

Films of Gulzar: Symbolism and the Relationship between Nature and Human World

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Gulzar, the living legend of Indian cinema, uses symbols in his oeuvre to communicate effectively. His films are one of the most important and philosophical chapters of Indian cinema. He made his finest films like *Mere Apne*, *Khushboo*, *Aandhi*, *Mausam*, etc. in the 70s - the age of parallel cinema in India.

Gulzar - a writer of story, script, song, dialogue and a film director, is a living legend of Indian cinema. His films are one of the most important and philosophical contribution to the history of Indian cinema. Parallel cinema emerged in India in 70s and Gulzar made his finest films like *Mere Apne*, *Parichay*, *Koshish*, *Khushboo* and *Aandhi* during that time. Gulzar is also a link between the legends of Indian cinema like Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor and Hrishikesh Mukherjee and new generation of filmmakers like Manmohan Desai, Prakash Mehra, Subhash Ghai, Yash Chopra, Mahesh Bhatt, Mansoor Khan, N. Chandra, Sooraj Barjatya etc. Gulzar's films are the documents of human relationships and emotions. This article discusses some aspects such as symbols, nature and human world that Gulzar incorporates consistently in his films and which become his *Auteur* signature.

Auteur is a French word, which means "author." In Film Studies, *Auteur* is the director who has the complete control over his films and shows the consistency of style and theme in each of his films. French film critics like François Truffaut, André Bazin and Andrew Sarris developed the *Auteur* theory in 50s and 60s. These critics used to write for *Cahiers du Cinema* - a film magazine. André Bazin was the founder of *Cahiers du cinéma*. The core of the *Auteur* theory of film criticism lies in the view that art expresses the vision and worldview of single artist. *Auteur* theory examines a single director's films, stylistically (visually) and thematically (textually).

Ijaazat- Gulzar's 13th feature film as a writer-director is about extra marital relationship of Mohinder (Nassuruddin Shah) - the protagonist with Maya (Anuradha Patel). In *Ijaazat* Mohinder and Sudha (Rekha)- two main characters in the film meet after many years on a railway platform and remember some of the sweet and sour moments of their married life through flashback sequences.

Mohinder and Sudha come face to face in one of the scenes in the first sequence of the film. They face each other in the frame and there is a shadow of Sudha on the wall between both of them (Figure 1). The denotative meaning of the image is very clear. However, a close and in-depth analysis of the image reveals the connotative and symbolic meanings. The shadow in the image represents 'something.' The shadow of Sudha represents Maya- 'the other woman' between Mohinder and Sudha. Therefore, the shadow is the symbol of 'third person' who comes between Mohinder and Sudha. Because of Maya, Sudha leaves Mohinder and marries someone else. It is a contextual symbol because if the film is not

about extra marital affairs, the shadow between them will not have any meaning. One can interpret this image in another way also. Second interpretation is that Sudha is not the same Sudha of her past. This Sudha is the shadow of the previous Sudha. Sudha used to love Mohinder but she receives the feeling of isolation and detachment in return. Now, she is a changed person.

Another example of symbol in the same film is a song: “कतरा कतरा मिलती है कतरा कतरा जीने दो जिंदगी है बहने दो प्यासी हूँ मैं प्यासी रहने दो (Drop by drop it flows, let it flow, it is life. Let it flow. I am thirsty, let me remain so...)”. The song is picturised on Mohinder and Sudha near a pool. Some small trees in the pool are not green (Figure 2). These trees are leafless and lifeless, although they are in water. Gulzar uses these leafless and lifeless trees as a symbol of unhappiness, dissatisfaction, detachment. The image evokes a sense of aloofness. Trees are in the water but still they are not green. Sudha is with her husband Mohinder but still not happy. As she expresses herself in the song: “प्यासी हूँ मैं प्यासी रहने दो (I am thirsty, let me remain so...)”. Sudha’s situation is like trees that are into the water but there are no leaves on them. She feels thirsty of love. The tree in the pool maintains its literal significance while suggesting other meanings. The reflection of the tree in the water also has significant meaning in the context of the story. Sudha loves Mohinder. On the other hand, Mohinder is in love with Maya. Sudha’s love for Mohinder is as deep as the roots of the tree, which is extended by the reflection of the tree.

Flying bird appears consistently in Gulzar’s films. However, Gulzar uses the traditional way of showing the bird in flight as a symbol of displacement (Figure 3). For example in *Parichay*, Ravi does not have a permanent house to live. He stays with his friend in the city. One day he receives a letter from his Uncle who invites him to his village. Ravi, who is in search of a job, leaves for his Uncle’s village to take a job of teaching Rai Saheb’s grandchildren. The next shot is of a bird that is about to fly. The bird flies and the song sequence: “मुसाफिर हूँ यारों न घर है न ठिकाना, मुझे चलते जाना है बस चलते जाना” also begins. Gulzar uses parallel editing throughout the song sequence and keeps showing the bird repeatedly. The bird becomes the symbol of Ravi’s movement from city to village.

In *Kitaab*, Gulzar’s most autobiographical film, Babla- the protagonist runs away from his sister’s house to reach his mother’s house. Gulzar again and again shows a flying bird to symbolize Babla’s journey to his mother’s house during the song sequence: “मेरे साथ चले न साया ” (My shadow does not move with me) ”

Bird in flight also appears in other films of Gulzar. Therefore, bird in flight is one of the symbols and recurring motifs in Gulzar’ films.

Ruins and dilapidated structures are another symbols and recurring motifs that Gulzar consistently uses in his films. This starts with his first film *Mere Apne* in 1971 and continues till *Maachis* made in made in 1996. In *Mere Apne*, the old ruined structure where all the boys and Anandi Devi live represents the broken family life of Anandi Devi, the Children and Shyam and his friends (Figure 4). Gulzar uses ruins as a symbol of ruined or unhappy life in his films. In *Mere Apne*, the house in which Anandi Devi and two children live may be a dilapidated

structure, but it becomes a beautiful home because of Anandi's loving and caring nature.

The house in *Namkeen* that is on its last pillar represents the bleak life of all the four women who live in the house. The house looks like a haunted house. When Gerulal- the protagonist comes to occupy the house, he looks at the house and asks Dhani Ram- the owner of the Dhaba "यहां कोई रहता भी है (Does anyone live here)?" It is a lowly house but a strong home. What makes the weak house a strong home is the togetherness of all the women. All the women lead a very miserable life. There is no man in the house. They struggle everyday to keep the kitchen fire burning. However, all the four women are happy. They sing together, cook and eat together, work together and get united when they have fight. This is what makes them happy. Gulzar shows a triumph of human spirit to live and love in adverse condition in this manner. In addition, this is Gulzar's concept of family that he reflects in his films.

In *Aandhi*, the ruins and ancient monuments are shown in a song: "तेरे बिना जिंदगी से कोई शिकवा तो नहीं" In the film, J.K. (Sanjeev Kumar) and his wife Aarti Devi (Suchitra Sen) have been living separately for the last many years. One day Aarti Devi goes to a hotel for her political campaign where J.K is a manager. They meet each other and one night J.K and Aarti Devi visit a dilapidated *barandari* (summerhouse with several doors) (Figure 5). Although they have everything in their lives, yet they are lacking in something. They do not have a complete family. Their daughter lives in a hostel. Everything is scattered. This is what the song expresses too. The dilapidated *barandari* represents the unhappy life of J.K and Aarti Devi.

In *Khushboo*, the old building where Luckhy and her Granny live is a ruined structure of some old *haveli* (a huge building or mansion). This ruined structure is a symbol of unhappy, miserable and broken life of Luckhy and her Granny (Figure 6).

In *Kinaara*, Inderjeet goes to a ruined fort to spend some days. In *Lekin...* there is a ruined structure in the desert. Rewa who is stuck between life and death roams around those ruined structures.

Ruined structures in Gulzar's films also reflect his personal life. Gulzar and Rakhi got married and within two years, they separated. Since then Gulzar has been living alone with his daughter Meghna Gulzar. Meghna Gulzar in her book *because he is...* says, "And during the course of our many chats for this book, Papi and I discovered that in most his films, the houses were dilapidated- or they were *khandars* (ruins). They made their appearance in films like *Mere Apne*, *Khushoo*, *Aandhi*, *Kinaara* and *Namkeen*, and presumably reflected his transient life. I also pointed out that when the houses weren't dilapidated, and were well done, they always had stone walls - much like the living room of his own house - again visible in *Achaanak*, *Aandhi*, *Mausam* and even *Maachis*." ¹ Ruined structures are also visible in other films by Gulzar.

In one of the scenes, in *Mere Apne*, Anandi Devi passes through a frame of a bicycle's wheel. It has a symbolic meaning of the imprisonment of Anandi Devi. She has been confined in a limited space. She is not as free as she was in the

village. Now she is a baby-sitter. Arun Gupta has brought her for his household duties.

In a scene in *Kitaab*, Babla and his friends are shown hitting iron grill with sticks. The shot has a symbolic meaning. Both of them do not want to go to the school. School for them is like a prison. They want to escape from this prison. Later in the film, Babla runs away from his sister's house to reach his mother.

Nature and human world are one with each other in Gulzar's films. They are dependent on each other. They are not different from each other. Bird in flight, flowing river, snow covered mountains, animals all are part of Gulzar's film world and they have symbolic meanings in the films. There is an image of bird in flight in all of Gulzar's movies. It is a symbol of migration, movement, resettlement or journey.

Gulzar uses long shots to establish a relationship between human world and nature. Windows are also open in his film symbolizing oneness of human with nature.

Snow covered hills also has a prominent place in Gulzar's films. In *Mausam*, there is a shot of Chanda in which she is working in the kitchen. Green mountains are visible through the window of the kitchen (Figure 6.84). The shot establishes the relationship between nature and people who occupy the house. Open window symbolizes their oneness with nature. There is no partition between them. The open window connects the interior of the house with the exterior.

Namkeen, *Mausam*, *Ijaazat* open with a long shot of green hills, which establishes a relationship between human beings and nature. The long shot makes it clear that human beings have a close relationship with nature. During the credit title sequence in *Namkeen*, village folks are shown using river to transport woods. They depend on the river for their livelihood.

In *Maachis*, Sanatan- one of the members of the terrorist group, is shown with a lamb in his lap during the song sequence: "छोड़ आए हम वो गलियाँ" Gulzar uses it symbolically. The members of the terrorist organization are as innocent as the lamb. In *Mausam*, there is a reference to a goat and in *Namkeen*, too, there are goats in Nimki's house. Her mother Jugni also depends on cow dung to keep the kitchen fire burning.

Certain images are common trademarks in Gulzar's films. Natural beauty is a part of Gulzar's celluloid world. *Aandhi*, *Mausam*, *Namkeen*, *Ijaazat*, and *Maachis* are laced with scenes of natural beauty. Scenic beauty, snow covered hills, flowing rivers, birds in flight, tall trees, rainwater drops falling from leaves, etc. are some of the beautiful images in his films.

In *Lekin...* there is a scene in which Samir and Rewa are sitting on sand dunes. The shot is taken from a low angle. In addition, both of them are sitting on the corner of the dune. It seems as if they are sitting on the moon. This is one of the most beautiful images in Gulzar's films.

The opening sequence in *Ijaazat*, *Namkeen* and *Mausam* are rich with natural beauty. The night shot of a moving train in *Kitaab* is remarkable and reflection of the

train in the water makes it more beautiful. The credit titles of *Namkeen* and *Ijaazat* have been superimposed on images of nature.

Mausam means season. The film represents the two seasons of Dr. Amarnath Gill's life. The first season of his romantic life with Chanda in Darjeeling and the second season starts when he faces Kajli- a prostitute and Chanda's daughter. *Mausam*, Gulzar's seventh film, begins with a close up of flowers, then it zooms out, shows green hills and then the camera pans right, and zooms in on a white car climbing the hills. The song: "दिल दूढ़ता है फिर वही फुर्सत के रात दिन." Here is a man in search of his past, his old romantic days – the golden period of his life. It is evening. The car is taking zigzag turns and moving very fast. There is a shot of a flowing river. The color of the credit titles is yellow. Gulzar shows the snow covered green hills. There are clouds. The camera in all the shots is subjective. Audiences see through the point-of-view of Dr. Amarnath Gill who is sitting in the car.

The first shot is a close up shot of red flowers and there is a sound of chirping birds. The camera zooms out, shows the green hills and then the camera pans right, and zooms in and there is a white car going through the zigzag roads. The song starts. It is a low angle shot of car, which is climbing the hills. The next shot is a long shot and high angle shot of car. The next shot has been taken from inside the car. The car is moving very fast. It shows how desperate is the person in the car to reach his destination. Immediately after a low angle shot of fast moving car, again there is shot taken from inside the car. This is the second shot taken from inside the car. It is a subjective shot. The distance being covered has been shown through this shot. The trees seem to be running in the opposite direction of the car. There is a close up shot of yellow flowers. Again, there is a shot of fast moving car. This time it has not been taken from inside the car. Again, there is a high angle shot of the car. Gulzar uses this same frame again at the end of the film when Dr. Amarnath Gill leaves the city with Kajli. After a long shot of the car taking zigzag turns, there is a shot of flowing river. This is a shot signature of Gulzar.

There is a rhythm in the opening sequence in *Mausam*. The moving cars, the flowing river, the shaking branches of the trees, the bird in flight are some of the objects, which create a rhythm in the opening sequence in *Mausam*. These objects can be seen in almost all of Gulzar's films. Gulzar, by not showing who is in the car, creates suspense for a few minutes in the minds of the audience. There is a point of view shot when Dr. Amarnath Gill looks out of the window.

Namkeen means salty. The name of the heroine in the film is Nimki. *Namkeen* represents the nature of Nimki- the eldest of the three daughters. She is neither disagreeable nor charming. The first shot of the credit title is a long shot. The camera zooms out and covers the entire hill. In *Mausam*, *Lekin...*, and *Ijaazat*, the first shot of the credit sequence is a long shot of nature and green hills. There is a shot of a flowing river. The credit sequence tells about the setting of the film. It is a village or small town in Himachal Pradesh. There is a temple in the village. Children are taking bath in the river. The whole credit title sequence shows the relationship between human beings and nature in the village. Children are happy with nature. Village women are going for their daily work. Cows are

grazing. It is a morning. There are snow-covered hills. The credit titles are in Hindi. The theme music plays on in the background. The credit title sequence sets the mood of the film. The first shot of credit title sequence in *Namkeen* is a long shot of the green hills. The camera shows the sky and zooms out covering the huge green hills.

The second shot is of the temple. The camera zooms out on the temple. The first five shots are zoom shots. The camera zooms out in all the five shot. In addition, in the sixth and seventh shots, the camera closes up a girl and a baby who is waking up. Clearly, it is morning time. Children are taking bath in a flowing river. There is a long shot of green hills, flowing river and women going to their workplace carrying big baskets on their back establishing the relationship between man and nature. Again there is a flowing river- this is the third time Gulzar shows the flowing river in the sequence. In this shot of flowing river, people are collecting woods coming from the other side. People use river for commercial purposes. The shot shows the dependency of people on the river and their relationship with the river. River is a means of transportation. There is a shot of cloudy sky and birds in flight. The pan shot of snow covered hills shows the hugeness of nature of which human beings are small part.

There is a rhythm in the entire credit sequence in *Namkeen*. There is movement, life, nature, harmony, peace, relationship etc. among the different elements shown during the credit title sequence.

Ijaazat means permission. The title *Ijaazat* is appropriate because Sudha, the heroine of the film leaves Mohinder- her husband without his permission. Mohinder loves Maya. Physically he lives with Sudha but mentally he is always with Maya. Sudha decides to leave Mohinder to get rid of Maya who 'lives' with them day and night. When Mohinder and Sudha meet after many years on a railway platform, they share their experiences. They spend a whole night at the railway waiting room. In the morning, Sudha's husband arrives to receive Sudha. This time Sudha touches Mohinder's feet and says: "पिछली बार बिना पूछे चली गई थी इस बार इज्जत दे दो. (Last time, I did not ask you, please allow me now)" There is a song in the credit title sequence of *Ijaazat*. "छोटी सी कहानी से बारिशों के पानी से सारी बाढ़ी भर गई, न जाने क्यों दिल भर गया." There is a long shot- an establishing shot, of green hills covered with fog. There is a flowing river, waterfall, raindrops on the branches and leaves. There is a moving train, flying bird, cloudy sky. When the credit titles finish, the train halts on the platform and Mohinder- the protagonist in *Ijaazat*, gets down. Here Gulzar uses the bird as a symbol. The bird represents the character in the train that is Mohinder. The train is moving and the bird is flying. Gulzar uses parallel editing. Both are in search of a destination.

This paper concludes that Gulzar is an *auteur* of his films. He has been using different symbols consistently and repeatedly since his first film- *Mere Apne* made in 1971. Nature has a strong presence in his films and his use of long shots of green hills makes clear the vastness of nature of which human beings are a small part.

Works Cited

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