Title of the Module:
Film Soundscape

A soundscape is the totality sonic elements in a specific territorial or artificial environment. A soundscape is generally described according to human perception; as animal perception of sound could be entirely different from that of human perception. In a soundscape the volume, pitch, tempo, frequency of each acoustic element might vary at different temporal moments. Any auditory element that breaches silence can be called a sound. An unwanted sound in a particular acoustic ecology is generally described as a noise. The concept of noise is subjective and circumstantial specific. In an unambiguously designed acoustic ecology, noise removal and reduction requires great effort and carries great relevance. Arrival of newer technological devices brings in newer sonic segments, adding on to the existing soundscape. Similarly, disappearance of existing technological devices causes the extinction of certain sonic segments from the existing soundscape. Just as the landscape of a terrain, the soundscape of that particular terrain would be unique and definitive of that particular location. Soundscape is the sonic identity card of a place.

Learning Objectives
To enable the learner to:

1) understand the concept of soundscape
2) comprehend various factors which decide a soundscape
3) to understand and differentiate various elements of film soundscape
4) comprehend and appreciate cinema with special reference to soundscape

International Standardization Organization defines a soundscape as an "acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people in context." Theoretically a soundscape can be classified into three: biophony, geophony, and anthrophony. Biophony refers to the entire gamut of natural sound produced by flora and fauna; geophony refers to the sonic emissions by natural elements; and anthrophony stands for artificial sounds created by devices invented by human beings. According to ISO, R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian music composer coined the word "soundscape". We are always immersed in and surrounded by different soundscapes at different times in one locality or when we move from one locality to another.

The process of adding a sound track to cinema is known as 'scoring'. The scoring process could be either magnetic recording or digital recording. Right from the time of Lumiere cinema of the 19th century, cinema has never been actually silent. The screenings of silent films were done often with the accompaniment of live orchestra in the theatre. Rick Altman suggests that, "the early cinema soundscape was heavily slanted toward audiovisual matching. Conditioned by a widely disseminated tradition of descriptive music, early cinema audiences harbored expectations of a connection between the audio and the visual portions of the program. …Even musical accompaniment for films made cinema into a multimedia affair, descriptive music was creating expectations of a connection between the audio and the visual portions of the program. Audiences accustomed to close audiovisual connections paid particular attention to visual representations of sound sources." Contemporary cinema, especially sci-fi films, makes use of computer-generated sounds also. So, film soundscape ranges from natural sounds, to orchestra composed sounds, to computer generated special effect sounds. Cinema soundscape refers to all the sonic waves that we experience while watching a movie. Generally only those sound elements recorded and embedded in the soundtrack of a movie are considered as part of a movie's soundscape. However, the extracinematic sonic elements present within a projection

theatre—such as the purring of the projector and air condition wends, sound of electric fans, noise created by the spectators, etc.—also can be considered under cinema soundscape. A movie Sound Designer is an important part of the film crew.

The following are some of the various functions of a cinematic soundscape:

a) Defining a location

In cinema, locational shifts are often suggested by changing the soundscape. A city will have an entirely different sound scape than that of a village. The outdoor locational soundscape could be different from that of an indoor location. Even in a particular space, soundscape varies as per the positioning of different characters in the movie. For example, the soundscape created to describe a character who sites in a closed car will be different form that of the soundscape to describe a traffic police man who knocks at the car window from outside.

b) Defining a time

A cinema soundscape has a critical role in describing the changing temporal environment of films. Temporal changes include seasonal time change, clock-time change and changes from day to night. A factory siren in cinema generally indicates either morning or evening. Soundscape of a location at dawn and dusk would be radically different.

c) Defining a mood

Mainstream commercial cinema thrives on manipulating human emotions at various points of the reel time. Along with right visuals, equally right sound elements could enhance or reduce both the characters' as well as the audiences' moods in film. A sequence of celebration in cinema will be boosted by a thrilling soundtrack. The pathos of loss at death in cinema is enhanced with an equally sad sound track.

d) Defining a character

Universally human speech and verbal mannerisms vary from person to person. In cinema, the creation of a unique character, specific accent, style and tempo are very challenging. Both the verbal and the non-verbal sounds generated by a character in cinema become an inseparable part of that character's personality. However, as cinema is a patriarchal industry dominated by male superstars, replacement of a male superstar's sound with another man's dubbed sound cannot be even imagined. Think of Amitabh Bachchan's peculiar sound replaced with another male sound.

e) Developing film narrative

Film narrative, or the cinematic plot often progresses through dialogues. Therefore, dialogues in cinema often form a major quantity of cinema soundscape. Cinematic voice-overs also take the narrative forward. In the silent era cinema, intertitles often were used to suggest further development of cinematic plots.

f) Providing further information

Cinema is a highly compressed work of art created with many layers of multifarious audio, visual, and textual elements. Using sound tracks, the audience can be provided with further information on the impending danger like tempest, air-raid.

g) Expanding situational meaning

Film soundscape provides clues to situational meaning in cinema. Even a specific situational cinematic meaning can be subverted by an opposite-meaning soundtrack. Serious situations are often rendered into comic and vice versa by inserting appropriate sound element in cinema.

The visual beauty of a cinematic shot or sequence can be enhanced by the insertion of an equally appealing sound element.

h) Create an acoustic aesthetics

Film soundscape provides a filmmaker to create a unique acoustic aesthetics. In the creation of a film's unique identity, soundscape plays a significant role. A movie can be critically analysed and aesthetically appreciated on the sole basis of its soundscape. Film texture, narrative, visual idiom and acoustic aesthetics collaboratively make a movie an integrated work of art.

Just like cinematic visuals, cinematic soundscape also confines the audience to the immersive environment of cinematic apparatus. Sounds too can dominate over a spectator. Sophisticated modern acoustic theatre architectonics and sound designs contribute to the sonic incarceration of a film spectator. The more noise is reduced in a film soundscape, the more acoustically observing and dominant will the film be.

Following are the major sonic elements which can be heard in a film soundscape.

1. Dialogue Sound

As in mainstream theatre, dialogues and monologues by characters constitute the major chunk of a film's sound track. It is primarily through the dialogue between/among characters the cinematic narrative is taken forward in talkies. In the case of silent era films, often insertion of intertitles was aimed at achieving a dialogue like situation. Film dialogues provide enough information to the audience so that they can follow the storyline.

2. Foley Sound

Foley sounds refer to sound generated by common everyday actions like opening the lock, starting a vehicle, sound of footsteps, sounds of explosion and gun fire, etc. Foley sounds are not normally captured while shooting, but added to the track from a sound library. But foley sound brings more realism into movies. It enhances the realistic ambiance of a film. The phrase, foley sound, was derived from the name of the American sound engineer Jack Donovan Foley.

3. Diegetic and Nondiegetic Sound

If the source of a sound element could be located or visible or suggested within a particular cinematic moment it can be called a Diegetic sound. For, example if a character in a film is shown watching a television, the sound coming from the television can be a diegetic sound. A diegetic sound is an actual or real sound which fits with the visual on screen. On the contrary, if the source of a particular sonic element in film is not shown or not implied by a particular cinematic scene, such sounds belong to the category of non-diegetic sound. Most often mood music used in films belong to the non-diegetic category. It has to be noted that at times a non-diegetic sound can turn diegetic in the adjacent sequence; and a diegetic sound could lose its diegetic status and thus become a non-diegetic one in the next sequence.

4. Synchronous and Asynchronous Sound

Any sound element, including a music score, or foley sound which is compatible with the situation, mood or the lip movement of a character or object in a movie scene is a synchronous sound. A synchronous sound could be recorded on location or dubbed in a studio. If an incompatible sound track is used in a particular situation, it becomes an asynchronous sound. For instance, if the sound of a moving truck is used while showing a moving car, it becomes asynchronous. Synchronized music sounds, recorded on soundtracks of the films, started its appearance in films from 1926 with the release of the American film *Don Juan* (1926). It was

directed by Alan Crosland. But it had no synchronized dialogue track. Only with the release of Alan Crosland's The Jazz Singer, in 1927, the usage of synchronized dialogue sound tracks, using the Vitaphone sound recording device, in talkies began.

5. Special Effect Sound

To accompany normal situations in cinema, sonic elements suggestive of natural origin are generally used. However, in Sci-Fi films and cartoon films, such natural sound elements would not fit in many circumstances. In such situations, artificially created or combined score, often electronically or computer-generated sound elements are often used. Such sounds are known as Special Effect sound. We do not have natural counterparts to special effect sounds.

6. Jingle Sound

A unique short tune used to define a particular person, situation, or product is called a jingle. In movies, the entry of certain characters could be accompanied by a specific sonic tune, which defines the general temperament of that particular situation. Similarly, at times a specific situation can be created by a jingle, for instance a comic turnout of serious situation. A jingle is the crispiest sonic description of a cinematic character or situation. A jingle often 'brands' a place or a character in cinema.

7. Film Songs

One of the most important features of narrative stylistics of Indian cinema, produced in all languages of India, is its employment of song and dance sequences. Bollywood cinema is globally popular for its excellent movie music and dance. Even when the filmic plot has nothing to do with music and dance, Indian cinema invariably uses song and dance either to develop the narrative further, or to provide a Brechtian break during cinematic narrative. However, songs and dance at times have certain narrative function to perform like the compression of the story, enhancement of the emotional factor, deeper depiction of characters etc. Song and dance sequences in Indian cinema significantly contribute to the box office revenue. Film Song and Dance, cut off from the body of the movies, in audio and video format respective, has a huge market value in Indian cultural industry.

The following quote from Los Angeles Film School provides insights on the importance of sound in a film. "Films are produced using three types of sounds: human voices, music and sound effects. These three types of sounds are crucial for a film to feel realistic for the audience. Sounds and dialogue must perfectly sync with the actions in a film without delay and must sound the way they look. If a sound doesn't quite match the action on screen, the action itself isn't nearly as believable. One way to achieve believable, high-quality sounds is to use original sound clips rather than relying solely on sound libraries for sound effects. Another way to make a film more believable using sound is it incorporate what are known as asynchronous sound effects – often in the form of background sounds. These sounds do not directly correlate to the action occurring in a scene, but they can bring a film to life. Including sounds typical of a city or rural area can help to make the film's setting more realistic." Distinct soundscapes are often created in the contexts of genre movies also. The soundscape created for a Western will not be compatible for a Noir film or an expressionist film. Similarly the soundscape of a Sci-Fi movie will not be fitting for a romantic comedy drama film.

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