

The Haryanvi Cinema: An Overview

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Production of films in Haryanvi dialect began as soon as Haryana was carved out of the Punjab as a separate state in 1966, and the debut Haryanvi film *Dharti* was released in 1968. It was followed by a few more Haryanvi films in the coming years. *Dharti* (1968) touched upon the indigenous theme of farmers' occupation and their attachment to the land. It was followed by *Harphool Singh Jat Julani* (1970), which was a realistic movie based on the legendry life of a local Robinhood who looted the rich and extended benevolence to the poor. *Beera Shera* was released in 1973 and *Bahurani* in 1982. These movies however failed to make their presence felt in any significant way in the cine world. The movies produced so far did not do well on the box office. It was only with *Chandrawal* (1984) that a regional film was able to create ripples in the world of Haryanvi cinema. *Chandrawal* proved to be the real blockbuster that pulled endless crowds in cinema halls not only in Haryana but also in neighbouring regions like western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi countryside. These people who share cultural affinities rooted in the peasant way of life were greatly enchanted with the theme, music and lyrics of this movie. Its well-knit plot focussed on the inter-caste love ventures between Suraj a Jat boy and Chandrawal a Gadia Lohar girl. They fall in love and wish to marry, being unmindful of the fierce opposition they will face from their respective love-unfriendly patriarchal ilks. The inter-caste love or marriage in Haryana still continues to be a fatal idea.

Chandrawal and its charms woven around its scintillating lyrics, folk dance, earthy comedy and music are ageless. Some of its songs like "Jija Tu Kala Mai Gori Ghani", "Main Suraj Tu Chandrawal Mhara Joda Thath Ka", "Gaade Aali Gajban Chhori Bahadurgarh Ka Bomb" and "Nain Katore Kajal Dore" etc. still catch the imagination of the audience. The names associated with the movie like Usha Sharma (producer and actress), Devi Shankar Prabhakar

(script writer), Jayant Prabhakar (director), Bhal Singh (singer), Jagat Jakhar (actor) and J.P. Kaushik (music director) became household names. The hilarious comedy by Roondah (Naseeb Singh Kundu) and Khoondah (Daryav Singh Malik) is still recalled with broad smile on the face. The movie brought about some changes in terms of public thinking including woman's access to cinema halls as audience. Earlier, women rarely went to theatres for watching movies. But *Chandrawal* broke this whammy and pulled men and women alike towards cinema halls riding in tractor-trolleys, and enjoying the forbidden subject of love and that also an inter-caste one. Regretfully this flight of imagination remained only in the sky like the rainbow and could not take roots in Haryanvi soil notorious for its anti-love attitude.

The next Haryanvi movie was *Lado Basanti* (1985). In this movie, Basanti is married off to Harbir, a soldier, as a reward after a wrestler from Harbir's village defeats his opponent from Basanti's village in an open *dangal* of wrestling. It was a pact between the headmen of these two villages in which young girls were dived for marriage. Soon after the marriage, Harbir is summoned to join his military duty immediately in the wake of the turmoil between India and Pakistan along the J&K border. During the war, Harbir undertakes a dangerous assignment, gets captured by the Pak army and is thought to be killed and burnt. Years later, he reappears dramatically and tells about his imprisonment by the enemy. He narrates the traumatic events following his capture and the inhuman torture he suffers at the hands of the Pak army in a flashback manner. In *Lado Basanti*, a good social bonhomie across castes is depicted when the whole village joins the *bhaat* ceremony of Basanti's son as all the members of her natal family have died in the *Kaatak* epidemic (Kartik plague). The songs "Aliye Gali Mein Ri Nandi Manara Phire", "Mera Chundar Manga De Ho Nandi Ke Beera" and "Mera Nau Dandi Ka Beejna" which form part of this movie are still enjoyable to the mind and the heart alike even today. The character of Lala Mukundi, a typically miser shopkeeper, played by the comedian Daryav Singh Malik, is still itched in the popular memory of the Haryanvi people.

Gulabo (1987) was the next Haryanvi film. It was about an unusual tale of love between Karan, a school teacher, (also a widow's son), and Gulabo, a daughter of a muscleman in the village. The muscleman's goons have already killed Karan's father too when he opposes their attempt to rape his young wife. The problem of freedom to love raised in this movie is not new to Haryana and its people. The lovers always regret to be born in Haryana. The song "Re Gori Tera

Joban Kare Re Kamal' from this movie is worth listening. Humour in the movie is a poor copy of the one in *Chandrawal*.

Later movies such as *Bairee* (1988), *Phool Badan* (1986), *Chandro* (2001), *Jatani* (1991), *Chora Jat Ka* (1991), *Panghat, Mhari Dharti Mhari Maa* (1986), *Sanjhi* (1985), *Lilo Chaman* (1985), *Chhail Gabru* (1985), *Chhail Gaeleian Jaangi* (1985), *Chand Chakori* (2001) and *Maati Kare Pukar* (2014) etc. are a few other Haryanvi movies. Most of them take up the issues of love, family feuds or soldiers' patriotism. *Zar, Zoru aur Zameen* (1988) chauvinistically puts blame on wealth, women and land for all skirmishes in the world in a typical masculinist fashion. In this film, two families in blood relationship come to be at daggers drawn against each other over a piece of land and the related inheritance issues. *Laado* (2000) won accolades. *Pagdi: The Honour* (2014) received two National Film Awards in 62nd Film festival for Best Supporting Actress (Baljinder Kaur) and Best Feature Film in Haryanvi. But *Satranghi* (2016) and *Chandrawal-2* failed to make any noticeable impact. However, some songs that continue to charm the listeners are: "Kothe Chad Lalkaru", "Manne Aave Hichki", "Meri Patli Kamar Nada Jhubedaar Layio", "Ae Nanih Nanhi Bundiya Pade", "Mera Daman Dhara Heri Aale Mein", "Upar Chad Ke Sogi Chandro", "Sasre Ne Jaagi Bebe", etc. These songs get people of all ages carried away lyrically and musically.

The fact remains that most of the Haryanvi movies barring *Chandrawal* so far could cut enough ice with people. Unfortunately, the diversity and novelty of themes that the land of Haryana offers still lie unexplored on the silver screen. The music (the mainstay of any popular movie in India) remains repetitive in most of the Haryanvi movies, and their plots haphazard lacking any kind of organic unity. The plots are jerkily thrown into comic scenes, involving crude jokes, physical horseplay and mimicry besides overabundant use of smoking, drinking and offensive idiom. The ill-timed comedy stymies the progress of plots, albeit some comedians have acted admirably. Music too suffers from repetitive chorus and tunes. Conscious mix of Hindi words with Haryanvi dialect compromises with the chaste Haryanvi idiom and tone and thus impedes the free flow of empathies between the screen and the audience. Mostly, the actors are not only amateur but also uninitiated in the art. Usually they are the producers and financiers and take it as their right to project themselves as heroes and heroines. Naturally their acting becomes laboured and forced. Dialogues are crude and stereotypical lacking in fluidity and subtlety. Hence,

several plots linger with a considerable scope for improvement. Actions, fighting scenes and sound effects are imitated from Hindi movies, but again in a very crude way using obsolete technology.

In this way, the euphoria generated out of the zeal to make the presence of Haryana felt in the cine world also could hardly become a serious movement barring a few and far between moments. Today when one looks at the trajectory of Haryanvi cinema, one cannot but admit that Haryanvi cinema has scarcely been conspicuous enough both in quantity as well as quality, to be equated with the mainstream Hindi cinema i.e. Bollywood. And there have been valid socio-economic-cultural reasons for it. Cinema has never been looked upon as a neat and clean profession by Haryanvi patriarchs till recently, and going to cinema halls was considered to be a sin and a sure sign of waywardness. Economically also Haryana could not harbour a clan of adventurous industrialists and professionals in its recent history who could venture into film-making in a serious way, Obviously most of the films produced in Haryanvi dialect have been the outcome of some individuals' amateurish efforts. Besides because of some cultural conspiracy Haryanvi language has been derided as something blunt and aggressive that can cause not any nuanced romantic expression but only violence. It was systematically repeated that 'in the name of culture there is only agriculture in Haryana'. And Haryanvi people too began to believe in it! The Bollywood in 1940s and 50s used Haryanvi expressions and folk melodies in an aesthetic way. But soon afterwards this trend disappeared. 1970s onwards many of the Indian vernaculars were manipulated by the Bollywood to display either villainy or crude humour, and Haryanvi has been no exception to it. The fact of the matter is that Haryanvi artists as well as the Bollywood did not care to engage themselves with Haryanvi dialect and culture in a fruitful way. They forgot quite easily that 'agriculture' too has its own 'culture' developed around the peasantry and its life-cycle.

The Bollywood has started showing a keen interest in Haryana in recent years cashing in on its glaring socio-cultural realities in an exotic way. And its outcome is many blockbuster movies like *Dangal*, *Sultan*, *Tanu Weds Manu* etc. One positive reason for Bollywood's newly-born love-interest in Haryana lies in the phenomenal performance the Haryanvi sportspersons have shown on international platforms like Olympics, Asiad and Commonwealth Games. It (Bollywood) went ahead experimenting with sports-based movies. A movie like *Dangal*, based

on Mahavir Singh Phogat, a wrestler, and his wrestler daughters, was recently been a blockbuster not only in India but also in China. Other successful movies are: Salman-Anushka starrer *Sultan*, and Kangana Ranaut starrer *Tanu Weds Manu*. Other reasons, mostly negative, can be traced in the changing economic and social scenario in Haryana in the wake of Globalization. The pitfalls in Haryanvi setup interested the Bollywood producers and the result has been exotic movies like *NH 10*, *Khap*, etc.

Like mainstream Hindi cinema that largely shies away from representation of lower castes or Dalits as protagonists, the Haryanvi films, too, deal with upper-caste dominance alone. The inter-caste love plots/fantasies fit into their scheme of things only for earning money. So much interest lies in it instead of actual state of caste issues and the skirmishes that rise due to upper-castes dominance over dalits. Currently Haryana faces ignominy of 'honour' killings. Inter-caste marriage is looked down upon within traditional Haryana patriarchal setup. In rural areas where the infamous Khap Panchayats still rule the roost, inter-caste and inter-community unions may draw fatal results besides harassment and ostracism of the liberty takers. Haryana is different from other states with regard to its local traditions. The younger generations do find it tough to coalesce into the diktats of old social order. So, Haryana witnesses the plight of the runaway couples. Haryanvi cinema here lacks intrepidity. Multiple dialects - Baangru, Bagdi, Punjabi, Khari Boli, Ahirwati and Rajasthani - also pose acceptability issue as one dialect cannot be enjoyed by the others. The challenges faced by the Haryanvi cinema can be summed up as follows: parallel Bollywood dominance, gender and caste-biased representation, paucity of spectators, poor cinematography, desynchronisation, dearth of professional directors and scriptwriters, non-availability of trained and experienced actors/actresses and no shooting studios.

It was only in 2014 that State University of Performing and Visual Arts (SUPVA), Rohtak was founded to promote Fine Arts, Film and Television, etc. The university endeavours to provide infrastructure and the required impetus in fields such as Fine Arts, Acting and Cinema. The nova-riche landed gentry now dares to venture into new arenas of profession and entertainment. The quick money, rapid urbanization and cracks in the social structures have led to many kinds of gender and caste related conflicts. These conflicts are staple diet for the social media, and cinema as an industry is more than willing to encash these burning issues. Many

talented actors and technicians have entered the Bollywood whose ethnic identity prompts the script writers and directors to focus on Haryana as a subject-matter. But the moot point is that the Haryanvi cinema itself has not been able to accomplish what the professional Bollywood cash in on. Haryanvi cinema, to read between the lines, has been standstill, insufficient and taciturn so far; and that is debatable how a cinema that once looked promising fell miserably in the ambit of insignificance. Keeping in view the recent rapid changes in the material as well as psychological landscape of Haryana, one can hope that its cinema will get a fresh lease of life in the coming decades.