

Portrayal of Punjab in 'Ardaas': A Socio-Realist Analysis

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Abstract

Punjabi cinema has grown into a significant artistic platform that mirrors the social, cultural, and ethical background of Punjab. Among its notable films, Ardaas offers an authentic depiction of Punjabi society. Deeply embedded in Punjab's cultural values, the film addresses issues like drug addiction, caste discrimination, joblessness, farmer suicides, and the decline of traditional values, while also celebrating the liveliness of the community. This research explores the social realism portrayed in the movie Ardaas through a qualitative content analysis of its story narrative, characters and their dialogues. It investigates how the film uses cinematic techniques to depict the real-life problems of the Punjabi people. The analysis shows that the film draws its strength from familiar social setting and emotionally authentic characters, allowing audiences to connect with issues that are both personal and societal. The film goes beyond mere commercial entertainment to encourage reflection on social challenges and the changing identity of Punjab.

Keywords: Social realism, Punjab, Cinema, Culture

Introduction

The term Social Realism refers to art and literary movement that took place in the 20th century around the globe. The word 'social' refers to the people in the society, and 'realism' refers to the way these people were portrayed in each art medium. Here society is portrayed as it is. Instead of an idealized situation, actual situation

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is shown. Artists created art that represented the everyday lives of common working folks. Artists wanted to show how the world really was, and thus didn't hesitate from showing things that are negative and painful. In this way, social realism moves away from romanticism and classicism. Romantic, frivolous notions were discarded for the gritty, harsh characteristics that defined the world after the Industrial Revolution and Great Depression. Social realism encompasses the work of painters, printmakers, photographers and film-makers who drew attention to the everyday conditions of the working class and the poor. Social realists are critical of the social structures, which maintain and sustain these conditions.

Objectives of the study

- 1) In-depth analysis of various socio realist issues shown in the movie
- 2) To find out the extent of commercial success achieved by it

Significance of the study

The research will provide an insight into the role played by Punjabi cinema in acting as a mirror to the society. Thus, it can provide feedback to the section of media committed towards filmmaking.

Research methodology

As the topic of the research is primarily based on content, therefore, the researcher has used qualitative research methods to conduct this study. The research methods applied for the same are content analysis and personal observations. Qualitative approach allows flexibility to be creative, artistic & innovative.

Content analysis

Analysing and interpreting textual, visual or audio content. It is mostly applied in media studies and social studies. This helps to find patterns and themes. Content analysis is a systematic research method used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns, themes, or meanings within qualitative or quantitative data such as texts, images, or media content.

Social realism: An overview

Social Realism refers to an art and literary movement that took place around the globe in the twentieth century. The word 'social'

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Social realism encompasses the work of painters, printmakers, photographers and film-makers, who draw attention to the everyday conditions of the working class and the poor. Social realists are critical of the social structures, which maintain and sustain these conditions. Realism can be found in ancient Hellenistic Greek sculptures, which accurately portray boxers and decaying old women. The works of such 17th century painters as Caravaggio, the Dutch genre painters and the Le Nain brothers in France are realist in approach.

Social Realism in its present form emerged in the 19th century in an industrialized Europe. Industrial revolution led to emergence of a strong and rich capitalist class and a poor and unprivileged working class which the capitalist class in factories exploited. It led to emergence of cities, which were crowded, polluted and stinky. Cities presented pictures of luxury enjoyed by the rich alongside daily struggle and hardships faced by the poor. Later, it got further impetus during the time of global economic depression and heightened racial conflict.

Social Realism as a film genre focuses on giving the audience a true indication of what life is like. Social realist films were keen to show the effects on society and depict the problems endured by the working class and 'underclass', including homelessness, unemployment and ambition and the inequalities of social class. Social Realism in cinema finds its roots in Italian neorealism, the films of Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and to some extent Federico Fellini. Social Realist films originated in the 1950s/1960s and became critically and commercially successful in the 1960s and benefited from the fact that only some middle-class households

had television due to which a large number of people flocked to the cinema to see films.

Socially realist Indian cinema emerged along with the mainstream social realist cinema in early 1930s. With the advance of sound, a number of social problem films, naturalistic in their depiction, were made even during colonial times criticizing oppressive colonial institutions, Gudavalli Ramabrahmam's "Raithu Bidda" (1939) was banned by the colonial administration for criticizing the Zamindars, hereditary Indian landlords who had turned tax collectors for the British.

The years after the partition were a golden period for social realist cinema, a new movement called Indian New Wave or parallel cinema was started by Bengali filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. There were films like Ritwik Ghatak's Nagarik (1952) and Satyajit Ray's The Apu Trilogy (1955-1959). These films portrayed stories of ordinary Indians.

Analysis

Film: Ardaas

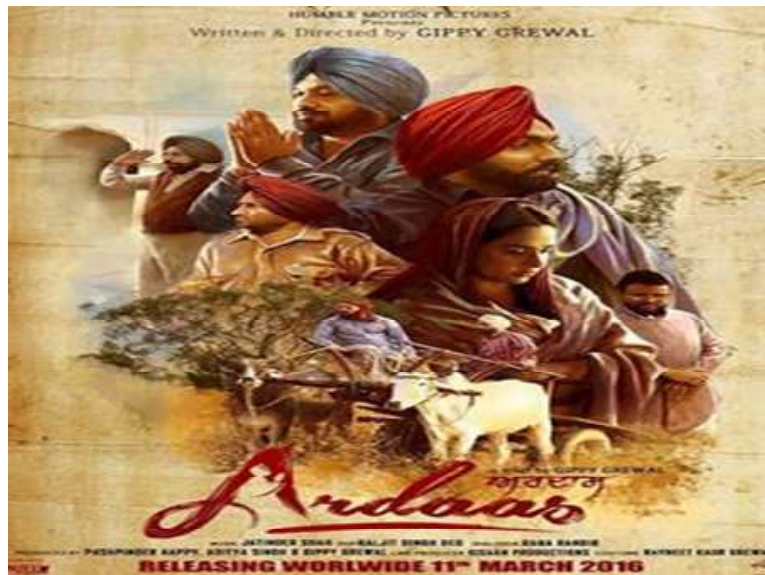


Figure 1: Theatrical release poster

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Release Date- 11 March 2016

IMDB RATING - 8.3/10

Director: Gippy Grewal

Cast

Gurpreet Ghuggi as Master Gurmukh Singh

Ammy Virk as Agyapal Singh/Aasi

B.N. Sharma as Subedar

Karamjit Anmol as Shambhu Nath

Rana Ranbir as Lottery

Mandy Takhar as Binder

Sardar Sohi as Diler Singh Sohi (Aasi's father)

Gurpreet Bhangu as Beebi (Gurmukh's mother)

Hobby Dhaliwal as Shamsher Singh Brar

Storyline

The movie is set in rural Punjab, where Gurpreet Ghuggi's character Gurmukh Singh works in a government primary school as a teacher where he notes the issues faced by the local people and helps them to combat them. From focusing on the sensitive topic of female foeticide, to showing the impact of widespread usage of drugs, the movie raises a number of other issues like farm crisis, poor quality public education in primary schools and the deeply entrenched caste system in the society.

Crisis of primary education

The main character in the movie is Master Gurmukh Singh who is a teacher in a government primary school. He performs his duty in a sincere manner whereas other teachers are not concerned with their duties. They even encourage Gurmukh Singh to perform his duty in a casual manner. On his first day at school the headmaster says to Gurmukh Singh, *Chaddo Sir, Pehla din aa kadiya classa sara saal classa e leniya. hun tusi rest karo* (don't bother sir. it's your first day. no classes today You will be teaching the whole year around .You should go and rest now.)

The film raises the issue of teacher absenteeism. The mid-day meal cook asks the headmaster when will he skip from his duty--

after eating the mid-day meal or before it. Teacher absenteeism is so normal in the school that even students named the Sir as 'Farlo Sir', which means the teacher who skips his classes and remains absent from the school.

Student attendance in the school is poor in the beginning, but later in the movie most of the students start coming to the school due to the participatory approach adopted by Gurmukh Singh.

Gender issue

The movie portrays Punjabis' preference for male child. Gurmukh Singh's mother insists on having a son. She even visits religious places and perform rituals to ensure that she has a grandson and not a granddaughter. She forces Gurmukh and his wife to undergo a sex determination test. When the doctor says, '*Dekho ji, sada ta business aa, me abortion nai karangi ta koi hor karega*' (See, it is our business; someone else will perform the abortion if we don't). It underscores the fact that there is proliferation of abortion clinics in Punjab and they are easily accessible to everyone.

Today Punjab has one of the most skewed sex ratios in India. According to 2011 census of India, it has a sex ratio of 895, which is only better than two States, Jammu and Kashmir (889) and Haryana (879). There is high preference for male child among Punjabis in pursuance of which parents resort to female foeticide and infanticide. Even if a girl is allowed to born, she faces discrimination by parents in aspects such as nutrition, education, freedom etc. Reasons behind this preference are patriarchy, desire for male successor among agricultural households and easily accessible sex determination services. Despite having laws like MTP (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Act and PC & PNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques) Act, clandestine clinics offering sex selective abortions are found in every nook and corner of Punjab.

Drug menace

Punjab today has become notorious for drugs. Alcohol, Bhuki (poppy husk), opium, medical and synthetic drugs are common and widespread in Punjab. Due to its proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has become an international transit hub for illegal trade in heroine.

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The movie raises the issue of drug menace in Punjab. Shamsher Brar, an old friend of Daler Singh Sohi, had become a notorious smuggler. He had been able to earn such a lot of money in a short interval of time that he refuses to recognise Sohi as his friend any more. The movie also portrays the politician - drug smuggler nexus. Shamsher Brar tells his father, 'Jidan tu marenga na cm aauga' (The chief minister will come to mourn at our house, when you die). Even Pinku, son of Shamsher Brar dies due to drug overdose.

According to a study conducted by the PGIMER, Chandigarh, one in six Punjabis is addicted to alcohol, tobacco, heroin and cannabis. To ensure no political party influences the study, the Punjab government was not involved and it was conducted under the supervision of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi.

Shrinking farm sizes cleaning agricultural income and lack of employment opportunities leave the youth disaffected and they easily fall prey to drugs. On the other hand drug smuggling offers a lucrative option for unemployed persons to earn easy money in a quick time. Alcohol consumption is also widespread in Punjab, to the extent that it is socially acceptable. It is often romanticised and normalised in cinema and Pop music.

Government is least concerned about this problem. Excise duty on alcohol is a major source of income for state government. Therefore, government is not willing to introduce any prohibition laws like some other states.

Caste society

The movie underscores the issue of supremacy of caste in our society. Even after 70 years of Independence, despite having a progressive constitution and laws, caste remains a dominant force and is a strong marker of one's identity. During his first interaction with Gurmukh Singh, Subedar Sahib enquires about his caste as he is going to live as a tenant in his house. He asks Gurmukh Singh, 'By the way *Jat*, got ki aa tuhada?' (By the way, what is your caste and lineage?)

Farmer deaths

While the green revolution brought prosperity for Punjabi farmers, its ill effects are still emerging. Declining productivity, degrading soil

quality, rising input costs and almost stagnant farm prices made agriculture an unviable occupation. More and more farmers are getting trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

Daler Singh Sohi who is under debt, tries to attempt suicide when Bank took possession of his tractor. One of the reasons behind his indebtedness is the heavy loan he took to arrange for the marriage of his daughter.

Besides these issues the movie also portrays how technology has penetrated into the rural society. Selfie and Facebook have become parts of the rural vocabulary. Aasi, son of Daler Singh, becomes an overnight star when his song becomes a hit on YouTube.

A study titled 'Indebtedness among Farmers and Agricultural Labourers in Rural Punjab' conducted by Punjabi University, Patiala reveals that each agricultural labour household in the state is under a debt of approx. Rs. 68,000. As farmers are unable to repay debt, they resort to suicide, reveals data compiled by three state universities.

While the movie does not explicitly talk about the caste of the characters it is implicit in the name of some characters. Surnames like Brar and Sohi are used for Shamsher and Daler Singh. Shambhu Nath the local shopkeeper (Hindu) is also called by names such as "Seth ji" or "Lala ji". Inferring by surname, most of the characters in the movie are Jaat Sikhs. But this division of characters is realistic as in villages the Sikh population is in majority. Most of the Hindus of villages have migrated to urban areas. The movie doesn't stereotype any caste or community. It has tried to portray each character according to the situation.

Conclusion

Movies act as a mirror to the society. They portray things and events happening in the society. But this is not a one-way process. As a popular medium, movies wield tremendous influence on the society. The viewers are involved in the course of unfolding events and the roles of various characters. They may try to imitate the characters shown in the movie, which can have both positive as well as negative effects. Similarly the movie develops and influences attitude of the audience towards various issues like alcohol consumption, gender biases, corruption and caste system.

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Filmmakers need to make movies, which are socially constructive. They need to balance this with the imperative of making the movie a commercial success.

Through this research, the researcher aimed to analyse the extent of social realism portrayed in a Punjabi film, Ardaas. The researcher also tried to find out the commercial success achieved by the movie. As a film, Ardaas is a combination of both essential elements, i.e art and commerce. It paves the way for the middle-road cinema style in Punjabi language cinema. It shows the social issues of Punjab like gender bias, farmer suicides, drug abuse etc. aligned with the everyday humour and liveliness of Punjabis to break the monotony of certain scenes. The movie did a good overall business by earning Rs 17crores gross at the box office. Much like any other Punjabi film, Ardaas too offers a bit of action, romance, and comedy but it helps the viewer feel a sense of having witnessed something that touches a chord.

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