

Perspectives of World Cinemas (DE 410)

Film Review by Himanshu Upreti (173059004)

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Majid Majidi

Children of Heaven



Director - Majid Majidi

Release year - 1994

Plot:

The movie revolves around two children Ali and Zahra, and their way of dealing with the problem without bothering their parents. Ali accidentally loses his sister's shoes when he was picking up some potatoes in a kiosk. They decide to keep it secret from their parents considering the poor condition of their parents. They had only one pair of shoes left and Zahra and Ali have to take turn to wear it. The answer is simple: Zahra will wear Ali's sneakers to school every morning, and then run home so that Ali can put them on for his school in the afternoon. But Zahra cannot always run fast enough, and Ali, who is a good student, gets in trouble for being late to class. Later as the story continues, Zahra finds a girl in her school is having her shoes, but she solemnly regards her own precious lost shoes when she knows that the shoes was taken by the student's blind father who works as scavenger. Ali then joins a race where third winner will get shoes, he wins but gets the first place instead. The movie ends with Ali sitting on the edge of the pond with many fish, his feet full of wound after the race and his shoes are torn apart.

Neo Realism: General Characteristics

- They are generally filmed with nonprofessional actors (though, in a number of cases, well known actors were cast in leading roles, playing strongly against their normal character types in front of a background populated by local people rather than extras brought in for the film).
- Such movies are usually shot in mostly poor neighbourhoods and in countryside. The subject matter involves life among the impoverished and the working class. However, I don't think that should be any necessary condition for neorealism.
- Realism is always emphasized, and performances are mostly constructed from scenes of people performing fairly mundane and everyday activities, completely devoid of the self-consciousness that amateur acting usually entails.
- Neorealist films generally feature children in major roles, though their roles are frequently more observational than participatory.

Analysis of the movie

- Children of Heaven is seems to be a very good example of early neo-realism and director has molded it into a more Iranian sense of Realism.
- The film's two young stars are as guileless as possible, even when the film contrives to turn the shoe issue into its main dramatic focus.

- Movie shows a very touching plot which everyone can understand. This movie can be included into one of idealist movie leaving the market aspect. Another such idealist movie that comes to my mind is **Lunchbox by Ritesh Batra**. I found lunchbox and children of heaven as a perfect example of neorealism.
- In "Children of Heaven," life in Teheran is documented in everyday detail, from the less desirable potatoes available to Ali's family to the way a woolen garment is carefully unraveled so it can be knitted into something else. Eking out a living is especially tough for a family of Turkish origin living in the southern part of the city, a neighborhood duly contrasted with a wealthy area in the north.
- Majid Majidi is part of the Iranian New Wave filmmakers. These filmmakers' work share some characteristics with the European art films of the period, in particular Italian Neorealism. Children of Heaven is just one example of Majid Majidi's films which takes neo-realism and molds it into a more Iranian sense of realism.
- There were many repetition of elements may be to demonstrate symbolic meaning in the film
 - the firm bonding of the Ali with the family, especially the father
 - the action of running, rushing of cycle etc
 - ali often connecting with the outside world in moments of solitude and depression (scene with the fishes in the pond)
 - flowing streams symbolizing some kind of loss
 - Majidi's poetic endings that stress on resurrection, or the destruction of the new and beloved which is then REPLACED by the new
- There is flow in the movie, something bad happens, protagonist handles it gracefully there seems a new hope but again something bad happens. It can be related to life of normal person
- The movie also seemed to be cinematic or dramatic, like when Ali's request is accepted to join the run without even eligible for run, or the lost shoes were found to be wore by one of schoolmate of Zahra. However, most of part were pretty realistic

Conclusions

Overall, the movie was sensitive, sensible, realistic for every group of society, beautifully directed and is more than one time watch. Bollywood director **Priyadarshan** has also tried to remake the movie with a little different ending in his movie **Bumm Bumm Bole**.

<https://education.burnsfilmcenter.org/education/classrooms/168/projects/756>

<http://cinematicreactions.blogspot.in/2013/12/children-of-heaven-1997.html>

<https://peepingcat.wordpress.com/2014/07/24/children-of-heaven-1997-the-shoe-and-siblings/>

- In "Children of Heaven," life is sweet despite countless hardships, and no reality beyond the economic intrudes upon a fairy tale atmosphere. Only through heavy-handed emphasis does the quest for new sneakers take on any greater meaning.
- Ali accidentally loses his sister's shoes when he was picking up some potatoes in a kiosk. Due to their poor condition, they decide to keep it secret from their parents. Because now there is only one pair of shoes left, Zahra and Ali have to take turn to wear it. Zahra in the morning and Ali in the afternoon. They rush to meet everyday so Ali won't be late to go to school, but Ali just cannot be on time how fast he runs. Zahra finds her shoes worn by another student in her school, but she backs off when she knows that the shoes was taken by the student's blind father who works as scavenger. Ali then joins a race where third winner will get shoes, he wins but gets the first place instead. The movie ends with Ali sitting on the edge of the pond with many fish, his feet full of wound after the race and his shoes are torn apart.
- In "Children of Heaven," life in Teheran is documented in everyday detail, from the less desirable potatoes available to Ali's family to the way a woolen garment is carefully unraveled so it can be knitted into something else. Eking out a living is especially tough for a family of Turkish origin living in the southern part of the city, a neighborhood duly contrasted with a wealthy area in the north.
- It's typical of Mr. Majidi's reliance on the expected that this journey of hope ends in frustration. And that a lonely rich child materializes out of nowhere, eager to make Ali his instant best friend.
- The film's two young stars are as guileless as possible, even when the film contrives to turn the shoe issue into its main dramatic focus. Ali and Zahra meet secretly in the middle of each school day to pass along the sneakers, but that proves to be no solution. Zahra is hampered by ill-fitting shoes at the rigorous girls' school that she attends. (The film is a production of Iran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, so all school scenes look beneficial and wholesome.) And Ali, against all odds, determines to run a long-distance race and win the third-place prize of running shoes for Zahra.
- Cinematic and real at the same time
- "Children of Heaven" does provide a kindly, enveloping sense of Iranian life and customs, from the way the family prepares sugar cubes to be served at a mosque to the way Zahra helps care for elderly neighbors. These moments come more easily to Mr. Majidi than his studiously bittersweet ending for what is, despite its surface bleakness, an essentially sunny story.
- **PLOT**
- The film is about a boy who loses his sister's shoes. He takes them to the cobbler for repairs, and on the way home, when he stops to pick up vegetables for his mother, a blind trash collector accidentally carries them away. Of course, the boy, named Ali, is afraid to tell his parents. Of course, his sister, named Zahra, wants to know how

she is supposed to go to school without shoes. The children feverishly write notes to each other, right under their parent's noses.

- The answer is simple: Zahra will wear Ali's sneakers to school every morning, and then run home so that Ali can put them on for his school in the afternoon. But Zahra cannot always run fast enough, and Ali, who is a good student, gets in trouble for being late to class. And there is a heartbreaking scene where Zahra solemnly regards her own precious lost shoes, now on the feet of the ragpicker's daughter.

Neo Realism: General Characteristics

- They are generally filmed with nonprofessional actors (though, in a number of cases, well known actors were cast in leading roles, playing strongly against their normal character types in front of a background populated by local people rather than extras brought in for the film).
- They are shot almost exclusively on location, mostly in poor neighborhoods and in the countryside.
- The subject matter involves life among the impoverished and the working class.
- Realism is always emphasized, and performances are mostly constructed from scenes of people performing fairly mundane and everyday activities, completely devoid of the self-consciousness that amateur acting usually entails.
- Neorealist films generally feature children in major roles, though their roles are frequently more observational than participatory.

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Majidi has a few motifs running through his films such as:

- the firm bonding of the central character with the family, especially the father;
- the action of running;
- protagonists often connecting with the outside world/nature in moments of solitude and depression (Ali being "consoled" by the fishes of the pond (incidentally, the gold fish is a sign of good omen in Iran)),
- flowing streams symbolizing some kind of loss;
- Majidi's poetic endings that stress on resurrection, or the destruction of the new and beloved which is then REPLACED by the new.

Motif: The repetition of an element to demonstrate symbolic meaning in a film.

Pan: A camera movement with the camera body turning to the right or left.

Tracking: A tracking shot usually follows a character or object as it moves along the screen; physically accompanies the entire range of movement.

Slow Motion: When action is filmed at a frame rate faster than normal/standard, then slowed down in post-production.

Conclusion:

The movie is based on true events that happens in Potemkin ship during first world war. But the movie is pure propaganda. The Odessa Staircase was so influential that anyone who had no firm political conviction could become a Bolshevik after seeing the film.