to move forward in life and attempts to take the place of a person who is ahead of him in the queue while waiting at the job vacancy office, just to be sent to the back of the line. By sheer

luck, he comes across a drunk, wealthy man, passed out on the side of the road with a room key to a fancy hotel named PUSHPAK. He kidnaps the man and keeps him in his dingy room tied up, while K lives the life of this rich man instead, and gets a good taste of the wealthy life. He consequently also falls in love with a girl, who will be referred to as “A”. She is also staying at the same hotel, Pushpak, where her father is a travelling entertainer and magician. At the same time, an assassin has been hired by the wealthy man’s wife’s lover who wants him out of the picture. The assassin mistakes K for the wealthy man and unsuccessfully tries to murder him several times. Eventually, K finds out and realises that wealth is not everything, it just gets him into a lot of trouble to be dishonest about who he is. He also understands that the girl, A, doesn't like him because he is rich, he cannot buy her love, and she likes him for who he is because he was sweet and kind to her. He decides to confess to “A” that he is in fact poor and releases the wealthy man back into his hotel suite and confesses to him as well. As “K” goes back to his normal life as an unemployed youth, he sees A in the car leaving the hotel with her

family, she smiles at him, forgiving him and throws him a note and a rose. As “K” picks up the rose, the note flies away in the traffic, ending the film on a bittersweet note. Comedy is intertwined with tragedy after all.

2.2 THE SPACES

The way *Pushpak* uses its spaces is interesting to note. There are many locations in the film. Primarily the namesake Hotel Pushpak and K’s room in it. Other spaces include the streets of the city, an antique store, “A”’s room in the hotel, a disco, and other parts of the hotel. The use of many new and interesting locations keeps the audience engaged in the film.

There is a very strong contrast between K’s dingy apartment and the hotel room.

K's apartment



Hotel room



The pictures on the left are his apartment and on the right, the hotel room. One is of course cleaner, air-conditioned and filled with expensive things, whereas his room is dirty, and the windows don’t have curtains and he has a small, inexpensive table fan. Contrast

helps build comedy - a once poor man, experiencing the land of the rich? There is a lot of opportunity for humour there. Especially when the film does not have dialogue, the audience experiences everything visually. As simple as this sounds, if the eyes of the audience have things to look at, they will be more engaged in the story and can immerse themselves better in the world. For example, in the photo on the left, K drinks some tea in front of a Rambo poster and stares into the distance. There is also a picture of Karl Marx in the corner. *Pushpak* is quite heavy-handed with its references to the stark class differences of the time and K's aspiration to be wealthy. This simple addition of the photo to the space gives the audience a hint into the theme of the film and also an insight into the character.

2.3 THE CHARACTERS

Creating interesting and humorous characters is important and key to a good comedy film, especially a dialogue-less one. Their appearance, costumes, as well as their demeanour, is important. The editor of course does not have a say in the way characters look or what is on the wall behind the character, but knowing how the audience might observe and read what is shown to them, can be something advantageous to know if you are editing a comedy film.

Here in *Pushpak*, we are only looking at what is communicated by visuals and sound. We have to maximise the message through visuals. For example, the filmmaker wants to communicate that the character we see on screen is an assassin. How does one do that? The assassin is dressed head to toe in black, with a black leather jacket and black sunglasses. The fact that he is wearing a jacket, that too leather, is hilarious, as it is quite hot in India. He is also wearing a shiny white tie. All this creates a funny effect. Hence, costume plays a very important role in creating humour. His hair is combed impeccably and he always carries around a thermos for his ice daggers, his preferred method to kill. The first time we are introduced to the assassin, he has a room full of guns that he points in different directions as well as into the camera but then proceeds to never use them later in the film instead opting for the dagger made of ice.



The assassin with his ice dagger

We need to communicate that the protagonist is poor and doesn't have any clean clothes. How does one communicate that? Let him wash just the armpits of his shirt. (Photo- top left) He also wears a mismatched tie and shirt (Photo- top right). When we need to show that the character is taking a metaphorical flying chariot to his dream, place the character in front of a sculpture with wings (photo - bottom left). Once he switches lives with the wealthy man, he wears black sunglasses and a crisp white tunic(Photo bottom right). All of this communicates to the audience the kind of person he is and the changes he's going through in the film without words. The changes in K as the film progresses-



The hotel's name is also the titular 'Pushpak' - denoting that the hotel takes you to places. *Pushpak* and *Pushpaka Vimana* have the same meaning. *Pushpaka Vimana* is a celestial chariot from a great Indian epic called Ramayana. It is the magical flying vehicle of the ten-headed Demon King Ravana, who rules the kingdom of Lanka. In reference to that, this metaphorical chariot will also take K to reach his dream of being wealthy via a shortcut.

How does one reveal that the wealthy man's wife is cheating on him with his best friend/business partner?



1. Wealthy man dials a number on the telephone



2. Tracking shot of photographs of the man, wife and lover



3. Wife and lover in bed



4. The wealthy man puts down the telephone

The wealthy man places a call to his wife from the hotel room. It then cuts to a framed picture of both of them. From this starts a tracking shot revealing a series of several framed pictures in their home of the wealthy man, wife and lover. There is the sound of the telephone ringing and the sounds of sexual intercourse. The tracking shot ends on the telephone in the wife's home. It then cuts to the wealthy man's wife and lover in bed. The editor then cuts back to the wealthy man in the hotel room putting down the phone, disappointed that his wife didn't pick up his call. The audience now understands the

whole situation in just a matter of seconds. There is a joy in discovering some new information about a character and in the way this scene is constructed, it puts the audience's mind to work and lets us fill the gaps of these characters' lives. For example, if this were a film with dialogue, this fact of the wife cheating on her husband with the lover could have been easily revealed through a talk between the wife and the lover. Or the lover and the assassin. When the lover hires the assassin, all he gives the assassin is the hotel room key, leading to further misunderstandings. But still keeping things interesting and pushing the plot forward. If there were dialogues, this would most definitely not be the plot of the film as a lot of misunderstandings can be cleared up with speech and all the information could be supplied through the dialogue instead. I believe this exact plot-line of *Pushpak* would be far more boring as a dialogue comedy film. Without the use of dialogue, the filmmakers were definitely pushed to think creatively about how to construct and hold the attention of the audience for two hours. The director/writer had given himself the restriction of using only visuals and sound and this is the result of his thought process. In fact I think it is an editor's dream to only work with visuals, filmmakers get too "lazy" in the way they reveal information through dialogue. This is also a reason for its success, it keeps a person interested and drawn into the story because of how visually engaging it is- through the subtle (sometimes not too subtle) use of symbolism, metaphors and interesting music and sound.

2.4 THE THEMES

The film discusses economic and class disparities mostly in subtle ways. The long queue that K has to wait in, to enter the employment office pushes this narrative. He is shown as one in a long line of unemployed young men. The film was a reflection of the state of the country during that time (1987).

K constantly tries to compensate for the fact that he is poor and tries in many ways to make himself have the upper hand over someone poorer than

him. Subsequently, this obsession leads him to commit the kidnapping of the wealthy man. The film also discusses death and how people around react to it. The film uses metaphors and symbolism strongly.



K stands in line at the job centre

So what is the role of the editor while editing a dialogue-less comedy? What tools can we have in our editor tool-belt during the process?

CHAPTER 3

EXECUTING A SUCCESSFUL JOKE

Editing is not just about cutting shots and placing them together. Sure, that's the technical aspect of the process, but more importantly, the knowledge of the editor always shines through in the choices he makes for his edits, more so in a comedy, as humour is subjective.. Finding and choosing the correct shots, correct lengths for these said shots and then working with sound to make the whole joke land and come together within a scene, is the job of the editor. The editor also then has to feel and find the rhythm of the film as a whole and not just focus on the workings of individual scenes. To edit a comedy dialogue-less film would be a challenge but with a lot of opportunities to try what works and what doesn't. While editing a scene, an editor will begin with understanding what the joke is exactly. Understanding that is the key to editing it the way it was intended. As the editor, our job is to make the best choices to create the desired effect.

It is very hard to say what makes a good joke. The setup, execution and landing have to be on point, these things need to come together and align for the comedy to work. Usually, comedy in the film medium is different from comedy in a stand-up. For example, in a stand-up set, the comedian's speech and delivery of the joke is the main point from where the joke works. This goes hand in hand with their appearance, body language, tone etc. But first and foremost, it is dialogue based. We have to approach editing a comedy film in quite a different way, MORE SO when in this thesis, we are exploring how to make jokes work WITHOUT the use of spoken words. When the film is very visual, as editors, we have to always keep in the back of our minds what the audience will be understanding if we place a certain shot here or there. Our choices are always important. Apart from delving into particular cuts, what also constitutes a good joke is how the joke plays in a person's mind. Making notes of what we as editors itself find funny is good, most likely, the audience will also find it funny, 95 per cent of the time.

How can I as an editor cut the joke in a way to bring forth this reaction? What actually makes something funny? What is the process my brain goes through when seeing the joke for the first time? The editor needs to understand the simplicities and complexities of the joke to actually work with the joke.

I have formulated some methods or strategies one could use to help land a joke. For each of the methods, an example from *Pushpaka Vimana* will be cited and we can delve into an analysis of why it works and the way the editor cut it, to execute the comedic intention.

3.1 - AN EFFECTIVE JOKE

A good joke has a -

1. Setup
2. Crux
3. Twist
4. Payoff

To demonstrate this, we use a scene where K interacts with a beggar on the street.

1. Setup - In the scenes leading up to this, we see K walking aimlessly around town, staring through the windows of shops, too poor to buy anything. He then reaches a little overbridge and on the opposite side of the bridge, he sees a beggar.



2. Crux - He observes the beggar and sees that the beggar's money bowl is empty. He takes out one of his coins and flashes it in front of the beggar, indicating that "Hey, I have money and you don't", even though the audience and the protagonist both know that's not true, and he just wants to feel better showing off to someone whose fate is worse than his.



3. Twist - The beggar picks up his coin from the bowl and looks at it. K smiles to himself, feeling pleased. Suddenly the beggar grins widely and takes out from his pockets a large bank note. From the rolled sleeves of his shirt, he again pulls out more money. The smile is wiped off K's face. Finally, the beggar moves his mat, revealing a lot of cash underneath him. He's literally sitting on money.



4. Payoff - K is visibly very embarrassed, learns his lesson and quickly turns away, staring at the traffic below



K is embarrassed



The beggar sits on a pile of money

Why this joke works:

1. Strong setup - Placing this scene after we see K walk around town aimlessly, look bored and not generally do anything in the morning is a strong image. He stares into a shop window and while his nose is pressed against the wall, someone comes and wipes his nose print off the window. The effect of the scene with the beggar is stronger and funnier because of its placement. The fact that also the audience knows that K is just putting up a front and pretending to be well off in front of a beggar itself is funny when the previous scenes indicated the opposite.
2. Strong twist - The character of the beggar is clear and we know from cultural context that a beggar on the street is perhaps poor. When he pulls out money from all the unexpected places, the imagery is very strong. He looks like that but he has money? It subverts the audience's expectations and we are pleasantly surprised when the beggar has the upper hand over K, as K was being slightly rude anyway.
3. Repetition of the twist - Cutting back and forth between the beggar pulling out money from multiple places from inside his tattered clothes edited along with the more and more embarrassed K, works very well and is almost a double twist. It's not that the beggar has one banknote, he has so much money stashed, that he slowly unravels and reveals it to the audience and to K.
4. A good joke also reveals more about the character - Through this joke, we see that K is quite insecure and it gives a hint that he has ambitions to be wealthy.
5. This joke is also an important setup for a scene later in the film. Towards the end of the film, after figuring out that an assassin is trying to kill him and maybe

kidnapping and impersonating a wealthy person wasn't right, K is walking back to the hotel room. On the way, he passes by the bridge again. This time, people are gathered around the beggar, who has died. His body is taken away and as someone gathers up his mat, the money he had hidden inside flies everywhere. People run to the money and fight over it. Even the men carrying the beggar's body drop it and run to grab some money themselves. As the people fight over the money, the image slows, the only time the editor uses a slow-motion shot. Because it is used carefully at this moment, the effect is very strong and one can really feel the meaning behind the sequence. A good joke also can have a strong message. It speaks volumes about the economic state of the time. The people jumping for the money looks "funny" but if we think about the beggar left behind and ignored while the people fumble for the money, it is quite dismal. It is comedic and sad at the same moment. Witnessing this pushes K in the next scene to put on his old clothes and go back to his old life. Hence, a joke can also be used as a setup that can have quite a strong payoff in the plot.

Now let's jump into some ways we can use the footage effectively while editing comedy. What are things we must keep in mind while doing so? By citing some examples from *Pushpak*, we can learn from them.

3.2 USING THE ACTOR

It is important as editors to understand the body language and facial movements of the actor (character) that we see in the footage so it can be interpreted correctly and used to our advantage.

In ancient India, the art of theatre was quite impactful so theories of dance and Sanskrit theatre were formulated into a book- the *NATYA SASTRA* in Sanskrit.

*"Bharata Natyashastra, also called Natyasastra, detailed treatise and handbook on dramatic art that deals with all aspects of classical Sanskrit theatre. It is believed to have been written by the mythic Brahman sage and priest Bharata (1st century BCE–3rd century CE). Its many chapters contain detailed treatments of all the diverse arts that are embodied in the classical Indian concept of the drama, including dance, music, poetics, and general aesthetics. Its primary importance lies in its justification of Indian drama as a vehicle of religious enlightenment."*¹⁰

¹⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2011, April 12). Natyashastra. Encyclopedia Britannica.

Here, we will be focusing on the actor's technique.

"The *NATYA SASTRA* mandates that an actor present the appropriate state or condition of the character portrayed, use energy to convey the playwright's text and exhibit appropriate feelings and emotions through the body.

Dramatic reincarnation followed the four means of the actor's *abhinaya*¹¹ (craft). The first, *angika* (physical movement), is detailed so minutely that the *Natya Sastra* lists thirty-six different types of glances alone! Finger movements, head shakes, eyebrow manoeuvres, cheek inflections, nose tensions, thin angles, neck movements, body postures, walks, and over 500 *mudras* (gestural ideographs) were available to communicate the entire intricate Sanskrit grammar. Kapila Vatsyayan¹² explains:

Every inch of the human form, every joint of the human skeleton, is given significance, for it is not only the geometrical and physical possibility which is being explored, but its correlation to the meaning, to the attitude or the state the whole will evoke. . . . Character is thus portrayed through a knowledge of types in which particular qualities predominate, and by a systematic use of physical postures, movements, turns and thrusts of the body which correspond to the moods."¹³

Why do we as editors need to know this? I believe understanding body language, facial movements and expressions of an actor can better help the editor in choosing the correct shot and length for its intended purpose. Knowing this will help us as editors develop precise interpretations of the comedic visuals in a dialogue-less film. It also helps to understand human behaviour and understanding humanity will help one become a better editor of comedies, as humour and feeling joy from it is a very primal, human emotion.

"This system, the world's most intricate sign language¹⁴, was rivalled by the second tool in the Indian actor's craft: *vacika* (vocal utterance). Particular pitches and tempos were believed to evoke certain *rasas* (sentiments)¹⁵. The third aspect of the actor's craft, *aharya* (externalisation), extended the performance even further, through costume, properties, and make-up. Thus, both realistic and symbolic properties formed peculiar playing

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Natyashastra>

11 The sanskrit words are all in italics

12 Kapila was a scholar of dance, architecture and art history and the author of *Bharata, The Natyasastra*

13 Kuritz, P. (1988). THE CLASSICAL ASIAN THEATRE. In *The making of theatre history* (p.74). essay, Prentice-Hall.

14 Referring to *Mudras* that are gestural ideographs

15 *NatyaShastra* and the Bhava-Rasa theory of Bharata Muni emphasizes that the success of a performance is measured by whether or not the audience has a specific experience called RASA. Rasa is the internal enjoyment which is relished by the audience.

conventions. Certain combinations of movements with particular properties could convey darkness, climbing, mourning, crossing a river, swimming, riding, or driving. The convention of touching a stool and bowing before sitting became standard in Sanskrit performance. These first three aspects of technique constituted the actor's external craft. The fourth aspect, *sattivika* (psychological composition), became the inner and most important aspect of the actor's craft. The Indian actor had to feel the character's *bhava*¹⁶ (mood). *Bhava* was an integral part of the theory of *rasa*¹⁷; *bhava* created the form while *rasa* filled it with emotion. A Sanskrit actor who mastered all four of these aspects of technique could be considered part of the "inner" school. An actor in the "outer" school knew no rules. The "inner" school was taught by the *sutradhara*. Such a teacher supposedly knew not only the *Natya Sastra* but also all arts and sciences, all customs, and all habits Sanskrit characters might possess. Acting students thus studied oil massage, acrobatics, diet, and eye exercises. A large part of the Sanskrit actor's training involved dance as well."¹⁸

In the following section, we will take a look at some examples of *bhava* below. Each black and white picture is a facial expression in an Indian classic performer denoting *Bhava*¹⁹ corresponding to the screenshot from *Pushpak* right below it, denoting the same *Bhava* (*mood*).

16 *Bhava* is something which conveys the meaning intended, through physical gestures and facial expressions.

17 Sentiments / indian concept of aesthetic flavour/ essence

18 Kuritz, P. (1988). THE CLASSICAL ASIAN THEATRE. In *The making of theatre history* (p. 76). essay, Prentice-Hall.

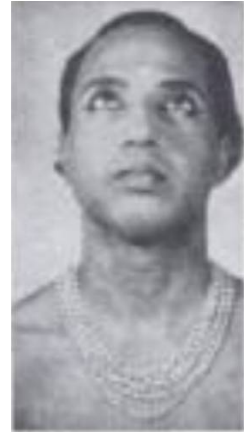
19 Bhavnani, E. (1965). In *The dance in India: The origin and history, foundations, the art and science of the dance in India - classical, folk and tribal* (p. 15). essay, Taraporevala.



WONDER

LAUGHTER

FEAR



DISGUST

ANGER

TRANQUILITY

The expressions that the actor K makes, are not as exaggerated as in the black and white photos. Those photos are taken of an Indian classical dance performer where the audience would have watched him perform without the help of closeups, hence the need to exaggerate to communicate.

The first time K and A “talk” is a very good example of gestural ideographs as well as body language and facial expressions. They also mouth certain words to each other. They are standing on opposite sides of the building on their respective balconies. As they cannot shout at each other, they gesture to each other instead.



Shot of A - she gestures “Your” “mother” “where”? - starts with pointing out towards K “your” , gesturing by rocking the hands side to side meaning “baby” and mouthing the word “mother”, hands out and fingers open and away from her gesturing “where?”. This does come down to cultural understanding of these gestures, but I believe they are mostly



universal and simple enough to understand. Recognizing the facial expressions can help the editor choose the correct take thereby creating a better comedic effect.

In reply, K looks sad, points upwards indicating the sky, sticks tongue out and keeps arms to the side similar to a Jesus on the cross pose, gesturing “dead” - indicating, his mother is no more.

3.3 - USING THE CAMERA

Films are made on the editing table. But the cinematography and consequently, the footage captured is also equally important to the editing process. How can we use aspects of cinematography to make a joke? How can the editor then use this in the right way?

a. MISE EN SCÈNE

Mise en scène is the arrangement of scenery and stage properties in a play. Translated from French, it means "setting the stage" but, in film analysis, the term mise en scene refers to everything in front of the camera, including the set design, lighting, and actors. Mise en scene in film is the overall effect of how it all comes together for the audience.²⁰

Comedy is created from the culmination of whatever you see in front of the camera. What the audience can see is what they react to. Placing all these aspects and choosing them the correct way to make the joke is very essential. Take, for example, the shot where in the Pushpak Hotel, K attends a magic show and wants to eagerly speak to his love interest A. At the same time, unaware to him, the assassin also arrives in the hall and tries to kill K using a frozen ice dagger. This is a choreographed one long take shot lasting a minute.

The camera first starts at a bird's eye view where we see K and other guests, watching the magic performance. He moves to the right and the camera follows his movement, tracking right. The camera stops when he notices the girl then the camera cranes down to reveal 'A'. As the crane comes down, the focus shifts to 'A'.



The frame is fixed now, focusing on her. Distracted by A, K struggles with an ashtray he has gotten his finger stuck inside. This comedic moment occurs as A is unaware of what

20 StudioBinder. "Mise-En-Scene and the Directors the Mastered It." *StudioBinder*, 1 Feb. 2021, www.studiobinder.com/blog/mise-en-scene/.

is going on behind her, only the audience and K know. We can refer to this as 'dramatic irony' - derived from Greek tragedies - Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something that the characters don't.²¹ It is a powerful comedic tool that an editor can use to his advantage, prolonging the moment until the character finally learns the information only known to the audience. The director uses this often, as well as in the following scene when K is blissfully unaware of the assassin who is trying to kill him with the ice dagger.



Back to the shot - as the scene continues, A exits the frame left with a friend, remaining unaware that K is in the room, making it more comedic, when K finally comes around to say hi to her and when he turns, she has left. In the second frame above, the plant in the middle of the frame is used as an important prop/ set design. The director has placed the women on the far left of the frame near the plant, having the character squeeze through the space between the plant and the women to get to the place where 'A' sat in front of the camera. The importance of this comedic moment where K slinks his body between and comes to the front is repeated by the assassin when he enters the scene next.

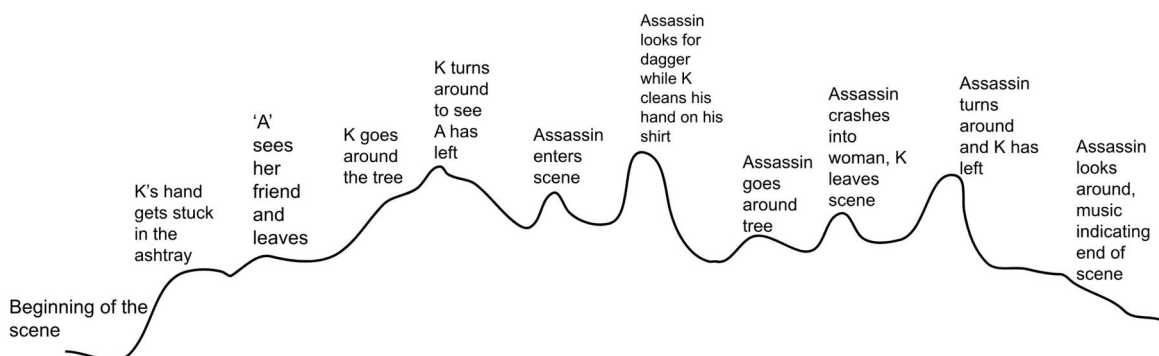


As K sits on the couch in front of the camera, the focus shifts subtly to reveal the assassin behind him. The assassin grabbing his chance shuffles through his thermos to

21 "Dramatic irony." *Vocabulary.com Dictionary*, Vocabulary.com, [https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/dramatic irony](https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/dramatic%20irony). Accessed 08 Jul. 2023.

take out his dagger as K sniffs his finger, his face showing disgust as he smells his ashy fingers after they got stuck in the ashtray earlier. There are two jokes simultaneously running. It keeps the audience engaged as there is a joke in the foreground as well as the background. The assassin then comes through the gap between the women and the plants but as he is bulkier than K with his dagger in hand, he bumps into the women and plant and apologises profusely by bowing. At that moment, K leaves without the assassin noticing. Another lady having some food takes his place. The assassin turns around and as he goes to grab K, thinking he is still on the couch, he stops himself, surprised to see the lady instead. The editor finally cuts away from the scene and shows the audience what is taking place on the stage.

Notice that, to execute this scene, there was no “montage” required– no cutting inside the scene to produce a comedic effect. The “edit” was done beforehand while shooting. The accuracy of the actions and the way it is choreographed is incredibly precise. None of what happens in front of the camera happens by accident. It is all planned carefully. When we are merely a viewer of a film, we might think to ourselves “Of course he goes here, and he does his action, it’s smooth but natural. It’s how it is supposed to be”. Behind the smooth and natural interactions between the characters and props in this scene, comes impeccable planning from the side of all the film departments working on the film, lengthy rehearsals as well as trial and error on set to get the comedic timings correct. If one actor is off, the whole timing is off. One might think, for a one-shot take like this one- “The action is there, all the editor has to do is trim the beginning and end”. As editors, our job when we have several takes in front of us, especially with takes of such length (almost a whole minute) we must watch it multiple times, choosing the ‘best’ take, here probably the most comedic one with the best body language communicated and with the best timing. I believe for this scene, the editor picked a great take and cut it to a precise length. I have drawn this graph illustrating the comedic heights and lows of the one take shot.



It is the representation of the shot's progression with its peaks being the top comedic moments and the dips representing the moment after the joke. There are jokes throughout the whole shot and they come in "waves", as represented in the graph. Each person might have their version of this graph for this one shot, but these peaks are roughly the areas most people would agree are humorous.

The use of music here is also something to note. The mise-en-scene is tied together perfectly with it. When K spots A for the first time in this scene, as the crane moves down, a sweet melody plays. L Vaidyanathan, the music composer, does a consistent job with the music. He has made specific themes for each character. The sweet melody (mostly using flute and tabla-Indian drums) plays until the assassin shows up behind K. The music then shifts to the assassin's theme which is more electronic and modern sounding (possibly synthesisers and saxophone). It stops when the assassin almost grabs the woman at the end, his stopping action "stopping" the music. In the last couple of frames of the scene, the music is used as a transition into the next shot which is with the magician on stage. His theme now comes in and we smoothly transition out of the scene.

b. SHOT SIZES AND LENGTHS

Each shot size has its meaning and usage. An editor's job is to accurately choose the correct size for the correct moment to accentuate certain details. Knowing this can help an editor to know what size works in a more comedic way for the joke to land.

What are the different shot sizes? Typically we use -

1. **WIDE SHOTS** - Mostly used as establishing shots to show the environment and vastness of space. Also used to see the full body language of the character against the space.



Wide shots in Pushpak (left to right) - The hotel Pushpak, Outside of K's room and opening shot of the film, K walking around aimlessly amongst people in town

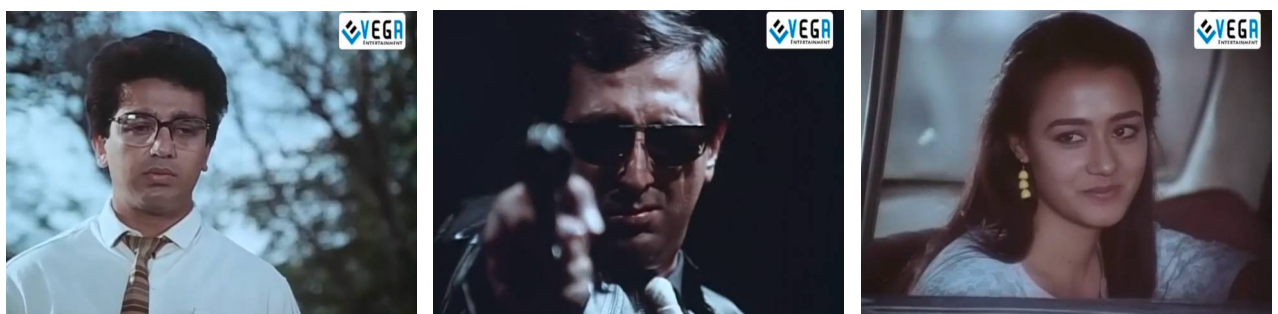
Wide shots can be used comedically as we see the whole body language. The whole action of the character interacting with the surroundings can be captured. Cutting to a wide shot can also reveal the dynamic between two characters existing in the same space together.

2. MID SHOTS - It is used to show the character as well as their surroundings giving them both an equal weight. Can also be used to have two people in the same frame (double shot) performing together.



Mid Shots - K and the assassin, K with his reflection in the hotel room mirror, K in front of the hotel Pushpak logo

3. CLOSEUP SHOTS - Used to show details of objects and facial expressions. Can be used by the editor to guide the audience and bring them closer to a detail.



Closeups - K, the assassin and A

“Close-ups are for dramatic moments, to feel more emotion. Performances are funnier in wider shots because you see more body language. You can’t see how awkwardly somebody is standing if you are seeing them only from the shoulders up.”²²

²² Nygard , Roger. Cut to the Monkey (p. 169). Applause. Kindle Edition.

The editor can also go from one shot size to another through camera movement. This adds emphasis to a moment. For example, when an idea comes into a character's mind, the camera moves from a wider shot to a closeup, giving emphasis to his rush of thoughts.

In the same way that shot sizes are important, shot lengths are important. Once the editor chooses the correct take of a shot, it is then crucial to choose the correct length. The "correct" length is of course subjective and one has to ask themselves what is the intention. Each shot also has its beginning, middle and end and it's the editor's job to find the exact part that will service the joke. Each shot also has its expiration, this is the time that the audience starts to lose interest and get distracted if there isn't any communication happening, then the editor has let the shot run for too long. Knowing when to start the shot is also integral so that it connects satisfyingly to the previous shot in terms of visual continuity but also intellectually.

How can we edit shots together to produce the desired comedic effect? Choosing the right shot sizes and lengths of shots makes all the difference.

Let us take the example of the scene where K after being too miserly to pay for a whole glass of tea, comes up with a creative solution to have a full glass of tea. This is one of the most iconic scenes in the whole film.

For understanding the scene, one must understand the importance of having chai (tea with milk + spices) in India. The tradition is a long one- fresh chai is sold everywhere in India throughout the times between meals. It is enjoyed by the working class as well as the wealthy. There are small tea stalls, as well as young boys who go around with a kettle selling tea on the streets, in offices as well as trains. It is such an integral part of Indian society. So, in the scene leading up to this, K, being miserly, bought tea with a coin and the tea seller (a kid), gave him only half a cup. K is forlorn, looking out of his room window and just as he is about to drink, he notices a man downstairs cheers-ing towards him with a full cup of chai. K awkwardly cheers his half cup of chai in the air. He then notices a crow cawing loudly and remembers the story of the thirsty crow.

A thing to note is that for jokes to land and be understood, cultural context is incredibly important. The context of the crow in this scene relates to a story. Every Indian school kid knows this story of the clever crow²³. A very thirsty crow finds a pitcher with a long neck that has little water inside. The crow couldn't reach the bottom of the tumbler to drink out

23 During the research of this thesis, I discovered that this is in fact an Aesop's fable.

of as he didn't have a long beak. So he grabs stones and other small items he can find and throws them into the pitcher, raising the water level to which he can finally drink.

This is the structure of the montage of the scene now - ('>' will be used to indicate a 'cut to')

1. Mid shot of K looking out of his window about to drink tea
- > 2. Wide shot of man below gesturing cheers with his cup of chai
- > 3. Mid shot of K looking awkward, then the sound of the crow garners the attention of K
- > 4. Mid shot of the crow cawing
- > 5. Mid shot of K camera tracks from a mid to a closeup
- > 6. Closeup of a bowl of buttons, screws, and pins and tea- he adds it to the tea, raising the level of the tea
- > 7. Closeup of crow cawing
- > 8. repetition of 6. K keeps adding things to tea
- > 9. cut to CU of K's face getting excited
- > 10. repetition of 6. K keeps adding things to tea
- > 11. repetition of shot 8- K's face-more excited
- > 12. repetition of 6. K keeps adding things to tea
- > 13. repetition of shot 8- K's face-more excited
- > 14. repetition of 6. tea he adds a last coin
- > 15. repetition of shot 8- K's face smiling
- > 16. Celebratory trumpet music plays as graduate steps into a mid-frame with a Rambo poster behind him and he triumphantly drinks his full glass of tea

Let us go into each shot in the sequence and reasons why the editor might have cut it this way.

1. The sequence starts with the graduate in a mid shot, looking out of his window. The frame shows all of his posters on the windows (beautiful women and motorbikes) hinting at his personality. This frame also helps to show his awkwardness and hand gestures clearer than a close up of his face and torso. This frame will be used again.



2. The man below, in a mostly empty frame, raises his full cup of tea, smiling. An innocent gesture makes K feel awkward.



3. The editor cuts back to the first frame (perhaps a different take?) where K raises his glass and looks awkwardly away. We understand the gag immediately. K feels insecure and looks down into his tea. There is then a 4 second pause. The audience takes in the feeling that K has. Suddenly, a sound of a crow cawing is heard, K looks up
4. The crow caws - it's easy to recognize the crow as we have heard its sound in the previous shot. It is also sitting near the "TALKIES" sign, which is recognizable to the audience as we have already seen it earlier.
5. The editor cuts back to K's mid shot (frame 1) but now it is in movement forward - the camera moves fast to a closeup of his face in interest. It stands still for 4 seconds, resting on K's face and the audience processes his thoughts again- What is he going to do? What idea has popped into his head? He then exits frame left.
6. In the movement of him exiting the previous frame to the left, K's hand comes into this frame from the top, placing the tea down. Cutting movement with movement connects well. It feels natural, even though there is some time jump, or space change. This frame will give the audience a hint about what's going to happen. He starts throwing the little items from the bowl into the tea.
7. Cleverly, the editor cuts again to the crow, from a closer, slightly different angle, in a silhouette - it turns its head, in interest. It is a very quick shot, only 2 seconds but it gives us a good connection with the tea and K's actions, connecting back to the story of the crow and the pitcher.
8. It cuts back to shot number 6, he adds more things into the cup - now the shot is very quicker- 3 seconds, as the pace picks up



9. We see K's face for the first time, determined, his hand lifting and dropping in a tight closeup - its very quick - barely 1 second, but because of the size of the frame and his hand movement, it is easy to understand what's happening



10. Shots 10-15 - They are repetitions of K's closeup with closeup of things being dropped into the tea, just with different lengths of the shot. Shots 10 and 11 are 1 second only. Shot 12 is slower at 3 seconds. Shot 13 is again fast, less than 1 second, just a quick reaction of K's face. The editor is playing with the pacing to get the correct rhythm. The slower pace in the beginning to the quicker pacing in the middle to then slower pacing towards the end again signifies a distinct beginning, middle and end to the repetitions of these shots. The editor plays with our expectations, will K make this actually work? Shot 15 has K starting to smile, while celebratory trumpet music comes in.



11. Shot 16 - The shot starts with K's hand with the tea in frame and then he enters into the frame from the right side, giving us a profile. There aren't so many profile shots in this film, as profile shots mostly do not show expressions clearly and it wouldn't be helpful to communicate that way. But here, the director here juxtaposes what's in the background with the foreground. The background has posters of Rambo, and tough wrestlers who have achieved things just as K has. In the profile shot, he looks like he's strong and achieved something, as he puffs out his chest. Karl Marx is also there, as mentioned earlier. That's up to the viewer's interpretation.



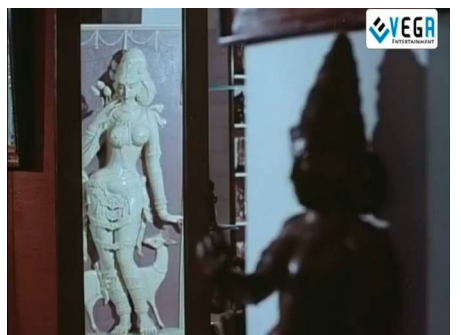
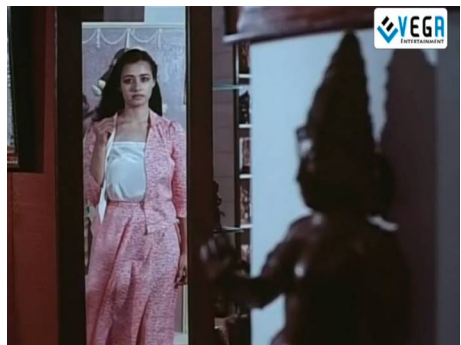
The trumpet music signifies his triumph. Music is used in the same way throughout, to stir our emotions in the majority of this film. I believe they used music heavily in this film as

the Indian audience is familiar with films that have lots of music. Without it, it might be an alienating experience for a regular Indian moviegoer during that time. I think this is also a testament to *Pushpak's* success.

c. LOCATION, SET DESIGN & PROPS

The locations in a film can be picked and written into the script in a way where more humorous moments can take place. There is an antique shop, where the characters can interact with the objects. A's father especially, who is a magician, shows off his skills in front of the camera, keeping the audience entertained. Introduction of a character to the audience can be done in an interesting, humorous way, by using set design. It can also be a predicting factor for the events that will transpire eventually in the film. For example, when K first sees A in the antique shop, he sees her in the reflection of a mirror. She catches him looking and he looks away. When he looks back again, A has disappeared and in her place stands a beautiful sculpture of a woman. The sculpture in the foreground, out of focus, is also an added touch of feminine energy.

This sequence uses the set design to introduce the beautiful 'A' and give indication to the audience of her importance and hint at their relationship. Some gags do not need to make us holler with laughter to be amused or interested. What *Pushpak* does well is create "micro-gags" like this every 20 seconds or so, keeping the audience invested and not bored. Even when there's no movement in the plot, there is still always entertainment.



Sequence - K seeing A for the first time

For example, if any of us have been to the shop, we know how shopkeepers walk close behind us and are attentive. This joke is illustrated below in *Pushpak* as well. The antique

shop is used well, as K wandered into it by accident and he met A there for the first time. He is out of place and that creates a humorous contrast with the fancy shop. The shopkeeper also follows K around to keep an eye on him.

It begins as shown -



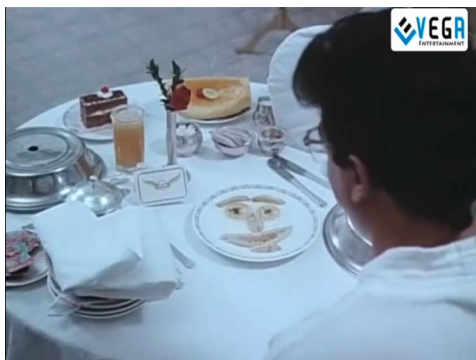
1. POV of K - wide shot of store and antiques with camera tracking forward and pan left



2. Closeup of K - The camera tracks left with K and it stops when he stops. The shopkeeper suddenly enters the frame behind him. They smile awkwardly at each other.

This sequence uses the space as well as the camera to make the joke work. The shopkeeper is almost literally breathing down K's neck. We are also not sure if he's there

to help him or make sure K doesn't steal. Characters entering a frame unexpectedly is always a funny joke. As it is a surprise. These created scenarios on the part of the director are comedic as well as relatable.



K has breakfast in hotel room

This picture on the left is when K receives hotel breakfast in his room for the first time and the fruit is cut into this funny shape of a smiling face.

These small details in this shot used by the editor is what helps the film work. The attention to detail, whether it be camera, set design or props has been used effortlessly to tell the story effectively.

Recurring symbols are interwoven in the story that connect the characters. For example, the Pushpak logo, a circle with wings is prominent in several scenes, and is featured prominently in the background or foreground. Take the scene in which we are introduced to the owner of the Pushpak hotel. We see his life through photographs. The editor cuts from inside the hotel to outside the hotel where K is in a simple, yet clever way, connecting the two spaces and characters. As we will eventually find out that K and the hotel owner(who later dies in the film) are very alike. The hotel owner started out as a very poor man running an honest tea shop. K eventually learns to be honest and work hard like the hotel owner.

The frames in order-



These connections made by the editor are simple, yet very effective. The characters connect through the visual storytelling without the need to show them meet and have a conversation. Especially the 3rd frame on the second row , a picture of the hotel owner is cut to the hotel owner now at the present time, admiring his hotel. If our eyes follow each frame, the intention of the connections are very clear. To make the connections even stronger, there is also music used to bridge the whole part from indoors and outdoors.

d. SOUND & MUSIC

The sound dramaturgy is very important to the storytelling aspect of the *Pushpaka Vimana* and any comedy film. When there is no dialogue, sound helps to guide the audience through the film. The film uses diegetic sound constructed in a way where it reveals a lot about the characters in humorous ways. For example, this shot with K sleeping in his little bedroom. We hear the loud sounds of kung fu cinema. This sound originates

offscreen from a movie theatre behind his room (which was cleverly set up earlier in the film). This scene (just one shot) and sound is the setup to a joke occurring later in the film. Later, once K switches places with the wealthy man, K gets to sleep in the hotel room. He tosses and turns, unable to sleep. The editor then cuts to K sneaking back into his old room with a small boombox and presses the record button. The sound of the kung fu film playing in the background is very loud. The editor then cuts

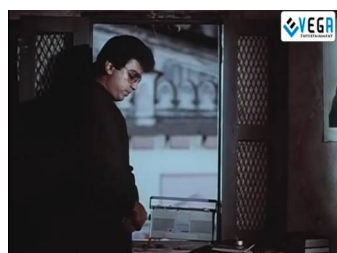


K sleeping soundly in his room in the beginning of the film

from the room, back into the hotel room, panning down on the boombox and then to K in bed, sleeping soundly. Showing us the boombox, shows us where the sound is originating from, meaning that he recorded it. The tape ends and the sound stops. K wakes up and switches the cassette tape to the other side and promptly goes back to sleep! The shots seamlessly connect through sound and the joke is very clearly communicated. It reveals a little extra about the character. He has all the peace and quiet but is now missing the ambience of where he came from. Illustrated below - Left to right - 1. K unable to sleep, 2.



1



2



3

K recording the sounds of kung fu cinema, 3. K sleeping soundly listening to the recorded sounds.

Roger Nygard, editor of television shows such as *Veep* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* said about editing a comedy scene - "There is no story without conflict. If you are editing a scene that is not working, ask yourself, "What is the conflict?" Conflict does not necessarily mean arguing or physical fighting. Any form of opposition, any barrier between a protagonist and a goal is conflict. Opposition can be verbal, physical, emotional, mental, environmental, societal, extraterrestrial, subatomic, or ... use your imagination."²⁴

Such a simple conflict in the previously discussed scene- K is unable to sleep in the quiet hotel room because it doesn't have the intense kung fu sounds from his room. The solution is also a surprising one. That unexpected element makes us laugh at his weird behaviour of wanting the opposite of what most humans need to sleep - silence.

L Vaidyanathan, was the film's music composer.²⁵ The music is almost a replacement for the dialogue in the film. It is used to communicate exactly the emotion the viewer needs to feel, guiding tenderly. Each of the characters in *Pushpak* have their own little themes and associated instruments. For example, the music with higher pitch using heavy flute and string instruments are used for the interactions between K and A, representing sweetness and innocence to their blooming relationship. For the assassin, a combination of deep bass, synthesiser and drums are heard.

Let's take as an example the use of music with the scene where the assassin hides in K's hotel room closet, ready to strike with his ice dagger in hand, as K watches a cartoon on television. The assassin raises his arm to stab and gets electrocuted when the ice touches an open socket. He screams and falls to the ground and K turns in surprise and fear. Leading up to this , when K walked into his hotel room, there was silence and only diegetic sound. He then turns



The assassin passed out after getting electrocuted

on the television , which plays a cartoon with music which is also diegetic sound. As the

²⁴ Nygard , Roger. *Cut to the Monkey* (pp. 113-114). Applause. Kindle Edition.

²⁵ Lakshminarayana Vaidyanathan (9 April 1942 – 19 May 2007) was an Indian musicologist, music director, and composer of classical Carnatic music.

assassin prepares the ice dagger behind K, the music still plays, giving a comical feel to the situation where the protagonist is about to get stabbed, consider also the dramatic irony here - we know what the assassin is up to but K does not. The assassin gets electrocuted and falls to the ground – here a change of music (diegetic sound from the tv) happens, the cartoon-ey music switches to a glitchy, space invader-esque, 8 bit video game music/sounds which is aligned with the fact that he got electrocuted. I think the use of music here is very clever. The lines of diegetic and non–diegetic music are blurry. Is it coming from the television or is it to give a mood?

L Vaidyanathan gave the characters recognizable themes with slight variations consistently throughout the film. He also designed the music in a way it connects from one scene to the next, like a guide. The music in this film is the glue that ties everything together.

When looked at objectively, music is a strong psychological tool that helps the audience overcome the ridiculousness of a situation and pushes it into whatever intention the filmmaker might need. For example, K kidnapping the drunk man, dragging his body through the city , up the stairs and into his apartment, can be a morally tricky territory. The music used is upbeat and positive, keeping the tone light and silly. In the scene where K takes the wealthy man to his room, there is a moment where the man falls into the door, opening it and crashing violently down on the floor. Suddenly it is silent. And then a voice says “Who’s in there?” , prompting the audience to think it's a dialogue said by a character, but in fact, it's from the kung fu movie playing from the cinema. The sound from the movie then continues, indicating that it’s from the movie theatre. The diegetic sound is mixed in with the music and at some point, we cannot tell it apart. The “Who’s in there?” works well for this moment, as it could be that K was caught by somebody.

Similarly, later in the film, when A’s father (the magician) is performing, we hear the sounds of clapping and voices of laughter from the audience. As we follow the Assassin trying to stalk and kill K, he places his hand on a metal surface containing food, not knowing it is hot and drops his knife. The “audience” from another room screams with laughter, mimicking what us, the audience, of the film we are watching, feel also in the moment he burnt his hand in a comical way. Even though dangerous things happen to people in this film (as well as most comedy films) , serious injuries never occur and the characters don’t get fatally wounded, which would be a comedy killer. The funny theme of the assassin combined with his looks, costume and body language make him less than a threat. This is why, even though the assassin has a dagger, we aren’t afraid for K’s life, as

we know with the light hearted tone, he's not actually going to get physically stabbed. The audience can laugh at someone's bad fate, without remorse or guilt. That is one of the fundamentals of comedy. The music helps keep this illusion together.

e. COMEDIC TIMING & RHYTHM

Here we come to one of the most important parts of comedy. What is the phenomenon that makes a scene more or less comedic? I believe the answer lies in COMEDIC TIMING. Many say it cannot be defined, as it is a feeling. I think it is the internal rhythm of the montage, either with cuts, or in one long shot, free of cuts but with choreographed motions and pauses. Rhythm is something felt, something natural. It is about the pauses and silences in between. When the editor is aware of this, they can edit comedy.

"Because editing is rhythmic, the editor has to improve the beat. There is an infinite number of rhythmic, comedic choices. It takes finding the right drummer, er, editor, to create the best rhythm."²⁶...Editing creates a flow of beats that feels right to viewers. If that seems like I'm stating the obvious, what's not so apparent is that the right pace is often vastly different from what felt right to the writer, the director, and the actors on the set."²⁷

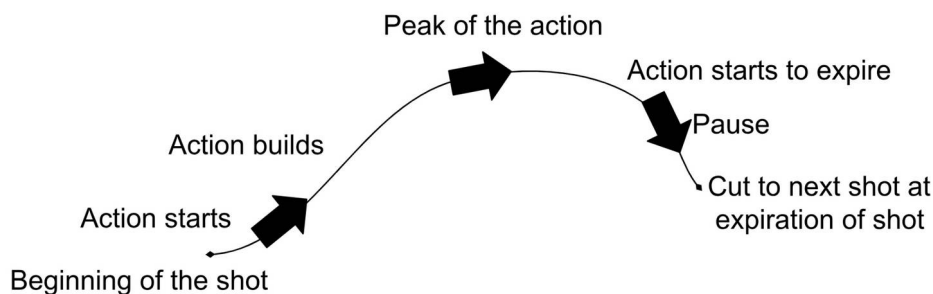
Take the example once again with the tea, crow and K. When the camera tracks in, from a mid shot to a closeup of K's face light up with the idea, there is a pause, we observe his face for about 4 seconds, before he exits the frame. Now imagine if it was constructed differently - K looks up, sees the crow and when we cut back to him, he leaves the frame, without the camera movement or the pause. The connection is not strong, and the audience does not have time to read his face. Now add in the camera movement but still remove the pause. The camera moves in and in the movement, K leaves the frame. We still do not have enough time to observe his face and see the change that has occurred. Hence, the timing is off. The actions are the same but the timing of the "montage" within the shot does not help.

The way to approach editing comedy is to play with the timings of the moments in the footage, either by creating it through editing (by stretching moments or shortening them) and then creating a "sense" of time, often different from how the moment was perceived while writing the scene. Take for example, a scene with two characters looking at each other, both in their individual closeups. The intention is to form a connection between them and make it as natural as possible without words. Eye contact especially is very

²⁶ Nygard , Roger. Cut to the Monkey (p. 173). Applause. Kindle Edition.

²⁷ Nygard , Roger. Cut to the Monkey (p. 174). Applause. Kindle Edition.

important to establish a strong connection. Think about the action and reaction between each of these frames. This might not be exactly the same way we perceive it in real life, as in real life we only have one point of view. When the editor makes a cut, the jump to a frame is always a “surprise” for the audience and they will take a few milliseconds to process what they are looking at. So, when we cut to a reaction and there is movement or action that happens immediately on the cut, it might be difficult to perceive, for example. For the reaction to be perceived appropriately, we must have a few frames in the beginning for the character to process what happened in the previous shot and then react. This timing and overall pacing, will take a few trial and errors but there is no exact formula to it. Every moment, the editor must think - What is important to see now? And then cut to that.



The above diagram drawn by me shows the internal rhythm of a shot that is adequately cut by the editor. A thing to note is that even though the beginning and ends of the shot are at the descend, it does not mean that it has no carry over energy from the previous shot or even to the next shot. It is merely a representative starting and end point.

Rhythm exists inside individual shots as well as in a scene and then a whole film. While editing, it will be hard to see the whole picture at first, but over time, the editor will be able to tell if the rhythm of the film works as a whole. It is important to get the rhythm inside the scenes correct at first. Understanding the rhythm of a shot is an internalised feeling and one that cannot really be taught, it's about going through life and experiencing it. And then projecting our understanding of time onto the footage. When we speak to somebody, as we finish speaking, the other person processes what we said and then reacts. The brain takes a moment to react. We as editors can use this to our comedic advantage, making moments faster or stretching it out to produce the desired effect. Longer pauses

could provide awkwardness and faster cuts could provide funny movements and reactions. It is about finding the balance between the two while cutting a scene.

3.4 THE EDITOR

To be an editor of a comedy film requires some special skills. The ability to make choices is essential. A good comedy comes with making the right choices. Once the footage is in our hands, as editors, we are now the auteur and the second director. We may find jokes and humorous moments in the footage even the director doesn't know existed. This is why it's important to be open to the possibilities and potential of the footage.

Firstly, it is crucial to know who we are editing for. Who is the target audience? Humour works differently in the mind of a child vs the mind of an adult or an elderly person. If we as an editor know who the cut is for, it'll be easier to make decisions to reach the desired reaction from the audience. Secondly, what works and doesn't? This can be achieved by playing around with the rhythm of the shots and changing the pacing of the scene. What is humorous? There are some situations which are objectively more humorous than others. Our job as editors is to hone in on the humorous moments and to amplify them.

"According to legend, when they asked Michelangelo how he made his statue of David, he said, "You chip away the stone that doesn't look like David." The way Mike Binder²⁸ updated this notion is, "Chip away everything that's in the way of telling the story the right way." This is the essence of editing: Trim away everything that is not related to the story. Whether writing or editing, give every act, scene, or line the value test: Does it build character, increase interest, cause problems, add suspense, or move the story forward? If not, is it at least funny? If it does not do at least one of these things, it has to go."²⁹

Choice is an important part of editing. Making the "right" choice will lead to the intended vision of the filmmaker. Formal theories I've mentioned above can be manipulated by the editor to make the humour work. But there is something more important. And that comes from inside the editor. And these are skills inside us that can be developed. I believe the best way for an editor to approach editing a comedy is this-

1. The editor and director/producer should be on the same page about the kind of humour they want to create. For example, does the humour in the scene come

²⁸ Mike Binder is an American filmmaker, stand-up comedian, and actor.
²⁹ Nygard, Roger. *Cut to the Monkey* (p. 108). Applause. Kindle Edition.

from the awkwardness between two characters? Is it visual humour? Is it a funny sound or music? Knowing this is the first step. Reading the script thoroughly is primarily important. It would help immensely to make notes about this, as well as during the first viewing of the footage - maybe you will see a funny moment in the footage that was not written in the script that can be used. Particularly while dealing with visual comedy, it is crucial to intently watch each take, even if the action is repeated the same way every time, the slight variation in the rhythm can make all the difference to the end result of the joke.

2. Knowing the intention will help the editor make the right choices with the footage. The "right" choice could be about picking a shot, the length of the shot, using or not using a particular sound etc.
3. Keeping aside all the formal tools that I have described above, editing comedy is also very instinctual. Editing in itself is. But working with humour is different from working with drama. Emotions are relatively more simple to comprehend as compared to humour which is ambiguous. In this thesis, we were only delving into humour without dialogue but when dialogue is introduced, it becomes vastly more complicated. That is more about editing comedic dialogue which is a different ball game from editing jokes purely visually. Editing dialogue is a hard task for any editor. While working with visual humour, how do we know what makes something funny? How do we know if we will get a laugh out of something if we edit it a particular way?

What could help an editor is experience and being self taught in the art of humour. An editor has to be interested in humour themselves to be able to edit humour. Editing mechanically doesn't really help any film, because editing is not about placing shots next to each other. In that case, the editor will only be a human with extended limbs who presses buttons. The brain behind the editing will leave a signature, and how can an editor have a signature if they don't enjoy and understand humour themselves? Watching comedy films is important. Humour comes in many different forms - slapstick, deadpan, conversational, satirical, dark humour, parody and many more. Observe the way the scenes are being constructed. Being well-versed will give the editor a huge advantage in applying the knowledge to their editing. Indulging in humour through films and books will give an editor the advantage of being aware of what is funny. If it makes you (the editor) laugh, it'll probably make the audience laugh, and at the end of the day, the films are made for the audience to enjoy.

“The theatre workers of ancient India were also interested to understand the mind of the audience and it was mentioned in the *Natyasastra* that the response from the audience was important to measure the success of performance. *Natyasastra* mentioned that the ideal spectator should be a good critic of the performance. *Natyasastra* also tried to depict the psychology of the audience of different age groups and insisted that the performers should keep in mind the psychology and the mentality of the audience as on the basis of their mentality, audiences from different age groups react to different types of acting and scenes.”³⁰

There is no exact formula to comedy. The theories I have written are just a few tools an editor can use to maximise the comedic effect. They are things one must think about while choosing the shot or take. There is a bigger scope to editing comedy. It is something psychological and unsaid. And the more you edit a comedic scene, the less funny it always becomes. Your mind gets used to the joke and it no longer makes you laugh the way it did when you first watched the footage. We as editors have to slip into the minds of the audience who won't come back for a second viewing to “understand the joke”. Good comedy will be timeless. And good comedy doesn't need to be over-edited or the cuts scrutinised to be understood.

For the sake of this thesis, we have delved deeply into the methods of cutting and such but in a broader sense, everything lies in the mind of the editor. It is a feeling and it is an instinct. We as editors naturally have that while editing any genre but tapping into the funny bone we have in our body is essential for editing comedy. It is simply , thinking rudimentarily about it, is about pinpointing what makes YOU laugh and keeps you entertained. If you can laugh, it's probably funny to somebody else. Of Course you cannot make everybody laugh, as comedy is also subjective in the minds of people. But at least 90% of the people will find what you found funny when you first saw the takes. Trusting that instinct is important. Taking frequent time away from the film and coming back to edit is important. I would even go as far as to say that comedy shouldn't take very long to edit. When we think about the intricacies of it, it stops becoming funny.

30 Chattopadhyay, Malyaban. “A HISTORICAL STUDY OF ANCIENT INDIAN THEATRE-COMMUNICATION IN THE LIGHT OF NATYASASTRA.” *Global Media Journal-Indian Edition-ISSN 2249-5835*, vol. 4, no. Winter, Dec. 2013, pp. 6–7.

CHAPTER 4

PUSHPAKA VIMANA AND SOVIET CINEMA

The films of Eisenstein have a special place in my heart. Sergei Eisenstein was a soviet film editor, theorist and director. He made films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Strike*(1925) and *October* (1928). He has written multiple books about film theory mainly focused on montage, the art of film editing.

Eisenstein has many montage theories but the one I would like to focus on here is the **MONTAGE OF ATTRACTIONS**. The word attraction is defined as - a feature or quality that makes something seem interesting or enjoyable³¹.

MONTAGE OF ATTRACTIONS as Eisenstein himself describes -

“An attraction (in our diagnosis of theatre) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psycho-logical influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion”

“I regard the attraction as being in normal conditions an independent and primary element in structuring the show, a molecular (i.e. compound) unity of the effectiveness of theatre and of theatre as a whole.”³²

“In our view, a prescription (or a list) of montage sequences and combinations by means of which the author intends to subject the audience to a definite series of shocks, a prescription that summarises the general projected emotional effect on the audience and the pressure that will inevitably be exerted on the audience's psyche.”³³

CHAIN OF ATTRACTIONS

The film is constantly celebrating and upholding Eisenstein's theory. It is important for the audience to be interested. In a typical drama, first the character is introduced, we then see his life, his struggles etc. An event happens to him (formally known as the inciting incident) that pushes him to make a decision to begin the journey through the subsequent

31 “Attraction.” *LDOCE*, www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/attraction. Accessed 14 July 2023.

32 Eisenstein, Sergei, and Richard Taylor. “The Montage of Attractions.” *Writings 1922-34*, British Film Institute, London, 1988, p. 34.

33 Eisenstein, Sergei, and Richard Taylor. “The Montage of Film Attractions.” *Writings 1922-34*, British Film Institute, London, 1988, p. 46.

plot. The audience, wanting to know what happens in the journey of said protagonist, is now emotionally invested and that keeps them focused on the picture. In *Pushpak*, the filmmaker plays out many comedic scenarios quite effectively to keep the attention of the audience - just like a parent or a sibling with incredible humour entertaining a baby. We are interested and look forward to seeing what happens to the protagonist but that is secondary to the comedy within the scenes that have us most interested. Indeed it is true that the protagonist himself goes through a journey and comes out different on the other side. But we also don't only spend time with the protagonist. We also share space and time alone with the assassin for example or the wealthy man's life. Or even the inside of the magician's house and we see the relationship between him and his wife. These little stories and jokes are completely non-essential to the plot but they are the binding glue keeping the chain together.

After reading Eisenstein's article, *The Montage of Attractions*, I came to the conclusion that the film *Pushpak* is actually a string of humorous attractions that are held loosely together by a plot. Therefore, we can say that *Pushpaka Vimana*'s structure is a CHAIN OF ATTRACTIONS. A chain can refer to the edited material - the shots + sound. The scenes in the film are metaphorically like links of a literal chain, each link connecting together to strongly form and communicate to the audience the humorous moments put together by the filmmaker. The combination of the visuals with sound and music to make jokes are like the jewels layered on top of the chain. The goldsmith who has masterfully welded this chain together, is the editor. The audience is like the admirer of this necklace that they cannot look away from and has them attracted to it. Each comedy scene in the chain being shown to the audience makes them excited for more, link after link.

CHAPTER 5

THE POST-PRODUCTION OF *PUSHPAKA VIMANA*

When given the challenge of creating a film without dialogue, the filmmaker, quite smartly formulated into scenes, all the moments he found comedic and then constructed a plot around it. This is an effective way to keep the interest of the audience while also having a message, also exploring a sub plot of a romance and discussing economic and political issues. The comedy helps and enhances all these moments. Introducing and commenting on economic and political issues, quite tough ones, is easier through comedy. The message is not received so harshly and is easier to digest. The man behind this is Singeetam Srinivasa Rao. I spoke to him directly and he gave me insight into his process as well as working with the editor, D Vasu. I have condensed the interview down and paraphrased his answers to my questions in the following section. For reference - An = Anagha (me), S = Mr Singeetam

An : What was the editing process for Pushpak?

S: Editing is not just a technical exercise. Editing is an emotion. There is emotional content going on between two shots and the emotion carries between them. It is not just joining two shots and keeping continuity. The real editing keeps the emotion. In my films, especially *Pushpak*, the editing was done in the script stage itself. The screenplay must be visualised. The screenplay itself is edited, I have written from which shot to which shot it goes. From long shot to closeup, every person on the set knows what is being created as well as the editor, as it is clearly written in the script. It is shot the way it is meant to be edited, it's all thought out beforehand. The editor is a technical person who takes the shots that the director has edited in his mind and then has to be placed in the correct order with the right continuity and keeping with all the technical aspects. He brings the emotion into the cutting, connecting all the drama.

An : What was your workflow with the editor Mr Vasu?

S : The editor of *Pushpaka Vimana*, Mr Vasu, was my friend from my days of being an assistant director. He was a very good friend of mine. Almost all my films he was my editor, he understood my mind and thought process very much. I usually first narrate the story to him. Both of us see the rushes in the cinema once the film is shot and we choose the best takes. He was not involved in the screenplay process, for him it was important only what shots he had finally to cut from. He then uses his expertise to cut the beginning

and ends of each shot and connect it with perfect continuity with the next. There were no storyboards for *Pushpak*. Finally we sit together and shot by shot, we watch the scene and we make final changes. During editing, no scenes were deleted. In all my films, the shots are timed during script stage and the whole footage is timed as everything is shot on film. The shots were deleted at the script stage itself in case I felt I did not need something. The final print of the film came out to be almost exactly as the anticipated, calculated time.

An: There are different titles given to the film depending on the state it was released in. Could you tell me about why you chose *Pushpaka vimana* as the title?

S : *Pushpaka Vimanam* was the Telugu title, *Pushpaka Vimana* was in Kannada and *Pushpakavimanam* in Malayalam and *Pushpak* was the universal title used. In Tamil, it was interesting, we decided on *Pesum Padam* , meaning, “the picture that talks”. *Pushpak* was chosen as a classic title. The title was designed as a symbolic title. The *Pushpaka vimana* is a celestial chariot. It takes a person on a big flight. The boy (K) has a dream to get somewhere via a shortcut so he takes this celestial chariot which is an illusion. Eventually he figures out that it is not the way to achieve something, only hard work and patience can get him there.

An : Was the film edited on an analog flat-table? Was it shot on 35mm? What kind of film and what kind of camera?

S : The film was shot on Kodak film negative and it was shot on an ARRI camera. It was edited on the analogue editing machine called Moviola. Now it's a technology that's obsolete. The negatives were kept very safely in a cold storage. The two negatives were made into a print and the print was edited first. The edited positive was then finalised until the last frame. The negative was then carefully brought and cut according to the edited positive. Then a complete print was taken without sound or music. Using this print, the re-recording and sound effects will be done. Until then we do not handle negatives , only the prints are worked with.

An : Did you have any influences from other silent films?

S : The film is not a silent film. It is a dialogue-less film. Sound exists in the film so it is not silent. But the screenplay is written in a way where the characters do not have to talk. I put this challenge in front of myself. Aside from that, it is like any other feature film.

Every filmmaker will be influenced subconsciously. We do not copy or imitate. Every film will have its own influence. When it comes to my film, it will be the way I see it. The films

of Kurosawa, Chaplin etc are only an influence to inspire, but not to copy. If I have a story, I should tell my film in my own way. The shots are designed by me as I would like to see a locale or person.

An : What were the editing ideas that came up when you decided that the film would not have dialogue? How did you decide to show comedy without it?

S : Usually in a comedy we don't write comedy. The situation itself is comedy and unfolds itself. The way the characters interact, the way the situations are mounted on top of one another, is the main stress and main source of comedy. There will be choreography here and there, but it's the mounting of one situation over another and the resultant situation that arises that makes up the comedy. The performances are very realistic in *Pushpak*. There is no over the top comedy. The situation is the central point. The situation unfolds itself in a way the comedy springs out– through character, by conflict or whatever way. Only when the situation provokes laughter when narrated or read, then it will also be funny on screen. Without this, no amount of character performance, space, shot, timing will work. Dissecting it too much, knowing how the brain works of the audience etc, is not the first thing. Is the imagined scene funny by itself first?

An : What was the feedback from the audience during the first screenings of *Pushpak*?

S : When the picture was shown in Chennai and Bombay, the people were taken aback since it was without dialogue. The advantage was that it could go to every corner of the world, it was its biggest achievement. I believe a few attempts to make dialogue less films have been made due to its influence. Indian films tell the whole story through dialogue, they are very dialogue oriented. There is very little visual presentation, cinematic value and film language is missing. In world cinema like European cinema or American cinema , the visual aspect of film is very strong. But in our regional films, the dialogue films are more prevalent. In India, there is a separate credit called "Dialogue Writer". They make dialogues spicy and strong. The dialogue is the way our films are narrated. That's without cinematic language. *Pushpak* had a great impact, and I think since then , more Indian films were influenced to have lesser dialogue.

An experimental film like this needs a star like Kamal Haasan, he was able to contribute a lot to the script and through improvisations in scenes. He was also a good friend. He was known all over India, a pan Indian actor. Unlike some southern stars that were only known in the south. He wanted to do something different and he immediately accepted to work on the film. The audience gave the film a chance because of him and it was very well received.

An : Sound plays a huge role in the film, so what was the process of working from edit to sound?

In all my films, I never involved the music or sound effects until I had a complete silent cut in front of me. The edit has to work without this. Once I have a silent cut without music and sound, The music director will then see it and emotionally will know when to put music and what music to put. L Vaidyanathan (music composer) and I watched the film together, to decide where to start and end the music and what the quality of music should be. I had to decide what mood I wanted in each scene and he noted that. The sound effects were also done simultaneously. The sound was shot on the set itself to get the right texture. It would have been difficult to recreate later so after every visual take, we took a sound take as well. The sound editor synced the sound and then during the mixing, we all sat together and completed the film.

When I sit with the editor and the picturized film form is created like I imagined, I am so delighted. With all my technicians and crew. It is such an enjoyable process. I am 92 years old now, even now I feel like making films. It is a wonderful line of work God has chosen for me.

-END OF INTERVIEW-

The director, Mr Singeetam, was one of the most interesting people I have spoken to. From the many questions I asked him, he always replied with youthful excitement and with utmost passion for the filmmaking craft. It is truly inspiring. He seems to care a lot about the process and is very proud of the films he made. *Pushpak* was definitely an achievement in visual storytelling and I could see from his answers, how much he thought of every single detail that went into the film. He even thought about the editing beforehand, while constructing the scenes during the script. Comedy does not come just out of the footage if not planned beforehand and executed with intention. The secret does not lie in how long a shot is or what size it is, etc - but it is the culmination of all these elements that the filmmaker should think about prior to the shoot that will help the editor cut the scenes to achieve the intended comedic effect.

CONCLUSION

The first time I watched *Pushpak*, I felt like there was something special about it. Of course it was an Indian film without dialogue (how bizarre) and without singing and dancing. Yet, somehow there was a certain innocence and charm to it. The comedy in it is very nuanced and only if you really watch it with your eyes, can your mind make the connections that they didn't do with spoken dialogue. Comedy is an incredibly difficult topic to theorise about. Even after writing the whole thesis about methods of landing a joke in the film, it is very hard to pinpoint what humour is and where it comes from exactly. I believe it is mostly about keeping the audience on their toes by presenting them with unexpected characters and settings. It doesn't always have to be something that makes us go HA HA but it can be what keeps us amused and interested in the story. I don't believe *Pushpak* would be as good with dialogue. As previously stated, there are several things to keep in mind while editing comedy, but mainly remember to use the actor, the camera, the set, the sound and music and never forget to play with the rhythm and pacing so as to achieve the desired comedic result. Everything available to us visually in the footage can be used to edit. As editors, our minds must be kept open to the potential of the footage.

Visually done comedy films are a genre that is not so prevalent at the moment. A film like *Pushpak* has not been made in a while. These kinds of films that rely fully on visuals and sound and no dialogue are incredibly difficult to make and puts the writer in a box. But where there are limitations, there is creativity. Audiences are also not used to being very focused while watching a film and prefer films with dialogue. That's why the typical comment after viewing an old silent black and white film is, hmm it was a bit slow and boring. It's not slow, it's about our perception. When sound, music and dialogue came into film, it became more attractive and audiences got used to it over the years.

Humour is an art that we all love, but doing it visually can be a bit tricky, but when done right, it really pays off. *Pushpak* is a very satisfying watch and delving deep into the editing of it, is very interesting to analyse and learn from. The editor back then might have seemed like a technician but his signature style is clearly there. He does a great job in making important connections and creating continuity intellectually. It is a very admirable feat.

While editing, if one simply thinks, "Would I myself find this funny?", if the answer is "yes", then most people will find it funny. Comedy is very instinctual and primal. Learning how to use that effectively while we edit comedy is the crucial part.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FOzD4Sfgag>