

ISSN-0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

VOL. 15 ISSUE-3 JUNE 2024

15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Hermeneutics of Pyasa: The Elusive Identity of Vijay

Dharmendra Kumar

Assistant Professor,

Department of English Literature,

BVM (PG) College, Bah, Agra, India.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12671932>

Article History: Submitted-14/03/2024, Revised-10/04/2024, Accepted-28/05/2024, Published-30/06/2024.

Abstract:

“Pyasa”, one of the 100 best films of all time according to Time Magazine in 2005, has been directed by Guru Dutt, written by Abrar Alvi, and its songs have been penned down by the famous lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. Vijay, the most debated character of the film (Pyasa), is always elusive. The identity of Vijay though associated partly with Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi, and Sahir Ludhianvi, in the end, transcends all these leading figures. Employing the theory of hermeneutics (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical types), the article aims to pinpoint how these figures contribute to the formation of the character of Vijay, to highlight him as a type-character and as a Christ-like figure, and to analyse him as a marginalised character aspiring to engender empathy and care.

Keywords: Indian Cinema, Identity, Hermeneutics, Melodrama, Degrading Relationships.

Introduction:

“Cinema”, asserted by Partha Chatterjee, “is a fair indicator of a nation’s psyche” (45). The films of the 1950s cannot be excluded from this indicator and are “essentially Nehruvian” (Ghose 94), either advocating for or challenging in subtle ways socialism and economic growth. In Bimal Roy’s film “Do Bigha Zamin (Two Bigahs of Land; 1953)”, a farmer Shambhu, unable to pay the forged debt though he laboured hard to earn money to pay off in the age of economic development and rapid industrialisation, could not save his land from auctioning. B. R. Chopra’s film “Naya Daur (The New Era; 1957)” was “released against the background of the launching of the Second Year Plans, with its emphasis on rapid industrialisation” (Ghose 94). Mehboob Khan’s “Mother

India (1957)” had a focus on nation-building. “Footpath (1953)”, “Shree 420 (Mr Fraud; 1955)”, “Ab Dilli Dur Nahi (Delhi is within Reach; 1957)”, and “Hum Hindustani (We Indian; 1960)”, were in the same vein. But Guru Dutt’s magnum opus film, *Pyasa*, released in 1957, simultaneously retained and transcended the Nehruvian elements, making it a classic.

According to Time Magazine in 2005, “*Pyasa*” is considered one of the best films of all time. It has been directed by Guru Dutt, written by Abrar Alvi, and its songs have been penned down by the famous lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. Vijay, the most debated character of the film (*Pyasa*), is always elusive. The identity of Vijay though associated partly with Guru Dutt, with Abrar Alvi, with Sahir Ludhianvi, but in the end, transcends all these leading figures. Through hermeneutics or the fourfold levels of interpretation (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical), the film *Pyasa* will be analysed to understand how the character of Vijay is elusive.

Despite the film “*Pyasa*” as a timeless classic, there are a few critical works on him. Firstly, it is charged with a melodrama. Through “Negotiating Empathy and Excess: *Pyasa* as a Melodrama of Authorship”, Rakesh Sengupta has addressed two key questions- (i) “what are the diegetic and affective strategies employed in *Pyasa* to make the viewer identify with the emotional life of the poet?”, and (ii) “how does melodrama elevate this empathetic engagement to the generality of a shared experience?” Through “Early Cinema in South Asia: The Place of Technology in Narrative of its Emergence,” Sudhir Mahadevan has argued that the film “*Pyasa*,” being a melodrama of mechanical reproduction, has resisted “the crass materialism of the world. (144).”

Second, it is a counter-narrative of nationalism and the Nehruvian model of economic growth. Through “Poetics of *Pyasa* and Narrative of National Disillusionment,” Gaurav Gadgil and Sudha Tiwari argued that “*Pyasa*” “deconstructed the myth of national pride” and questioned the “nation-building process” which marginalised the poet and the artist, who were not contributing to the material and scientific development.

Third, it is semi-biographical. It is associated with Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi and Sahir Ludhianvi. Film reviewer, Jaime Rebanal pointed out that *Pyasa* was semi-autobiographical inferred from “the directions or Dutt’s performance.” According to *FilmSpell* reviewer through “Guru Dutt’s Thirsty Poem on Celluloid: *Pyasa*,” Abrar Alvi’s life became a model for the character of Vijay and even the character of Gulabo was based on a real-life prostitute whom Alvi

had met in his real life. Akshay Manwani in his book “Sahir Ludhianvi: the People’s Poet” pointed out that *Pyasa* was “replete with references to Sahir and his life (95)” and Sahir’s views of the world were similar to those of Guru Dutt.

Fourth, it is highly symbolic and allegorical. According to Cinestaan’s review on “*Pyasa*,” Blessy Chettiar pointed out that “to open with a wide-angle shot of a water pond with lotus flowers blooming is only the beginning of a barrage of symbolism Guru Dutt lets loose in the following two-and-a-half hours.” Through “Breaking down Guru Dutt’s Masterpiece *Pyasa*,” the reviewer, Gill, pointed out that *Pyasa* employed “layer storytelling” and the character Vijay symbolised Jesus Christ.

Fifth, it quests for the meaning of life. In the *Bollywood Rewind* of *The Indian Express*, the reviewer, Sampada Sharma, highlighted that the film “questioned the meaning of life.” A film director, Neeraj Ghaywan commented that Guru Dutt’s “*Pyasa*” was a story of a poet, “wandering to know the purpose of life but only finds himself battered by the brutal absurdity of our existence.”

Despite the film “*Pyasa*,” unanimously considered to be a timeless classic, there are conflicting views regarding its meanings. Hermeneutics or the fourfold levels of Interpretations have been employed to synthesize these conflicting views under one common thread. Using the theory of hermeneutics, the article aims to highlight how the character of Vijay is elusive. Further, the objectives of the article are the following. First, we will analyse how the life and thoughts of Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi, and Sahir Ludhianvi formed the character of Vijay and endeavour to discern the contradiction making the reviewer charge the film of “unrealism concerning Calcutta” (Sengupta). Second, we will highlight the character of Vijay as a type character, representing poets and artists whose contributions to nation-building have been overlooked in the Nehruvian age of industrialisation and economic growth. Third, we will pinpoint the character of Vijay as a Christ-like figure to restore the lost innocence by engendering empathy & care and defend the film from the charge of melodrama. Fourth, we will highlight the character of Vijay as an alienated poet speculating on the fate of the whole of humanity.

The film is as relevant today, if not more, as it was in the year 1957 because of its complex characterisation of Vijay with multi-level interpretations and his questions of the meanings of life, together with subtle acting, dreamy quality, and the adroit use of the expressionist technique of light and dark ahead of his time.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

The theoretical approach applied to the film “Pyasa” is hermeneutics or the four-fold levels of interpretations (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical). Hermeneutics, the theory and methodology of interpretation, is concerned with understanding and interpreting texts, symbols, actions, and expressions within their cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. It focuses on understanding the meaning, themes, symbolism, and aesthetic qualities of a literary work within the cultural and historical contexts. It also highlights the importance of understanding the beliefs, perspectives and understanding of an author. In the modern sense, hermeneutics intends to “plurality of meanings.” Frederic Jameson, in the chapter “On Interpretation” of his book “The Political Unconscious,” has interpreted the four-fold levels of interpretations with a new approach. Northrop Fry has divided them into five phases (Literal, Descriptive, Formal, Mythical and Anagogic) in his essay “Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols.”

The four-fold levels of interpretations are literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. The literal level of interpretation involves understanding the surface meaning, keeping a focus on the form, structure, and narrative of a text, and understanding its sentences in their most basic sense. It is a foundation upon which all other interpretations are built or constructed.

Going beyond the literal meaning, the allegorical level of interpretation seeks to uncover the layered storytelling and symbolic and metaphorical representations. This level is equivalent to the “formal phase” of Fry’s interpretation of a literary text. To Fry, “all literature” can be “organised” along a continuum of formal meaning from the most to least allegorical.” It means that he has divided the allegorical level into sub-levels. The sub-levels are “naïve” (educational literature), “explicit” (works of Dante, Spenser & Bunyan), “doctrine” (Milton’s Paradise Lost), “implicit” (works of Shakespeare), “ironic” (Melville’s Whale & Woolf’s Lighthouse), and “indirect” (dadaism). To Jameson, Allegory opens up “of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwriting which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations (14).” However, the focus of the article at the allegorical level of interpretation is in biographical, historical, and intertextual contexts.

The moral level of interpretation involves extracting ethical and moral interpretations from the narrative, character, and events of the text. Finally, the anagogical level of interpretation relates to the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of the text, uncovering the metaphysical reality of

salvation or ultimate truth. But, according to Jameson, it is “the fate of the whole human race, the wholesale spiritual awakening or confessional revolution that forms the teleology of human history. (Irfan Ajvazi).”

Discussion:

By keeping the objectives at the centre, the fourfold levels of Interpretations (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical) will be used for the analysis of the film. First, at the literal level, the poet Vijay, abandoned by his brothers, friend (Shyam), and beloved (Meena), struggles to get his works published. After Vijay has been presumed to be dead, his poetry gets published by the efforts of Gulab. In the end, he becomes famous and gets popularity, but he rejects it, seeing the greediness of the people all around. Contradictions and unrealism in the film force the reviewers to interpret it in many ways. And here comes the second level, allegorical. In a biographical context, the character of Vijay is the embodiment of Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi, and Sahir Ludhianvi, and, in turn, becomes a cause of unrealism; in a historical context, Vijay is a type-character, representing poets and artists, whose contributions have been neglected in the Nehruvian Age of the 1950s; and in term of intertextuality, Vijay is a Christ-like figure, endeavouring to restore the lost innocence of human beings. And here comes the third level, morals. Vijay is a marginalised character, endeavouring to engender empathy and care through his works and the film from the charge of melodrama is defended. Finally, at the anagogic level, Vijay is an alienated character, abandoning the world after seeing the dark fate of whole humanity.

The Literal Level of Interpretations:

The literal level of interpretation involves understanding the surface meaning through the structure and narrative of a text or a film and understanding its phrases and sentences in their most basic sense. The structure of the film “Pyasa” is characterized by a non-linear narrative combining romantic elements in flashbacks and dream-like shots, social criticism through poetic symbolic songs and shifting point-of-view shots from the protagonist to the outside world. Its narrative revolves around the life of a struggling poet Vijay, navigating a world dominated by greed, corruption, and superficiality. He grapples with societal rejection, identity crisis and the commodification of art.

The film begins *in medias res*. Out of his house for many days, the poet Vijay lying on the ground of a garden and reciting his song/ *nazm- Yeh Hanstey Hue Phool, Yeh Mahka Hua Gulshan* (These Smiling Flowers, these Fragrant Gardens), observes a bee drinking nectar from the flowers, and suddenly coming under the shoes of a pedestrian, got crushed and killed.

From the garden, Vijay arrives at the publishing house where his theme of poetry is degraded by Sheikh, the publisher. Seeing him in the market, his mother brings him to the house where he, being slandered by his brothers, comes to know that his poetry has been sold to the shop at the rate of scrap and from there it has been sold to an unknown lady. The unknown lady is Gulab, a prostitute, who sings Vijay's *nazm - Jane Kya Tune Kahi* (Who knows what you said?) to entice Vijay and berates him, knowing he has no money but later on gets sympathetic knowing that he is the poet whose *nazm* she has bought from the shop.

Out of the house and with no support from his family and friends, he spends nights and days sitting on the bench of a garden or a port. After getting up from the bench, he sees Meena coming out of the car and remembers their romantic relationships in flashbacks. The next day, sitting on a bench, he sees Pushpa, a college classmate, who invites him to the gatherings of former college classmates. At the gathering, he meets Meena's husband, Mr Ghosh, the owner of the Modern Publishing House, who offers Vijay a job at his office. At the Modern Publishing House, Vijay meets Meena in the lift and imagines a dream-like setting with smoke and a series of black stairs touching the moon, from where Meena descends. He sings the song - *Hum Aapki Ankhon Main, Is Dil Ko Basaa Dey To?* (What if my heart were to dwell in your eyes?). One day, Mr Ghosh organises a party and invites him to his house where he, first time in a Christ-like pose, sings *Jane Vo Kaise Log the Jinke Pyar ko Pyar Mila* (Who are the fortunate ones, who love and loved in return?). After this, Meena comes to meet Vijay and justifies her decision of getting married to Mr Ghosh. After coming out from the publishing house, Vijay saves Gulab from the policeman by saying that she is his wife. And here Gulab's spiritual connection with Vijay has been portrayed through the song- *Aaj Sajjan Mohe Ang Laga Lo* (Today, beloved, hold me in your arms).

At the river Hooghly, Vijay sees his brother performing the death rituals and comes to know that his mother is dead. This event heightens his sorrow, and he starts drinking for the first time. He visits the brothel, where he sees the helplessness of a prostitute and sings the song- *Yeh Koonchey, Yeh Neelamghar Dilkashi Ke* (These lanes, these houses of auctioned pleasure). It is

said that this song was so evocative that Nehru got affected by this song. Seeing him drunk, Gulab brings him to her house. When he becomes conscious, he contemplates suicide and arrives at the railway station where he gives his coat to a beggar. The beggar dies and Vijay gets wounded and hospitalized. Everyone thinks Vijay is dead.

Gulab spends all her savings to get Vijay's works published. His works get published and he gets popularity. Mr Ghose makes a lot of money because of its high demand and consumption in the market. A nurse reads Vijay's *nazm, Parchhayian*, and he comes out from the shock. He says to the doctor he is the poet, Vijay. The Doctor, thinking him mad, detains him in the asylum where Mr Ghose and his friend Shyam deny accepting Vijay as a poet. When Sattar, a masseur, frees him from the asylum, Vijay arrives at his house where his brothers, dealing with Mr Ghosh, also deny accepting Vijay as a poet. A large number of people gather to celebrate Vijay's death anniversary in the hall, where standing on the door in Christ-like pose sings- *Yeh Mahlon, Yeh Takhton, Yeh Taajon Ki Duniya* (The World of Palaces, Thrones, and Diadems). Here, Sheikh, the publisher, recognises Vijay as a poet. Now, his brothers and Shyam turncoats in support of Sheikh by recognising Vijay as a poet. But seeing the greediness and corruption of his friends, he abandons the popularity. And in the end, with Gulab, Vijay goes somewhere.

The Allegorical Level of Interpretation:

The literal level of interpretation is the foundation upon which all other interpretations are built. And here comes the second level, allegorical. In a biographical context, the character of Vijay was the embodiment of Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi, and Sahir Ludhianvi, and, in turn, became a cause of unrealism; in a historical context, Vijay was a type-character, representing poets and artists, whose contributions were neglected in the Nehruvian Age of the 1950s; and in term of intertextuality, Vijay was a Christ-like figure, endeavouring to restore the lost innocence of human beings.

According to Jameson, allegory's two sworn enemies are "unity of living symbol," and "realism" and fighting the enemies, a text can have "multiple meanings." "Pyasa" is charged with unrealism regarding its setting in Calcutta. According to the reviewer, there are two central points. First, "a Bengali poet writing in Urdu." Second, "Urdu poetry" has been "consumed by such great numbers. (Sengupta)." Analysing "Pyasa" in the biographical context, one can find the reason behind the discrepancy. The character Vijay was the embodiment of Guru Dutt, Sahir Ludhianvi,

and Abrar Alvi. “Pyasa” is based on Guru Dutt’s story “Kasmakash” written in 1947 in which “the character of a powerful and wealthy socialite woman of Chetana Art Gallery in Kala Ghoda who patronised art and artistes for her benefit. (Manohar Iyer)” The commodification of the art is the central issue of the film which one can find in the story “Kasmkash,” but he changed the setting from Kala Ghoda, Mumbai to Calcutta. In the 1940s, Guru Dutt worked as a telephone operator at a Lever Brothers factory in Calcutta. He was familiar with every nook and corner of Calcutta. Consequently, this place became the setting of the film.

Another reason for changing the setting to Calcutta was taking inspiration from the life of Abrar Alvi. “It is said that the character of Vijay is based on the film’s writer Abrar Alvi’s life only. Even Waheeda’s character Gulab was based on a real-life prostitute of the same name whom Abrar had met in his life. (FilmSpell).” To portray the character of Gulab, Guru Dutt planned to shoot the redlight area scenes in Sonagachhi (Calcutta), the biggest redlight area of Asia, and consequently the whole setting in Calcutta, but redlight area scenes got scraped because of some pimps, and filmed on a set. Initially, Abrar Alvi suggested the title “Pyaas,” “hinting at the thirst for fame and success in Vijay (FilmSpell),” but Guru Dutt, finally, finds the title “Pyasa” more appropriate.

Vijay as a writer does not capture the mood of the film, so Guru Dutt changed from Vijay as a writer to Vijay as a poet. Guru Dutt had recently read the “Talkhiyan” of Sahir Ludhianvi, an Urdu poet. According to Akshay Manwani, “Sahir’s words seem to articulate Guru Dutt’s view of the world and experience of tragedy. (100)” One can find many references to Sahir in the film. The name on the file of Vijay’s poetry, which Gulab hands over to Meena to get it published, is “Parchhaaiyaan.” The lines of Parchhaaiyaan were spoken by the nurse when Vijay was in the hospital. Moreover, the songs of the film were penned down by Sahir Ludhianvi.

No doubt, the life of Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi and Sahir Ludhianvi formed the character of Vijay. But the character of Vijay simultaneously retains some elements of these great figures and transcends them. In historical context, the character of Vijay was a type character, representing artists, poets, and writers whose contributions have been neglected in the Nehruvian age of economic growth and nation-building process. He was a witness to the closing of “Uday Shankar’s dance academy due to funding” which intensified his doubt “whether art could survive in a harsh consumerist world. (scroll.in).” In the film, one can find that his poetry has been separated from

Vijay by not recognising him as a poet. The commodification of art is one of the central issues of the film. Gaurav Gadgil and Sudha Tiwari rightly pointed out that “Pyasa” “deconstructed the myth of national pride” and questioned the “nation-building process,” which “marginalised the poet, the rebel and various such voices which could not contribute to the material and scientific advancement of the nation.” To restore the value of artists, writers, poets, and other marginalised classes in the nation-building process, Vijay deconstructs the myth of national pride by pointing towards the loopholes through two important songs- *Yey Hanstey Hue Phool, Ye Mehka Hua Gulshan* and *Yeh Koonchey, Yeh Neelamghar Dilkashi Ke*.

The first song, *Yey Hanstey Hue Phool, Ye Mehka Hua Gulshan*, is recited by Vijay at the beginning of the film when he, lying on the ground of the garden, observes a bee drinking the nectar of the flowers, coming under the shoes of a pedestrian got crushed and killed. Seeing the bee crushed, he suddenly changes his mood and says, “What can I offer except a few tears and sighs.” According to Gaurav Gadgil and Sudha Tiwari –

“The garden reflects the nation, and the bees represent the people. But the poet realizes and confesses he has nothing to offer to this beautiful garden, but a few tears and sighs. The poet’s confession of his inability to contribute to this success story is actually the nation’s inability to accommodate artists, poets, and sensitive minds in the nation-building process. The poet is unable to place himself within this euphoria and excitement of freedom and independence. The poem effectively brings out the truth that emotions are displaced or marginalised because they are incapable of contributing to the nation’s growth and development... (941)”

The second song, *Yeh Koonchey, Yeh Neelamghar Dilkashi Ke*, is recited by Vijay when he sees a helpless prostitute who continues dancing, though her child is weeping. It is not only about the deplorable conditions of women in the brothels but also a satire against the old narrative of national pride, probably observed in Iqbal’s song, *Saare Jahan se Achcha Hindustan Hamara* (India is better than all the worlds). By portraying the deplorable conditions of women in the brothels, Vijay says *Jinhe Naaj Hai Hind Par Woh Kahan Hain!* (Where are they who take pride in India?). This song was so provocative that Nehru got affected by it and asserted “enough of nobility and greatness about her. (Gadgil, 942).” Through this song, Dutt probably redefines the roles of poets and artists in the nation-building process. Clearly, Vijay is a type of character representing poets, writers, and artists.

Seeing the lost innocence of human beings and degrading human relationships in the age of materialism, Guru Dutt presents Vijay as a Christ-like figure. In the context of intertextuality, the journey of Vijay is parallel to that of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ comes on the Earth to save whole humanity from sins, first done by Adam in Eve and then by their progeny and restoring the lost Eden. Similarly, through his poetry, Vijay as a Christ-like figure endeavours to restore the Lost Eden of innocence by liberating human beings from the sins of materialist systems, corrupting the human beings to the core. According to the reviewer, Harshdeep Gill –

“...the way Vijay, who is presumed dead by the world, reappears or you can say resurrects to see he is being posthumously celebrated for his great work, references what happened with Jesus Christ. Guru Dutt also makes excellent use of symbolism to further this analogy by constantly placing Vijay in the Christ pose and giving him intense backlight to symbolize a holy figure.”

The Moral Level of Interpretation:

The moral level of interpretation involves extracting ethical and moral interpretations from the narrative, character and events of a text or a film. Through the film, “Pyasa,” Guru Dutt endeavours to engender empathy and care, the foundation of human relationships, in human beings. Vijay as a marginalised character demands empathy and care from human beings which is no more in the materialistic system. How the system has devoured the innocence of human beings and human beings treat one another as objects, can be observed in the movies. Three central characters possess empathy and care – Vijay, Gulab, and somewhat Sattar. All other characters are presented as devoid of empathy and care. Through a dialogue with Shyam and Vijay, one can find how the system has lessened the feelings of human beings:

“Shyam: Hungry? You’ll end up starving to death. As for me, I got 200 rupees from a rich man today.

Vijay: How?

Shyam: He ran over an old woman’s leg, but I gave false witness for him.

Vijay: Shyam, remember how you found a lamed sparrow as a kid? You cared for it until it was better.

Shyam: I was only a kid then. But you’re still the kid. (Pyasa; 12:00)”

Rakesh Sengupta has charged “Pyasa as a Melodrama of Authorship” on two grounds- (1) “an empathetic identification with the poet’s emotional life through diegetic and sensory cues” meaning that viewers can find the poet’s emotional life through the way story unfolds and through shifting point-of-view shots from the outside world to the poet’s face, and (2) “ a melodramatic excess which launches a critique of the postcolonial nation-state”, meaning that Vijay’s problems were manifested through a critic of the nation-building process.

In defence of the charge of “Pyasa” being a melodrama, one can observe this. The character of Vijay has been presented as a powerless hero who can do nothing but show empathy and care through his face. Guru Dutt uses shifting point-of-view shots from the outside world to the poet’s face to highlight empathy. For example, in the brothel scene, when Vijay sees a prostitute keeps dancing through her child weeping. The shifting point-of-view shots from the poet’s face to the dancing prostitute and the weeping child. One can observe the tear in his eyes. The purpose of Guru Dutt in doing so is simultaneously to highlight the empathetic quality of human beings and to make the audience realise that these issues can be abolished by collective efforts.

The Anagogical Level of Interpretation:

The anagogical level of interpretation relates to the spiritual and transcendental dimensions of the text, uncovering the metaphysical reality of salvation or ultimate truth. One can observe a spiritual connection between Vijay and Gulab, the only characters in the movie having empathy and care. This spiritual connection has been shown through the song, *Aaj Sajan Mohe Ang Laga Lo* (Today, beloved, hold me in your arms). The inner feeling of Gulab is shown through the song sung by a religious woman in the film. Akshay Manwani asserted:

“There is an outstanding double entendre in his (Sahir) lyrics in this song. The words, at once, serve as a devotional song for the character of the singer as well as a prayer by Gulab for Vijay to deliver her from a life of sleaze and suffering. (Manwani 2013: 99)”

Further, at the end of the movie, Gulab spiritually feels that Vijay is calling her and when she goes outside, she finds him coming. Both of them, leaving this world, go together keeping hand in hand.

The character of Vijay has been presented as a Christ-like figure. But if the character of Vijay is analysed in the light of Jameson’s understanding of an anagogical level of interpretation,

one can find Vijay as an alienated character seeing the dark fate of the whole of humanity. Vijay endeavours to engender “the wholesale spiritual awakening or confessional revolution” regarding restoring the lost innocence through empathy and care but in the film, he failed. This is the reason, he, rejecting the popularity, abandons the whole world. This can be best exemplified through the song, *Yeh Mahlon, Yeh Takhton, Yeh Taajon Ki Duniya* (The World of Palaces, Thrones, and Diadems).

“Burn it, annihilate such a world,

Burn it, burn it, annihilate such a world,

Remove such a world from before my eyes,

It is yours, this world is for you to lord over,

What does it matter even if one has such a world at his feet?”

(Manwani 2013: 104)

Conclusion:

Guru Dutt’s “Pyasa” is universally acknowledged as a classic because of the complex character of Vijay, multi-layered storytelling, dreamy quality, and expressionist technique of light and dark. It critiques the materialist system by pointing towards degrading human relationships and questions the meaning of life. The film and the character of Vijay are analysed in the light of Hermeneutics or the four-fold levels of interpretations. The character of Vijay in the movie is elusive. First, at the literal level, Vijay as a poet, abandoned by his beloved, brothers, and friends, grapples with the greed, corruption, and commodification of art to get his works published. This is the foundation on which, all other interpretations are built.

At the Allegorical level, the character of Vijay is analysed in three contexts- biographical, historical, and intertextual. In the context of biography, the character of Vijay is formed by Guru Dutt, Abrar Alvi, and Sahir Ludhianvi. Dutt’s life spent in Calcutta becoming the setting of the film, Alvi’s meeting with a real-life prostitute of the same name adopted in the film, and Sahir’s writing poetry in Urdu becoming a model for Vijay are some real-life examples associated with these figures. In the historical context, Vijay is a type of character representing the poets, writers, and artists whose contributions have been overlooked in the Nehruvian age of economic prosperity.

Guru Dutt endeavours to restore their roles in the nation-building process by deconstructing the myth of national pride. In the context of intertextuality, Vijay is a Christ-like figure to restore lost innocence by engendering empathy and care through his works.

At the moral level of interpretation, Vijay is a marginalised character, trying to engender empathy and care in human beings, but he fails in doing so. Argued against “Pyasa being a Melodrama,” the shifting point-of-view shots have been taken to highlight empathy and Vijay has been presented as a powerless hero who can only show empathy and care because the problems can be eradicated by collective efforts.

At the anagogical level of interpretation, a spiritual connection between Vijay and Gulab has been shown throughout the film. Moreover, Vijay is an alienated and defeated character, visualising the dark fate of the whole humanity.

One can observe that the character of Vijay is elusive- from a poet to a type character, to a Christ-like figure, to a marginalised character, and finally to an alienated and defeated character. We cannot pinpoint that the character of Vijay falls under this and this category. The character of Vijay opens up to multiple levels, which can be further analysed in detail. “Pyasa,” transcending the boundaries of mainstream commercial cinema through the elusive character of Vijay appropriate in all ages, continues to be celebrated as a significant contribution to Indian cinema.

Works Cited:

Ajvazi, Irfan. “Reading Jameson’s Allegory and Ideology.” Philarchive.org, 19 Dec 2021, URL (accessed 05-05-23).

Bhattacharjee, Sunayan and Amrita Chakraborty. “Feminist Messages in Guru Dutt’s Pyaasa (1957): A Distinctive Case Study.” *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2022.

Bhowmik, Tathagata. “The Relevance of Pyaasa in a Materialistic World.” Film Companion (filmcompanion.in), 20 May 2022, URL (accessed 12—05-23).

Chatterjee, Partha. “Indian Cinema: Then and Now.” *India International Centre Quarterly*, Volume 39, Number 2, 2012, pp. 45-53.

Chettiar, Blessy. "Pyasa@60review: Poignant tale of Sensitive Soul in a Selfish World". Cinestaan, 14 Feb 2019, URL (accessed 10-05-23).

Dev, Kapil and Shivani Thakar. "First as Tragedy, Then as Farce: A Comparative Analysis of Guru Dutt's Pyasa and Imtiaz Ali's Rockstar." *Smart Moves Journal IJELLH*, Volume 5, Issue 10, 2017.

Dhall, Karan. "15 Things You Didn't Know about Guru Dutt's Pyasa." Film Companion, 19 Feb 2022, URL (accessed 11-05-23)

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Gadgil, Gaurav and Sudha Tiwari. "Poetics of Pyasa and Narratives of National Disillusionment." *Indian History Congress*, Volume 74, 2013, pp. 938-944.

Ghaywan, Neeraj. "Existentialism, the Absurd and Pyasa." Neerajghaywan.wordpress.com, 12 March 2009, URL (accessed 15-05-23).

Ghosh, Partha S. "Nehruvian Cinema and Politics." *India International Centre Quarterly*, Volume 46, Number 2, 2019, pp. 90-99.

Gill, Harshdeep Singh. "Breaking Down Guru Dutt's Masterpiece Pyasa (1957)." Medium (medium.com), 29 June 2021, URL (accessed 15-05-23)

Iyer, Manohar. "The Grey Dusk of Guru Dutt." Keepalivemusic.com, 10 Oct 2020, URL (accessed 11-05-23).

Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Routledge Classics, 2002.

Kabir, Nasreen Munni. "' Pyassa' is the Guru Dutt Gift Keeps Giving." Scroll (scroll.in), 17 Oct 2015, URL (accessed 10-05-23).

Mahadevan, Sudhir. "Early Cinema in South Asia: The Place of Technology in Narratives of its Emergence." *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Volume 54, Number 2, 2013, pp. 141-144.

Manwani, Akshay. *Sahir Ludhianvi: The People's Poet*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2013.

Misra, Nimisha. "The Melancholic Majesty of Guru Dutt." QRIUS (qrius.com), 10 July 2018. URL (accessed 10-05-23).

Mitra, Devdan. "A Life Behind the Scenes." The Telegraph (telegraphindia.com), 13 Aug 2021, URL (accessed 11-05-23).

Rebanal, Jaime. "'Pyasa' Review: Guru Dutt's Hauntingly Semi-Autobiographical Poem." Cinema from the Spectrum, 3 June 2019, URL (accessed 16-05-23).

Satakshi. "Guru Dutt's 'Thirsty' Poem on Celluloid: Pyasa (1957)." FilmSpell (filmspell.com), 17 March 2020, URL (accessed 12-05-23).

Sengupta, Rakesh. "Negotiating Empathy and Excess: Pyasa as a Melodrama of Authorship." *Literature/Film Quarterly*.

Sharma, Sampada. "Pyasa: Guru Dutt Questions the Meaning of Life in this Timeless Classic." Bollywood Rewind (indianexpress.com), 20 June 2021, URL (accessed 15-05-23).

Szondi, Peter and Timothy Bahti. "Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics." *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Volume 10, Number 1, 1978, pp. 17-29.