

Revival of Punjabi cinema - Understanding the dynamics

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Abstract

The Punjabi film industry is currently in its growth stage. The Punjabis in the Diasporas gave a new dimension to the Punjabi identity. It has brought a massive boost in the cinema and film music. Bollywood in the North Indian film industry is commercial and art cinema Punjabi is in its initial stage. Producers target just clientele and seldom take the risk. Crisp comedy films overpower an experiment in production, rare themes and different genres. The research did a descriptive analysis with the support of unstructured and semi-structured interviews of producers, actors, and Bollywood directors. The research also explores the need and importance of film institute and film clubs to sensitize the Punjabi audiences regarding the film as a medium, film grammar, and aesthetics. The research also focused on the marketing trends and the vital role of social media in multiplexes' age. Bollywood also lacks in skills and availability of high-end studios for post-production. Indirect taxes and expensive multiplex as a hindrance to attracting rural audiences to remote areas in Punjab.

Keywords: Bollywood, Diasporas, multiplex, approach, revival.

Introduction

Punjab of North India is the most fertile land it also called Sapta Sindhu in 'Vedas'. Agriculture is the main occupation in Punjab. Hard working Punjabis as community adapt to changing condition and adjust a lot faster than others. A considerable amount of literature and Vedas originated in Punjab. Its rich literature and culture provide a prolific base for cinema in Punjab.

Punjabi cinema's origin started with Film-Ishk-e-Punjab released in 1935 at Niranjana Talkies, Lahore(now in Pakistan). Followed by Shiela- Pind di Kuri produced and directed by K D

Mehra. It was a super hit in its time released at Palace Cinema, Lahore in 1937. Baby Noorjehan played the lead role and had fifteen songs in it.

In 1939, seven Punjabi films and in 1940 eight Punjabi films released. In 1941 first film on Dowry system 'Kurmai' was released through Punjabi film industry is separate from Lahore film industry excessively borrowed from the styles and esthetics of Bollywood explains Gill (2012). After independence, Punjabi cinema shifted to Mumbai and 'Chaman' was the first Punjabi film in 1948 produced by Jaimani Dewar and directed by Roop. k.Shory with eighteen songs in it. K.D Mehra directed first Punjabi comedy Posti in 1951 released at New Chitra Amritsar. In 1962, Chaudhari Karnail Singh won National film Award in the Best Feature film in the Punjabi language.

Nanak Naam Jahaz hai was the first Eastman colour film in Punjabi produce in 1969. The film on the auspicious occasion of the quincentenary (500 years) of Parkash Utsav celebration of Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The film won National Film Award For the best Punjabi feature film of 1969 and Best Music director Award to S. Mohinder.

In 1975, Tera Meri Ek Jindri introduced Veerendra. It was a superhit Romantic film. Veerendra Singh also becomes superhit star of Pollywood During his 12 years film career as a producer, director and protagonist.

Punjabi films made in the 1980s and 1990s primarily focused on the life of rural Punjab. Asghar and Rehmani (2019) mentioned that Punjabi films often belong to the land-owning 'Jat' caste. The particular society's performance known by their ability to move between different rural, urban and transnational spaces. Punjabis cinema engulfed desolation after the assassination of Varinder Singh in 1988.

Punjab's state endured a significant difficulty during the turmoil period around two decades from 1978 to mid-90s. This period destabilized Punjab's political, social or economic development, yet it also brought about a considerable setback to craftsmanship, culture, and Punjab regional cinema - Pollywood. After the assassination of Varinder Singh Punjabi cinema industry faced set back till the 1990s; audiences avoided going to cinema halls because of terrorism in the state. Even the producers did not invest due to lack of audiences.

Punjab stayed disconnected from Punjabi films till 2002 with Jee Aayan Nu directed by Manmohan Singh, ace cinematographer of Bollywood. Enormous accomplishment to the film brought new life to dying Punjabi cinema. Thus 24 Punjabi movies were released in 2012 which practically twofold in 2013 with 42 films. In this decade the Punjabi film industry became a lucrative part of Indian film industry business with 61 Punjabi films released worldwide in 2019.

After a moderate and sluggish beginning, the Punjabi film industry is by all accounts presently ready to scale new highs. It is progressively turning out to be well known in the North-Indian states yet in a foreign land where a sizeable number of NRI populace with their foundation in Punjab has settled down. Punjabi films boosted with the release of Jee Aayan Nu (Welcome) in 2003. This film denoted a historic addition throughout Punjabi cinema, as it was the first Punjabi film to be produced in Punjab and Canada. It added the NRI genre with Punjabi films. Recent take shows that significant a part of Punjabi cinema has Diasporas' subjects, location and storyline to tap NRI audience of the film.

Literature Review

Regional cinema connects the filmmaker with their audiences in a much better way, and film in a person's mother tongue will have a much more significant impact on him than a film in a national language since the viewer can connect better with it. In 2018 Siddharth Roy Kapur, producer of successful regional National and international films in an interview to midday.com, narrated that Indian films were successful globally. However, Indian cinema was still to produce a film embraced by the world.

Verma (2013), a known film commentator, asserted that pollywood was getting global contours with many Punjabi films on Punjabi Diaspora and gaining success in the global market. Punjabi cinema is concerned with desire and aspirations as of 14 crores Punjabi worldwide and giving it a broad reach. "It is high time Punjabi filmmakers realized that we need movies that are closer to real-life to depict the life of the common man and project the rich culture of Punjab" revealed Amrik Gill (2012) script-writer for Hindi and Punjabi movies.

Team AISFM (2018) sited that with the words ' Good film' or 'significant movie' 'Hollywood' or 'Bollywood' comes to mind. Indian regional film is sun film for the European Motion

Picture of France and Italy also possesses cinema jewels. These are the untapped market for culture films. These films have good script stories and impact significant theme, and innovative treatment can be seen clearly in this cinema channel. Linguistic films can be known as 'Cinema with purpose'.

According to the news report by INA (2012), the Bollywood industry has edged its approach to progress; however, the content still limits to romantic tales and Potboilers. Punjabi audience is eager for quality substance.

Jajje and Suri (2020) express that militant themed films' average box office collection was less than comedy films. It indicates that Punjabi audience show reluctance towards film based on religious, political radicalization. The last decade we have witnessed popular Hindi film actors such as Jimmy Shergill, Neha Dhupia, Gul Panag performing well in Punjabi films. Punjabi cinema is complete packages of entertainment, foot-tapping number of international location are dominating.

Dudrah (2011) in the dialogic assessment of Hindi film Prades (1997) representing the Diasporas suggest that the little and publicity capture many of the sensibilities which constitute the diasporas subject: displacement, new beginning and issues of belonging and attention. Such sensibilities proved popular amongst the film urban Indian and diasporic audience, who experienced social and cultural shifts in their attendant societies that had undergone modernization.

Johal Navjeet (2007) in his research article Punjabi Diaspora ate film Express that no Punjabi film could win National prize as compared to Bengali Kannada and Malayalam regional films. He considers a lack of infrastructure for teaching and learning film production and techniques besides our small Punjabi film audience films for the low number of Punjabi films released compared to south Indian films. Appreciating the advent of diasporic movies like Jee Aiyain Nu, Asian Na Maan Wanna Te, he stressed more 'creative freedom' so that Punjabi cinema flourishes.

Devi Davinder (2010) in her article Punjabi film da sirtaz filmsaz- Manmohan Singh in Punjabi Tribune states that he as a professional film regret the low intellectual level of the audience discourage film on serious issues related to corruption and politics. He

emphasizes the strong screenplay for the success of a good film. He advocates for anti-piracy act on the lives of the southern States.

Gill H.S (2012) opines that ' Ji Aayan Nu' was a turning point in Punjabi Cinema's history as it was the first regional film of the states shoot patty in India and Canada. He further Expresses that this film introduces NRI (non-resident Indian) give within Punjabi cinema.

Objectives:

The research-based on interviews aims to determine the following objectives:

1. The preferred genres/themes and dynamics/demographics of audiences targeted by them.
2. Contemporary marketing strategies adopted by film artistry.
3. Means to achieve structured and organized growth of Punjabi cinema and industry.

Research methodology:

The film reflects and impacts society. It makes us think. With the craft of involving audiences, film cause individual to feel acknowledged and part of the story. Indian cinema attains a specific status in the world cinema for producing a large number of films annually. Besides Bollywood, the South-Indian cinema shares a large chunk of success. In North-India Punjabi cinema contributes though less but the largest number of films annually (61 in 2019). According to CARE rating (2018), the Hindi language films are approximately 500, and the rest of the cinema belongs to regional languages out of estimated 1500-2000 films produced in India annually. 48% of the films are in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi and other languages.

In this paper, the research focuses on the revival, audience acceptance and economics of Punjabi Cinema. The researcher applied the descriptive research method for qualitative analysis. The qualitative research is not an immediate technique; hence it is a long process. It is difficult to express the fluidity of qualitative research in graphic focus. The procedure of qualitative research is persistently interlinked and working off each other in repetitive designs (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Erickson (2011) defines it as a qualitative enquiry to study

and elaborate in narrative reporting about individual personalities or section of society in its routine life. Broadly it is based on the methodological pursuit of understanding the ways that people see, view, approach and experiences the world and makes meaning of their experiences as well as specific phenomena within it.

The primary data gathered through semi-structured interview method. The unstructured interview offers participants a chance to openly express their opinions on the issue at hand (Croucher - Cronn-Mills, 2015). This open expression of views can provide what Geertz (1973) called thick description. Thick description is an in-depth understanding of a culture or setting provided by the culture members and captured by others. Further, to support and comprehend the points put forth in this study in a substantial manner, numerous media reports, newspapers, research journals, film magazine are the source of secondary data for qualitative research. The research sample is purposive as renowned Punjabi film directors, dialogue writers, actors and producers were interviewed. All participants are audio recorded through voice mails, telephonic interview based on following queries.

The interviews with film industry artistry conducted keeping in view the researcher's objectives.

Following people for Punjabi film industry were interviewed to collect primary data.

Amardeep Singh - Renowned lyricist who has been sung by Hans Raj Hans, Gippy Grewal, Amrinder Gill and many more Punjabi singers who have earned name and fame in glocal audiences (150 Songs). He is a poet and filmmaker. *Jora 10 Numberiya* (2017), *Yoddha* (2014) and *Jora - The Second Chapter* (2020) scripted and directed by Amardeep Singh Gill.

Rana Ranbir, an Alumnus of the theatre department, Punjabi University, Patiala, is an ace comedian in Punjabi films in *Jatt and Juliet* (2012). *Jatt And Juliet* (2013) directed by Anurag Singh. He is a story and dialogue writer of *Manje Bistre* (2016), *Ardaas* (2016) and *ArdaasKaran* (2019). Produced, directed, lyricist, story and dialogue writer of *Asees* (2018). He debuted in films in 2006.

Anurag Singh - He is Mumbai-based film director and story writer known for Bollywood blockbuster *Kesari* (2019). A very sought after director in the Punjabi film industry, known

for producing Jatt and Juliet series, Punjab 1984. These films acclaimed success in India and abroad.

Binnu Dhillon - He is an alumnus of the theatre department from Punjabi University, Patiala. He has successfully earned a name in comic and other roles in Punjabi cinema. His successful films were Carry on Jatta Series (2012) (2018), Produced and lead role in Jhalle (2019), Bailaras (2017) and Vadhayaan Ji Vadhayaan (2018) co-producer and lead role.

Dr Harjeet Singh directed a biopic film based on Bhagat Puran Singh's life with the title- 'Eh Janam Tumhare Lekhe'. Bhagat Puran Singh was an environmentalist and philanthropist who spent his whole life taking care of downtrodden, abandoned orphans and special children. He established a home for them under the name Pingalwara at Amritsar. Written dialogues for Hindi film 'Hawaayein' based on turmoil period in Punjab. Having done a PhD from Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar in Punjabi folk art has a passion for films. He has worked as a producer in Doordarshan for two decades. He is directing Tele-films for PTC Punjabi channel running almost across the globe.

Samuel John is an ace theatre artist and alumnus of Punjabi university. He played the lead role in Punjabi film - Anne Ghode Da Daan (2011); won a national award for direction, cinematography and the Best feature film in Punjabi at the 59th national film awards of India. Gurvinder Singh directed this film which was funded by NFDC.

Jasdeep Singh - Just deep Singh is a software engineer turned dialogue writer and translator. A successful dialogue writer of Punjabi film 'Chauthi Koot' based on the short story of a renowned writer Waryam Singh Sandhu. Chauthi Koot screened at Cannes Film Festival in 2015 (Uncertain Regard Section).

Rajiv Kumar - He is pursuing his PhD in films at JNU. Rajiv Kumar is a Punjabi film director and was awarded national film award for the Best feature film in Punjabi - Nabar (2014). He produced many Punjabi documentary films - Apna Pash, Aatu Khoji. His film Chamm based on Dalit community in Punjab was screened at Cannes Film Festival 2017.

Discussion

The film equivalence to literature compiles sounds and visuals. Films have been a medium of representing a culture, clan, or value system to its audiences, including religion, culture, traditions, morals, literature, beliefs, and ideology, crucial elements in forming a social system. Films also make an essential part of the entertainment industry. India is the largest producer of films, i.e., 1500 to 2000 films annually. The CARE - Ratings (July 2018) reveals that Indian industry produces films in more than 20 regional languages. In North India, the annual production Punjabi Films is highest with 61 films released in 2019.

The research focused on revival, genres, techniques and budget of Punjabi cinema to understand the dynamics. Content and its audiences, along with various production and marketing issues, were studied.

Descriptive research was applied as it explores the research problem in detail and gives a detailed explanation of the subject beyond the surface level. Thus it promotes further research in the field, adopting various other research methods. Similarly, the interview method helps to validate the data collected by the researcher for qualitative descriptive analysis.

Punjabi films had experienced three stages in the previous 100 years of Indian films, i.e., pre-partition when Lahore was capital of Punjabi films, post-independence, and Punjab's turmoil period and revival of Punjabi films in 2002. Director Manmohan Singh, also a renowned cinematographer in Bollywood initiated the change in the Punjabi cinema. He directed movies like 'Jee Aayan Nu', 'Asa Nu Maan Wanna Da' and 'Yaaran Naal Bahrain'. 'Jee AayanNu' starring singer Harbhajan Mann as the lead was the first big-budget (2.5 Crore) movie by the

Punjabi film industry standards. It was released worldwide and earned good revenues (Business Today, April 2004). Hence the revival of Punjabi cinema had offshore (Canada) connections.

Revival and Market:

In the 80s and 90s, Punjabi films had rural Punjab landscapes. Themes were related to land, conflicts/disputes around it as agrarian life was mostly rural, in and around Chandigarh.

The narratives only revolved around the 'Jatt' titles. 'Jatt' titles were the unique selling points in Punjabi films.

The cinematographer Manmohan Singh produced the film 'Jee Aayan Nu' in 2002. The film narrated the tale of a migrant family in Canada. It brought massive success in India and Canada. This success brought a new life to dying Punjabi cinema. As a result, in 2012, 24 films were released, and the number doubled in 2013 (Tribune, 2014). The year 2019 was exceptional for the Punjabi cinema. 'Shadaa' movie released across the globe crossed the milestone of 50 Crores. It earned 52.50 Crores. Anurag Singh considers release and acceptance of the Punjabi language across India could bring success. NCR is a good pocket. "Hollywood has secured a good position, and 50 to 70 shows are screened almost every day in Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon." narrates Anurag Singh. Punjabi cinema is not confined to Punjab. The overseas locations where a sizeable Punjabi migrated in the past also are potential markets of Punjabi cinema. Producers focus US, Canada, Europe and Australia simultaneously for the release of the movie. In 2019, 'Chal Mera Putt' earned 25.46 Crore as a gross income abroad followed by Ardaas Karaan (19.10 Crore) and Shadaa (18.74 Crore). Australia emerged as one of the largest markets for Punjabi movies after the UK and Canada. Punjabi abroad shows interest in Punjabi language cinema. Punjabi films Shadaa, Ardaas Karaan and Chal Mera Putt, surpassed Bollywood cinema released same time. Mimansa Shekhar, a critic and deputy copy editor of The Indian Express, felt that these films' success attributed to the growing Punjabi community abroad. According to Times of India's reports, the top three openers of 2016 in Australia were Love Punjab, Ardaas and Airlift. Airlift and Bajirao Mastani took a backseat in Australia and New Zealand.

Genres in Punjabi Cinema: The most successful Punjabi movies in the recent past had a combo of good content and recognized industry faces. Binu Dhillon narrates that Bollywood is commercially savvy. It values the entertainment of its clientele. Similarly, Amardeep Singh Gill producer and director of 'Jora 10 Numberiya' opined that the audience is always essential and central to production. According to him, Punjabi cinema was never delivering in continuity. "Audience is nostalgic about their past, and they do not come out of their rural roots." He expresses. Most of the interviewees felt that urban Punjab has never been in this regional cinema's themes because the urban audiences are clientele of Bollywood. Rajeev Sharma added, the films of different genres that

thematically belong to the region are essential for the overall growth of regional cinema. Rana Ranbir, Producer and Director of *Asees* (film focused on Mother) and *Ardaas* (Focused social issues of society) argue that Art cinema is always less in number in any language. However recent films like *Sajjan Singh Rangroot*, *Subedar Joginder Singh*, *Punjab 1984*, *Anhe Ghode da Daan*, *Harjita*, *Rabb da Radio* and many others had explored diverse genres like historical personalities, the period of operation blue star and militancy in the state, the plight of farmers and their relationships with landlords. Samuel John who played the lead role in *Anhe Ghode da Daan* further elaborates that such genre's audience had always counted numbers. "Through these films claimed appreciation at national and international platforms but often marginalized by the producers, finances and promoters in Punjab" he added.

Jagdeep Singh states that "Contemporary cinema does not take the risk to produce quality films or experiment. Producers make what sells." Multiplexes are expensive for the consumers in remote areas of Punjab. Producer and Director of '*Charm*' film based on Dalit issues and screened at CANNES film festival in 2017 could not find finances or producers because of its shrink audience. The director Rajeev Sharma emphasis that mainstream cinema should experiment with new themes. Citing Iranian cinema, the filmmaker feels that contemporary time demands a new narrative to change audience response. Kumar argues that there is no literature reflecting and expressing youth, which weakens society's art and culture. He iterates that youth literature is narrated only in Punjabi lyrics, resulting in Punjab becoming home to India's largest non-film music industry (200 Crores estimated size of the organized Punjabi music industry).

The infrastructure of Bollywood industry: Cinema has borrowed freely from photography, theatre, opera, music and other traditions (Monterio,2017). It provides the imaginary for various sections of the society where it operates. Film clubs, societies play an important role in initiating dialogue. "Debates and discussions on films not only help gauge the audiences' understanding, but it also gives feedback to the director." expresses Rana Ranbir. Rajiv Sharma adds that art cinema is to provoke or create controversy. These are low budget movies and often require funding. "There is no cultural policy for Punjab," says Rajiv Sharma. Dr Harjit Singh opines that lack of skill development and skill gaps would reduce by establishing a Punjab film institute. He evaluates that Bollywood industry lacks

in how to approach cinema. Film literacy is not evolved either in film makers or its audiences yet. Majority of the interviewee strongly recommended the organization of this industry. Lack of film institute saw talent pool of actors, directors and people behind the camera (Pre Production, Production and Post Production). Punjab lacks a film city, and the government has no clear vision regarding films as a medium of education and entertainment. Jasdeep Singh opines that film division should be more participatory in regional cinema and its structure needs to be changed. "Contribution of film journalist and critics is hardly visible", said Binu Dhillon. Digital media- the web journalist are also not experts in the film as a subject. Film reviews based on promotional activities, trailer and advertisement provided to these web channels. Amardeep S. Gill and Harjit Singh opposed censor board and emphasized on self-regulation. Harjit Singh asserted that undue censors curtail the natural flow of the film. "Visuals are prominent, and censorship can interrupt the flow of the film", he added.

The presence of a singer as a lead is favoured as these singers' star status has a permanent place in the public's imagination, which covers the risk of investment in the film. Punjabi singer Diljit Dosanjh, Gippy Grewal and Amrinder Singh with their Bollywood appearance made a mark in Punjabi cinema. Kamal Gianchandani, CEO, PVR pictures, elaborated the success of Pollywod as singers are capable of drawing more audiences into cinemas. Delhi's consumption of regional cinema is no more segregated, but viewers are increasing based on content.

In the past decade, the short film genre made a successful entry in Punjab. These self-funded films draw from Punjabi literature that depicts issues prevalent in Punjab at some point in time. Navtej Sandhu's directed Nooran (2014) based on Balwant Gargi's story. Rabbo Marasan for Cannes film festival short film corner. Film producer and lyricist Amardeep Gill's SuttaNaag (2014) was an adaptation of a short story written by late Ram Sarup Ankhi. This story had earlier bagged Sahitya academy award for Ankhi. This low budget film was premiered at the International Punjabi film festival Toronto.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Punjabi film industry depends upon romantic comedies targeting the Punjabi youth as audiences. The Punjabi film industry, even after almost two-decade, still lacks in attaining professionalism on various fronts. The study also reveals that that infrastructure for developing films such as film cities and a professional institute to enhance film-making skills needs the hour. Punjabi cinema is the largest contributor to the regional cinema in the North Indian states. It still witnesses a considerable supply gap in various fields of film making. The research also highlights that though film producers hardly take the risk to step in third cinema.

Film institute of the state is needed to brush up skills, creativity and understanding of film as an art. However, producers attempt to touch various genres by making films like *Anhe Ghore da Daan*, *Jora 10 Numbers*, *Ardaas* and many others but avoid taking the risk.

Few films of this genre manage box office success. The producers, finances and promoters often marginalize such films in Punjab. Rural Punjab and offshore locations managed to pull the crowd to multiplexes. The success of Pollywod films also depends mainly on Diasporas abroad. Unlike the Punjabi movies of before, now films with real-life stories and situations got global recognition with many Punjabi films making way to Cannes and other prestigious film festivals. Involvement of big production houses such as Viacom 18 and Eros Now in production and distribution of Punjabi film substantiates that Punjabi cinema is slowly coming of age. To conclude Punjabi Cinema no more belongs to the Indian state of Punjab instead it has come up as a cinema of Global Punjab.

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