



## Cinema Through Guru Dutt's Gaze

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**Abstract**—The article explores the magic of Guru Dutt's cinematography with attention to the movie *Pyasa* and delves in the details of its subjectivity. The existence of a timeless piece of art and the creative manifestation of an exemplary director finds home in the hearts of millions of people transcending generations to inspire as well as evoke the emotions of inevitability of life. Through the vivid lens of Guru Dutt's expertise, the author intends to navigate his world and his intentions.

**Keywords**—Melodrama, Cinema Studies, *Pyasa* movie, Contemporary idea, cinematography, Guru Dutt



It is inevitable to admit defeat when parents from the twentieth century argue saying - “*gaane toh humare zamaane mein hua karte the!*” Raised by parents who started their day with a pot of boiling tea and a cassette in the walkman, the melodies of Kishore Kumar and Mohammad Rafi served as a routine wake-up call. What started as simultaneous involuntary humming developed into an admiration for how much meaning these compositions held, adulthood and its experiences brought me closer to the artists who had passed away before I ever came to exist. Grown attached to these songs, their impact has always played the role of a powerful reminder in my life - music holds the power to give a voice to one's feelings. As I watched *Pyasa*, I was in awe of how Guru Dutt uses music not just to accessorize, but sew it into the narrative so well that its absence significantly reduces the cinematic effect and the message that the movie delivers.

The movie opens with the protagonist Vijay lying in the embrace of the very pleasant nature and the immediately emerging background score ‘*ye hanste hue phool, ye mehka hua gulshan*’ as Vijay romanticizes nature, we come across a down-to-earth character who will be central to the narrative of the story. An extreme close up shot of a bee cut to a close up shot of Vijay offers the viewer his point-of-view as we feel the disturbance shared as the bee gets trampled by a man - this opening scene could also serve as a metaphor of Vijay's ideology which we learn

closely as we progress into the film. The music holds the rhythm of the scene, intensifying with the emotions felt by Vijay allowing the viewer to identify with his spontaneous overflow of emotions that is expected out of a melodrama.

The movie employs sensations attached to Vijay's poetry to help intensify the viewer's empathy towards his character. There is a tangible anxiety generated in scenes where Vijay is separated from his manuscripts and the treatment of the manuscripts in the hands of the possessors - Vijay rummaging through files to find his manuscript only to find it in the dustbin of the publishing house, on asking his brothers about his manuscripts they claim to have sold it as *raddi*, Vijay following Gulab in the hopes that she might have them but only to be dismissed by her because she finds him to be penniless and not a potential customer. These sequences create in the viewer a tangible need to see Vijay united with his manuscripts. The heightened image of the manuscripts flying around the room as Gulab hears the news of Vijay's death gives birth to the realization that they need to be bound together in a book. But even on publication of the book, the viewer wishes for the book to be united with Vijay, which happens in the hospital and Vijay exclaims ‘*Yeh meri kitaab hai!*’, ultimately providing the viewer with a sense of satisfaction. The film also incorporates point of view shots to evoke the sense of vision, and the auditory as well as oral senses in Vijay's performance of his poetry and the heavy dialogues.

Guru Dutt indulged in reflecting the realistic state of post-independence India at a time when the norm was entertaining, light-hearted cinema. In commenting on the reality of a materialistic world, that dehumanizes artists and prostitutes, *Pyaasa* is a poetic, cinematic representation of a pseudo-modern world. Vijay's college sweetheart Meena chooses wealth over love as she says in an argument with Vijay - "*sirf pyaar kaafi nahi hota*", Mr. Ghosh hiring Vijay only to belittle him in front of his wife Meena and using a soap advertisement instead of Vijay's poetry for an empty space in his paper, his brothers vilifying his work - there is a lack of compassion in Vijay's life which lets the audience empathize with his character.

*Pyaasa's* essence lies in how integral songs and poetry are to this film. Guru Dutt's art of picturization of the mind-provoking lyrics penned by Sahir Ludhianvi is what awards this movie the status of a masterpiece. At Mr. Ghosh's soiree, Vijay's spontaneous performance of commenting on his lost love Meena even brings the camera to dance to its rhythm. Capturing the awkwardness of the situation and the sad reality of '*Jaane wo kaise log the jin ke pyaar ko pyaar mila, hum ne toh jab kaliyan maangi kaanton ka haar mila*', the song is enriched with close up shots of Vijay singing his heart out, Meena's struggle with her repressed feelings and Mr. Ghosh is offended but refusing to accept how talented Vijay is only because he was his wife's past lover. The song is picturized in accordance with the lyrics, Meena was sitting in a rocking chair and gets up, the camera zooms in on the empty rocking chair as the lyrics say - '*is ko hi jeena kehte hai toh yun hi jee lenge, uff na karenge lab see lenge, aansu pee lenge*' - a direct reference to her absence in his life. It is important to note that Guru Dutt also delves into the understanding of Gulab's unspoken feelings for Vijay brought to life through the song sequence of '*aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo*' which reflects Gulab's escalating feelings as she follows Vijay through stairs, the scene on the terrace where Vijay has no realization of Gulab's presence is how she assumes Vijay thinks about her in life. While the camera zooms out on Vijay, it zooms in on Gulab showing the distance between them and Gulab's growing desire for Vijay. Guru Dutt believed that eighty percent of acting was in the eyes and face, which justifies the dominant close up shots and how expressive the actors are in the movie. The exaggeration while Meena questions Gulab's relationship with Vijay in the office, and the weight and depth of the two words Gulab utters, "*saubhaagya se*" keep us attached to the melodramatic aesthetics of the film.

The song sequence that is followed by the scene where the dancer is forced to dance despite having an ill, crying child, brings the viewer closer to the ideology of the women. The consecutive close up shots of the dancer's

helplessness and tears in Vijay's eyes speak with a heightened sense of emotion to the audience as Vijay runs out of the room into the streets and starts to sing about the harsh realities of the world of prostitutes who are not considered human - *jinhein naaz hai hind par wo kahaan hai*. While Vijay is subject to rebuke on the hands of the people in power, he finds compassion in his masseuse friend Abdul Sattar, Gulab and a beggar. In the scene of his death anniversary, Vijay realises how his posthumous fame and fortune brought people to unite for selfish gains including his brothers and his cunning friend, his cinematic entrance in the auditorium is created through an image of crucifixion - art crucified by the materialistic world. with the help of bright backlight and the dark hall, (also earlier hinted by Meena picking up a magazine showing a similar image), as he erupts into the song - *Ye duniya agar mil bhi jaaye toh kya hai*.

Towards the end there are two sequences where the organised audience turns into a rioting mob - Vijay's first public appearance after escaping the asylum and Vijay denying his identity; the mob lynching hurts both Vijay and Gulab who are rescued by their friends. The mob lynching proves the shallowness of Vijay's popularity, and as opposed to his god-like entrance in the theatre, he now appears in front of Meena as a downtrodden man who has had enough of the societal expectations, cultural stereotypes, greed, capitalism '*jo insaan se insaaninat cheen lete hai*'. The scene also incorporates the forces of nature that mimic the turmoil in the lives of our characters. In stark opposition to the pleasant steady nature in the opening scene of the movie, the closing scene is windy and dark, where the two outcasts finally unite in recognition of their love for each other despite the chaos that has been caused in their respective lives.

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