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***First as Tragedy, Then as Farce: A Comparative Analysis of Guru Dutt's Pyaasa and Imtiaz Ali's Rockstar***

The paper in hand attempts to draw a comparison of Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) and Imtiaz Ali's *Rockstar* (2011) vis-à-vis their respective socio-economic and political reality. The focus will be on appropriation of the creative prowess of the two artists situated in two different periods, their respective resistance and the ultimate fall. An attempt will also be made to compare and contrast the nature and manner of their fall and its relationship with the larger socio-economic and political reality. The tragic fall of the poet in *Pyaasa* will be analysed as symptomatic of the collapse of the euphoria built by the nationalist leaders around the idea of India as an ideal modern republic. The marginalisation of the poet as the 'other' and the subsequent appropriation and commodification of that otherness will be studied in contrast to the rhetoric loftiness of Nehruvian socialism. The disintegration and reification of the artist in *Rockstar* vis-à-vis the rhetoric of universal emancipation promoted by global capitalism will also form the crux of the paper. The fall of the artist in this film will be studied as symbolic of the dismantling of the dreams of neoliberal India exposing the darker side of the hype built around the notion of emergence of India at the global stage.

The paper draws its title from Slavoj Žižek's famous work *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009). The title of Žižek's book has been borrowed from Karl Marx's interpretation

of a Hegelian idea that all the events and characters of world history occur twice: first as a tragedy and second as a farce. The first occurrence is tragic as its historical inevitability marks the erosion and finally the ultimate collapse of the established order at the hands of an emerging one. The second occurrence is farcical as it is a historical anachronism. The old order has already lost its relevance; still it asks the world to share its fantasy resulting in hypocrisy. The hypocrisy cannot defer the fall; however, it deprives the fall of its tragic grandeur, evoking comic laughter only. In this book, Žižek has emphasised the universality of Marx's ideas through his analysis of the two crucial events of the contemporary age. The first event is the 9/11 attack on America marking the collapse of liberal-democratic utopia that claimed its universality and timelessness on Fukuyama's 'the end of history' hypothesis. For Žižek, the destruction of the twin towers has erected new walls in the world community as well as within nation states. The second event that Žižek refers to is the financial meltdown of 2008 that emerged from the heart of capitalism-the American banking system. For Žižek, this marks the end of economic utopia of global capitalism. However, the capitalist world still wants the rest of the world to believe in its fantasy and it also wishes to continue its legitimacy and validity in the popular imagination (Keneth 126). Žižek urges the radical Left to disrupt this hypocrisy of the capitalist order and expose its anachronism thereby facilitating its comic end.

Since the paper covers an extensive time span, the theoretical mapping of the change in a complex and fragmented society like India over such a considerable period of time has its problematics and even limitations. The theoretical backdrop used in the paper will focus on interaction between the state and the society while highlighting their simultaneous interdependence and relative autonomy. The impetus will also be on how the interaction between the two influences the patterns of political and social change. The study of the aforementioned interaction would also facilitate the location of the nuances of the direction of economic growth and how that growth, in turn, enters into a dialogue with and shapes the dynamics of interaction between the state and the society. A logical conclusion will be a critical analysis of political and leadership strategies, the design of political institutions and the role of diverse social groups vis-à-vis the process of power negotiation that opens a simultaneous dialogue and bargaining between the state and the society. Concurrently, a key area of theoretical thrust will be on the shifting paradigms and dynamics of power and political-economic scenario at international level and how these shifts interact with the national socio-economic-political reality.

The fall of the Nehruvian socialism has been termed tragic as the idealism that it evoked was first of all born out of the legacy of the freedom struggle, simultaneously catering to the complex socio-economic reality of contemporary India. The Nehruvian consensus built around the pillars of democracy, socialism and secularism was by no means an ideal or all-encompassing entity (Kothari 1205). Rather, it was the result of negotiation between the idea of India as a socialist, democratic and secular nation-state and the socio-economic and political reality that consisted of a massive plurality, inherent contradictions and a strong presence of regressive and conservative elements (Sharma 18). So, there was an inherent gap between the dreams of the nationalist leaders and the material reality of the contemporary age. However, the loftiness of the dreams cannot be denied. That is why, the shattering of the dreams, though somewhat inevitable, had a tragic grandeur and an aura around it. The continuous breaking up of the hype and sensationalism created around neoliberalism in India has been referred to as farcical as it seems a historical inevitability. The rhetoric of 'India shining' or 'super power syndrome' has been created and managed by vested interests as it is not based on facts and does not correspond to the material reality. The high growth rate of G.D.P. presents only one aspect of a very complicated picture. In fact, as pointed by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen in their collective work *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (2014), the high growth rate in India has failed to correspond into an improvement in quality of life for its citizens as India lags behind most of its South Asian neighbours in human resource development index. So the ever widening chasm between the haves and the have-nots, agrarian crisis, rampant inflation, polarisation of the society on the lines of caste and religion resulting in a serious tension in the prevailing social setup, commercialisation and commodification of a whole way of life are the other side of the growth story. Concerted attempts have been made to push these disturbing realities to the margins of public memory by a section of media. However, these are too real and emphatic to stay buried for a long time. Moreover, being a part of the political unconscious of the time, they invariably find expression in one form or the other exposing the cracks in the rationale of neoliberalism. This breaking up has been termed as farcical in the paper; not because it is comical, but in the sense that in spite of the fall being historically inevitable, neoliberal regime wants the world to believe in its hypocrisy thereby trying to uphold its legitimacy among masses.

The journey of the Indian republic upto the point of time that the paper covers will be studied vis-à-vis three paradigms, each marking a set of practices evolving from a convoluted

combination of factors hovering around the category of politics, society and economics. The first paradigm is the reigning years of Jawaharlal Nehru marked by evolution of the Indian republic around the three all-important pillars of 'democracy', 'socialism' and 'secularism'. However, there was, as pointed out by Benjamin Zachariah in his book *Nehru* (2004), a gap between pedagogical ideals and performative practices of the new born nation-state. The second paradigm will focus on the era of Indian politics dominated by Indira Gandhi and Rajeev Gandhi. Atul Kohli in his remarkable and extensive study titled *Democracy and Development in India* (2010) has put forward the hypothesis that the era is marked by weakening of the spirit of the three pillars of Indian republic, simultaneously characterised by their multiplied lexical usage. The paper will also highlight the continuation and interlinks between the policies of the second and the third paradigm. Atul Kohli has concluded in the above mentioned book that around 1980, Indira Gandhi realised the inability to continue with mere popular and personality-cult-centered politics and entered into an alliance with the local capital that was further consolidated by Rajeev Gandhi. By 1990, the national and international circumstances had partly acquired and had partly been given a shape in a way that there was the third paradigm shift in the form of unleashing of neoliberal policies induced by intermingling of the elite political class, a strong lobby of technocrats having a deep ideological faith in free marketism and finally coming together of local and international capital (Corbridge 123-126). The study will conclude that on the receiving end of the above mentioned paradigm shifts have been the ideas of 'democracy', 'socialism' and 'secularism'.

The following findings can be inferred from the journey of the Indian state up to this point of time. Democracy, socialism and secularism have been the much proclaimed pillars of the Indian republic. They have demonstrated the local peculiarities and have never been ideal or all-encompassing in real sense of the term. However, the erosion of the three has been too obvious. The affinity and interrelation of the three has also shown a consistency. First of all, the institution of democracy has eroded as the ruling alliance has diminished and narrowed in its reach. The ruling alliance among the ruling elite, business, capital and technocrats has weakened the functioning of democracy confining it to the practice of elections only (Kohli 182-185). Democracy is no longer a long-term process to be infused into every sphere of life through operational democratic institutions. Its lexical celebration has multiplied and the spirit has been relegated to the background as there is a little meaningful participation of the masses in the process of democratising every aspect of society. Though Indian socialism was never radical enough, the alliance between the state and capital has further deprived it of its relevance. Although socialism still has a lot of emotive and lexical usage, yet it has for long

ceased to be redistributive; rather it means certain perks for different but mutually competing sections of society at the time of elections only (Kohli 185). Related to this is the erosion of secularism. The depletion of meaningful socialism has given way to the rise of ethnicity as a great emotive cohesive force in Indian polity for vote-bank politics (Corbridge 175). The parallel rise of ethnicity in Indian politics and the alliance between the state and capital cannot be a mere coincident.

After a considerable discussion on the changing nature of the Indian republic, it will be indispensable to dwell upon the interaction between film as a representational mode and its relationship with the immediate socio-economic-political reality. With its continuous movement between still shots, film creates a fictional world that reels present, past and future into one continuous movement bringing everything close in terms of time and space. There is nothing transparent, naïve or innocent about the visuals and sounds in film. The popularity of film as a genre in any case has rested upon an active visual form as a knowledge producing ideological practice in which both producers and consumers are engaged. Nevertheless film, as a representational mode, has always engaged in a chaotic participation with the dominant ideology.

Film as a part of cultural production, carrying a significant impact on the popular consciousness and being a partner in narratives constituting reality, is a route from the cultural to the political. The form and content of film, though focusing on entertainment, is not devoid of the socio-economic-political reality of its time. In his introduction to *Beyond Appearance? : Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, Ramaswamy while referring to Walter Benjamin has asserted that the moving pictures of films complemented by sound are placed at the centre of human perception under the aegis of the cultural logic of modernity (xx). Moreover, the production and consumption of film does not lie outside history, culture and politics. In fact, film simultaneously reflects, constitutes and interrogates the socio-economic and political reality. Reflecting on the political situatedness of the raw material of even a commercial film, Fredric Jameson rebuffs the fallacy considering such entertainment oriented ventures as devoid of the political content. He says:

But it is to fail to reckon with the political content of daily life, with the political logic which is already inherent in the raw material with which the filmmaker must work: such political logic will then not manifest itself as an overt political message, nor will it transform the film into an unambiguous

political statement. But it will certainly make for the emergence of profound formal contradictions (38).

The inference therefore is that a film with an involvement of huge capital and essential function of 'showing' cannot be overtly political. But at the same time, it cannot help carrying cracks in the symbolic order exposing the political unconscious of the time. In India in particular, with its mass appeal and pedagogic ability, film is a site where the politics of major constitutive categories of India's social and historical context is played out.

In line with these theoretical orientations, film makers of the 1950s could not evade the sense of excitement created by the birth of new republic and the ultimate disappointment that followed. Through both content and cinematic techniques, they interacted with the shifts taking place in the order of things around them. As mentioned above, these upheavals in the socio-economic reality inevitably found reflections in the fields of creativity. The sensitivity of the artists simultaneously interacted with and interrogated the undercurrents of the shifting paradigms. Though film making was essentially a commercial adventure, film as a genre could not help mirroring the cracks within the dominant ideology of the time. The euphoria built around the independence and the ultimate disillusion that followed affected almost all the major film-makers of the time. Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy, being the leading ones reciprocated to these developments in their own individualistic ways using cinematic forms to portray the nuances of the resulting socio-economic scenario. For Raj Kapoor, "the 1950s were optimistic and hopeful times... an age of optimism. The republic was new; the rulers were new to the leadership" (qtd. in Bakshi 105). This sense of optimism and hope got itself translated into freshness and pristine quality of the characters in his early films. The sensitivity and the artistic prowess of Bimal Roy evolved in different directions. He was an integral part of the socially relevant cinema that developed in his home state of West Bengal under the great patronage of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. In fact, his works have "a distinct flavor of social realism about them" (Ramakrishnan). His films like *Parineeta* (1953), *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953), *Devdas* (1955), and *Sujata* (1959) portray the central characters caught between an established but eroding way of life and the one yet to hold grounds. Guru Dutt, on the other hand, seemed to have reacted differently to the turbulent transitions taking place around him. Though he started as a commercially successful film-maker, his later films *Pyasa* (1957) and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (1959) portrayed the darker side of the tall claims of the nationalist leaders.

*Pyaasa* is a “romantic melodrama focusing on the thirst for love, the thirst for recognition, and the thirst for spiritual fulfillment” (Kabir 121). It is a story of a struggling poet Vijay (Guru Dutt) trying to come to terms with the new realities of post independence India. His poetry is rejected by publishers and his brothers. His beloved (Mala Sinha) deserts him as he cannot provide her material comforts and financial security and she marries a rich publisher Mr. Ghosh (Rehman). Ironically, it is a prostitute named Gulabo (Waheeda Rehman) who recognises his talent and falls in love with him. However, Vijay is too disillusioned with the world to reciprocate to Gulabo’s love. The story takes an interesting turn and Vijay is employed by Mr. Ghosh who is by now harbouring strong suspicion about the relationship between Vijay and his wife. Lack of recognition and a sense of failure still haunt Vijay. One day a beggar wearing Vijay’s coat is crushed under a train and is mistaken for Vijay. In Vijay’s supposed death, Mr. Ghosh senses a big business opportunity and publishes his poems with the help of Gulabo who finances the entire project with her life time savings. Ironically, the recognition that defers Vijay forever is poured upon him in plenty. He is canonised as a poet and a memorial is held for the great poet who sacrificed his life at the altar of callous society. On the other hand, Vijay is alive and is being treated in a hospital after a train accident in which he unsuccessfully tried to save the deceased beggar. When he claims that he is the poet Vijay, he is sent to a mental asylum. However, with the help of his friend Abdul Sattar he escapes from there to reach the memorial where the highest adulations are being heaped on the dead poet. Initially his brothers and friend refuse to recognise him as they have also been bought by Mr. Ghosh. They again show the height of hypocrisy when they are bought by one more publisher and are now ready to identify Vijay as Vijay. By this time, Vijay is fed up with the corrupt and hypocrite world and declares that he is not Vijay. He then leaves with Gulabo to abolish the last remains of their presence on cinematic screen.

As a cinematic text, *Pyaasa* is symptomatic of the inherent gap between progressive and socialist rhetoric of the state and the regressive social reality. In fact, the split goes even deeper and wider than that. To comprehend this chasm, one needs to analyse the fractured and multiclass nature of Indian society which has always had glaring differences. The competitive politics pursued by the British nurturing itself on strengthening of the prevailing divisions in the Indian society further added to the fragmented nature. The stagnant economic growth during the colonial period benefitted only limited vested interests. This further consolidated the already prevailing gaps. The result was, as pointed by Khilnani in his work *The Idea of India* (1997), that India housed a number of financial periods i.e. there were

multiple modes of production and financial activities from crude stone breaking to the most sophisticated banking. Hence, there were highly advanced steel and textile mills concurrently matched by the presence of invincible feudal structures in rural India. Therefore, the rhetoric of socialism and equality always had a little epistemological validity and was imposed from the top of the pyramid by the ruling elite class. Hence, the new republic claiming to realise the ideals of the French revolution still had its social foundations based on exploitation. To speak in terms of historical materialism and psychoanalysis, India as a collective entity suffered from schizophrenia between the predominant mode of production and the corresponding social reality.

In fact, the movie shows coming together of the regressive feudal elements symbolised by the family of the poet Vijay and exploitative capitalist class represented by the publisher. Vijay's family shuns him and brands him as a good for nothing fellow. The family structure portrayed in the film seems to be both an ideological apparatus and a gang of individuals interested in material gains only. As an ideological apparatus, it hinders the awakening of the consciousness by promoting values that keep an individual blind to the reality of the world around him. It is also a group of money mongers as for a petty sum of money Vijay's brothers deny to recognise him and when someone else pays more, they are ready to identify him as their blood relation. Even the act of deserting Vijay on the part of his girl friend exposes her sense of insecurity and the power of the institution of marriage and family to provide that security. In the end, it is the alliance between the institution of family and the capitalist class that deprives Vijay of his identity. The posthumous commodification of Vijay's poetry unveils the working of capitalism in that particular period. As long as Vijay is alive, his poetry is mocked as it talks about hunger, unemployment and ugly aspects of life ignoring the sensuous beauty of female body and pangs of love. However, the moment Vijay's supposed death is announced he is canonised and his poetry is appropriated. The clever publisher aptly exploits the collective public guilt and curses the society for being callous and even sadistic to the genius of the poet.

The posthumous popularity of Vijay is symptomatic of society's guilt caused by a sense of failure to bring about a just and an equal society. Ironically, it also stands for the parasitic need of the society to feed itself on such opposing views by removing the revolutionary intent of the persona behind it and by appropriating it in a manner that it satisfies its guilt somewhat without altering its basic exploitative and shallow structures. The way positions are changed vis-à-vis identity of the poet reflects the hollowness and fickle-

mindedness of the masses. The reification and appropriation of the supposed death of Vijay and his resurfacing also reflect the fate of rhetoric loftiness of Nehruvian project. A parallel reading of Nehru's famous speech on the midnight of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 and two songs of the film "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" and "Ye dunia agar mil bhi jae to kya ho" will be very revealing.

Jawaharlal Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" has become a part of collective consciousness of our nation. It is marked by an emotive appeal and rhetorical flourishes. At one level, it documents the hope and commitments of the leader of a nation who is to be the chief architect of its destiny- the real tryst with destiny. It immediately announces ushering in of a new era as Nehru says:

A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance... We end today a period of ill fortunes and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us.

The entire Nehruvian rhetoric of a new beginning or an epistemological break had its dark side as well. First of all, the so called postcolonial India was not a complete dismantling of the rationale of colonialism. In fact, there was a deep rooted complicity between the nationalist elite and the colonial masters. G. Aloysius has pointed out this complicity brilliantly in his work *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (1997), where he propounds that the perception of the nation to be born took place within the frame work set by the British, whether the nationalist elite complied with it or opposed it totally. Therefore, the stepping out from the old to the new and ending of an age was theoretically and practically never possible. Hence, the postcolonial India was deeply rooted in the nuisances of the colonial India. Moreover, retaining of the repressive colonial state apparatuses like the army and the bureaucracy in toto exposed the point of confluence between the mechanism of colonial state and the new republic. In addition to this, there was a strong continuity between the rationale and modus operandi of the colonial state and the so called postcolonial one. At the heart of the seemingly lofty aims of colonialism was the exploitation, especially the economic exploitation of the natives which was legitimised by a parallel discourse that emphasised on modernising the natives. The emphasis on modernising the natives was achieved by

describing them in binary opposition to the colonial master. Thus, the native was termed as backward, uncivilised, and irrational; and the colonial master was presented as modern, civilised and rational. So the darkness of exploitation was veiled behind the lofty rhetoric of civilising mission. Edward Said has put up this entire point in his path breaking work *Orientalism* (1978). Ashis Nandy has further elaborated this point by highlighting the complicity between colonialism and postcolonialism in his work *The Romance of the State* (2003). For Nandy, when after decolonisation, the indigenous elite acquire control over the state apparatuses, they quickly learn to seek legitimacy- a native version of the civilising mission that introduced and internalised the idea of modern nation-state in the southern hemisphere. Therefore, a similar colonial relationship is formed between the state and society even after the formal political independence is achieved. The natives are asked to sacrifice as the agents of modernisation and the guardians of national security. Thus, Nehru's new herald was not a new arrival. In fact, it was like the proverbial 'same wine in a new bottle' continuing the exploitation of masses by those in power. Moreover, the speech is conspicuously silent about the partition of the country that "broke the continuity of a communally shared history and cultural heritage of the subcontinent" (Pabby 45-46).

The film *Pyasa*, released almost a decade after the speech was delivered, seems to be in direct dialogue with it as both the movie and the speech inhabit the same political unconscious. If Nehru's "tryst with destiny" was written by a politician about the destiny of a nation; *Pyasa* seems to be a poet's version of the same. Specially, the songs "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" and "Ye dunia agar mil bhi jae to kya ho", written by Sahir Ludhianvi reflect the buried unconscious of the above said speech. The melancholic tone of the songs can easily be contrasted with the mood of enthusiasm prevailing in the speech. The utopia envisioned in the speech can also be compared with the dystopian reality portrayed in the songs. The rejection of the poet by the family, the beloved and the society sets the tone of the song. The second passage of the speech emphasising the continuous struggle of India since the dawn of history based on certain ideals she has never lost sight of and her eventual entry into an era where she discovers herself again is contrasted with the image of decadence, an eternal fear among the exploited and an everlasting hypocrisy of the society as the poet sings: *Ye sadiyon se bekhauf sehmi si galian; yeh masli hui adkhili zard kaliaan... Yahan peer aa chucked hain, jawan bhi, Tanomand bete bhi abha miya bhi. Yeh biwi bhi hai aur behan bhi hai, maa bhi* (These crouching lanes, for centuries undaunted. These crushed and pallid half blown buds... The aged come here also the young ones, also the healthy son and

even the father. She is wife, sister and even mother). Portraying the pangs of the plight of the prostitutes, the poet invokes mythological characters: *Madad chahti hai hauya ki beti, Yashodha ki hamjins, Radha ki beti, Pyambar ki umatt, Zulekhan ki beti...Jinhe naaz hai hind par vo kahan hain* (The daughter of Eve needs help, the breed of Yashodha, the daughter of Radha, the Prophet's nation, the daughter of Zulekhan...Those who are proud of the orient, where are they).

The use of mythological figures by Sahir builds a parallel between the plight of the female sex workers pleading for help and sexed female imagery used to describe the nation by Nehru and other nationalist leaders building parallel between the images of the nation and various glorified mythological characters. The imagining of the nation as sexed female in Nehru's speech also strengthens the contrast. The last passage of the song is a call for the so called custodians of the nation to look at the ugly side of the nation: *Zara mulkh ke rehbaro ko bulao. Yeh kuche, yeh galian, yeh manjar dikhao. Jinhe naaz hai hind par unko lao* (Just call the leaders of the nation. Show them these alleys, these lanes and the view. Bring on those who are proud of the orient).

These words seem to be in direct correspondence with the last words of Nehru's speech, where he called upon the members of the constituent assembly to usher in an era of equality, liberty and justice as he has said in his speech:

The future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we might fulfill the pledges we have so often taken and the One we shall take today. The service of India means the service of millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from eye. That may be beyond us but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

Therefore, the song shows that the proclaimed project that was envisioned as a new dawn for the nation has fallen into the deep valleys of darkness. The song "Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya ho" continues the critique of the so called nationalist leaders' dreams. The tone is as melancholic as in the other song. However, there is a sudden change of tone in the last stanza. The higher notes reflect the sheer anger of the poet who wants to set everything on fire and start anew: *Jala do ise, foonkh dalo yeh duniya. Mere samne se hata lo yeh duniya. Tumhari hai tum hi sambhalo yeh duniya. Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya ho*

(Burn it, smoke away this world. Move this world away from me. It is yours, you nurture this world).



Fig.1. The Rebel

The end of the song is perhaps the only point where Vijay comes close to an open rebellion, when he appears in the doorway, illuminated with white light, arms outstretched against the door frame, the camera and lights make him seem larger than life. An immediate parallel with the crucified Christ is too obvious. The anger and fury in the last words reflect the rage and acrimony of the poet Vijay and through him that of Guru Dutt. It is a very well known fact that Guru Dutt wanted the film to end on a tragic note; however the distributors dissuaded him and a happy ending was designed. Therefore, the soreness and infuriation at the end of the song seems to be in line with the rebellion inherent in art. This rebellion seems to have potential to engulf everything present on the cinematic space, including the poet himself. However, the prudent and practical forces of commerce significantly alter the path of the film and it ends on an amiable note. The last conversation between Vijay and Meena is a reflection of the thinker in Vijay, where he does not complain against individuals. Rather, he interrogates the structures and institutions of the society that alienate human beings from each other as he says: *Mujhe shikayat hai us danche se jo insaan se uski insaniyat cheen laita hai...Mujhe shikayat hai us tehjeeb se, us sanskriti se jaha murdo ko puja jata hai aur jinda insaano ko pairon tale ronda jata hai* (I have grudge against that system that deprives a human of his humanity...I have grudge against that culture, that civilisation where the dead are worshipped and the alive are crushed under feet).



Fig.2. The language of light and shadow

So, Vijay exits the cinematic space, not to burn it; but in search of a utopian land where the institutions of society do not alienate a human from his humanity and his fellow human beings. In fact, the brilliant use of light and commendable cinematography is the highlight of the movie. The lengthy shadows used in the entire sequence are expressive of the inner storm of Vijay and add to the intensity of the atmosphere. The shadow in the first figure is in front of him and seems to engulf him. However, the second figure is reached out by constantly rotating the shadow to reach a point where the substantial body of Vijay fully asserts itself and no trace of Vijay's shadow is found.

As pointed by Madhava Prasad in his book *The Ideology of the Hindi Film* (2000), film production in India till 1980s was never centralised as it was the case in Hollywood. There were very few well-established production houses. In fact, the production was dominated by a large number of independent filmmakers with a very high rate of failure caused by inherent uncertainty of success in a highly volatile industry. Therefore, filmmakers were by and large working in a market economy, producing films for mass production; however the production relations were based on kinship and personal loyalties. The role of powerful financiers seems to have contributed a lot in the internalisation and perpetuation of a backward capitalism in production and pre-capitalist ideologies in production relationships where institutionalised Hindu religious practices based on loyalties and a strong sense of kinship formed the base. Prasad has further argued that the strong presence of family based entertainers pertaining to a particular narrative structure is the symptomatic of the above mentioned production relations. For Prasad, the predominant linear narrative of the Hindi

films up to 1970s was a kind of meeting point between the fragmented state and the underlying socio-economic reality consisting of the above said factors. In fact, he asserts that the coherence in the narrative was an effect of that underlying socio-economic reality which provided the ideological cohesive to remove all the contradictions from the formal aspect of the films. The predominantly linear narrative of the film under analysis can be studied from this perspective.

However, as pointed by Catherine Belsey in *Critical Practice* (2002), a counterintuitive reading highlighting the gaps and tensions in a text can easily foreground the contradictions rooted in the unconscious of the text exposing the prejudices in the larger structures of the time. Therefore, though the film exposes the feudal setup of the institution of family very strongly in its content, the form somehow fails to bring out the contradictions in the dominant mode of production and production relations. But there is a tension in the narrative which makes the overtly linear narrative very vulnerable and assists an access to the underlying political unconscious. In fact, the form exhibits an omnipresent, though very subtle conflict between the political and the personal. There seems to be three poles in the film that pull its narrative in different directions. The portrayal of Vijay as a victimised artist and the other of the social setup seems to be close to Guru Dutt's idea of an artist; the politically and existentially conscious lyrics of the songs "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" and "Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya ho" are manifestation of the revolutionary in Sahir; and the omnipresence of the financiers perpetuating above mentioned modes of production and production relations prohibiting the film from taking a tragic turn or an overt revolutionary position, are those poles. Vijay is always too engrossed in his own world and seems to be in perpetual conflict with his own self. However, the abrupt transformation of the Devdas in Vijay into a politically aware individual evoking Nehruvian idea of India suddenly before the song "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" and sudden change of the tone at the end of the song "Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya ho" are testimonial of imposition of the revolutionary in Sahir over the textual space of the film. In the same manner, a happy conclusion and a dream sequence testifies the strong presence of financiers internalising a particular ideology. So, even formally the film is not devoid of the presence of the larger structures of its time and the split that they inherited. On the whole, the film has a tragic grandeur evoking the shattering dreams of the nationalist leaders based on historical fallacies.

*Rockstar*, a Hindi film with an English title, was one of the biggest hits of the year 2011 and was also critically acclaimed as one of the best movies of the year. The film is a story of Janardhan Jhakar (Ranbir Kapoor), a simple boy at heart and a student of Hindu College, New Delhi. He dreams of rocking the world as a rockstar. His mentor Khatana, a canteen owner (Kumud Mishra), tells him that the only way melody can be produced is by undergoing trauma via heartbreak. To bring intensity in his music, he starts chasing a girl Heer Kaul (Nargis Fakhri), from St. Stephens College as this girl from the valley of Kashmir is a "perfect heartbreaking machine". He proposes the girl without actually being in love with her and suffers an immediate humiliation. However, the situation takes an unexpected turn and they both become good friends, hanging out together and doing things like drinking desi liquor and watching a B-grade Hindi film called *Junglee Jawaani*. Heer marries Jai (Moufid Aziz) in Kashmir and departs to Prague with him. During the process, she develops feelings for Janardhan and coins the name "Jordon" for him before leaving. Jordon returns home and finds himself thrown out by his elder brother for attending Heer's wedding and stealing ₹5 lakh. He takes refuge for two months in the nearby Nizamuddin Dargah, singing qawaalis and finally to Khatana's place, making it his home. Ustad Jameel Khan (Shammi Kapoor), a Padma Bhushan classical artist, recognises his talent at the dargah and recommends JJ to Dhingra (Piyush Mishra), the owner of a music company called "Platinum Records", to sign Jordon as he foresees a bright future for him. Destiny plays its part and Jordon lands in Prague as a part of commercial music group sponsored by Dhingra. There he meets Heer and unveils his feelings for her. Initially, Heer is reluctant but finally she too gives in. This illegitimate love-relation surfaces and Heer's marriage is broken. On the other hand, she is diagnosed with Aplastic Anemia. Jordon comes back to India and becomes a victim of his controversial behaviour with the media. Jordon meets Heer's younger sister Mandy during one of his performances. She asks him to help Heer, as she has been diagnosed with a fatal disease. Heer starts recovering in his presence. But soon this relationship raises storm in the media. Completely oblivious to this storm, Jordon and Heer- the innocent birds are engrossed in their world. However, the catastrophic turn of action takes place when Heer becomes pregnant and it is certain that she is not going to survive. The film ends at a point when Jordon, while performing, imagines Heer, who is dead by now, coming on stage and a recap of the happy times they spent together follows.

Interestingly, the movie begins and ends with Rumi's words: *Pata hai, yahan se bahut door, galat aur sahi ke paar, ek maidaan hai. Main vahan milunga tujhe* (You know, far away

from here, beyond good and evil, there is a field. I will meet you there). In fact, the entire movie seems to be a poetic interlude coming out of the creative prowess of these words. What is really intriguing is that the words are symptomatic of a transformed space- a space where the idea of normalcy is challenged and restructured. The space is also marked by openness where everything remains to be thought, to be experienced. Ironically, the entire movie with the running length of 2:32:54 seems to be a struggle against the forces of various power structures. The first scene of the movie sets the tone for what is to follow. The globalised celebration of Jordon cult depicts an artist caught between existentialist angst and capitalist appropriation of his genius. The celebration and consumption of brand Jordon by a global crowd in a European city is highly suggestive. The broken sequence of the scenes covering the event seems to be a part of a documentary with a naturalistic narrative style. However, the naturalistic narrative style is soon disrupted with the entry of Jordon on cinematic space. The otherness of the artist disrupts the celebratory mood and cinematic space is captured by the uncouth, angry and outlaw artist. What follows is a kind of stream of consciousness narration of the transformation of Jordon from a simple Haryanvi boy to a burning star.

Like the artist in *Pyaasa*, Jordon's family background is very revealing. He is from a big Haryanvi joint family, where the difference between the family and clan disappears. The feudal family structure terming art as shameful and wastage of time bears similarity with the family structures prevailing in *Pyaasa*. In fact, the proto feudal familial structure prevailing in both the movies hints at a very deep malady. It points to a split between the mode and forces of production on the one hand and the social reality on the other. In social reality surrounding *Pyaasa*, the predominant mode of production is capitalistic but the social values and institutions are predominantly feudal. The mode of production in *Rockstar*, releasing a good six decades after *Pyaasa*, is more akin to late-capitalism. However, the feudal values and institutions still seem to be quite strong. It hints at inauthentic modernity in the form of capitalistic modernity in India creating a split between the mode of production and the social reality. What is really intriguing is that the predominant mode of production is changing without correspondingly altering the social reality, thereby putting a serious question mark against the epistemological validity of such modernity.

In *Pyaasa*, the regressive feudal elements in the form of family and exploitative capitalist class in the form of publisher are at the core of the plight of the artist. However, in *Rockstar* different power apparatuses in the form of media, law, family, institution of marriage

and the police form a group to target the artist and commodify the inherent dissent of an artist hinting at ever deepening penetration of capital in every sphere of life. The transformation of the poet in *Pyaasa* seems to be brought to light by revolutionary poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz and his personal circumstances. However, the artist in *Rockstar* is transformed through his encounter with the absolute other. Jordon's transformation from a non-serious, simple Haryanvi Jaat to a self-burning Rockstar takes place when he encounters the absolute other at the dargah. It is with this encounter that his artistic genius surfaces. At this point of time, the door of home- the ultimate shelter created by society, is shut and that of a dargah is opened for him. The opening lines of the qwaali: *Aaja khali pan mai, pi ka ghar tera, tere bin khali, aaja re khali pan main* (Move into nothingness. Your beloved's home is empty without you. It is empty without you here. Move into emptiness. It is empty without you) seem to be the call of the other. In a very complex manner, these words show the relational nature of the relationship between the self and the other. Ironically, it is the other that is calling the self. At the same time, the other is asking the self to move into nothingness and emptiness because it seems to be empty there without the self in the realm of the other. It, therefore, can be concluded that the gravitational pull between the self and the other is from both the sides.

In both the cases the unsettling experience that art inherently carries transforms the personal into the political. In fact, it can easily be inferred that the personal does not exist in a vacuum; rather the self does carry the impressions of the largest structures of the time and enters into a dialogue with them. Therefore, the confluence of the existential angst and the political anger is so marked in both the films. The song "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" from *Pyaasa* and "Sadda haq" from *Rockstar* are the highest points of this intermingling. Both the songs are expression of the artists exposing the tall claims of the dominant rhetoric of the time. The relationship between Nehruvian idealism and the song in *Pyaasa* has already been elaborated in the earlier part of the paper. What is intriguing is the tone prevailing in both the songs. There is a melancholic sadness, somber tone and inbuilt slowness in *Pyaasa*'s song. However, the song in *Rockstar* is marked by higher notes, sound, fury and all-pervasive cacophony. This combination of sound, fury and cacophony seems to be a mockery of shallowness of the rationale of neoliberalism. The same also seems to be a tool to conceal the historical anachronism mentioned by Zizek, making the entire pretension a mere farce.

The first few frames of the song are very suggestive. In fact like *Pyaasa*, the cinematography is the soul of the film.



Fig.3.1. Law and prison



Fig.3.2. Judiciary and family



Fig.3.3. Judiciary and police



Fig.3.4. The personal and the public  
personal

Fig.3.5 The capital intervening the

The different frames portraying the intermingling of various state apparatuses, both repressive and ideological, are an attempt to capture the formative influence of the capital in the formation of contemporary subjectivity. The broken narrative and various cut-shots used to give a form to the broken narrative are symptomatic of various complex artistic forms evolved for the cognitive mapping of the capital in its most complex avatar. The playback words: *Tum logon ki duniya main har insaan galat... Main sahi samaj ke jo bhi karun tum kehte ho galat. Main galat hu to fir kaun sahi hai...* (In this world of yours, every human being is wrong. Whatever I think is right, you term it wrong. If I am wrong, who else is right?) are perfectly matched by above mentioned consecutive frames. The manufactured plot of selling the dissent of the artist is hatched by the capitalist who envisions: *Market main album khulte hi artist jail ke andar... This is my vision...negative...negative...sirf negative chalta hai market main* (The moment the album opens in the market, the artist is in the jail. This is my vision...negative...negative...only negative sells in the market). The words reveal the alliance between the capital and the media and how the media creates an image that ultimately suits the interests of the capitalist class. The sequence also settles the fate of dissent under late-capitalism, where even the inherent rebellion of the artist is turned into a commodified fetish. If the exploitation of the poet Vijay was at the hands of a local publisher, Jordon's exploitation is scripted by collaboration between the local and the international capital hinting at the deep rooted alliance between the two in the neoliberal India. There is also appropriation of the dissent in both the movies. The shrewd publisher in *Pyaasa* cashes on the guilt of the society and sells the poems of Vijay that are in the form of a bitter attack on the hypocrisy of the society. Mr. Dhingra, the proprietor of Platinum Music seems to rely a lot on image making, asserting the superiority of the simulacra over the real under late capitalism. His precious lessons to Jordon about the all important image are very revealing as he says: *Everything is image, image is everything...Aaj kal sangeet koi nahi kharidta. Sab log kharidte hain image... brand hai... brand hai...Bas tu ek baat yaad rakh ke aaj se tu koi sangeetkaar vangeetkaar nai hai* (Image is everything, everything is image. Nobody buys music these days. All buy image only...only brand is there...only brand is there. Remember one thing from now onwards that you are no longer an artist). The song also hits hard at the shallowness of the so called global efforts to defer the apocalyptic end that has been staring at the face of humankind because of exploitative urge and greed lying at the core of capitalistic

modernity. The words: *Oh eco friendly, nature ke rakshak, main bhi hun nature... Rivajo se, samajo se, kyun, kyun, tu kate mujhe is tarah...* ( Oh eco friendly, the savior of Nature, see even I am Nature... With customs, with society, why do you dissect me like this) expose the hypocrisy of the so called save planet programmes as the same try to cure the mere symptoms and willingly do not reach the root cause of the disease- the unbridled industrialisation and the insatiable capitalist greed. Such programmes are basically meant to divert public attention from the real cause of the catastrophe.

The last part of the song is most overtly political. It is here that Jordon vents his anger against the political establishment.



Fig.4. The personal transformed into the political

The above mentioned three figures from the song are very revealing. The waving of Tibetan flag seems to be an assertion against Chinese imperialism. It is here that the movie

crosses the national barriers and acquires a universal human appeal. The visual of the Sikhs and Kashmiris shouting 'sada haq' are very revealing. They represent the epitome of the two separatist movements that challenged the might of the Indian state. It cannot be a coincidence that both the movements emerged around 80s when the nature of Indian state, as discussed in the earlier part of the paper, underwent a major transformation, in turn, significantly altering the idea of India. Both these movements also seem to be the last nail in the coffin of Nehruvian narrative of unity in diversity. Moreover, the visuals very naturally invoke the song, "Jinhe naaz hai Hind par vo kahan hain" as the disillusionment that initiated there seems to have come to its apocalyptic conclusion in these visuals where the nationalist leaders' idea of India is completely fractured.

After the above discussion, it will be helpful to focus on the interaction of the formal aspects of the film with the larger structures and how that interaction further adds to the appeal of the film. In the postliberalisation era, the cinematic apparatus with its inherent ontological and epistemological characteristics has worked in tandem with two overlapping categories- the socio-political formation of the modern Indian state as a determining factor in cultural production and the global capitalist structures significantly rewriting the norms in the arena of cultural production. Interestingly, cinema has dealt with these forces simultaneously in the directions of heteronomy, dependency and antagonism. The real complexity lies in the parallel working of the socio-political formation of the Indian state and global capitalism. As mentioned in the earlier part of the paper, since the 1980s the social reality in India has become increasingly fragmented with a very narrow ruling alliance at the top. The failure of democratic institutions, socialism and secularism has not been replaced by any other consensus. The rise of Hindu nationalism and other ethnocentric movements has made Indian identity parochial in spirit, whereas the ushering in of capitalist and commodified culture has given it a global garb. This split therefore has eroded "the old - the old that held everything together without replacing it by a new" (Basu 51). Gramsci's famous words: "old is dying and the new can not be born: in this inter-regum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" truly reflect the complexity of the situation (qtd. in Rai 15). The morbid symptoms that Gramsci refers to here can be interpreted at multiple levels. Anustup Basu in his book *Bollywood in the Age of New Media* (2012) in a way has tried to reconcile the morbidity of the symptoms by terming it as a manifestation of weak or incomplete modernity generating intense effects towards statism and capitalist modernisation without any obligation to the core ideas of modernity. However, what seems to lie at the root of this morbidity is the split

between the state, society and the economic policies followed that has been highlighted in the earlier part of the paper. The broken narrative of the film *Rockstar* can be analysed vis-à-vis the above mentioned developments. First of all, it seems to be a cultural logic of late capitalism. Under late capitalism, the capital has scattered itself and has acquired multiple centers making its reach even deeper and wider; also making it extremely difficult to locate it and attack it with full force. Therefore, a linear narrative is not good enough to locate and critique the capital in its new avatar. Concurrently, the broken narrative seems to be a reflection of the above mentioned “morbid symptoms” as with capitalist modernity, the old cohesive forces of religion seem to be receding without being replaced by a commitment to authentic modernity based on rationality, equality and universal brotherhood. The result of these “morbid symptoms” is a split subjectivity that is ultra modern in outlook; however harboring the most regressive tendencies in its psychology, hence the importance of ethnicity and parochial identity in today’s politics.

The narrative style of *Rockstar* is intriguing because of one more reason. As pointed earlier, in *Pyaasa* there is a tension in the narrative as the three different poles seem to pull it in different directions. However, in *Rockstar* the broken narrative of the film does not seem to carry any such tension. Rather, the brokenness seems to be an integral part of the text. The changed nature of the pattern of consumption of films might offer an explanation. In 1950s, the directors were generally bound to adhere to the whims and fancies of the distributors and financiers thereby forcing them to adopt certain formulas. However, the modern and urbane audiences of the multiplexes have altered the equation to some extent. The simultaneous rise of the new pattern of consumption of films and directors like Ram Gopal Varma, Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap and Imtiaz Ali introducing new narrative styles in commercial Hindi films can not be a coincident. Therefore, even the form of the film is not devoid of the political unconscious of the time and exposes the darkness inherent in the larger structures of its time and their farcical attempts to veil the darkness at heart.

On the whole, it can be concluded that both the films are complex works of art entering into a critical dialogue with the political unconscious of the contemporary time asserting the scope of even a commercial art form like film to come up with an authentic critique of the forces instrumental in its formation.

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