

Gulzar's Films: Alice in Bollywood

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Abstract

This paper examines Gulzar in light of films directed by him. Gulzar is rare among the rarest who possesses multidimensional qualities. Whatever he tried his hand in he succeeded. Gulzar as a director has his own unique identity. In directing films there is a disciplined mechanism. His films depict peak of his genius. His films are not mere entertainment. They are laced with diverse messages so that one can translate them in one's life. They are brightened by different colours of life. They have unity and pattern. All these elements give him a unique identity. It would not be wrong to say that Gulzar directed films with diverse themes which demonstrate his hold on his art. Gulzar directed seventeen films from Mere Apne to Hu Tu Tu.

Key words: multidimensional, psychology, socialism, showcased, memories, anxious

After independence there were so many films like Raj Kappor's *Awara* and *Jagte Raho*, Mehboob Khan's *Andaz*, *Amar* and *Mother India* and K. Asif's *Mugal-e- Azam* which made film industry prosperous and reputed. It is a general opinion that the decades of 60s and 70s were the golden period of Bollywood films. Though few films like *Garam Hawa*, *Arath* and *Umrao Jan* contributed well, but usually Hindustani film industry remained indifferent. At that time Gulzar stepped in who was lucky enough to remain under the guidance of Bimal Roy and learn techniques of film-making and art from him who directed in 60s effective and successful films like *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Devdas*, *Mudhumati* and *Bandini*. Gulzar started his film career with Bimol Roy. His films are of diverse themes. Some portray riots, vulgarity of the new generation. There is also material of child interest. In his films there are issues of handicapped, issues of eastern women, their greatness, their role in politics, issues of unmarried persons and problems

of children which have been raised. There are issues focused on characters, politics and issues of minorities. To handle such diverse themes with care is possible only for an expert and experienced artist. Silence speaks in Gulzar's films. No other director has handled men-women relationships so sensitively as Gulzar did. This is the uniqueness of his films. Beyond doubt, Gulzar is the living legend of Indian cinema. Gulzar is the last living link between old and new generation of filmmakers.

The basic thing that is found in Gulzar's films is the environment of these films. Through his films depict life, domestic conditions—where there are near and dear ones and human kindness. One can see in his films people meet and separate as in normal life. Story develops in a natural way. Film begins slowly. There are incidents which touch the soul. There are some sentences which compel us to ponder for a long period. There are some queries which are associated with this life. Human psychology is portrayed in a nice way and film ends with slow effectiveness. It seems as if a novel is shown on the screen. In one of his interviews Gulzar said, “My films, I did say, are about human relationships other things happen in the story as well but my camera focuses on the human angle or at least that what it feel”. (*Hindustan Times*, 5 Feb., 1999)

Let us briefly analyze his films.

In his first film *Mere Apne* (1971) Gulzar depicts a transition from the old values which still exist in the rural areas in contrast to urban life. This was the last film of Meena Kumari. The poet-turned director Gulzar showed his anger in his first film—*Mere Apne*. Gulzar is brave enough to cast Meena Kumari as a determined grandmother (instead of giving her glamorous role) amidst quarrelling street youth. He had nicely portrayed the students in the film to show bitter truths of real life. Gulzar described how today's youth had rebellious or terrorist attitude

towards social system. He has depicted the angry and unhappy youth. In his first film one of the characters is brave enough to say, “We have been defrauded by the politicians, sometimes in the name of socialism and some times in the name of democracy”.

His second film *Parichay* (1972) revolves round the psychology of children and other aspects. It portrays alienation of grand children from their strict highly disciplined grandfather. It shows how love demolishes the wall between the generations.

Koshish was the third film directed in 1972. It is an attempt to prove that silence is the best language to express feelings. *Koshish* is the best example of non-verbal communication. Gulzar portrays the feelings of a dumb, deaf and blind in a nice manner. It explains through films how those who do not have eyes make pictures by words and their ears see, similarly whose lips do not move, their eyes become their ears. Gulzar is so emotional person that after film *Koshish*, he arranges a charity show for deaf and dumb every year. (Kumar 38) *Koshish* screen play fetched Gulzar a National Award for the best script.

His next film *Achanak* got released in 1973 revealed a completely new facet of the poet. *Achanak*, for Gulzar is the, “. . . best film to date” and his only film without songs. It is about a man, who is being tried to be hanged for the murder of his wife and her paramour. It raises an argument– a soldier gets a bravery award for killing a number of people in the battle field while for killing his wife and her friend, he gets death punishment.

His next film *Khushboo* got released in 1974. It portrays our concept of love is different from that of Europe or the West. Once a woman falls in love, nothing can detach her from her everlasting adoration of her lover. That love which begins in childhood has strong roots.

Aandhi is the next film which got released in 1975. People say it has a political theme, but in fact it is a love story. It was banned due to resemblance of one of its main character, Arti

(played by Suchitra Sen) with Indira Gandhi, the former prime minister of India. Gulzar told, “*Aandhi* had nothing what so ever to do with Mrs. Gandhi”.

Mausam was released in 1976 is one of the most popular movies. It portrays the story of a man and woman who have blessings of children, but are unmarried. Gulzar’s films are totally different from others. They are not meant for mere financial gains. There is an open and clear message in most of his films. According to Rajinder Singh Bedi, “I saw some of Gulzar films of which I found to be very beautiful”. It won National Awards for three categories, namely for the best film, the best director and the best actress.

Kinaara released in 1977 is a different story from other love stories. It is Gulzar’s first film as a producer, as he was anxious to make films of his choice. It is to some extent apart from common stories where historical background has been shown. It is the story about a car accident which results in the death of a lover.

Kitaab released in 1978 portrays the psychology of children. It is considered as an autobiographical film that revives Gulzar’s childhood memories. It is an attempt by a sensitive poet and writer to highlight the unhappy memories of his difficult past. Gulzar admits, “If there is anyone who could be identified with me, it is the child and not the husband”. (Mohamed 2).

Angoor released in 1980 is a story depicting mistaken identities. It is a comedy film, with a lot of laughter. It is the one of the best comedy films made in India (based on Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*). Meghna (his daughter) says, “His films were almost always drawn from literature and were marked for their simplicity and deep understanding of the human psyche and relationships. His adeptness in exploring human relationships was showcased in his film *Koshish*” (Meghna 52).

His next film, *Namkeen* (1981) is based on the story written by Samresh Basu. It deals with several relationships which depict human interaction in an effective manner.

Meera (1981) was based on the character of Meera the saint poet of sixteenth century. It fascinated the audience. Gulzar contends that the film *Meera* should be seen as a metaphor or a symbol of the life of saint poet. Gulzar succeeded in interpreting the life of Meera.

Ijaazat (1982) was commercially successful and “. . . one of the most finely tuned films of Gulzar’s career.” (Chatterjee 199) It portrays human relationships in a very sensitive manner in which weaknesses of human relationships has been described. There is a song “Mera Kuch Saman” becomes a popular song. It has a fine story.

Lekin released in 1990 revolves round Rewa, who is wandering unable to succeed in fulfilling her wishes. She is caught in the web of time and wants to get out of it. *Lekin* won all the three national awards for music in 1991, namely for the music director, the singer and for the lyrics.

Libaas was completed in 1986, but has not yet been released. Gulzar adds that, “This was the first film in which I felt confident about my own story and I did not feel the need to have the support of any well-known author”.

Maachis (1996) is based on the theme of terrorism. When the young people lose faith in the system, they take up arms or turn rebels. It is set in Punjab where the communal riots erupted after the assassination of the then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi in 1984. It conveys the message to have better understanding between various communities in order to preserve ethnic harmony and political tolerance between them.

Hu Tu Tu released in 1999, portray the political condition of India with its unemployed youth and corrupt politicians. It captures the frustration of today’s youth with rulers of the

nation. Gulzar says, “Young people now do not kill others. They kill themselves. That is the most extreme form that the act of rebellion can assume”. (Chatterje 236) Gulzar uses *Hu Tu Tu*—the leg pulling game symbolically in the film to depict the fight that takes place among politicians in the Assembly Halls and Parliament. According to Gulzar, our national game would have been *Hu Tu Tu* as our politicians sometimes pull the legs of one another or sometimes twist the arms of one another.

After analysing Gulzar’s films it can be said that he stands tall among the film makers of India. Indian cinema has produced some legends such as Mehbbob Khan, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Raj Kappor etc. Gulzar is one filmmaker who carried on the legacy of these legends. He is not only a film maker, director or song writer, but a story teller, a great story teller. One can say that, “. . . films are not simply entertainment. They are also meaningful documents with the potential to yield rich insights into the cultures and times in which they are made.” (Jeffrey and Rutsky 17) Gulzar in an interview with Ali Fatmi says, “I tried my level best to put [my films] very near to literature. My films have been taken from literature in one or the other way. . . .I made *Khusboo* on the novel of Sarat Chander, *Kitab* on the story of Samresh Basu, *Achnak* on the story of Khawaja Ahmad Abbas which had the title in Urdu “Dil He Too Hai” (Still it is a Heart). (*Naya Safar*, Issue 7).

By analyzing briefly Gulzar’s films it is pretty clear that the period which was greatly dominated by vulgarity, terrorism and politics. Dirty atmosphere prevailed everywhere and in such atmosphere Gulzar’s films prove like a fresh breeze of fragrance.

It is destiny’s own way of dispersing justice that the man who did not want to write a single film song brought the first and the only Oscar award for the industry.

The songs that thrilled children of 60s continue to thrill them when became grandparents. Children as well as their grandparents enjoy such songs together.

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