



The Songs of Pyaasa: A Narrative within a Narrative

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Abstract

This article analyses how the songs of the film, *Pyaasa* (1957) not only contribute to advancing the film's narrative but also stand apart weaving their own narrative and themes that are relevant to current Indian politics and society. Five songs from *Pyaasa* are used to examine the objective of the research. Each song including its lyrics and picturization is explored to understand how the song promotes the overall narrative of the film. Further, the songs are juxtaposed with the current Indian political and civilizational climate to highlight their relevance.

Keywords: Guru Dutt; Bollywood; Pyaasa, Narrative; Golden Age of Hindi Cinema



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Srijana Siri Murthy

Introduction

Songs are an intrinsic part of Indian cinema, particularly Hindi films. As opposed to conventional Hollywood films where songs are played in the background, the characters in Hindi cinema diegetically sing the vocals (Morcom, 2015). The usage of such a technique explains the narrative function of songs in Hindi cinema, which is to develop the overall plot of the film. Sigfried Kracauer theorises that songs possess “*a language of their own*” and “*assume cinematic functions of underscoring discreetly some of their implications*” (Kracauer, 1960). Cinema in the 1950s appreciated this quality of songs and abundantly used them to establish a theme or conflict in the narrative.

However, songs in contemporary films only bear a tenuous link to the overall narrative of the film (Vijayakar, 2013). They are merely employed to market films for commercial revenue at the time of their release. For instance, the song ‘*Ladki beautiful Kar Gayi Chull*’ (A Pretty Girl Made Me Crazy) from the film *Kapoor and Sons* (Batra, 2016, 00:25:59) serves no purpose in the narrative of the film. It is included to provide a momentary interlude from the film’s emotionally heavy screenplay and not further its story leading to a more climactic ending. Such treatment of songs is a colossal degradation from the Golden Age of Hindi Cinema (1940s - 1960s).

Pyaasa (The Thirsty One) (Dutt, 1957), released in 1957 and directed by Guru Dutt¹ is a testament to the Golden Age of Hindi cinema. It is one of those rare films that convincingly communicate and develop a narrative using multiple modalities (song and screenplay). Other Guru Dutt films employ this technique as well. A brilliant example is a scene from *Mr & Mrs 55* (Dutt,

1955). When Johnny (Johnny Walker) notices a lady's handkerchief in Preetam's (Guru Dutt) hands, Johnny immediately asks Preetam whether he caught feelings for this lady. To which Preetam responds with the song, '*Aji e Dil Par Hua Aisa Jadoo*' (Such Magic Happened To Me). In this context, the song functions to denote Preetam's romantic feelings for Anita (Madhubala), which becomes pivotal to the progression of the film. Dutt uses the same technique in *Pyaasa*. However, it is only in *Pyaasa* where the entirety of songs including the musical (lyrics, rhythm, vocals) and cinematic elements (lighting, cinematography) become storytelling devices. Dutt first envisions each song as a poem that conveys the emotional state of *Pyaasa*'s protagonist, Vijay. Only then can Vijay's character transform with each song and transcend from material aspirations to a cerebral space by the end of the film. Although Dutt weaves the poems into music, he creates the required silence to illustrate Vijay's metamorphoses through cinematography. Such renewed relationship between lyrics, music, the protagonist and the camera distinguishes *Pyaasa's* songs from other Guru Dutt and contemporary films.

Additionally, the songs also possess a Marxist and existentialist character. Sahir Ludhianvi, the lyricist of *Pyaasa* was part of the Progressive Writers' Movement. The movement encouraged writers to not "ignore politics" and "emphasise human suffering and advocate the values of freedom and democracy" (Manwani, 2013). Manwani (2013) also mentions that Ludhianvi was influenced by Marxist philosophy and Urdu poets like Faiz and Josh who had "strong communist leanings". Marxist ideals like social equality deeply impacted him and seeped into his poetry in *Pyaasa*. Ludhianvi also read Camus's philosophy like absurdism and was not afraid of asking "profound existentialist questions" (Manwani, 2013). He combined philosophy with his political criticism that ultimately lends *Pyaasa's* songs their Marxist and existentialist character.

Multiple authors including Nasreen Munni Kabir, a Guru Dutt scholar, Arun Khopkar, a filmmaker and Firoze Ragoonwalla, a film critic have analysed *Pyaasa*'s songs and screenplay. Kabir in her biography of Guru Dutt, *Guru Dutt: A Life in Cinema* states that the lyrics of the film “were the essence of *Pyaasa*” calling it “a true masterpiece” (Kabir, 2006). Arun Khopkar in his book, *Guru Dutt: A Tragedy in Three Acts* writes that the songs in *Pyaasa* carry time—past, present and future—which is used as “a force of destruction” (Khopkar, 2012). It is through the “increasing poignancy in the soundtrack, music” that *Pyaasa* communicates the tragedy in its narrative (Khopkar, 2012). Ragoonwalla in Dutt’s monograph, *Guru Dutt (1925-1964)* argues that *Pyaasa*'s songs are “a rare case where songs are not just song number but a poetic expression of natural feelings” (Ragoonwalla, 1973) that steers screenplay and characterization. However, there is little interpretation of how *Pyaasa*'s songs in agreement with Kracauer’s theory utilise cinematic and literary techniques to construct narrative meaning pertinent to the film’s screenplay. Darius Cooper in his book, *In Black and White: Hollywood and the Melodrama of Guru Dutt*, notes that Dutt executes his screenplay “in relation to the emerging Indian nation” (2005). Family is the central unit of society where the protagonist, Vijay's emotional and intellectual turmoil is interrogated with respect to his relationship with his family. Many of his realisations about society occur at a moment of intense personal grief which Vijay always articulates through poetry and music. Examination of these songs in the context of the bourgeois Indian nation-state, ultimately render *Pyaasa*'s songs to be its political microcosm. *Pyaasa* as a screenplay and piece of art is tethered to interrogating India’s political structures, and civilisational values. Hence, the songs in *Pyaasa* become instrumental to developing the overall narrative of the film yet stand apart teeming with their own identities, philosophies and themes relevant even sixty-four years after its release.

This article will explore five songs from *Pyasa*. The narrative relevance of each song through literary and cinematic techniques will be examined first. After this, the pertinence of these songs to the current Indian political and social climate will be discussed.

Yeh Hanste Huye Phool (These Smiling Flowers)

Pyasa begins with the song ‘*Yeh Hanste Huye Phool, Ye Mehka Hua Gulshan*’ (These smiling flowers, This fragrant garden). Dutt uses this song to establish three fundamental elements crucial to developing *Pyasa*’s narrative. Firstly, Vijay’s (Guru Dutt) romantic thought process. To construct the song as a reflection of Vijay’s thoughts, Dutt chooses not to lip-sync the lyrics which would mean reciting the poem. Instead, the song simply plays in Mohammed Rafi’s² voice in the background, suggesting very convincingly that the poem is purely Vijay’s thoughts. The figurative language of the poem is derived from the amusing landscape in which the song was picturized. This indicates a Wordsworth-like romanticism innate in Vijay’s observations. When a flower drops from the tree, Vijay calls it ‘*Yeh Hanste Hue Phool*’ (These smiling flowers). As the camera pans towards the vast sky where the trees are dancing to the winds he describes them as ‘*Yeh Rang Main Aur Rooh Main Doobi Hui Raahe*’ (Paths dipped in colour and light). SD Burman³ fills the momentary pause midway in the song, allowing Vijay to gather his thoughts with the *Sitar*⁴. The melodic tunes of the Sitar amplify the joyous visuals of flowers and bees. With a big smile on his face, Vijay remarks ‘*Yeh Phoolo ka Ras Peeke Machal Te Hua Bhaware*’ (Drinking the nectar from the flowers, the bees sway). An immediate contrast develops when a man does not notice the gleeful bee and walks upon it instantly killing it and the momentary happiness. The high-pitched dramatic harmonica playing in the background heightens the contrast as Vijay is noticeably

disturbed. Unable to place his sensitive mind in a society mindlessly aiming for success measured only in terms of money he asks a rhetorical question, ‘*Mein Doon Bhi Toh Kya Doon Tumhe, Hai Shok Nazare, Kuch Aansu Hain, Kuch Ahe*’ (What can I give you, O splendid nature, all I have is few tears and sighs). Vijay’s sensitivity to his environment brings out his empathy for the dead bee. It carefully carves the romantic being within him as he dismally marches off from the beautiful garden disappearing into the silhouettes.

Secondly, the song introduces Vijay’s poetic spontaneity. He intuitively composes an entire poem only by observing the scenery around him. Along with a Wordsworth-like romanticism innate to his poetic sensibilities, Vijay’s style also captures Wordsworth’s definition of poetry, “*spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*” (Wordsworth, 1802). Vijay processes his surroundings through poetry. Thus, he channelises his emotions into complex metaphors and similes describing the environment he inhabits, ultimately composing a poem instinctively. Vijay’s poetic spontaneity helps maintain continuity in *Pyaasa*’s narrative - ensuring that the songs add to the narrative and not digress from it. Dutt also uses multiple other techniques such as the question and answer to situate the songs. But attributing spontaneity to Vijay’s character is the most effective means to yield powerful songs like ‘*Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hai?*’ (How does it matter if one has this world to themselves?) that visually illustrate his catharsis from worldly pursuits. Vijay’s poetic spontaneity develops a contrast between him and his contemporary poets, who recite memorised poems (evident in Mr Ghosh’s party) and do not observe reality with a nuanced eye. Consequently, exhibiting his meditative poetic sensibilities.

Additionally, Dutt utilises the picturization of this song and its lyrics to introduce *Pyaasa*’s philosophy - absurdism (Ghaywan, 2011). Camus defines the *absurd* in his book, *Le Mythe De Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus) as, “*L’absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l’appel humain*

et le silence déraisonnable du monde” (The absurd arises from this confrontation between the human call and the unreasonable silence of the world) (Camus, 1942). The moment of confrontation between the bee and the man’s foot introduces the absurd into *Pyaasa*’s narrative. As mentioned before, the bee symbolises Vijay’s ambitions that define him at the beginning of the film. He is a poet who is romantic by nature but also on a journey to fulfil his ambitions and find some purpose in his life. This is evident when he associates meaning with every object he observes. For instance, in ‘*Yeh Hanste Huye Phool*’, he associates happiness and smiles with flowers. The lack of any dialogue after the conflict between the man and the bee stipulates that the man symbolises the world and its unreasonable silence. Therefore, the confrontation between these elements produces the absurd within *Pyaasa*’s narrative. Although the absurd is introduced into *Pyaasa*’s plot using symbolism and action, Vijay carries and develops this philosophy throughout the film. In this song which is also the beginning of the film, Vijay asks a rhetorical question, ‘*Mein Doon Bhi Toh Kya Doon Tumhe, Hai Shok Nazare, Kuch Aansu Hain, Kuch Ahe*’ suggesting that he embraces the *absurd* and his confrontation with the world. He does not address or question this conflict until later on in the film evident in the song, ‘*Gham -E-Iss Tarah Bade Ki*’ (Sorrows become unbearable).

In this song, Dutt also establishes an important theme of the film— disillusionment with post-independent India. Infusing this theme with the song allows it to thrive independently of the film’s narrative because Vijay’s poetry embodies the despondency of the suppressed classes in society. In 1947, when India attained independence from the British Raj there was a wave of motivation and buoyancy for national building. A new philosophy of liberty, equality and scientific rationale guided a newly independent India. But by 1957, the year of *Pyaasa*’s release, personal interest had replaced national interest (Cooper, 2009) resulting in widespread corruption. As a result,

suppressed classes of society were disillusioned with the promises of glory and success that post-independent India once carried.

Dutt introduces this theme by picturing the song in a garden symbolising the newly post-independent India. It is free and beautiful. The gleeful bees reflect the hopeful people of the nation (Gadgil & Tiwari, 2013). Vijay compares the bright sky to the path of success signifying the united aspirations and hopes of a country. However, the cruel act of stomping a ‘bee’ to its death symbolises the relationship between the suppressed classes and the bureaucracy of the country catering to only the elite sections of society. Thereby, highlighting the theme of disillusionment with post-independent India. Upon seeing the inconsiderate action of society, Vijay confesses that he has nothing to contribute to the ‘garden’ except for some tears and sighs. He realises that in modern society there is no place for his sensitive poems. He must cater to the demands of the market where poetry is a mere business — a form of entertainment not art. Although his tears, sighs and deeply empathetic poems can be useful to build the culture of the ‘garden’, they will not serve much of a purpose to an inconsiderate materialistic growth model with no room for sensitivity. When Vijay despondently walks away from the ‘garden’, he expresses his disagreement with the materialistic demands of the society he lives in. The notion of success is not only quantitative but a philosophical journey of excellence. The willingness to stomp a ‘bee’ to death only to navigate the dwindling, convoluted ambition for wealth accentuates the precedence of personal interest over national interest. The contrasting imagery of Vijay disappearing into the dark shadows and leaving behind the shiny, bright ‘successful’ path to glory speaks about our failure as a society to accommodate the suppressed classes into the mainstream national narrative. The character of Vijay is a personification of the suppressed classes in society. He survives with limited financial resources and emotional support. Through Vijay, Dutt not only includes

economically weaker sections of society to the strata of suppressed classes. It also encompasses practitioners of vocations often dubbed to be disgraceful, low-paying and unstable.

The inability of society to exist in harmony bears relevance to the current modern ‘inclusive’ society where we fuel hatred between communities. The Indian parliament passes controversial bills such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (2020) that consciously attempt to create a majoritarian state with no regard for the country’s secular principles. Legal cases against dissenting artists, activists and academicians are filed every day. Unfortunately, we choose to mask the ‘bees’ of our ‘garden’ with bright, shiny paths for meaningless glory. Thus, the introduction of Vijay’s romantic thought process along with the larger theme - disillusionment with post-independent India - makes the song a perfect prelude to *Pyasa*’s narrative, while bearing relevance to modern-day Indian politics.

Sar Jo Tera Chakarye (If your head reels with pain)

About thirty minutes into the film plays *Pyasa*’s third song ‘*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*’. Earlier critics have often dubbed the song to be a “light-hearted comedy” (Kabir, 2006). However, they overlook its highly symbolic lyrics and satirical subtext. As a result, the song is widely oversimplified and underappreciated. Dutt employs ‘*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*’ for the most curious and essential purposes. In accordance with other songs of *Pyasa* that thrive on their own, ‘*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*’ achieves it in the more subtle of ways.

To further *Pyasa*’s screenplay, Dutt manoeuvres the song in three ways. First, he introduces Abdul Sattar (Johnny Walker), a masseur and major character in the film through the song. The decision to introduce multiple main characters namely, Gulab (Waheeda Rehman) through the

song ‘*Jane Kya Tune Kahi*’ and Vijay (Guru Dutt) through ‘*Yeh Hanste Hue Phool*’ is an effective strategy to imprint the characters into the minds of the audience. It makes the process of storytelling more engaging as audiences can easily associate characters with specific songs and rhythms. Introducing Sattar is vital to *Pyasa*’s narrative. He frees Vijay from the asylum he is admitted to, following his supposed death later on in the film. If it were not for Sattar, Vijay would not be present at the event observing his death anniversary to realise the futility of his aspiration for intellectual recognition in a materialistic world. *Pyasa*’s philosophy, absurdism—the conflict between man and society—revolves around this realisation.

Sattar’s introduction by singing Vijay’s poems also constructs his character as Vijay’s voice. Neither does Vijay recite his poems nor does he showcases them vocally to the world (evident in ‘*Yeh Haste Hue Phool*’). Conversely, Sattar sings ‘*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*’, one of Vijay’s poems, in merry to attract customers for his business. By doing so, he becomes Vijay’s voice presenting his ideologies and talent to the world. When Sattar sings Vijay’s songs, it conveys a deeper connection between the two characters at the core of which is trust and emotional security. This nature of their friendship justifies Sattar’s action to bravely face the world that declares the alive and healthy Vijay to be his own imposter only to bank on the profits that his books generate.

Sattar as a character and his business ethics personify Vijay’s utopian dream world. He sings, ‘*Naukar ho ya Maalik, Leader ho ya Public, Apne aage sabhi jukhe hain, Kya Raja, Kya Sainik*’ (You can be a servant, You can be a master, You be a leader or a follower, everyone bows their head to me for a massage, who is king, who is a soldier) which establishes that Sattar welcomes everybody for a massage irrespective of their profession and social status. The lack of discrimination in any of Sattar’s dealings as a masseur is a visual representation of Vijay’s utopian society. Through Sattar and his heroic actions in the climax of the film, Vijay’s ideals and talent

can be understood more deeply. In other words, Abdul Sattar is the catalyst of the film's narrative, therefore contributing to advancing *Pyasa's* screenplay.

'*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*' also flourishes as a living, breathing independent song with its own character. Dutt manages the mammoth task by reigniting social justice⁵ and fair society as an alternative to the emerging capitalistic economic structure. Although in the first decade of independence (1947 - 1957) the vision of a modern, impartial society dominated India, the signs of a pre-capitalist economy surfaced. Menon (2015) argues that the notion of a modern, developed society is envisioned as progress in technology. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India developed policies to advance India's technological prowess. However, this model of development did not account for the lack of formal western education in India required for the people to actively participate in the development of sophisticated technology. Consequently, the people of the country became mere silent spectators and "beneficiaries of this oversight" resulting in most of the power, and wealth getting concentrated with the elite, giving the economy a capitalist outlook (Menon, 2015).

Sahir Ludhianvi, the lyricist of *Pyasa* uses symbolism and satirical subtext in the song to subtly indicate reality. The attempt to rekindle social justice begins in the very first stanza of the poem. The song begins as, '*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye, Ya Dil Dooba Jaye*' (If your head spins with pain or heart aches with sorrow). The song is picturized on a street in a city, hence, Sattar naturally sings to the lower, suppressed classes of society roaming the streets in search of a better life. The headaches and heartaches symbolise the effect lack of available jobs, and constant humiliation from higher socioeconomic classes have on lower classes. As previously stated, Sattar and his business personify Vijay's utopian, liberal and socialist dream world. When Sattar sings, '*Aaja*

Pyaaare Paas Hamare, Kahe Ghabarye (Don't be afraid, Come to me and I shall make things better); it is a reference to reinstitute socialism into the nation's economic policies. Moreover, the choice of words '*Kahe Ghabraye*' (Don't be afraid) seems to be a sarcastic remark on the reluctant attitudes of politicians to implement socialist ideals.

Ludhianvi himself was a socialist and a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM), which was directed at the "labourers and peasants" of India (Manwani, 2013). Involvement with the PWM provided Ludhianvi with a fresh perspective on the Indian social fabric that translated into his poetry. Manwani (2013) cites the poem, "*Mujhe Sochne Do*" (Let Me Reflect) to demonstrate the inclusion of political, social and economic subtext into his literary output. Hence, Ludhivani's political leanings and first-hand understanding of the struggles peasants and labours go through every day justify the renewed interpretation of the song, '*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*'.

Unfortunately, the plea of this song remains pertinent. The lower classes of society are only the beneficiaries of oversight rather than a concrete action plan. The repercussions of certain policies and decisions on the underprivileged are seldom discussed in the media and become part of the national discourse. This lack of empathy was evident when the Indian government responding to Covid-19 imposed a sudden 21-day lockdown in March 2020. Citizens had barely four hours to accumulate enough resources to survive for 21 days. All modes of transport were suspended. With no other option in sight, the labourers working in cities like Delhi and Mumbai started walking back to their hometowns. Research from Jesline et al. (2021) shows that, although policies like "*The Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan*" where free rations would be supplied to migrants without ration cards exist, its poor implementation due to widespread corruption "*failed to reach the entire migrant population*".

Additionally, many of the current economic policies such as demonetization (2016) and the introduction of Goods and Service Tax (2017) have further widened the gap between the elite and lower sections of society. Medicines and diagnostic kits have higher tax rates, 12% (Ministry of Finance - Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, n.d.) as opposed to the previously lower 5% VAT, (Gautam & Sharma, 2019) making them less accessible to the lower classes. Therefore, ‘*Sar Jo Tera Chakarye*’ not only plays an important role in furthering *Pyaasa*’s screenplay but also maintains an independent theme, revitalising social justice in economy and policy which is very relevant to 21st century India.

Gham - E - Is Kadar Badhe Ki

In *Pyaasa*, Dutt creates two parallel and contrasting worlds that eventually converge in the second half of the film to produce Vijay’s moral catharsis. All of *Pyaasa*’s characters move between the two spaces—Vijay’s abstract consciousness and its antithesis, reality, which is a constant conflict between Vijay’s desires and the world. When Vijay is first introduced in ‘*Yeh Hanste Hue Phool*’ he inhabits his romantic paradise. As a result, he embraces the *absurd* and his confrontation with the unreasonable silence of the world. Midway through the film, Vijay meets Meena, his college sweetheart in an elevator. Meena’s blurred reflection transports Vijay to his past where he daydreams about their love in the song, ‘*Hum Aapki Aankhon Mein Iss Dil Ko Basa De Toh*’. Throughout the memory, Vijay inhabits his misty cognizance existing within his reality, the elevator. However, in all these instances Vijay’s abstract consciousness exists within his reality and does not converge with it.

The convergence between the contrasting spaces begins with the song, ‘*Gham - E- Is Kadar Badhe Ki*’. The song itself is an expression of Vijay’s ongoing dilemma heightened by his vulnerability. This dilemma itself originates from his guilt for not living up to his promise and taking care of his mother while she was alive. Unable to bear the loss of his mother and at the insistence of his friends, Vijay drinks alcohol for the first time. When one of his friends asks, “*Tum Ne Kab Se Peene Ki Shuru Ki Bhai?*” (When did you start drinking, Pal?), Vijay in his despair clinging to the only recognisable aspect of his reality, his poetry, feebly sings,

‘Gham E - Is Kadar Badhe Ki Main Ghabra Ke Pee Gaya

Iss Dil Ki bebasi Pain, Taras Kha Ke Pee Gaya’

Sorrow became unbearable, drowning in my anxiety I drank

My heart was so helpless, I drank out of pity

These lines act as a culminated catharsis of Vijay’s grief and sorrow. It is at this moment that Vijay finds the clarity of his reality and not his dream within it. Seconds later he openly rejects the materialistic society he desired to publish his poem in and sings,

‘Thukra Raha Tha Mujko Badi Der se Jahan

Main Aaj Sab Jahan Ko Thukra Ke Pee Gaya’

The world has ignored me countless times

Today, I reject the entire world

Although Vijay can sense his reality—the endless conflict between his desires and the world—he still resides within abstract consciousness. He needs his intoxicated self to navigate through the

newfound space and become acquainted with it. Interestingly enough, Dutt does not completely discard Vijay's abstract consciousness (evident when Vijay tries to attempt suicide to escape from reality) from his character. He keeps it alive until the very last moment of the film, when Vijay is able to address his conflicting reality, the *absurd*, without resorting to his abstract consciousness or alcohol and not rejecting it outright.

Vijay's character development from a shy poet to a questioning soul⁶ in this song furthers *Pyasa's* screenplay. If Vijay did not express his grief, he would never be able to distinguish between these two worlds, which is instrumental to progress towards his moral catharsis. This song also marks the change in Vijay's sense of identity and existence. He no longer possesses the ability to co-exist with the unreasonable silence of the world nor is he able to question the hypocrisy of society.

Like other songs of *Pyasa*, '*Gham - E- Is Kadar Badhe Ki*' also weaves its own tale. The song becomes a reflection of human impulsivity and guilt. It carries universal emotions—loss, sorrow, and recognizing harsh realities—making it relatable to viewers of all generations. Unlike the other songs, its narrative is not explicitly conveyed through cinematic techniques. Rather, it is implied and unique to each viewer's experience.

Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?

Until now, *Pyasa's* narrative highlights the materialistic ambitions of society with no regard for family, relationships, personal satisfaction and purpose in life. Vijay's brothers forsaking him for money and Meena, Vijay's girlfriend leaving him for a more comfortable lifestyle serve as a few examples. Vijay accepts this sorrow and does not confront them directly as seen in '*Gham - E - Iss Tarah Badhe Ki*'. At Mr Ghosh, the publisher's house he sings

‘Isko Hi Jeena Kehnte Hain, Toh Yun Hi Jee Lengey

Uff Na Karengye, Lab See Lengey, Aansoo pee lengey

Gham Se Na Ghabrana Kaisa, Gham Sau Baar Mila’

If this is what you call living, I will continue to live like this

I will not complain, I will seal my lips, I will wipe my tears

Why should I fear grief any longer, it is the only thing that comes my way

However, Vijay’s inability to grapple with his mother's death teaches him to question and analyse the workings of the idle materialism and insensitivity ubiquitous in society. Vijay's capacity to interrogate reality emerges because his dream world that is nested within reality is broken. Dutt keeps Vijay’s utopian dream alive and functions as his guiding question to analyse the unkind society evident from the imagery created in the poem.

Each stanza begins with a clear visual description of the setting, a red-light area. For instance, *‘Yeh Kooche, Ye Neelamghar DilKashi Ke, Yeh Luthey Huye Kaarawan Zindagi ke’* (These lanes, these auctioned houses of pleasure, These looted caravans of life). In contrast, Vijay starts examining his utopian dream, where authorities care for the public. Since his dream world no longer exists within reality, Vijay becomes confused with its tangible materiality. Consequently, he asks *‘Kahaan Hain Kahaan Hain Muhafiz Khudi Ke? Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?’* (Where are those guardians of self-pride? Where are they who take pride in India?). It is at this moment that Vijay’s dilemma is both glazed with confusion and clarity.

Moreover, within the narrative of *Pyaasa*, *‘Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?’* provides Vijay with the capacity to emotionally sympathise with the world. This is not to say that

Vijay did not possess the ability before, however, it was limited. Although his mother's death makes him question the world, it does not allow him to let go of his narcissistic venture toward recognition. It is only in this song that Vijay finds meaning in a place other than a publishing house. Therefore, Vijay's faculty to examine stems from his ability to emotionally sympathise and address his internal reflections. Vijay's ability to find meaning in the world and emotionally sympathise prompts him to give away his jacket to a tramp who dies minutes later. The world confuses his death with Vijay, who is in a hospital recovering from the incident.

Manwani (2013) states that "*the song itself comes out of nowhere in Pyaasa*". But, Dutt places the song strategically in the film. He combines the economic, political and social sensibilities of the decade with Vijay's most vulnerable moment giving the song a wider range and context. Accordingly, Vijay becomes one with the suppressed sections of society and not just a character in a film. In turn, the relationship between the audiences and Vijay is propelled forward where the masses see Vijay as a reflection of themselves.

Additionally, Dutt also uses the song to reveal previously unseen layers in Vijay's character. Till now Vijay was characterised as a brooding poet. However in '*Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?*', he transcends to interrogate a larger reality by setting aside his romantic poems about flowers and trees (Yeh Hanste Hue Phool). Thus, placing himself and his vulnerability within a larger narrative of post-independent India.

Gadgil and Tiwari (2013) argue that in the song, the poet (Vijay) bemoans the state of affairs in Independent India by showing the degradation it has brought upon its women. Other critics too considered the song to be an evocative commentary on the plight of women (Manwani, 2013). Although the picturization of the song in a red-light area demonstrates the predicament of women,

Dutt uses this song to be a comprehensive study of human pain and suffering. He slowly unfolds the various reasons for this suffering, relevant even today. Owing to this aspect, the song develops its own distinct narrative.

Dutt develops the song's independent character using three key elements. Firstly, the “*restless and weary*” (Creekmur, 2019) camera movements combined with lightning become *Pyasa's* collective consciousness. Though this argument can be applied to the entire film, it becomes a crucial part of establishing the downfall of a nation responsible for human suffering in this song. Notably, at the beginning of the song, the camera cuts from an extreme close-up of Vijay's anguished face looking up to a high-angle shot of a narrow gate. High-key lighting illuminating the tapered gateway symbolises the promise of a bright, happy life for all Indians. The camera swiftly moves downward following a dwindling ray of light - the promise of a happy life until it reaches absolute darkness. The tilt shot where the camera moves downward from a high plane portrays the inability of the newly independent country to accommodate fairness and inclusive economic prosperity as guaranteed in its constitution. It erases the myth of a rising egalitarian nation and generates a larger discourse on the reality of the political establishment in India. Alas, the myth prevails even in the seventh decade of Indian independence, where “*Vikas*” (development) is still not for the public but only for the politicians magnifying the extent of human suffering.

Secondly, the rhythmic spatial arrangement of suffering using music furthers the unique narrative of the song. Dutt often uses music in his films to break an event and restructure it (Khopkar, 2012), thus offering different levels of reality rather than surface reality. In order to achieve depth in the representation of human pain and suffering, Dutt dramatically structures the visual imagery of the song. He places many background actors to enact the lyrics of the song in

accordance with the music highlighting the moral and ethical bankruptcy and creating multiple levels of reality. For instance, when Vijay sings

‘Yeh Purpench Galiyaan, Yeh Badnaaz Bazar

Yeh Gumnaan Rahi, Yeh Sikkon Ki Jhankaar

Yeh Ismat Ke Saudey, Yeh Saudon Pe Takrar

Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?’

These winding lanes, these infamous markets,

These anonymous travellers, this clinking of coins,

This trading of chastity, this insistent haggling

Where are those who claim to be proud of India

The camera pans from the streets giving a glimpse of the infamous markets. In an instant, the audience spots the anonymous travellers aggressively trading money for modesty. In between the stanza, the character moves with the music. Vijay nods his head in disappointment at the Sitar’s haunting tune after noticing the reality, thus creating a coherent, rhythmic spatial rendition of human pain and suffering. Additionally, SD Burman integrates certain musical instruments mentioned in the lyrics of the song generating an auditory presentation of pain and suffering. As an illustration, the sounds of the Payal⁷ and Tabla⁸ play before Vijay sings *‘Woh Ujle Darichon Mein Payal Ki Chhan Chhan, Thaki Haari Saanson Pe Tabale Ki Dhan Dhan’* (Dancing bells chime from the latticed windows, The tabla plays over the weary breaths). Such a choice builds the melodramatic mood rendering complementary auditory imagery of human despair.

Lastly, Mohammad Rafi's mellow, poignant vocals construct '*Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai*' to be a "une métonymie de l'Inde" (a metonymy of India) (Boyer, 2019). Rafi introduces a human element in his vocals to communicate the widespread gloom. For example, Rafi faintly breathes when he sings '*Saanson Pe*' which delivers the tiredness and unhappy lives of many Indians in a literal sense. Thus, along with the lyrics, cinematography, music and vocals, the song becomes synonymous with human pain and suffering and not just a mere representation.

'*Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai*' also functions as an "allegory of social morality" (Griffiths, 1996). Although the entirety of *Pyasa*'s screenplay has political underpinnings, this song in particular directly questions the accountability and responsibility of the decade-old government towards the public. Dutt frames this issue in the tilt shot at the beginning of the song. Rini Bhattacharya in her book *Unruly Cinema: History, Politics and Bollywood*, writes that the song was a direct counter to Nehru's statement, "*Mujhe Hind Par Naaz Hai*" (Mehta, 2020) However, the song is not limited to being a mere response. The use of allegory acts as a catalyst to remind the audience to always demand political accountability and not settle for complacency. Hence, '*Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai*' clarifies Vijay's confusion about reality promoting *Pyasa*'s narrative. Simultaneously the song composes its own tale, a depiction of human suffering and acts as an 'allegory of social morality, thus emerging as an independent song.

Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hain? (How does it matter if one has the world to themselves?)

The last song of *Pyasa* completes the essence of its philosophy, absurdism. It fulfils *Pyasa*'s narrative through Vijay's transformation from the poet who embraced and accepted the unreasonable silence of the world to address the *absurd*, the conflict between his desires and the

world thereby changing the justification of his existence. Additionally, Vijay now realises the futility of desiring fame and recognition. He becomes appreciative of the meaningful meaninglessness of the world. Dutt unveils the transformation through the placement of the song, symbolism and cinematic techniques particularly *mise-en-scène*, a technical term used to describe the “*organisation of the contents in a frame*” (Gibbs, 2012).

Given Dutt’s mastery of song picturization, ‘*Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hain?*’ also comes as a response to Mr Ghosh’s emotional remarks on Vijay’s poetry. Mr Ghosh accuses the *duniya* (world) of killing him. He says that Vijay should have been alive to see that the world which starved him to death is now willing to shower him with wealth and fame. Vijay after fleeing the asylum stands on his own death anniversary, a celebration commemorating his life silently listening to these remarks. Frustrated he feebly sings,

‘Yeh Mehton, Yeh Takhton Yeh Taajo Ki Duniya

Yeh Insaan Ke Dushman, Saamjo Ki Duniya

Yeh Dulat Ke Bhuke Rawajo Ki Duniya

Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye To Kya Hai?’

This world of palaces, thrones and crowns

This world that abhors humanity

This world that craves wealth

How does it matter if one has the world to themselves?

Akin to '*Gham - E- Iss Tarah Bade*', Vijay rejects the world in this song. However, the difference in the nature of rejection is the element of transformation. Earlier, Vijay in a highly vulnerable, emotional and inebriated state rejects the world only because it rejected him. In contrast, Vijay knowing about his supposed death, witnessing his rejectors feast on his death and squeezing every penny of his value changes Vijay's interpretation of his own existence. It alters his belief system and sense of identity. His belief in the absurdity of life reaches its zenith when he sings, (Ghaywan, 2011)

'Jala Do Ise Phoonk Dalo Yeh Duniya

Mere Samne Se Hata Do Yeh Duniya

Tumhari Hai, Tum Hi Sambhalo Yeh Duniya'

Burn such a world,

Remove such a world from my sight,

This world is for you to lord over

Unlike at the beginning of the film when he accepts the absurd, Vijay is finally able to address it. Thereby, gathering the courage to "*renounce the world and not simply reject it*" (Vasudevan, 1994).

Dutt uses symbolism to convey Vijay's transformation progressing towards his final moral catharsis, renouncing the world. He uses visual imagery to evoke the symbolism of a "*resurrected Christ*" (Micciollo, 1975) in multiple layers with different meanings thus catering to all three levels of experience - "*the intellectual, the emotional and the sensuous*" (Khopkar, 2012). Vijay standing at the entrance of the hall with his hands outstretched touching either side of the door creates the image of a resurrected Jesus. This imagery symbolises Vijay's revitalised outlook on the *absurd*,

in two dimensions. First, due to the “*hierarchy of knowledge*”⁹ (Sengupta, 2019) dominating the second half of *Pyaasa*, Vijay’s entrance to a gathering of people who know him as a dead poet creates a dramatic effect. Consequently, acting as the literal metaphor for Vijay’s resurrection. Second, on a deeper level, Vijay finally addresses the *absurd*, ending the convergence between the worlds. Namely, his abstract consciousness and reality.

Similar to ‘*Jinhe Naaz Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hai?*’ Dutt also amalgamates the song’s lyrics into the picturisation of the song. In order to accomplish it and promote the film’s narrative, he uses *mise-en-scène* particularly, the use of broad space, camera angle and lighting. Given Vijay’s spontaneity as a poet (established in the first song), he sings describing the setting of the song, the town hall

‘Yahan Ek Khilona Hai Insaan Ki Hasti,

Yeh Basti Hai Murda-Paraston Ki Basti

Yahan Par Toh Jeevan Se Hai Maut Sasti

Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hai?’

Here a toy’s life is more valuable than a human

Here live worshippers of the dead

Here life comes cheaper than death itself

How does it matter if one has the world to themselves?

A wide-angle shot of the majestic pillars, expensive chandeliers and a packed hall effectively constructed the *duniya* (world) Vijay was in constant friction. However, this is the first time that Vijay consciously confronts it, therefore it is crucial to use broad space to show the extent of his conflict literally. When Vijay first walks into the hall, he is shown in the dim light from a low camera angle, portraying him to be an authority figure. Dutt never used a low-angle shot before to frame Vijay in other songs as he was not confronting the *absurd*. Thus, showing Vijay's transformation and ability to address the *absurd*. To integrate the lyrics into the picturisation, Dutt, first focuses on Mr Ghosh, the publisher who ill-treated him, Meena, his college sweetheart who abandoned him and Shyam, his friend who betrayed him. All these characters are filmed in bright lighting. Consequently, exposing the people who played with Vijay like a *khilona* (toy). Subsequently, a forward dolly shot focuses on the unveiled statue of an alive Vijay sculpted in remembrance of the supposedly dead poet. Such visual representations of the lyrics reveal the complex layering of meaning in the song.

Cooper (1988) describes the song as “*a supreme song of martyrdom*”. However, the song does not depict Vijay's sorrows or portray his character as a martyr. Within the narrative, the song instead provides Vijay with the clarity of reality consequently, his ability to address the *absurd*. Besides the narrative function of the song, Dutt also constructs it to be a commentary on human emotions and the philosophy of living particularly, jealousy, greed, relief and the futility of desire. He accomplishes it by weaving action and performance-driven sub-text. A commentary on human emotions (Kabir, 2006) in the song is evident in a close-up shot of Mr Ghosh effectively depicting his fear and panic upon seeing an alive Vijay. As soon as unrest breaks the crowd, Mr Ghosh orders some men to throw Vijay out of the hall portraying his jealousy and greed to be the sole profitter of Vijay's success. In contrast, the camera captures Gulab's hopeful eyes and relieved expressions upon hearing and seeing Vijay. Most importantly, the song through its lyrics ‘*Yeh Duniya Agar*

Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hain' conveys the futility of desire in a restricted and covetous world. Using the performances of the actors to communicate deep human emotions resonates with the audience.

Moreover, Dutt uses a range of positive and negative emotions. This choice prompts the audience to introspect about their reality and their desires within the avaricious world. Although emotions remain central, the song also dwells upon the corrupt political establishment enabling the covetous society. However, Vijay is not expressing his dissatisfaction with the politics of 1957 India, as apparent in the first song. Rather he questions the inability of the political establishment to protect the innocence of the youth and equates it with the *duniya* (world) he is addressing. Vijay sings,

'Jawani Bhatakti Hai Badkaar Ban Kar,

Jawa Jism Sajatey Hai Bazar Ban Kar,

Yeh Pyaar HoTa Hai Vyapaar Ban Kar,

Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hai?'

Youth strays into crime,

Young bodies are adorned for the marketplace

Here love is another name for trade,

How does it matter if one has the world to themselves?

These lyrics also suggest the reluctance of the political establishment to prevent another Vijay to emerge from the *duniya* (world). Apart from using lyrics, Dutt also picturizes urban

disorganisation to illustrate the gullibility of the *Duniya* (world). Numerous mobs arise from the crowd gathered to celebrate Vijay's life and poetry attack and injure him. Hence, establishes that neither is Vijay a martyr of a materialistic society nor is society a devious structure constructed to destroy innocent lives. Rather, the innocent and the worldly reside in the same person. These aspects of the song carefully structure the song's independent narrative. The universality of human emotions and the failure of political establishments make the song pertinent and significant even today. Hence, by adopting a dual character role of driving the climax of the film and critiquing modern Indian politics simultaneously, *Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye* fulfils the complex role of songs that Guru Dutt envisions for his films.

Conclusion

Songs are an important part of Indian cinema. However, Guru Dutt's use of music, lyrics and cinematic technique to create meaning not only furthers *Pyasa's* narrative but also stands apart while weaving their own narratives is rare. The songs mostly promote *Pyasa's* narrative through Vijay's character transformation until he reaches his final moral catharsis, renouncing the world. Additionally, the cinematography and use of light and shadow construct the independent narratives of these songs. The themes and questions arising from the independent narratives are relevant and significant to the current '*duniya*' (world). Another reason these songs are important is that they do not depict a biased world. Rather, show that good and bad reside within each of us. These aspects also structure *Pyasa's* narrative and are most often manifested through Vijay. But the question—was his thirst finally quenched—remains.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ An Indian film director, producer and actor

² The singer of the song, “*Yeh Hanste Huye Phool*”

³ The music director of *Pyaasa*

⁴ An Indian string instrument

⁵ Marxism greatly influenced Sahir Ludhianvi. His deep distaste for capitalism and materialism stems from his strained relationship with his father, a zamindar. Ludhianvi often tried to include his political ideologies in his

poems evident in his anthology, *Talkhiyaan*. However, Ludhianvi's politics shines bright in *Pyaasa* because the songs can be read independent of the screenplay.

⁶ The change in Vijay's identity and existence is reflected in the following songs of *Pyaasa*. Unlike the previous songs which describe his blurred reality, the following songs question reality. There was no question mark until now.

⁷ Anklets

⁸ An Indian percussion instrument

⁹ Vijay's audience and the world are unaware that their beloved poet is alive. Simultaneously, Vijay does not know that the society only knows him as the dead poet.