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Visual Representation of American Dream in Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*

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Letter of Recommendation

This research paper entitled “Visual Representation of American Dream in Damien Chazelle’s *La La Land*” has been prepared by SagarBhattarai under my supervision. He carried all this research from November, 2020 to August, 2021. I hereby recommend this research paper for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled “Visual Representation of American Dream in Damien Chazelle’s *La La Land*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by SagarBhattarai has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.:

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Abstract

This research paper examines Damien Chazelle's movie La La Land to show how the cinematic representation of American Dream with its deep impact upon the characters reveals hollowness in American dream. It further explores how the employment of cinematographic rhetoric manifests what the movie maker's critical position to view American dream as such. Chazelle paints the realistic picture of American society in the context of American dream. Rather than supporting or opposing, he picturizes the core base of American society. Cinematography has been used to achieve the intention of the director. His intention is to scrutinize the most celebrated idea of American society in the form of American dream. This movie can be taken as the modern approach of redefining American social structure with fresh perspectives from the moviemaker's point of view. It also closely analyzes how each American is submerged in their faith towards the attainment of material prosperity through so called 'success'. Mainly Sebastian and Mia's pursuit of American Dream leads them to the doom of their life. The research incorporates insights of the film theorists like James Monaco, Jon Lewis and idea of visual representation by Stuart Hall and idea of "hidden meaning" by Roland Barthes. And finally research concludes that the movie minutely presents the denigrating effects of American dream upon its citizen and call to unveil its flamboyant curtain to the common viewers' view. In short, the finding of research puts forward the complexity of American dream as shown in La La Land.

Keywords: American Dream; visual representation; melancholy; consumerism; color; music; pursuit of dream

Visual Representation of American Dream in Damien Chazelle's *La La Land*

This research analyzes how Damien Chazelle's movie *La La Land* (2016) criticizes the notion of American dream in the light of American society with its fascination towards achievement of goals. The movie investigates through the employment of various cinematographic techniques critiques the American dream and its hollow principles. American dream stands on the principle of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. The research further explores how the movie has exploited the lighting, music, color and other cinematographic aspects to display the hollowness of American dream. The movie is based upon urban American setting to show the struggle, life style and the psychology of modern Americans. Hollywood and Los Angeles is portrayed as the land of opportunities where people can achieve their dreams. The movie narrates the struggle of the protagonists to achieve American dream in their lives. Similarly, *La La Land* falls under the genre of musical romantic comedy movie which carries the central idea of movie through the expression of music and songs used in it. Therefore, this paper explores the objective behind the portrayal of America as the land of opportunities where people get success, freedom, material prosperity and live happily in their life. Likewise, the paper tries to find out the reasons behind the representation of above mentioned particular theme in this movie.

To elaborate, after the development of science and technology camera has become a new way to present the ideas and feelings of people. Single frame of a movie can carry the weight of thousands of words. Movie has become a means of entertainment where it can reach millions of people easily. Due to its global reach with easy accessibility, it has become the best medium to put forward many intended ideas. Likewise, moviemakers can easily manipulate the feelings of common man for

the fulfillment of their hidden agenda. In this regard, James Monaco's idea consisting of depth analysis of film theory in his book *How to Read a Film* is relevant. He argues, "It is no longer sufficient to know how to read a film. Now we must also understand, in a profound way, how to use a film" (561). This suggests the necessity of looking through different prisms of the movie. On the other hand, movies often come under criticism for their role as one of the mediums to brainwash the psychology of viewers by portraying something as positive or negative. In case of *La La Land*, while inspecting the movie and the underlying theme of failure of American dream, it has artistically incorporated various cinematographic techniques. The use of lighting, background score, songs, color, music and acting reinforce that American dream is just a myth not to be realized by an average American and a common immigrant.

The movie *La La Land* was although widely celebrated for Chazelle's direction and screenplay but message it imparts is against American dream that reflects in life of major characters. Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone's performance was also praised by the audience in the movie. It was awarded Academy Award for Best Directing, Best Cinematography, Best Music and Best Actress in a Leading Role. It was praised all over the world with many awards. *La La Land* became a commercially successful movie. It was screened on 9th of December, 2016. It collected 446 million dollar all over the world. The collected revenue shows that it was hit number and had influenced people all over the world. Chazelle through his screenplay and direction revives the musical films in Hollywood. Cinematography and lighting are influential which directly support the idea of the moviemaker which is to show the different shades of American lifestyle wrapped in the form of complex layers of diverse dreams. Experiment with colour and lighting makes the movie even more interesting. Music, colour and lighting appeal sensory attraction. Characters in the movie

resemble those youths of American society who want to achieve success in their life. At the end, the characters go their separate way. They achieve their goals; however, they remain unhappy even after getting what they initially dreamt of. Fulfilling the dream does not guarantee them mental peace and emotional satisfaction. The gradual shift of their life starts from the first scene of the movie.

The movie *La La Land* begins with thick traffic jam in flyover where thousands of people were entering Los Angeles. Two of central characters Mia Dolan and Sebastian Wilder were shown in congestion where they saw each other. As movie moves forward, it introduces respective dreams of the characters and their struggles to achieve them. The movie mainly revolves around the protagonists, Mia Dolan who pursues the dream to become actress and Sebastian Wilder who is struggling to be Jazz pianist. The story focuses on the journey of Mia and Sebastian, how they meet each other and share their journey towards the fulfillment of American dream, along with all the hindrances and obstacles they face in their life. It shows the excessive desire in American people to fulfill American dream by hook and crook which eventually cost them a lot. Moreover, the movie maker portrays different consequences followed by the pursuit of this dream. His visionary movie making techniques and cleverly used elements of the movie have analyzed different angles of American expectation, hope, dream and what it means to be an American. Mia and Sebastian carry the spirit of all American people which is based on fulfillment of society's expectation, more than an individual case.

American values, principles and morals are presented in numerous Hollywood movies which are produced every year. However, *La La Land* strongly grasps the theme of American dream with beautiful work of art manipulating different visual representation tools. This movie is a global success and has impact on wide audiences

all over the world. The artistic representation of these themes makes it more credible as a subject matter of research in order to decode the meaning of the combination of visual art representation to dismantle American dream. The movie establishes and critiques ideology of American dream through the help of cinematographic features which is the prime concern of this research paper.

The movie has got enormous critical appraisals from various fields of scholars. Various critics have labeled *La La Land* as one of the finest Hollywood movie of its genre. Most of them have analyzed it only from the perspective of story without establishing any connection with consequences of American dream. Garry Victor Hill has talked about the brilliance of this movie and compared it with other similar movies of same category. He claims, “*La La Land* has too many descriptions of it as a feel good movie” (5). He implies that the movie has correctly combined right acting, beautiful cinema photography, experimental music and vision of the movie maker.

Meanwhile, Manohla Dargis highly praises *La La Land* for taking Hollywood musical movie to another level. She praises the way it has presented with perfect mix of every materials that make a movie beautiful piece of art. She argues, “. . . *La La Land* engages with nostalgia, it also passionately speaks to the present just by asking whether it’s possible (finally) for a romantically involved woman and man to get passed the struggle part of the struggle for reciprocity” (Dargis). She sees the struggle of two protagonists to maintain their relationship while focusing on their individual passion and goal at the same time. This is familiar scenario in most of the cases among the American youths.

Similarly, Rebekah Bruckner explores this movie in the context of its authenticity. She illustrates why this movie deserves all the praise from audience and

critics along with financial success across the globe. She focuses on the appealing features of this movie. Borrowing the words of film professor Ryan Izay, Bruckner writes:

La La Land is deserving of all the nominations because of the way it simultaneously-and often subtly- addresses a nostalgia for the simplicity of the past and a hopefulness in an increasingly complicated future. (Bruckner)

However, the movie making techniques separate a highly acclaimed movie from the commercial ones. Use of right tools with creative vision makes artistic movie appealing as well as beautiful. Whereas, commercial movies focus on the entertainment part with little or no concentration towards art forms of the movie. On the contrary, most of the critically praised movies emphasize on beautiful presentation. Bruckner emphasizes the correct choice of different ingredients in *La La Land* (*La La Land* roughly means being out of touch with reality) which makes it both critically and financially successful Hollywood movie. Mark Dillon examines *La La Land* solely focusing on cinematography and how use of modern technology has helped in the creation of a flawless movie of our time. He asserts, “The filmmakers made a concerted effort to shoot just before or after sunset for many exterior shots, such as when Sebastian, high on new love, walks alone on a pier; when the couple strolls together across a bridge; and when toward the beginning of the film, they dance in the hills overlooking the city” (Dillon). He praises choice of shots with creative cinematography for story telling in the movie. In musical genre, cinematography plays an important role as it must have tuning with music and characters.

Likewise, Nicholas Barber sees the movie in relation to proper casting and the execution of actors in the screen. He praises the movie for its projection on the screen

as well as for its approach. He applauds the movie maker for not deviating from the central theme, with meaningless shots and unrequired sequences in *La La Land*. He writes:

By this stage in the average 21st-century romantic comedy, the lead characters would have got drunk, have sex and then moaned to their respective buddies that they had made an embarrassing mistake. But Chazelle uses the film's first act to establish Mia and Seb's individual career and passions. When they finally get around to having a conversation, the audience is primed and ready for them to fall in love. And even then, the pacing has a relaxed, breezy confidence. (Barber)

For Barber the movie has got more than artistic representation of characters and events. It paints a kind of magic in the screen that binds the audiences even after the end of the movie. He emphasizes the match of comedy with beautiful music.

On the other hand, Noah Gittell critiques *La La Land* for being over-simplified, use of excessive colour and misrepresentation of some issues. He puts forward complain of Jazz fans, "Jazz fans see this as a false depiction of important debates within the Jazz community" (Gittell). However, he defends the movie regarding the portrayal of a Jazz musician. Many accuses *La La Land* of racial discrimination as the protagonist is a white man whereas Jazz is typically the genre of African American community. Gittell justifies his point, "none of this is to suggest that the film is exactly racist. Sebastian romanticizes Parker [Sebastian most reverses is Charly Parker] simply because he lived and died before Jazz started to change for the first time" (Gittell). His particular concerns regarding this movie deals with identical, racial and gender politics while analyzing the Hollywood's stand on such issues. In

recent time, Hollywood has come under strong criticism for its racial and gender biasness.

Similarly, another critic, Richard Brody focuses on characters. He minutely interprets the way two major characters act frame by frame. He critiques, “The one thing that Chazzele’s seems to have little interest in is life. He turns Mia into an absolute cipher, giving her nothing whatsoever to talk about” (Brody). He explores artistic and cinematic representation by close introspection of actor’s movement. However, Julia Felsenthal analyses *La La Land* from the perspective of feminism. She appreciates the strong representation of the female protagonist in the movie. She argues, “Is there any simpler way to portend a feminist awakening than a one-woman show? I think not. Like whatever makes a butterfly finally emerged from chrysalis . . . Mia’s Monologue, springs her from a life of barista-ing and humiliating audition” (Felsenthal). The role of female protagonist can be seen powerful and weak in the movie. Mia represents many young American girls who dreams of getting success in American cities.

All the above mentioned reviewers and critics have explored *La La Land* from different perspectives with focus on particular element. Most of them have praised the movie for its cinematography and perfect execution of artistic vision. On the other hand, others have criticized the movie for misinterpretation of some of the issues. Apart from all of them, this research paper analyzes *La La Land* in the light of visual representation and how American dream and its pursuit have been represented through cinematic brilliance. The research analyzes the connection of American dream with its visual representation in the movie. This also focuses on the moviemaker’s reflection on American dream through underlying messages of certain ideology. It

primarily concerns with the exploration of *La La Land*'s role in portraying life, liberty and pursuit of happiness by using modern approach of movie making techniques.

For the analysis of the movie some of the theoretical concepts like that of Stuart Hall and others from visual representation theory are used in this research work. This theory minutely examines socio-political aspect of visual art as well as other form of visual representation. Its major concerns deals with the hidden motive and agenda of the movie. Visual representation has been dominant form of meaning making tool with rise of technology. This form of art has been heavily politicized with different people using visual technique for personal motive along with hidden agenda in some cases. So, the theory of visual representation comes as a useful tool for the intentional research of *La La Land*. Stuart Hall's notion of representation comes in handy for the close analysis of the politics behind visual representation as well as the way meanings are formed for expressing certain ideas by the movie maker. He claims, "Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, sign and images which stand for or represent things" (15). Likewise, Roland Barthes's concept regarding representation and hidden layer of a meaning has been applied to analyze *La La Land* for the clear understanding of core meaning behind visual representation of movie. His notion of "layers of meaning" become useful for the exploration of American dream presented in the movie wrapped up by colour, music, lighting, exceptional camera work and other cinematic representations.

On the other hand, technical aspects of the movie are explored by using ideas of different film theorists for better understanding and clear interpretation. This research paper uses James Monaco's concept of movie's function in determining certain meaning through relevance of cinematic elements. Similarly, various technical

aspects of this movie are minutely examined by using ideas of film theorist, Jon Lewis.

In the next part, textual analysis section, this paper discovers how American dream is represented through different cinematographic tools like - colour, lightings, music, sound and movie maker's intention.

The movie is set in motion with the song, "It is another day of sun", in the morning where thousands of people were entering into Los Angeles. People are standing on their cars during traffic congestion when music starts on the background. People come out of their cars and start dancing collectively. The opening scene reflects that Angeles, land of opportunities, to achieve their dream which is also known as 'American Dream'. This notion of dream has lured almost all American people. Even many people from abroad who move to America get fascinated by it.

Fig. 1: People from all cultural backgrounds dancing together in traffic wearing bright colored dress (00:04:34)

Bright colors like yellow, red, green and blue are worn by the people to show that there is hope in Los Angeles to achieve the success. Chazelle shows the colourful and bright environment to show that new day will bring new opportunity to everyone which America promises. In the song people from different cultural milieu are seen dancing which indirectly proclaims that American society easily accepts the people from all the backgrounds. People belonging to the different origins like African, Spanish and Asian dance with each other belonging to different social structures. Chazelle intends to show American society as an inclusive society which accepts people from all race, gender and origin.

To analyze more, the above screenshot, Fig.1, in the movie expresses Chazelle's intention to visualize American society as the multicolor and mixed one. The power of visual imagery has been explained by Stuart Hall. He claims, "Visual signs and images, even when they bear a close resemblance to the things to which they refer, are still signs: they carry meaning and thus have to be interpreted" (19). A close interpretation of visual images is necessary to decode the meanings they carry. Chazelle deliberately uses the long shot of cinematography where long shot is used to show that although the people do not know each other they share a common dream. Similarly, the colourful dresses show that their hope are alive. In this reference, Theo Van-Leeuwen claims, "In pictures, distance become symbolic. People shown in a long shot, from far away, are shown as if they are strangers; people shown in a "close up" are shown as if they are "one of us" (138). In this way, through the above shown screenshot in the form of a long shot, the moviemaker attempts to reveal that despite their uniqueness from each other, people contain exactly same dream wrapped by American circumstances. For all of them, America signifies a promised land.

To talk of the use of season and coloring in the movie, there are some intended meanings. The movie is divided into different parts according to season. The movie begins with 'winter' season and ends with 'winter'. The movie compares characters' lives with different seasons. As the seasons change the lifestyle, behaviour and psychology of characters change too. Chazelle uses seasons to show the struggle and success of protagonist in the movie. Chazelle's intention towards using seasons as different parts of movie is to associate human life with nature. He puts forward the idea that nature and human life are both interrelated with each other and the human beings behave according to its surrounding and environment. The movie begins with heading "winter" (00:04:52) and continues with other headings as it moves forward.

Winter symbolizes struggle and cold with chilly environment. Both of protagonists enter to Los Angeles, a dream city for the most of the Americans, in hope of living their dream. In the new city they find themselves totally lost as well as isolated. They struggle for life; they suffer from hardship of glowing city life. As it is difficult to maintain livelihood in winter, both characters struggle in the early part of movie.

The heading 'winter' season remains from (00:04:52) to (00:26:35). This time frame of the movie shows early days of Mia and Sebastian in Los Angeles and their struggle in the new city. In the movie Mia's struggle and her loneliness has been presented through colour and lightings. From the scene (00:13:24) to (00:14:07) it shows the inner state of Mia's mind where she talks with herself looking at mirror. Mia speaks to herself in the form of song:

Is someone in the crowd /

The only thing you really see?

Watching while the world keep spinning 'round somewhere there's a place
where I find who I'm gonna be.

A somewhere that's just waiting to be found. (00:14:01)

This monologue from the song shows that Mia has been waiting for the right place and right opportunity so that she could show her real talent. Her aspiration to be successful is to be a self-made person what American dream promotes. Jim Cullen puts forward American dream as desire “. . . that of upward mobility, a dream typically understood in terms of economic and/or social advancement” (8). It voices for upliftment, especially in social and economic sectors. Mia's desire vibrates with the same mindset of American dream.

Movies are considered important tools for the representation of human conditions and behaviour. In this context, James Monaco illustrates, “Film covers a

broad range, from practical (as a technical invention it is an important scientific tool) through environmental, on through pictorial, dramatic, and narrative to music” (29). Film provides critical viewpoint regarding the various human aspects. In this case, *La La Land* provides insight upon Mia’s life. At the same time, it scrutinizes the basic structure of American dream.

Before the scene about Mia’s singing in front of the mirror, she has been rejected from the audition. Rejection hurts her feeling. She feels as if her dreams get shattered into pieces. Her sadness is clearly reflected in her words. She shows the reaction towards the unwanted outcomes which she has to face in her life. She used to be hopeful and energetic. She has this thought of getting everything easily as promised by American dream. However, rejection shows her the real side of this dream and sacrifices that have to be made at the cost of fulfilling the dream.



Fig. 2: Mia reflecting herself in the mirror (00:13:32)

In the above screenshot, the colour fades from brightness to darkness to signal hurt psychology and sadness of character. To show the inner state of mind Chazelle uses the dark colour and dim light. In bright colour Mia seems happy but as she becomes alone bright colour changes into gloomy colour where she speaks about her problem.

Mia's life seems to be bright and happy from outside, enjoying party with her friend but deep inside she is sad and lonely. She seems quite unaware of being victim of her own ambition which stems from the consequences of American dream. Use of different shades of color to represent different states of mind highlights the power of visual representation. The dark colour and gloomy lightings reveal her inner state full of sadness and loneliness. Her inner psyche reflects her inner struggle that constantly torments her while pursuing her dream.

Spring succeeds 'winter' in the movie which covers from (00:26:36) to (00:59:50) part of the movie. Spring begins in the party where many people enjoy party in the bright sunny day. Party is the symbol of American culture where people drink, dance and meet new people. Party culture shows American society as a lavish, hedonistic and materialistic in its life style. They seek material happiness rather than spiritual one. It is the general understanding that materialism along with consumerism symbolize American value. Spring is the season when new flower blooms and new plants are germinated likewise Chazelle uses spring season to introduce Mia and Sebastian to each other.

After the party is over Mia and Sebastian got time to spend with each other that is the time when two protagonists come together. Through the medium of song they talk with each other in the scene from (00:32:24) to (00:36:03). In that song they talk about their feelings and what they think about each other. Chazelle deliberately uses song to move story forward and give the movie musical song and romantic move. Song proceeds plot in the movie. About the importance of music in the movie, James Monaco argues, "Music . . . makes a lot of interesting art out of the relationship between "horizontal" lines of melody, set in rhythms, and "vertical" sets of harmonies" (54-55). Melodies and harmonies set the mood of the movie. For the plot

development as well as to keep the essence of the story music plays central role in the movie. In short period of time with the help of lyrics, music and dance both Mia and Sebastian know each other which leads them to their friendship. Through dialogues it would take long time but music and lyrics capture metaphorically about their feelings. Songs are considered as effective medium of catching audiences' attention easily. In this respect, music has been used as an effective tool in this movie to progress the plot and have easy impact upon the audiences.

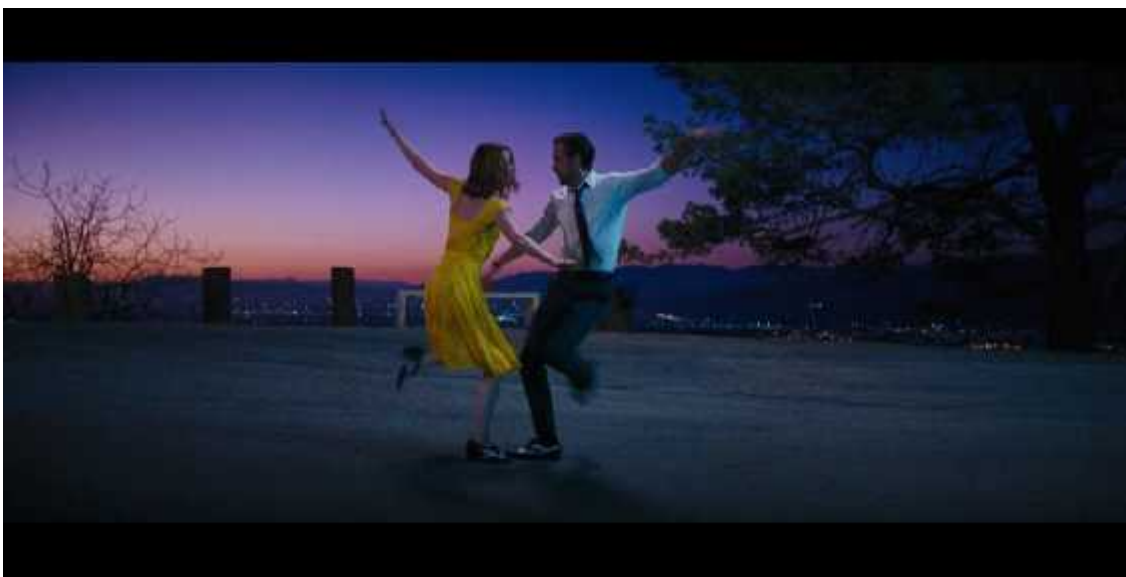


Fig. 3: Mia and Sebastian Dancing together on the top of hill (00:35:46)

In the above figure, through a semi – closed shot, and mixture of near about perfect lighting, the movie maker captures the crucial stage in the life of characters. At this reference, Paul Wheeler, a cinema theorist, says, “It is important, before lighting a scene, to be able to visualize the lighting ratio you are going to use” (107). The amount of light used has massive impact to convey certain meaning in the movie. The beautiful moments of Sebastian and Mia get reflected in the mixture of warm colors. Here, both of them are dancing together after party. It was dark evening after sunset, at the very time lighting was coming on and Los Angeles city was all bright. Usually at the evening, the environment becomes dark and there is absence of light in the

screen. However, to show the romantic situation and beauty of city low light has been frequently used. The romantic environment creates favorable environment for two souls to come together. As a result, a kind of bonding starts between them.

The strength of this movie lies in its powerful symbolic representation of American dream. It shows the prevailing party culture in American society. American youths' fascination towards mass gathering with intention of fun has been defined as an important part of American dream. Fig. 4 reflects the same mindset of Mia where she interacts with others.



Fig. 4: Mia participating in the party (00:28:05)

The above long shot captures the large scenario within a single frame. It broadens the horizon of the information we get within a single frame. Through this shot the movie maker portrays free spirits of American youths who are in pursuit of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness as general understanding of American dream. Here, Jim Cullen clarifies the psychology imposed by American dream. He illustrates, “The American dream was never meant to be a zero-sum solution: the goal has always been to end up with more than you started with” (159). This dream demands more and more. It seems it has large appetite. It points towards upward direction, to the highest place.

Enjoyment comes with the pursuit of this dream. Both Mia and Sebastian are often seen partying with their friends and others. This trend continues until they face reality of American dream. The reality seems harsh than they have ever thought of.

On another note, the movie visualizes the imagination of protagonists: Mia and Sebastian. The use of animation with excessive use of blue colour highlights in certain parts of the movie hints towards the moviemaker's intention of showing core promise of American dream. This over use of blue color reflects the deep intentions of characters that reside in their hearts.



Fig. 5: Mia and Sebastian flying in their imagination (00:57:45)

This wide spread long shot in the form of animation portrays the inner psyche of Mia and Sebastian. Animation has occupied large space in recent movie making techniques. In this connection, Jon Lewis voices for importance of animation as it is necessary “to understand and appreciate animation as a significant mode of cinematic art” (220). Even in this case, two characters are flying high above the sky. They are dancing and celebrating. This particular shot expresses the high form of youth passion and energy with strong sense of imagination. Here, the opening lines of F. Scott

Fitzgerald's very famous novel *The Great Gatsby* become significant in order to illustrate the high compelling power of American dream. The narrator says, "In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since 'Whenever you feel like criticising anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'" (3). This signifies how American youths take their privilege for granted. They think that they deserve success as per their wish. The same line of thought can be traced in two major characters, Mia and Sebastian, of *La La Land*. Especially, it can be observed in visual manifestation of these characters throughout the entire movie.

Furthermore, visual representation has different implications in the way it puts forward meaning wrapped up in different forms. Stuart Hall explains the way representation works among people. He argues, "Representational system consists of the actual sounds we make with our vocal chords, the images we make on light-sensitive paper with cameras . . . the digital impulses we transmit electronically" (25). All the elements we see in this movie form a system of representation that pictures the vision of the movie maker. American dream is all about individualism where people become happy when they are successful. It deals with an extreme form of individualism where everything revolves around oneself. Mia and Sebastian become good friends; she gets a breakthrough in television. On the other hand, Sebastian constantly struggles in his career which makes him feel like a loser. At the end of the day, he stays lonely and full of sorrow. He expresses his pain through a song, "city of stars" (00:46:48). Sebastian sings:

City of stars/

Are you shining just for me?/

City of stars/

There's so much that I can't see/

Who knows?/

Is this the start of something wonderful and new?/

Or one more dream that I cannot make true? (00:46:48 - 00:47:55)

Sebastian's suffering reflects his lack of opportunity despite hard endeavor in his career. It gives birth to hopelessness in him. He starts to believe that his dream to get success in Jazz music will remain unfulfilled forever.

In the next scene, Mia and Sebastian are supposed to meet each other but due to her busy schedule with film makers she could not get time to meet him. She meets movie makers in a restaurant, however, she despises their company. In the background, Jazz music starts to play and Mia starts to miss Sebastian. She gets out from restaurant and runs to meet Sebastian. In this connection, Amy Villarejo describes the importance of background music in a movie. She claims, "If the sound coming from the floor above in the hotel room is audible, it is meant to be audible in order to give our hero and heroine the chances for an accidental encounter" (52). The sound of jazz music in the restaurant seems intentional; it is meant to be listened by Mia. That very music reminds her of Sebastian. Then, she runs for him. Sebastian waits Mia in cinema hall. Following their meeting, they see film together and kiss passionately. These events portray blooming of their love life. It is a new beginning, a new day of love. The feeling of emotional sensation incubates born in their heart. They find themselves in cloud nine.

After 'spring' the movie shifts to 'summer' season with the significant changes in the characters' life. Summer begins with the scene Mia and Sebastian walking in the garden holding each other's hand. They can be seen living happily in their

relationship; to show that the movie maker has used bright dresses for both Mia and Sebastian. The movie maker has chosen bright background for joy and happiness of characters. The technique of continuous transition takes story forward in a fast manner. Jolly and happy days' pass faster than usual speed; a technique embedded by most of the movie makers which shows continuous transition between one shot and next.

Although summer begins with joy and happiness, the characters carry sadness within them because they could not succeed in their respective field. Visual representation is not about only straight forward or superficial meaning, it contains underlying meaning. Roland Barthes argues, "At the first level, to get any meaning at all, we need to decode each of the signifiers in the image into their appropriate concepts" (qtd. in Stuart Hall 39). This means even in the condition of the protagonists of *La La Land* what we see is merely their emotions while in deeper analysis we can see characteristics of American dream. Their hard work is not paid off. Sebastian wants to open his own club for jazz music. He wants to preserve jazz as well as influence youth generation through his music. He starts working with his friends to play music and they upload it in social media platform YouTube. At this point, Mia also starts working in a theatre. Mia and Sebastian both struggle in their respective fields. They both sing to convey their feelings, "City of stars/You never shined, so brightly" (01:12:43). In the lyrics city of stars symbolically stands for Los Angeles and Hollywood where they have come to fulfill their dreams but they constantly find themselves in the middle of crisis. They struggle to earn their livelihood. City of opportunity has not brought any hope till that time so they sing above mentioned song.

In the last scene of summer Mia runs away from the concert of Sebastian. She sees Sebastian has become a star and people are enjoying his music. Her boyfriend becomes successful in his career and she still struggles in her field, which makes her to go away from concert. She feels pity for herself. At the last scene of summer the movie foreshadows Mia's intention of leaving Sebastian.

'Fall', the month of separation appears in the screen after summer. As leaves separates from its plants it tries to tell that in 'Fall' Sebastian and Mia are going to be separated. 'Fall' captures screen time from (01:16:10) to (01:43:34) in the movie. In the fall section, movie shifts from romantic comedy to tragedy. All the seasons carry their own theme. Some carry comedy, romance, irony and tragedy. Probably, the movie makers are trying to compare season with human life and its different aspects like happiness, sadness, separation, love etc. To see the movie from archetypal criticism it incorporates human nature along with different seasons. Northrop Frye in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* divides different genre of fiction according to seasons. Frye associates Mythos of Spring with the genre of comedy. Frye claims that, "The obstacles to the hero's desire, then, form the action of the comedy, and the overcoming of them the comic resolution" (164). In spring Mia and Sebastian are in struggling phase of their career but they were managing time for each other. Though they are going through rough and tough phases of their lives in a new place, they show no sign of complain towards time. It shows that struggle and happiness as comedy in the spring. Seasons signify changing nature of characters' life with the perfect use of color mixing. With each season, characters move towards deeper layer of life.

In the movie *La La Land*, seasons are associated with different themes of the movie. Fall stands for the tragic separation between Sebastian and Mia. Mia appears sad in the first shot of 'Fall' portion. The bright and lively colour shifts to dark and

night. The use of low light shows their sadness and nervousness. In spite of his recent success, Sebastian seems unhappy with his work life in the club. He wants to play jazz music in club but ends up playing something else. Mia asks Sebastian, “Do you like the music you’re playing?” (01:20:26). In response, Sebastian answers, “No, I don’t” (01:20:30). This conversation shows that what Sebastian has been doing for his livelihood could not satisfy him. He compromises with life. Sebastian wants to make his career in jazz music but he finds that people show no interest toward it. So, he wants stable career. This discussion between Mia and Sebastian show that they are not happy with what they are doing. The ultimate goal of American dream is happiness but it fails to achieve what it promises to fulfill. The scene between (01:23:36-01:24:14) shows the burning of dish prepared by Sebastian and smoke alarm turned on. This scene metaphorically presents the relation between Mia and Sebastian which is burning because of their dissatisfaction with each other. The significance of that scene represents the way a beautiful love relation slowly turns into ashes due to misunderstanding created by outcomes of American dream. Mia runs from Sebastian’s house with tears on her eyes. This tragic situation portrays the reality of American dream which the characters are unaware of. These two characters are not just fictional characters; they are the representative of American youths, who undergo with similar situations throughout their lifetime. The movie reflects the tip of the iceberg, it has got multiple layers of complex systematic structure.

Mia struggles for recognition in her acting career. Only small number of people comes to watch her drama in the theatre. She does her best but cannot achieve success. Young people harshly criticize her show for not standing up to the mark. The voice in the background says, “. . . shoot myself in the head. She’s not even good. That whole window things . . . oh, well not good. One-woman shows are always

terrible” (01:28:18 - 01:28:27). These background voices clearly display that people are not satisfied with Mia’s acting and her drama.

In the movie, night time is mostly shown in ‘fall’ by the movie maker as night symbolizes darkness and contrasts of human life. Mia and Sebastian struggle both in their career and love relation. For visual representation of characters’ suffering the movie maker has used multiple scenes of night time. Low presence of light connotes a slim chance of hope in their life. Visual representation consists of certain motive and politics of the person. Here, Theo van Leeuwen explains multiple angles of visual representations. He highlights meaning of images by the help of Berger’s ideas, “. . . images provide interpretations, ideologically colored angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge” (136). Images act the way image makers desired to. In *La La Land*, we find visual representation of dream, hope, loss and grief. Visual images connect with multiple layers of human emotions. Shades of human psychological traits can be challenging for any form of representation. However, in this movie, the movie maker has overcome this challenge in a perfect way.

Likewise, in *La La Land*, the movie maker has presented American dream as a kind of myth that captures American people’s mindset. The very term ‘American dream’ connotes different meaning to different people, however, it signifies homogeneous idea to every people. Regarding myth Roland Barthes notion becomes useful here. His insights prove to be significant tool for the understanding of various myths. He claims:

. . . all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. This substance is not unimportant: pictures, to be sure, are

more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it. (108)

Images provide compact meaning along with multiple layers. As shown in the movie, this myth of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness has a deep rooted impact upon people. Sebastian and Mia pursue this myth in which they sacrifice even their most precious happiness. Below given two screenshots, Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, play central role in *La La Land*. They depict two realities: a real one and an alternate one. Difference in realities shows expectation versus real life situation in the characters' life. This variation projects actual scenarios where a kind of mythical dream hampers the life of the protagonists and other people who are involved in it.

The power of visual representations can be felt in below given two frames. One frame, Fig. 6, represents the real life of Mia and Sebastian, where Mia spends her life with her husband. On the other hand, next frame, Fig. 5, portrays the inner mindset of the character. This frame carries the dream of the character. The contrast of what is and what could have been denotes the cleverness of the movie maker by using cinematic elements. Stuart Hall's insight tells how this pattern of representation works. He dissects the complex pattern of representation that can be seen in everywhere. He claims:

Representation is a complex business . . . it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way. This is why we need theories -to deepen our analysis" (226).

Representation involves human emotions, visions and intentions. The following two screenshots speak about art of representation pictured by the movie maker:



Fig. 6: Mia and her husband, a real life scenario (01:58:21)

The above screenshot, Fig. 6, is a character centred shot which captures two intended Mia and her husband with extra focus. This frame depicts reality of Mia's life; a life which is different from what she has expected while pursuing American dream. In this frame, the movie maker has used combination of both bright and dark color. This signifies neither she seems totally happy nor sad. It shows a kind of balanced situation where she sacrifices something and gets something. Her inner mental state has been represented by using lightening as a cinematic element.

On the other hand, the screenshot, Fig. 7, depicts the alternative reality. It presents the scenario which would have been the reality if the protagonists' pursuit of American dream had met with happy ending. This shot too uses the same technique as the previous one. However, in this frame two of them are in comfortable position as they live their desired life. In this connection, James Monaco's pointed out the significance of color in the movie. He discusses the impact of color combination for the delivery of messages in the movie.



Fig. 7: Mia and Sebastian, an alternate reality thought by them (01:57:59)

He states, “Black-and-white communicates significantly less visual information than color film, and that limitation can have the effect of involving us more deeply in the story, dialogue, and psychology of the film experience instead of the spectacle” (117). The use of extra and deep color in these shots clarifies the intention of the moviemaker of presenting traits of American dream.

Music creates different effects in the movie. It carries different functions and attracts auditory sensation of audience. Besides this it plays vital role in narrating story and tells the inner situation of characters. In the movie music acts as medium of flashback as well as helps movie maker to convey the theme of the movie. Sebastian plays piano in his club and the tune from it takes Mia to her old days with Sebastian. She recalls all the moments she spends with him five years back. Sebastian used to play piano for her when they were in relationship. The same tune from piano acts as catalyst for her flashback and reason for her anguish. In movie making, music is normally thought to be a medium of expressing regret, loss, pain, suffering and anguish in the movie. The same music allures her heart in the beginning of the movie

and at the end it becomes reason for her suffering.



Fig.8: Sebastian playing piano in his club where Mia accidentally visits

(01:50:05)

In the above screenshot, Fig.8, Sebastian plays piano for his audience in his club where Mia sits with her husband. Sebastian succeeds in his dream as a successful pianist, owned a club but he looks sad. Long melancholic music in this situation artistically paints the remorse, guilt, anxiety and void of both of the protagonists. Here, James Monaco highlights the power of music in movies, “Film thus utilizes a set of musical concepts expressed in visual terms: melody, harmony, and rhythm are long-established values in film art” (57). Music creates a kind of sensation which transforms in to strong point of the cinematic brilliance. Achieving American dream does not make Sebastian happy; achieving his dream by abandoning his beloved, who once used to be source of happiness for him. The combination of light and music can be perfectly seen in this above particular frame to display the outcome of American dream. Americans believe that material possession and success are keys for happiness but movie maker concludes that self-satisfaction is the way for happiness.

In a nutshell, *La La Land* as a form of visual representation portrays the myth of American dream from a realistic point of view. It scrutinizes the pros and cons of American dream from the eyes of Mia and Sebastian. More to say, this movie portrays American dream from fresh set of eyes. At least on the basis of this movie we can claim that American dream's sweet as well as approachable on surface but that is not the reality. It promises successful life with all materialistic happiness. However, at the deeper level it carries quite different scenarios that make life painful than it seems. This movie's main concern lies in exploration of that inner layer of American dream. With use of brilliant direction techniques, the movie maker has craftily tried to peel out the layers of American dream. American dream's hollowness seems to spread hope among the youths at first but ultimately wrecks their life. This movie has truly portrayed invisible gap between the world of imagination created by American dream and the world of hard reality, the differences between imagination and truth, dream and reality.

Above all, the best part of this movie is definitely its use of cinematic elements. Amalgamation of music, color, sound and light and all these cinematographic art rhetorics are perfectly employed to convey the theme of "failure of American dream" in the movie. Different colors for different seasons perfectly capture the changing psychology of the characters. Likewise, they beautifully show the temporary growth of two protagonists from ignorance to knowledge. After the awakening from American dream the characters come to the realization of real world which is cinematically presented in excellent visual art. Similarly, the breathtaking music captures the soul of the movie, a tragic love story; a separation between Mia and Sebastian. Along with this, well-coordinated dances and powerful background score add life in the movie. It shows the power of visual representation in delivering

of certain messages and ideas related with effect of American dream in American societies. Wrapped in attraction of dreams, Americans are easily lured by glow of it. The moviemaker shows the complexity the characters face while chasing those dreams which are deeply rooted in their sub-conscious mind.

Thus, *La La Land* examines the so-called American dream from critical approach. It criticizes concept of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. It puts forward the true face of modern American societies from the perspectives of two youths. It shows the reality and hidden bitter truths that lie in the core of American dream. The unshakable image of materialistic life has been challenged by outcome of highly modernized lifestyle in present time. When right amount of cinematic ingredients meet with right subject issue then the result comes in the form of *La La Land*. Both commercially and critically acclaimed movie has taken the debate surrounding American dream to the next level. The movie points out the flaws that preside in the system of American dream as such and its underlying dimensions. It compels everyone for giving second thoughts before going after fancy promises of American dream. Through the visual form of art, it makes us realize that we should not seek after dream set by others which touches and this heart of everyone.

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