

***Pyasa:***  
**Sahir Ludhiyanvi's Politics and Poetry**

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*Pyasa* remains one of the best films in the list of Bollywood classics for which Sahir Ludhiyanvi wrote some ever green social and romantic songs. With Guru Dutt in the lead, the storyline of the film and the songs by Sahir raised some uncomfortable but pertinent questions about class exploitation, inequality, and women's conditions in the then newly independent India. This paper discusses the film *Pyasa*, and examines the politics of songs penned by Sahir.

**Key Words:** Chakley, Guru Dutt, Poet, *Pyasa*, Talkhiyan

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On 8 March 2021, the world of music and poetry celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the famous lyricist of the Hindi film industry, Abdul Hai Fazl Mohammad, who is popularly known by his pen name, Sahir (magician) Ludhiyanvi (8 March 1921- 21 October 1980). Sahir was a poet who has successfully written several Hindi film songs expressing different moods. Among the films for which Sahir wrote songs, one of the most popular is a 1957 classic *Pyasa* (thirst) by Guru Dutt (real name was Vasanth Kumar Shivshankar Padukone). Like great artistic creations, characters in *Pyasa* are open to multiple interpretations. Even the storyline of the film is interpreted differently: some see the story from a class angle and find it a story of a struggling and despondent poet who is trying to artistly survive in the world where art and publication are run by the capitalists; while others believe that the film is a beautiful love story. *Pyasa* leaves strong footprints in both ways. Due to its intense capability to attract viewers across generations, in 2011, *Pyasa* was included in the *Time Magazine's* Valentine's Day list of top five romantic films of all time.<sup>1</sup>

*Pyasa's* storyline is fully absorbed in the lyrics that broadly talks about the politics in which Sahir believed in. Sahir was a member of the All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA), and actively participated in India's freedom struggle. Like many freedom fighters and Marxist activists, Sahir had a dream about a society that is free from exploitation. After the independence of India in 1947, the Indian constituent assembly and early political leadership of the country talked about setting up of a socialist society based on equality of liberty and rights, it remained a dream. Class and caste-based hierarchy and discrimination is embedded in the Indian society. After independence, like many postcolonial states, the local capitalists and rural and urban power elites successfully established their control over the country's resources to fulfill their class interests. *Pyasa* is a critique of that form of society. Through his lyrics in the film, Sahir highlights the exploitation of the marginalised people by the rich, growing sense of alienation, frustration, and pathetic conditions of women in early independent years. Alternatively, *Pyasa* has equally powerful romantic songs where the protagonists express their emotions for each other in simple but sensuous words.

This paper attempts to answer two questions. *First*, what questions were Sahir and Guru Dutt trying to pose to the then managers of Indian State and society through the storyline and lyrics of *Pyasa*? *Second*, does the film *Pyasa* reflect Sahir's political beliefs and does it have a glimpse of his personal life? The main argument of this paper is that the storyline and the lyrics of *Pyasa* underlined the exploitative character of the early post-colonial Indian State.

### ***Pyasa: The Storyline***

*Pyasa* was released on 22 February 1957. It is the story of an unsuccessful Hindi poet, Vijay from Calcutta (now Kolkata), played by Guru Dutt, who struggles to get his collections of poems published and due recognition in the literary world. As he does not earn, Vijay has been thrown out from his house by his brothers, for whom he is good for nothing. Vijay lives in street sideway where one day he encounters a prostitute (now the term sex worker is used), Gulabo (Waheeda Rehman). Coincidentally, Vijay also meets his college day's girlfriend, Meena (Mala Sinha), who is now married to a wealthy man, Ghosh (Rehman), and owner of a big publication house. Ghosh hires Vijay to work for him, and he deliberately

insults him. To get rid of the pathetic life, Vijay tried to die by suicide. One day he runs toward the railway track to end his life, but first, he gives his coat to a beggar who was shivering from cold. The beggar also runs behind Vijay and loses his life despite Vijay's effort to save him. As Vijay's coat covered the beggar's body, the protagonist was declared dead by the people he knows. Afterwards, Gulabo goes to Ghosh with Vijay's poems, who now agrees to publish them. The published poems become successful.

Meanwhile, Vijay comes out from the hospital after his wounds are healed, which he received while saving the beggar. When Vijay comes to know that his poems have been published by Ghosh, he appears in public, but is not recognized by anyone, including his very close friend Shyam (Shyam Kapoor). He is taken as a lunatic and imposter who is trying to prove himself as Vijay. He is sent to a mental asylum from where his old friend Abdul Sattar (Johnny Walker) rescues him. Later, to celebrate the success of Vijay's poems, a memorial is held where his bust is to be inaugurated. Vijay reaches the memorial service, and there he denounces the corrupt, materialistic world. Seeing him alive, Vijay's brothers and friends take the side of the rival publisher for a larger amount of money. In the end, sick of the hypocrite world, Vijay leaves with Gulabo to start a new life.

About the climax of *Pyaasa*, in his interview to Nasreen Munni Kabir, biographer of Guru Dutt, Devi Dutt, brother of Guru Dutt, said that:<sup>2</sup>

The end of *Pyaasa* was changed. In the original version, the film ends at the scene where Vijay finishes talking to Meena and leaves. And no one knows where he goes. Later on, we added the last scene that you now see in the film in which Vijay comes to Gulabo and asks her to go away with him. He [Guru Dutt] changed the ending because of the way distributors reacted. They felt the ending was too heavy. The financiers requested, 'Why don't you have a happy ending?' It now has a sort of happier ending.

Politically, *Pyaasa* is a story of class exploitation where a wealthy publisher tries to exploit the labour of a struggling proletariat poet to generate capital. On the condition of the writers and the labour they produce, Karl Marx writes, "A writer is a productive labour not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publishers who

publish his works, or if he is a wage-labourer for a capitalist."<sup>3</sup> But at the same time, the artists, writers, etc., can be categorised as unproductive labour to the capitalists if he/she sings or writes something for own account and not produces capital.<sup>4</sup> In *Pyaasa*, the poet Vijay is productive labour whose works the publisher Ghosh wanted to use to create wealth.<sup>5</sup> However, as shown in the film, Vijay's poetry does not conform to the taste of the capitalist ideology and production system. Therefore, he is thrown out of a *mushaira* after he reads his poem. However, later, a large gathering at his memorial service shows that the poems can attract people having different tastes and produce capital. This is why a publishing house capitalist, Ghosh, publishes the poems written by Vijay, who is taken as dead for the world.

Like many of Guru Dutt's films, *Pyaasa*, too, shows an easy and natural relationship between a Hindu and Muslim, as in the relationship between Vijay and masseur Abdul Sattar, without harping on the film's secular significance. Secondly, *Pyaasa* also shows that the protagonist leaving with a sex worker defies all social condemnation.<sup>6</sup> This message was compelling given the status and position the sex worker has in the patriarchal social structure.

Besides its political content, in real life, the story of depressive, frustrated, and anxious poet Vijay was very close to Guru Dutt's personal life. Those who know Guru Dutt closely remember him occasionally behaving like his reel character of *Pyaasa*, Vijay. In a letter dated 22 February 1952, Guru Dutt writes to his wife, Geeta Dutt:<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes when I get too tired after work I become silent & moody. Though my work is very dear to me yet I feel as if I have nothing else in life to hold on to. Sometimes you come near me, close, enough but then sometimes I wake up to find myself all alone. Even if you are very far away from me. Who knows one day you will also get absolutely away from me. The more I see life the more bitter I am becoming - and have less faith in people and human nature.

Waheeda Rehman, the lead actor of many of Guru Dutt's films such as *Chaudhian Ka Chand*, *Kagaz ke Phool*, *Saheb, Biwi aur Gulam*, and *Pyaasa*, in a talk show called *Rendezvous with Simi Grewal Part I*, said that Guru Dutt was like Vijay in real life. Rehman said that Guru Dutt was

depressive and in constant pain, and used to say that he has seen both failures and success, and nothing is left now.<sup>8</sup>

Commercially, *Pyasa* did well, and Vijay turned out to be an eternal character. However, Guru Dutt, who started his career in film industry as a dance choreographer before turning as a director, was reluctant to act in the film. He always underestimated himself as an actor.<sup>9</sup> In *Pyasa*, Guru Dutt wanted Dilip Kumar to play the role of Vijay, and he approached him for that. Guru Dutt narrated the script to Dilip Kumar, who quoted his price of one-and-a-half-lakh rupees. About the incident, Yaseer Usman writes, "Guru Dutt requested him to consider reducing the price as he had already scrapped the shoot he had done for the film, wasting a considerable amount. In reply, he was asked not to worry about the money. Now that Dilip Kumar was to take on the lead role, his loyal film distributors would take care of the finances."<sup>10</sup> This perhaps was the point, Yaseer further writes, "where Guru Dutt disagreed with him. Guru Dutt clearly told Dilip Kumar that he had a fixed team of distributors too and he had committed *Pyasa* to them."<sup>11</sup> Abrar Alvi, writer, and director who worked with Guru Dutt for ten years, said to Sathya Saran that, on the issue of distribution, Guru Dutt told Dilip Kumar, "I haven't come to you to sell my film. I can sell it on my own. I have come to you as a director because I believe that if I cast you in my film, I will make a better film. You will add stature to it."<sup>12</sup> At that time, Dilip Kumar promised to come for the shooting the next day, but he never turned up; eventually, Guru Dutt decided to play the protagonist Vijay himself. Later Dilip Kumar said that he did not sign *Pyasa* as his role was similar to the one he had played in *Devdas*.<sup>13</sup>

The film *Devdas* was based on a story by Saratchandra Chattopadhyay. The character of *Devdas* is so popular in India that over the gap of years, three films have been made with the same title. In all three films, the character of Devdas has been played by the superstars of their times. K.L Saigal played Devdas in 1936, Dilip Kumar played it in 1955, and Shahrukh Khan in 2002. All three *Devdas* have done very well at the box office. Character-wise, Devdas, which Dilip Kumar thought is similar to Vijay in *Pyasa*, is in a real sense different. Unlike Devdas who is very rich, *Pyasa* is a story of poor struggling poet. Secondly, *Pyasa* looks at the vices prevailing in the society, while *Devdas* is more personal and is the story of a family. Thirdly, unlike *Devdas*, Vijay of *Pyasa* is in a relationship with a sex worker. In the end, Vijay leaves the materialistic world with Gulabo.

When *Pyaasa* was planned, the original choices to play the two lead female roles were Nargis and Madhubala in character, finally played by Mala Sinha and Waheeda Rehman. Both Nargis and Madhubala were replaced because the two actresses could not decide which role they wanted to play. Guru Dutt eventually opted for the then-new actresses, Mala Sinha and Waheeda Rehman.<sup>14</sup>

Music of the film was composed by S.D. Burman, while Sahir Ludhiyanvi wrote songs. At the time of writing songs for *Pyaasa*, Sahir was new in the film industry but was relatively well known among the leading poets of that time. About the songs of *Pyaasa*, in an interview to a popular film magazine *Filmfare*, Sahir said: "that the producers and makers of film gave more importance to the form of the songs and poetry than to its content."<sup>15</sup> He added that such change "indicates that good, meaningful poetry, poetry calling for radical social change or poetry of social disillusionment is not seen till *Pyaasa* in Hindi cinema."<sup>16</sup> The following section talks about reflection of Sahir's politics in his poetry.

### **Sahir Ludhiyanvi's Politics in Poetry**

Sahir Ludhiyanvi was born on 8 March 1921 in Ludhiana in Punjab. His father, Chaudhary Fazl Mohammad, was a wealthy landowner of Sikhewal.<sup>17</sup> Chaudhary Fazl married eleven times. In his childhood, Sahir's parents separated from each other after a long court battle. In that parental dispute, young Sahir stood by his mother, Sardar Begum, who raised him as a single parent. As he grew up, under the guidance of Maulana Faiz Haryanvi, Sahir studied Urdu and Persian and soon became proficient in both languages.<sup>18</sup>

During his teenage years, Sahir took an active part in India's freedom struggle and held various political positions in the student organizations in Ludhiana and in Lahore, where he joined Dayal Singh College. During his student days in Lahore, Sahir also edited literary journals-*Adab-e-Latif*, *Shahkaar*, and *Savera*. In 1942, Sahir was to sit for his final examinations of B.A. He, however, refused to do so as a mark of protest against the British colonialists against the student activists from the nearby college.<sup>19</sup> For the writers of the 1940s who wanted to become a part of the anti-colonial movement, there were two ways: one was offered by Mahatma Gandhi who had a deep belief in non-violence and rule of *satyagraha* (truth-force) and; the second was Marxism that talks about revolution and rule by the

proletariat. Sahir chose the latter path and became an active member of the AIPW, a Marxist organization of writers set up in 1936.<sup>20</sup>

In 1944, Sahir published the first collection of his poems titled *Talkhiyan* (Bitterness). Since then, *Talkhiyan* has been published many times with additional poems from Sahir. One of the popular poems in this volume is about Taj Mahal. Different from being a symbol of love, Sahir looks at Taj Mahal as a sign of the influence of capital and capitalism on love, and interprets the beautiful mausoleum in a non-materialist way from a viewpoint of a proletariat lover. Sahir writes: —“Ek Shahenshah ne Daulat ka sahara lekar, hum garibon ki muhabbat ka udaya hai mazaak... Mere Mehboob kahin aur mila kar mujh se!”<sup>21</sup> (With the help of his wealth an emperor has made mockery of the love of the poor... My lover meet me somewhere else!).

At the time of the Partition of India in 1947, Sahir was in Lahore. However, he could not live there for a long time, as his 1949 poem “Avaaz-e-Adam” (Voice of People) angered the Pakistani establishment. In the poem, Sahir challenges the exploitative system of the country with a warning of how long they will silence the voice of people and carry out atrocities. He read the poem at a gathering in Lahore in 1949 and, a few days later, travelled to India, never to return.<sup>22</sup> The phrase “*hum bhi dekhenge* (We Will See!)” from Sahir’s “Avaz-e-Adam” was borrowed by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, but without acknowledging him, and in a different context. Faiz wrote “Hum Bhi Dekhenge” in 1979 against General Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorship, using religious symbolism “to show that he was not an atheist and that his religion was the antithesis of what Zia called Islam”.<sup>23</sup>

Sahir’s political belief was well rendered in many of his songs. In *Dhool ke Phool* (1959) he writes “Tu Hindu banega na musalman banega, insan ki aulad han insan banega... Maalik ne har insaan ko insaan banaya, hum ne use Hindu ya musalmaan banaya” (You will not become a Hindu or Muslim, you are a child of human so will become human... God has made every human a human, it is we who have made them Hindu or Muslim). Believing in the power of people, Sahir has questioned the God in “Aasman pe hai khuda, aur zameen pe hum... (God is in the sky and we are on the earth)” in *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958). At the same time Sahir writes wonderful spiritual songs where the weak is praying God to give strength to them and knowledge to the powerful.<sup>24</sup> “Allah tero naam Ishwar tero naam... O saare jag ke rakhwale, nirbal ko bal dene wale; Balwaano ko de de gyaan” (Your name is Allah,

your name is Ishwar.... Hey, lord of the world give strength to weak and knowledge to the powerful" in *Hum Dono* (1961). On the then prevailing situation, in *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), Sahir writes: "Taleem hai adhoori, milti nahin majoori; maaloome kya kisi ko dard-e-nihaan hamara; Chin-o-Arab hamara, Hindostan hamara; Rehne ko ghar nahin hai, saara jahan hamara" (Education remains incomplete, we do not get job; who knows our pain; China and Arab world are ours, India is ours; we do not have house to live but the whole world is ours). His feminist critique is visible in a song from *Sadhna*<sup>25</sup> (1958) "Aurat ne janam diya mardon ko, mardon ne use bazar diya; Jab jee chaha kuchla masala, jab jee chaha dutkar diya" (Women has given birth to men, men has given her market; they molested her whenever want and then throw whenever want). Sahir, like many progressive writers of his time, had a hope amidst melancholy. Sahir expressed such optimism in *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), he wrote: "Wo subah kabhi to aayegi..." (That morning will come someday).<sup>26</sup>

Sahir's poems exhort the oppressed masses to rise against the prevailing exploitative bourgeois system. His poems have special space for the issues concerning women; he wanted women to rebel against all forms of constraints to achieve their goals. Sahir's much thought maybe because of deep affection for his mother, whose side he took during the parental dispute and separation. Calling women to break the chains, in one of his poem Sahir writes:<sup>27</sup>

"Mein tasawwuf ke maraahil ka nahin huun qaayal,  
Meri tasveer pe tum phool chadhate kyo ho,  
Tum mein himmat hai toh duniya se baghawaaat kar do,  
Warna maa baap jahaan kehte hain shadi kar lo.

(I do not believe in the stages of mysticism/Why do you offer garland to my image/If you have courage rebel against society./Otherwise, marry according to wishes of your parents. As translated by Mohammad Kamran Ahsan).<sup>28</sup>

In another famous poem titled *Nur- Jahan ke Mazar Par*, Sahir shows how rich people exploit women for their lust and leave them afterward. In the poem, Sahir writes:<sup>29</sup>

pahlu-e-shah mein ye dukhtar-e-jamhur ki qabr kitne gum-gashta  
fasanon ka pata deti hai,



Kitne khun-rez haqq eq se uthati hai naqab kitni kuchli hui janon  
ka pata deti hai.

(The tomb of the people's daughter, by the side of the King, is a doorway  
to many a lost tales.

It unveils many blood-soaked incidents. It points to many a crushed  
lives).

His other women centric powerful poetry, *Chakley*, is discussed  
below. Not only through his songs, but Sahir was also politically active.  
About his political activity, famous songwriter Kaifi Azmi writes:<sup>30</sup>

The [Municipal] Corporation elections were about to happen  
around the time when he [Sahir] arrived in Bombay. Pitted against  
the Congress candidate was Comrade Bhogle, the much-adored  
leader of the labourers who was a worker himself. There were  
problems galore, but Sahir accompanied me to the polling station.  
Upon reaching there I got busy with work, while Sahir lay down  
under a dense tree, as he was a bit unwell that day. Behind the  
cover of the Congress, goons had created a ruckus at the polling  
station. They were pelting stones at the Communist volunteers,  
abusing them and were also intimidating the labourers who had  
come to vote. Sahir couldn't remain a mute spectator and joined  
the row of volunteers post-haste. He raised slogans, ran around  
and was busy working till 6:30 in the evening.

### **Songs from *Pyasa***

To try his luck in the Hindi film industry, Sahir moved to Bombay (now  
Mumbai) with his friend Majaz. Before coming to Bombay, Sahir, after  
coming from Lahore in 1949, lived for some months in Delhi, editing the  
magazines *Shahrah* and *Preetlari*.<sup>31</sup> While Majaz gave up within six months,  
Sahir kept on trying.<sup>32</sup> Later, through Mohan Sehgal (producer), Sahir met  
Guru Dutt, who subsequently introduced him to music director S.D.  
Burman in the late forties. Burman asked Sahir to write songs for  
*Naujawan* (1951), but the first film released with his songs was *Baazi* (1951).  
After the two films, Sahir also worked with Guru Dutt and Burman for  
*Jaal* (1952) and *Pyasa*.<sup>33</sup> The songs of *Baazi*, *Naujawan*, and *Jaal* did well, but  
it was *Pyasa* which turned as an essential milestone of Sahir's career. The  
first poem of *Pyasa* is:

ye hanste huye phul  
 ye mahka hua gulshan  
 ye rang me aur noor me dubi huyi raahe  
 ye phulo ka ras pee ke machalte huye bhanwre  
 main du bhi to kya du tumhe  
 aye sokh nazaro  
 le de ke mere pass  
 kuch aansu hai kuch aahe

(These laughing flowers,  
 This fragrant park,  
 This colourful paths  
 These nectar sipping insects  
 If I have to give what I can give you  
 Hey wonderful scene  
 I have only my tears and pain)

This small poem with which *Pyasa* starts shows the condition of the unsuccessful poet who has nothing to give to the beautiful world except pain and few tears.

The next song is: "Tang Aa Chuke Hain Kashmakashe Zindagi Se Hum, Thukra na de Jahan ko kahin bedili se hum" (I am fed up with my life, I may disown the world with tough heart). Picturised on Guru Dutt and sung by Mohammad Rafi. In this song Vijay expresses his alienation, frustration, depression and disdain.

Then there is song: "Ye kooche ye Neelam ghar dilkashi ke,  
 ye lutate hue kaaravaa zindagi ke  
 kaha hai, kaha hai muhafiz khudi ke  
 jinhe naaz hai hind par vo kaha hai  
 kaha hai, kaha hai, kaha hai..."

(These lanes, these houses of flesh,  
 These pillaged caravans of life,  
 The vanguards of hollow pride,  
 Those who are proud on Hind (India),  
 Where are they  
 Where are they)

Sahir wrote this poem in his collection *Talkhiyan*, titled *Chakley* (Brothels), which was like "Sana khwane taqdis-e-mashriq kahan hain" (Where are the eulogists of Oriental Piety?) This was picturized with its refrain, *Jinhe naaz hain Hind par vo kahaan hain*. Assistant Director of *Pyasa*, Raj Khosla, told Nasreen Munni Kabir that the language of the poem was simplified for the film because no one would understand the difficult Urdu of the original.<sup>34</sup> Sahir's poem *Chakle* is a fine example of political comment combined with humanitarian compassion. His words, it seems, articulate Guru Dutt's view of the world and experience of tragedy.<sup>35</sup> In this poem and song, Sahir appears to show brothel as the microcosmic world of the bourgeoisie exploitation of women.<sup>36</sup> Sahir's poem is analogous to Marx's understanding of the brothels and prostitutes. Marx sees prostitutes as victims of the capitalist system.<sup>37</sup>

About *Chakley*, Kaifi Azmi writes "The rank intensity, hatred and sincerity with which Sahir has shaken up the *Sanakhwaan-e-tasdeeq-e-Mashriq* are simply incomparable. In *Chaklay*, Sahir's dignity, his soul and restlessness of his conscience can be seen at the acme of eminence; I get goose bumps when I read this poem. The feelings that might have stimulated him to write it are so intense that here his characteristic melancholy transforms into an overwhelming deluge."<sup>38</sup>

Fourth song of *Pyasa* which has a high impact is:

Yeh Mahlon, Yeh Takhton,  
Yeh Tajon ki Duniya,  
Yeh Insaan Ke Dushman,  
Yeh Samajon Ki Duniya,  
Yeh Daulat ke Bhukhe,  
Rawajon ki Duniya,  
Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaaye to Kya,  
Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaaye toh Kya.

The world for forts, power,  
The world for Taj,  
This enemy of people  
This world of community,  
These greedy people  
World for populism  
Even if this one gets so what  
Even if one gets this world so what

This song poignantly conveys the condition of the then, and now, an existing society which Sahir and Guru Dutt narrated as corrupt, mean, greedy, and where power, money, and populism widely prevail. Even if one gets such sort of society, as the lyricist and director talk about, there is no use.

*Ye kooche ye Neelam ghar dilkashi ke and yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaaye toh kya* gives many people an idea that Sahir was "a poet of despair, of melancholy, of nihilism".<sup>39</sup> For Sahir's critics he was a poet of human sadness and poignancy. To this, Sahir writes:

“Ham ghamzada hain Laayen Kahan se Khushi ke geet,  
Denge Wahi jo paayenge is zindagi se ham”

(I am aggrieved... from where shall I get songs of happiness?/I will return the same that I get from this life.)<sup>40</sup>

In the same film Sahir wrote a song, *Sar jo tera chakraye*, filmed on Johnny Lever. There are lines:

Naukar ho ya Malik,  
Leader ho ya public,  
Apne aage sab jhuke hain,  
Kya raja, kya sainik,

Whether servant or master,  
Whether Leader or public,  
Everyone bent before me,  
Whether king or soldier.

This song shows a character of a hair masseur who, as portrayed, is beyond the boundary of social inequality. No matter how powerful or wealthy someone is, he has to bend his head before the masseur to get a hair massage. Sung by Mohammad Rafi, this was declared one of the most popular songs of 1957 by Amin Sayani in his programme *Geetmala*, which he used to do on the Vividh Bharti station, All India Radio.

Sahir had an extensive range and was not captive to only one form of writing, as mentioned above. In *Pyaasa*, Sahir has also written wonderful romantic songs. One of them was:

Hum aapki aankhon mein, is dil ko basa den toh  
 Hum moond ke palkon ko, is dil ko sanja den toh

If I settle my heart in your eyes,  
 With close eyes if I fix this heart.

This song is sung by Mohammad Rafi and Geeta Dutt and picturised on Guru Dutt and Meena Kumari. The other romantic song of *Pyasa* is:

Jaane Kya Tune Kahin  
 Jaane Kya Maine Kahin  
 Baat Kuch Ban Hi Gayi.

Do not know what you said,  
 Do not know what I said  
 Something has happened.

This song is picturised on Waheeda Rehman and sung by Geeta Dutt. In this song, Sahir's lyrics are so powerful that a woman, without any hesitation and sophistication, talks about her feelings for her love with the help of sensation she feels in her body. Another soothing song again picturised on Waheeda Rehman and sung by Geeta Dutt, talks about love between the Hindu God Krishna and Radha was:

Sakhi ri, birha ke dukhree sah-sah kar jab radhe besudh ho li  
 Toh ek din apne Manmohan se ja kar yun boli  
 "Aaj Sajan mohe ang laga lo  
 Janam safal ho jaaye...

O friend after dealing with lots of pain of estrangement Radha,  
 One day went to her god and said  
 "O dear hug me today  
 My life will become successful".

In *Pyasa*, Sahir's lyrics have also captured the emotional feelings of the failed lover in a song, *Jaane who kaise log the jinke pyar ko pyar mila, humne toh kaliyan maangi kaanto ko haar mila* (Do not know how those people were who got their love, when I asked for flower I got garland of thorns). This song was picturised on Guru Dutt and sung by Hemant

Kumar. It beautifully depicts a failed lover who has lost everything, including his lady love.

Despite a musical hit, *Pyasa* is the last film in which S.D. Burman and Sahir worked together. Sahir and Guru Dutt were close to each other but not very close personally.<sup>41</sup> The depth of Sahir's socially conscious and humanitarian songs have made his biographer, Akshay Manwani call him, "The People's Poet." Akshay also calls Sahir an "Angry Young Man" of the film industry. The term "Angry Young Man" is given to Amitabh Bachchan for the anti-establishment roles he played in the 1970s films written by Salim Khan-Javed Akhtar but, for Manwani, Sahir deserved the epithet before Bachchan.<sup>42</sup> In his songs, Sahir consistently raised uncomfortable questions and expressed bitter truths. The anger in his writings for *Pyasa* is palpable.<sup>43</sup>

Like Guru Dutt, the story of *Pyasa* is also in tune with Sahir's own life. Manwani writes: "Sahir Ludhianvi, his lyrical contribution apart, remains central to the theme. The film is replete with references to Sahir and his life, even if they happen unwittingly. For example, in the film's second scene, when the publisher refuses to publish Vijay's poems, saying that poetry should be about beauty and romance instead of hunger and unemployment, the parallel to Sahir's own brand of poetry is all too familiar."<sup>44</sup>

The romantic triangle in the film with Guru Dutt, Waheeda, and Mala Sinha had a parallel spillover from reel to real life. Sahir was in a relationship with poet Amrita Pritam. Also, there was a rumour about his relationship with Sudha Malhotra, whose singing career he tried to support in the film industry. However, none of the two women became a part of Sahir's life as he remained unmarried. Four times he closed to get married, but he managed to escape every time.<sup>45</sup> In Bombay, he used to live with his mother and sister.

Interestingly, artist Imroz who replaced Sahir in Pritam's life, was appointed to make the publicity posters of *Pyasa*. In the posters, Imroz included poems of Sahir with the still of Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman.<sup>46</sup> About the premier of *Pyasa*, Imroz recounted Nirupama Dutt that:<sup>47</sup>

I was given two tickets for the premier show in Delhi besides the payment I had got for the artwork for the film. I went to Amrita and told her that I had got the tickets for the premier and would like her to accompany me. She, however, said that Sahir had

already asked her to accompany him... I [Nirupama] remained silent for a few seconds and then asked him, Did this trouble you? He was quick to reply, Not at all. She had known Sahir before she got to know me so it was all right and then he had asked her to accompany him before I did. I also went to the premiere and saw the film by myself and they saw it sitting side by side. That was all.

### Conclusion

As discussed in this paper, *Pyasa* remains one of the popular all-time Bollywood classics. The questions which the film raised in 1950s are still relevant. In so many years, class-based exploitation and society's vision towards women remain the same, though ways to exploit individuals have changed. The protagonist Vijay is an eternal character that one can encounter even in present India.

Looking at the songs of *Pyasa*, the range shown by Sahir makes him someone who has a deep knowledge about human emotions and feelings. Sahir's range is apparent in two completely different types of songs – *Jaane Kya Tune Kahin* and *Tang Aa Chuke Hain Kashmakashe Zindagi Se Hum*. In the first song, love is acutely expressed for the other, while a poet expresses his frustration in the second. Besides human emotions, Sahir's songs *ye nilamghar* raises a pertinent question to the stakeholders and managers of the society, and the then Indian state. Finally, the song *yeh mahlon...* shows the persisting exploitation and inhumanity in society. Through this song, Vijay states that even if one gets this society, it is of no use. In this sense, Sahir and Guru Dutt, through *Pyasa*, give a message about a need for an exploitation free society.

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### End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni (2006), *Yours Guru Dutt: Intimate Letters of a Great Indian Filmmaker*, Roli Books, New Delhi. P 78.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, Karl and Engels, F *On Literature and Art*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 144.  
[http://ciml.250x.com/archive/marx\\_engels/english/marx\\_and\\_engels\\_on\\_literature\\_and\\_art.pdf](http://ciml.250x.com/archive/marx_engels/english/marx_and_engels_on_literature_and_art.pdf). Accessed on 29 March 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, P 145

<sup>5</sup> Gaurav Gadgil and Sudha Tiwari "Poetics of "Pyaasa" and Narratives of National Disillusionment". Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 2013, Vol. 74 (2013), pp. 938-944. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44158896>

<sup>6</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni (2006), *Yours Guru Dutt: Intimate Letters of a Great Indian Filmmaker*, Roli Books, New Delhi. P 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. P 41.

<sup>8</sup> "Rendezvous with Simi Garewal Waheeda Rehman Part 1 (2003)" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADhp\\_f6npqI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADhp_f6npqI). Accessed on 25 March 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Yaseer Usman (2021, 11 January), "How Guru Dutt became the reluctant hero of his masterpiece 'Pyaasa'" *Scroll.in*. <https://scroll.in/reel/983100/how-guru-dutt-became-the-reluctant-hero-of-his-masterpiece-pyaasa>. Accessed on 25 March 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Saran, Sathya (2009), *Ten Years with Guru Dutt: Abrar Alvi's Journey*. P 87.

<sup>13</sup> Yaseer Usman (2021, 11 January), " How Guru Dutt became the reluctant hero of his masterpiece 'Pyaasa'" *Scroll.in*. <https://scroll.in/reel/983100/how-guru-dutt-became-the-reluctant-hero-of-his-masterpiece-pyaasa>. Accessed on 25 March 2021.



<sup>14</sup> Dinesh Raheja (2005), "Pyasa: Guru Dutt's Masterpiece".

<https://www.rediff.com/movies/2003/jun/23dinesh.htm>.

Accessed on 25 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Raza Naeem (2020, 25 October), "The Poem That Forced Sahir Ludhianvi to Leave Lahore Forever," *The Wire*,

<https://thewire.in/culture/sahir-ludhianvi-faiz-hum-dekhenge-lahore-avaaz-e-adam>. Accessed on 21 March 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Carlo Coppola "Politics, Social Criticism and Indian Film Songs: The Case of Sahir Ludhianvi," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Spring 1977. P. 897-

902. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1977.1004\\_897.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1977.1004_897.x)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Talkhiyan "Taj Mahal"

<https://ia801608.us.archive.org/25/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.551286/2015.551286.Talkhiyan.pdf>. p 53.

<sup>22</sup> Raza Naeem (2020, 25 October), "The Poem That Forced Sahir Ludhianvi to Leave Lahore Forever," *The Wire*,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Namrata Joshi (2021, 8 March), " Sahir Ludhianvi: The personal in political and the political in personal," *National Herald*,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Mohammad Kamran Ahsan, "Sahir in the 21st Century: The economic exploitation of the underprivileged, gender oppression and the abuse of power are the eternal themes in the verse of the Marxist feminist poet, Sahir Ludhianvi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 27, 2014, Vol. 49, pp. 117-118.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> "Nur-Jahan ke Mazar Pe -Sahir Ludhiyanvi," <https://biharispeaks.wordpress.com/2017/10/16/nur-jahan-ke-mazar-par-sahir-ludhiyanvi/>. Accessed on 27 March 2021.

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<sup>31</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni (1997), *Guru Dutt: A Life in Cinema*. Oxford University Press: Delhi. P 82.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni (1997), *Guru Dutt: A Life in Cinema*. Oxford University Press: Delhi. P 82.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Mohammad Kamran Ahsan "Sahir in the 21st Century: The economic exploitation of the underprivileged, gender oppression and the abuse of power are the eternal themes in the verse of the Marxist feminist poet, Sahir Ludhianvi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 27, 2014, Vol. 49, pp. 117-118.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, Karl and Engels, Fredrick (1988) *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, translated by Martin Milligan. Kolkata: Prometheus Book.

<sup>38</sup> Azmi, Kaifi, "Sahir Ludhianvi." Republished in Abbasi, Yasir *Yeh Un Dinon Ki Baat Hai...: Urdu Memoirs of Cinema Legends* (2018). New Delhi: Bloomsbury. P. 37, pp 31-39.

<sup>39</sup> "Sahir Ludhianvi's Songs Were Full of Joy, Exuberance and Also a Subtly Delivered Message," *The Wire*, 8 March 2021.  
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<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Kamran Ahsan "Sahir in the 21st Century: The economic exploitation of the underprivileged, gender oppression and the abuse of power are the eternal themes in the verse of the Marxist feminist poet, Sahir Ludhianvi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 27, 2014, Vol. 49, No. 52. pp. 117-118.

<sup>41</sup> Kabir, Nasreen Munni (1997), *Guru Dutt: A Life in Cinema*. Oxford University Press: Delhi. P 83.

<sup>42</sup> Akshay Manwani (2021, 7 March), Sahir Ludhianvi at 100: Why the poet and film lyricist was the original 'Angry Young Man' *Scroll.in*  
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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Nirupama Dutt (2020, 24 October), "Roundabout: Pyasa revisited on Sahir Ludhianvi's death anniversary in his Centenary year," *Hindustan Times*.  
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<sup>47</sup> Ibid