

Marium Sultan

Professor Moorti

Indian Cinema

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Andaz the Social Film

Andaz is a film with strong moralistic undertones. It includes many tropes and techniques that we have seen in other social films such as *Pyaasa*, *Awara*, and *Mother India*. It includes themes of family conflict, dissolution of social identity and melodrama (“Shifting Codes”). In this essay, I will examine scenes and filmic elements that contribute to coding this movie as a social film.

A transgression, namely desire, is the focus of narrative attention. Although, it is male desire for her that haunts Neena, it is her desire and who she has it for that is the subject of contention. Even though she is cleared of the charge of desiring someone other than her husband- "what counts is what the heroine provokes..", as Mulvey writes. Neena provokes desire in Dilip. Without the bloody ending the heroine could not protect herself from the voyeuristic-scopophilic look, because even in the absence of the real Dilip, a vision of him stays in her home and appears in her mirror (Mulvey). I see the moral of the film as the necessity of maintaining traditional Indian social conventions in the face of a Westernizing India. It is set in the modern day at the time of filming, which is a prerequisite for the social according to Vasudevan (“The Melodramatic Mode.”). The convention the movie focuses on the disruption that comes with friendship between men and women who are not married to each other. The plot shows the

consequences that come with defying this boundary, namely, unwanted desire and the dissolution of husband/wife bonds.

Neena's father's portrait is a device used to cure Neena of two different ills- withdrawal from the world and Westernization. The idea of visual representation having power may stem from Hinduism, where representations of Gods are pathways to their blessings. First, Dilip uses a picture of her father to cure Neena of her silence after his death. Her gaze focuses on nothing for two days. He takes the picture of her father and puts it in front of her eyes. She looks and walks in a circle, following it as Dilip moves it and her gaze focuses. Taking a certain kind of darshan from her father allows her to reenter the world. Later another portrait of the father teaches values in line with the moral of the movie. Neena's father's advice is ignored in life, but his portrait, like the portrait of Rita in *Awara*, leads the main character to reconsider their actions. The portrait begins talking to Neena only after Dilip has told her he loves her, when she has realized her transgression. Although the portrait says nothing that we haven't heard her father say, all that is said is seen in a new light now. In contrast to *Awara*, *Andaz* uses male, rather than female, figures as moral centers, although all of them fail to impart necessary values. The father and the professor both know what is in line with the moral of the movie, but are incapable of setting the course straight. In this film the only redemption can come from the woman realizing her mistake and repenting.

A crucial scene is that of the wedding night. Neena is shown to be regretful of her actions. The filming of this scene mirrors and distorts the ideal wedding night scene shown in *Mother India*. As a leading point, Dilip is playing the piano at the wedding party. Neena gets up and leaves, running playfully to her bridal room. Rajun follows behind. When she looks out the window there is a storm. The storm signifying an inner or moral storm appears in *Pyaasa* and

Awara. Outside she hears singing of Dilip. His song haunts her; the lyrics include 'what have you stolen?', the lyrics tell us we should see her as a thief (Chatterjee 52). The clouds are heavy in the sky and the wind blows her bird cage down. The symbol of the cage falling down at the time that transgression/ a transgressive force is introduced is also shown in *Charulata*. Neena keeps hearing Dilip say he loves her and Rajun comes in from window, having the door shut to him. This can symbolize how Neena doesn't have space for him to enter now that Dilip dominates her mind. This is surely shown later through her nightly dreams and coldness towards Rajun. Then in this scene, Neena sits down and covers her face with her shawl. Rajun says that she as a new bride is feeling shame/shyness (shram). He asks her why she is sitting like an old fashioned bride. The room is dark and she is shadowed. Rajun pulls her sari over her head, to complete the picture and she falls to his feet. The feet touching makes a clear parallel with *Mother India*, but is used ironically because both the bride and groom know the same conventions haven't been followed prior to this day. This night has been tainted by not only her relationship with Dilip, but also her closeness with Rajun before it was appropriate.

The love triangles in the film are captured often by aligning the actors in actual triangles. Many common images lead up to the Rajun/Neena/Dilip triangle, and gazes play a big part when it finally aligns. The last scene prior to the entry of Rajun starts with Neena, dancing and singing about love between columns in house. She is holding her tiny dog- a highly western pet. As she is descending the stairs the camera pans out to capture more of the house. The house is totally in Western style and shows the forces of Westernization engulfing Neena, who sings about permissible love (for her fiancée). She doesn't look the viewer in the eyes, but looks off at an absent Rajun. Dilip enters house, dwarfed with giant paintings. He stands behind her, looking at her while she looks ahead, but not at us, and doesn't see him. She turns back to him and they

both look in a parallel direction but do not make eye contact. The estrangement has begun to be seen through positioning, even though the estranging event has not occurred yet in the plot. The scene then cuts to a plane landing and Rajun meeting Neena. In this part the situation is repeated, but with Rajun present. She looks at him while Dilip looks at her. They stand in a triangle. Then he averts his eyes to the side, knowing his dream to have her is unfulfillable, and breaks the triangle. The triangle of gazes also arises a few times at the piano previously between Neena, Sheela and Dilip. No better ways to represent a love triangle than to have the participants form an actual triangle. This tableau renders the central theme of the film, the destruction of the husband/wife (two person) relationship, in clear visible signs (“Addressing the spectator of a ‘third world’...”). This is an inversion of the more common unreturned gaze described by Vasudevan *Andaz* is a movie made for the Indian audience, validating traditional norms in a technologically modern fashion (“Indian Cinema: Pleasures”) (“Shifting Codes”).

The court scene at the end of movie is a trope also used in *Awara*, although it serves as a frame in that film. There is a “relay between the familial, social and sacred” in the ending scenes (“Addressing the spectator of a ‘third world’...”). The social/legal institution of the court inquires as to familial matters, and the proper actions in that sphere are decided by religion and tradition. When the camera goes to Neena she looks completely wild. Her face is in soft focus, as it is when she visits Dilip in the hospital. Her hair is on end and her eyes contain pain. The soft focus shows she is disconnected from herself. Her husband says he doesn’t recognize her. He accuses her of making innocent Dilip fall in love with her with her Western ways. She admits she is guilty because she never listened to society or her father. None of this is relevant to the legal accusation of her killing Dilip, but it matters because her faithfulness as a wife is what is actually

in question. The court is more of a metaphorical than literal court and is concerned with family values.

The Ramayana also seems to be an inspiration in *Andaz*. Neena, in the end, fits into the female devotional idiom (“Addressing the spectator of a ‘third world’...”), like Sita. Rahda in *Mother India* emblemizes the stance that Indian woman are meant to only love one man their whole life, as Dilip writes in his letter. Even though her husband is gone forever she still can never be with another man (“once a priest offers flowers to deity he can never offer them to anyone again”). When Neena calls Rajun her God she is invoking the male sacred authority in order to protect herself from judgment. The court scene is analogous to Sita’s trial by fire, and the letter from Dilip, stating Neena’s innocence, is similar to the Gods coming to absolve Sita. However, Neena brought a lustful gaze upon herself through her mistakes, albeit unknowingly. Even though it is found out she never loved Dilip she still transgressed. That is why the letter comes too late. She accepts her punishment and through her prison bars makes a plea that her daughter be raised in a way that glorifies Indian and rejects Western tradition. The third generation shown in the film now has the potential to be saved from the sins of the second.

Andaz is a film with much potential to be studied. It is obvious the filmmaker is very intentional with his use of symbolism, blocking, dialogue and camera angles. *Andaz* functions as a commentary on the destruction of traditional family integrity caused by the Westernization of Indian society, and provides insight into issues worrying Indian audiences in the late 1940’s. Mehboob Khan, like the character of the professor, seems to believe ‘you can’t compose a Western tune on a harmonium’, at least not without consequences.

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