Abstract

Punjabi, Dogri, Kashmiri, Haryanvi, Rajasthani and even Bhojpuri cinema have witnessed sluggish progress since their inception. Owing to innumerable reasons Regional Cinemas in North India could never grow on the lines of the cinemas of South India. Although a number of male actors of Bollywood hailing from Punjab did act in Punjabi movies in the early days of their carriers yet cinematic culture failed to emerge in Punjab. The unprecedented bloodshed during the partition of India in 1947 and the reorganization of Punjab in 1966 are the two historical events which cast their shadows on the development of Punjabi cinema. Being a border state Punjab had to bear the first brunt of foreign invasions for many centuries which never allowed its people to lead a settled life. The situation was never conducive for fine arts to develop albeit poets of Sufi cult did sow the seeds of music.

Even till date folk singers in Punjab are regarded as celebrities and enjoy the same status of demi-gods at par with the actors of South India. From Noor Jehan to Miss Pooja many male-female singers have tried their luck in Punjabi films but barring a few all licked the dust. Nanak Naam Jehaj Hai was the first film that brought people to cinema halls and it lent dignity to Punjabi cinema itself. It created the much needed film environment in the state which later witnessed the production of films like Santo Banto, Sat Sri Akal, Nachdi Jawani, Sarpanch, Batwara, Chann Paradesi, Putt Jattan De, Long Da Lishkara, Marhi Da Deeva, Shaheed-e-Mohabbat Boota Singh, Badla Jatti Da, Kachehri, Tabahi, Shaheed Udham Singh, Jee Aaya Nu, Waris Shah-Ishq Da A Waris and Des Hoya Pardes.

The evolution of Punjabi cinema developed its own genres which are quite distinct than those of Bollywood or Hollywood. An intensive study of Punjabi films reveals that no particular theme has ever taken it by storm. There has been an amalgamation of feudalistic, devotional, romantic, and social movies. For example Punjabi cinema produced hits like Mamla Garbar Hai & Aasra Pyar Da (Romantic), Putt Jattan De (Feudalistic), Sassi Punnu (Love Legend), Bagga Daku (Heroic), Batwara and Laojo (Social), Do Madari and Voht Hatt Soti (Comedy) and Ucha Dar Babe Nanak Da (Devotional) in 1983 itself. This trend continues even today. Hence a peep in the development of Punjabi cinema makes it crystal clear that chronological study of its changing themes is not possible. A number of themes continue to co-exist on the lines of
the diversity of the country. But there is no denying the fact that despite all their short comeings Punjabi film producers have made films on almost all the aspects and issues concerning society.

Divergence of themes represents the multi faceted Punjabi society and its vibrant culture. That’s precisely the reason behind most of the Punjabi films representing agrarian society and the problems there of. Even the diasporic movies continue the trend of revolving round the big land lord Jatt NRI families. The trend of Punjabi singers exhibiting their acting skills in films can be ascribed to the celebrity image they enjoy in Punjab. But certainly the level of cinematography in Punjabi films has improved with the entry of cinematographer turned director Manmohan Singh. With many directors taking keen interest in Punjabi film production and some Punjwood films have done better than big budget Bollywood films at UK box office, it seems great future beckons Punjabi cinema. The film makers are in search of new themes. Punjabi cinema is in its transition period where the established themes are exhausted and the new ones are yet to emerge. Only the time will tell whither goes the Punjabi cinema.