
Satire and Social Critique in Urdu Cinema: Revealing Cultural and Moral Tenor of Society

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Abstract:

In the Late 60s and 70s Pakistani Urdu movie used humor and satire to undermine standards and political discourse in society and gender roles. This study has selected Rangeela (1970), Insaan Aur Gadha (1973), and Aurat Raj (1979) in order to demonstrate the possibilities of satire in terms of censure and conservative values. The study makes use of Bakhtinian carnivalesque theory and feminist cinema criticism in the analysis of narrative methods, character inversion and performative parody, in order to expose class exploitation, political hypocrisy and patriarchal systems. The production and reception of the movies were informed by the PPP era and Pakistan's conservatism under Zia. The paper explains how the medium of satire exposes and responds to issues of concern in society, as a zone of ambiguity where subversion may take place, but is generally limited by censorship, financial interests and popular wants. Case studies special emphasis is given to a few issues, Rangeela lampoons urban life and social mobility, Insaan Aur Gadha questions authority and mass manipulation through grotesque transformation and political parody, Aurat Raj subverts the gender roles to discuss feministic demands and cultural backlash. The

paper concluded that Urdu films during this period used satire to pass culturally comprehensible moral judgement and indirect dissent.

Keywords: Urdu cinema, Satire, Social Criticism, Pakistani film, Rangeela, Insaan Aur Gadha, Aurat Raj

1. Introduction

Historically, the movies that were being played in the South Asia have been a fun but also a way to criticise the society. After independence Urdu film is often referred to as Lollywood that had to big impact on the imagination of the people in Pakistan. While melodrama and romance characterized the popular trends in the mainstream, satire became a subtle, but powerful, vehicle for filmmaking to comment on socioeconomic differences, political power, and gender relations. Satire in the form of poetry also plays a large role in Urdu literature particularly in the works of Akbar Allahabadi, Patras Bokhari and Krishan Chander. After 1960s, the Pakistani film industry adopted mode of humour, irony and hyperbole in attacking the social hypocrisy and the powers of the government. Filmmakers used humor more and more during this time, not only to make people laugh, but also to make a point about society. This article looks at three Urdu movies - Rangeela (1970), Insaan Aur Gadha (1973) and Aurat Raj (1979) that have used a satire as their main way of telling a story. These movies depict a major decade in the history of Pakistan where populism of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and authoritarian Islamization of General Zia-ul-Haq were in their peak. Cinema as a form of popular culture plays a peculiar role in postcolonial societies like Pakistan where literacy, oral culture and visual forms intersect. Films can often serve as collective memory, the dream and the nightmares of society. In

this sense, satire is particularly effective as a way of critique that can be incorporated into entertainment. The laughter from satire does not only amuse but invite recognition and reflection and let audiences face uncomfortable truths in an indirect manner. In Pakistan, where political expression has frequently been restricted by state power, satire has always been a form of dissent that has been relatively safer. The period being studied, that is, the late 1960s and the late 1970s, is a transformation period in Pakistani history. It witnessed the optimism of populist politics, the trauma of war and secession and the gradual imposition of moral and ideological controls on culture. Urdu cinema of this period took in these tensions and conveyed them through allegory, parody, and comic exaggeration. Satirical films thus become important historical documents, providing insights into how society viewed the role of power, authority, class mobility and gender norms at moments of upheaval.

Bakhtin and the Carnavalesque

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque is focused on laughter as a social force with which authority is shaken. Carnival allows the grotesque, the absurd and the inverted hierarchy, it allows the voice of the marginalised to ridicule the power structures of the dominant. In cinema, carnivalesque satire is made up of the mocking of overblown characters, bodily humour and narrative inversions which shake up social mores, at least for a moment (Bakhtin, 1984, foreword x-xi). Closely related to the carnivalesque is the political role of the satire as indirect critique particularly in restrictive socio-political circumstances such as Pakistan. (Bakhtin, 1984, foreword x-xi). Bakhtin's notions are especially helpful in analysing popular cinema where exaggeration is used as an aesthetic tool, along with spectacles and bodily

humour. The carnivalesque offers a temporary suspension of official norms, which enables ordinary people to laugh at kings, leaders and institutions, who otherwise appear to be invincible. In film narratives, this manifests in the form of comic protagonists who challenge authority not by direct confrontation but by ridicule, irony and absurdity. Such laughter does not cause the overthrow of power forever, but its moral legitimacy is de-stabilised. In the context of Pakistani cinema, carnivalesque satire becomes an important cultural strategy. It gives filmmakers to comment on political and social realities without specifically naming or attacking those in power. By employing metaphors, fantastic situations and inversions of humour, movies can speak of dissent while staying within the acceptable parameters of popular entertainment. This is especially evident in the film parody of leadership, bureaucracy, and public rhetoric with their exaggerated performances that reveal the hollowness of authority.

Satire, Power and Subversive Indirect Dissent

Satire can easily be a form of "safe criticism" especially in societies with a high level of censorship. Rather than direct confrontation with the power, satire outwardly conceals the dissent in the humour and thus makes the circulation all the more widespread with the critical edge intact. This framework is especially applicable to Pakistani cinema where the role of the state censorship boards to control the political subject matter was strong. Gender has been one of the most contested domains of social power and satirical inversion has always played a major part in patriarchal norm articulation. Throughout Pakistan's political history there has been a level of regulation, surveillance, and moral policing of cinema. Filmmakers frequently turned to symbolic representation instead of realism as a way to avoid censorship.

Satire by its very nature also thrives on ambiguity; its meanings can be denied, deflected or laughed away. This ambiguity allows satire to serve as a double-edged tool - fun and entertaining on one level and talking about deeper ideological critiques behind the surface. The power of satire is that it is accessible. Unlike overt political commentary, the satire caters to a wide audience, potentially to people who may not be consciously looking for political engagement. By incorporating critique through a sense of humor, films get spectators to question norms and assumptions without feeling alienated or being lectured. This quality made satire especially suitable for the Urdu cinema which relied heavily on mass appeal.

Feminist Film Theory

Feminist theorists have proposed that gender inversion and gender parody can be ways of exposing the construct of patriarchy. In *Aurat Raj*, the exaggerated role reversal not only is comedy, but it is a political statement on the misogyny, moral double-standards and institutionalised gender inequalities. Against this theoretical and cultural background, this article is concentrated on three Urdu films: *Rangeela* (1970), *Insaan Aur Gadha* (1973) and *Aurat Raj* (1979) which use satire as a major narrative strategy. These films narrate a very important period in history of Pakistan where populist politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and followed by Islamisation during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq took place. Gender relations in Pakistani society have traditionally been determined by patriarchy, religious interpretations, and comparatively developed legislation. Cinema has both reinforced and challenged these norms. Feminist satire and especially role reversal where men are put in the position of women, call into question the arbitrariness of gendered power. The

discomfort and laughter such inversions produce is indicative of how deeply-mingled these hierarchies are. *Aurat Raj* is a rare cinematic experiment that openly questions the patriarchal authority with the use of humor. By envisioning a world in which women are in charge and men experience limitation designed for women, the film forces viewers to confront the injustice that is embedded in the daily practices. Satire here becomes not only social commentary, but a kind of feminist resistance.

The article try to address the following issues by the means of comparative analysis of different films:

- Satire as a means of the society criticism What Does It Do in Urdu Movie?
- Why do such funny stories mock which aspects of the Pakistani society? Class, politics, morality and gender?
- What are the limits of satire (where censorship, Patriarchy and popular culture are concerned)?

These questions help to structure the analysis of the study and determine the comparative methodology. By looking at films on various thematic concerns such as class struggle, political authority and gender relations, the article aims to show how satire is capable of adaptation in different social contexts while preserving its critical function.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly research on the cinema in Pakistan in the past have focused on several issues such as the decline of the industrial sector, censorship and the construction of national identities. Satisfaction as a genre have received a very little amount of study.

However, the innovating work by Mushtaq Gazdar on Pakistani film did not present the continuum study on satire as cinematic genre. Instead, it deals with the pendulation of the freedom of art and oppression by the state (Gazdar, 1997, 149-238). In more recent study which has been published in publication like screen and BioScope, there has been an attempt to reevaluate Pakistani cinema in the frameworks of Transnational and Cultural studies.(Ahmad, 2014, 175-181; 2016, 468-479). While Gazdar's work continues to remain fundamental, subsequent scholars have broadened the scope of work on Pakistani films by placing the cinema in global and regional frameworks. These studies highlight the issues of migration, identity and cultural exchange which emphasize the participation of Pakistani cinema in transnational dialogues. However, satire is a cinematic form that is underexplored, as it is frequently treated as a secondary form to the more commonly privileged forms of realism or melodrama. In south Asian satire studies satire is through literary works or laughing programs reminiscent of other fields of satire more important modern political satire shows through. There is dearth of theorization on satire in the cinema especially Urdu cinema. A useful theoretical approach is given by Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque which focuses on inversion, parody and temporary suspension of social hierarchies (Bakhtin, 1984, Introduction, p.10). The framework of feminist cinema theory adds more knowledge about the ways in which hierarchies of power based on gender may be destabilized through the use of role reversal and parabola. Journalistic and archival materials, e.g. Dawn, Pakistan Times, Nigar Awards records, which provide unique insights for the reception of these films in the present and the problems associated with censorship and cultural debates which surround these films. “Aurat Raj has been defined as a courageous satirical film using gender inversion and buffoonery of fantasy to resist

the patriarchy and gender norms of Pakistani society. The film's depiction of men reduced to 'dupatta-covered minions' and the thematic focus on the rule of women have been pointed out as subversive comment on patriarchal culture as well as in film retrospectives". (Rabe, 2017) In order to overcome the divide between the studies of films, cultural history and the study of satire, through this essay we situate Urdu cinematic satire within the moral and political environment of Pakistan throughout 1970s.

3. Sources of and Methodological Framework

The present study takes a qualitative approach of interpretive methodology in order to explore the role of satire and social critique through Urdu cinema with a close reading of film texts, historical context, and critical theory. Given the nature of the research questions (which concerned with ideology, power, humour, and representation), quantitative approaches would be inadequate. Instead, the research is based on textual and visual analysis, comparative narrative interpretation, and archival verification through the support of theoretical and historical sources.

Textual and Visual Analysis of Films

The major sources for this research are the three Urdu films, Rangeela (1970), Insaan Aur Gadha (1973), and Aurat Raj (1979). These films were chosen deliberately as they explicitly adopt satire as a narrative approach as well as having been made during a highly volatile decade in the history of Pakistan. Textual analysis focuses on narrative structure, characterization, dialogue, symbolism, comic devices like exaggeration, parody and inversion. Visual analysis looks at *mise en scene*, performance style, costumes and spectacle; all of which are important to

understanding satire in popular cinema. Close reading of selected scenes enables the study to identify the workings of humor not as an entertainment factor but as a means of critique. Satirical techniques: Anthropomorphism (Insaan Aur Gadha), comedy based on class (Rangeela) and reversal of gender roles (Aurat Raj) are analysed as cinematic manifestation of social tension.

Comparative Technique of Analysis of Narrative

Comparative analysis is the central methodological approach of such research. Rather than addressing each film separately, the study situates them in conversation with one another in order to determine common satirical strategies and different ideological targets. Comparison allows the research to follow the traces of satire in its engagement with various domains of power - class, politics, gender - in the same cultural and historical context. This way, in Urdu cinematic satire, the continuities and the limits can be identified as well. While Rangeela is concerned with the precarity of everyday life in the cities, Insaan Aur Gadha practices political parody and Aurat Raj stretches the satire towards the feminist. The comparative method thus brings greater analytical force by locating individual films within a larger satirical tradition.

Historical Contextualization using Archival Sources

To avoid purely textual or ahistorical readings, film analysis in the study is based on archival and journalistic sources. These materials are the fundamental to an understanding of the conditions of production, of censorship and of public reception.

Archival articles from Dawn and Pakistan Times are used to substantiate claims in relation to censorship, political sensitivity and cultural debates. For instance, Dawn Images has reported on the temporary ban on *Insaan Aur Gadha* during the Bhutto government, which validates the fact that the satire in the film was seen as political provocation. Such sources are evidence of the fact that satire in Urdu cinema was not only symbolic but had real political danger. Newspapers also help to contextualize *Aurat Raj* in the moral climate of the late 1970s, especially the first few years of General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies which greatly curtailed cultural expression and representations of gender.

Film Data Verification and Sources in the Film Industry

Accurate filmographic information, including when the film was released, who directed it, who starred in it, how it was rated, etc., is important for scholarly credibility. For this purpose, cross-verification between several authoritative sources is used in the study:

PakMag (Pakistan Film Magazine) is taken as a primary database for Pakistani cinema. PakMag has comprehensive information on Urdu films in its records, including cast information, production credits and films, making it one of the most reliable archives of Lollywood film history.

Wikipedia, although not considered in any way as an academic source, is cautiously used and only on basic film data, cross-checked against PakMag and archival sources.

Nigar Awards archives are consulted to check industry recognition and modern appreciation of the movies. The inclusion of award data helps to place these films in the mainstream of cinematic culture of the day, showing that the genre of satire was not marginal, but was part of popular cinema.

This triangulation of sources means that the accuracy of the facts is assured and that the reliance on a single database is reduced.

Theoretical Sources

The analytical framework of the study is based on existing theoretical literature: Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1984) is the main source of theoretical work for an understanding of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's discussion of laughter, grotesque realism and the inversion of hierarchy gives a strong basis to analyze satire in the cinema, especially the provisional suspension of authority through humor. Feminist film theory inspired by the work of film theorists like Laura Mulvey and more recently feminist film critics informs the reading of *Aurat Raj*. Gender inversion and parody are interpreted as ways of exposing patriarchy as an artificial system rather than a natural order. These sources from the theoretical side are widely cited, peer-reviewed and foundational in the cultural and film studies, so appropriate for rigorous academic analysis.

Literary sources: Secondary Scholarly Literature

Secondary sources include books and journal articles on the cinema in Pakistan and South Asia studies of the screen. Foundational to current understanding of the political economy of Pakistani film, censorship and the state control of film is Mushtaq Gazdar's *Pakistan Cinema, 1947-1997*. Although Gazdar's work is not

exclusively about satire, it does give important historical basis. More recent scholarship published in journals such as *Screen and BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* (edited by Ali Nobil Ahmad and others) re-assess Pakistani cinema in terms of transnational and cultural studies. These sources support the study's argument that the Pakistani cinema is increasingly being analyzed within realms outside of nationalist narratives, though the theme of satire remains under-theorized.

4. *Rangeela* (1970)

4.1 Film Background

Rangeela (1970) was directed by and starred Rangeela (Mohammad Saeed Khan), one of the most influential comic figures in Pakistani cinema. The film occupies an important position within Urdu cinema for its integration of comedy with social observation rather than relying solely on slapstick or escapist humor (Tahira, 2025). According to film records, *Rangeela* received recognition at the Nigar Awards, reinforcing its contemporary critical and popular significance (Wikipedia contributors, 2025a). The film belongs to a period when Lollywood was experimenting with socially grounded narratives alongside commercial formulas. Rather than depicting grand political allegory, *Rangeela* situates its satire within everyday urban experiences, making it especially relevant for understanding class consciousness in Pakistani cinema of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

4.2 Everyday Satire and Class Consciousness

The accent of *Rangeela* lies on what may be called micro-social satire, as opposed to the overt political satires, which are an outright satire of the power of the state. Unemployment, unstable housing, and the struggle to retain one's dignity are at the

core of Rangeela's (1970) key thematic themes. Through Sohna's proclamation, "*Main shehar jaakar itni daulat kamaunga*" the movie brings economic desire to the forefront. This assertion epitomises a rural-urban fantasy of mobility and money that is characteristic of the post-independence metropolitan imagination. Nevertheless, this hope is suddenly cast down by the realities of structures that must be reckoned with. "*Makaan girvi rakha hua hai, karza lene wale ghar se nikaal denge*" is the nervous admission by Sohna's mother. This admission hints at the fragility of housing and the looming threat of dispossession which puts the existence of the family within cycles of indebtedness and insecurity. The story always explores the breakdown of human dignity in an unequal metropolitan space, beyond the material hardship, which is the subject of the story. Sohna's battle is not only economic but one of morality as he is compelled to negotiate for humiliation, contempt, and social rejection while trying to hold together his self-respect on the one hand and his dignity on the other. It becomes clear the city is a place where one's value is not determined by their character but by their look, employment and degree of respectability in their actions. (FILMAZIA URDU, 2025)

This dichotomy between dignity and social value is made most strongly through Salma's statement which reads as follows: "*Tumhri surat iss kabil hai ki tumse mohabbat ki jaye, maine tumhe maskara samaj ke ahmiyat di thi.*" As a result of the debate, the conditional character of acceptance in the metropolitan culture are revealed. In this society, love and attention is only granted to those that are able to transcend the mark of being comical or impoverished. Humour, which initially enables Sohna to survive, at the same time becomes the cornerstone for his marginalization, for being turned into an object rather than a subject that is worthy of a true regard. (FILMAZIA URDU, 2025)

Rangeela is a subtle social commentary about the urban modernity, in which unemployment, housing insecurity, and class-based perceptions intertwine to address an individual's struggle for survival in terms of dignity. When taken together, these moments position Rangeela as a social critique of urban modernity. It is not through the extreme parody that the satire of the film is found, but through its daily realism that the film calls attention to the profound entanglement in moral fabric of the city that economic vulnerability and social respectability represent.

Rather it being abrasive; the comedy in Rangeela is of great empathy. The film makes no joke out of poverty, but instead highlights the structural constraints that compel people to make moral concessions. It would seem that social respectability which is often represented in one's appearance, clothes, voice and performance, is a fragile thing which has to be maintained constantly. According to academic studies, Urdu comedic film had frequently humanized the marginal instead of caricatured them. This is in line with the findings of these observations.

4.3 Carnavalesque Moments and Temporary Inversion

The thematic issues of unemployment, housing precariousness and the precarious striving for dignity in Rangeela (1970) can usefully be studied in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, especially its accent on laughter, exaggeration and the temporary upending of social hierarchies. In the film moments of humour act as a momentary interruption in the otherwise unequal social order and allow marginalised figures such as Sohna to temporarily de-stabilise the position of authority and to reclaim visibility within the urban space.

Sohna's comic appearance in the city represents the carnivalesque subject who is able to survive based on wit and performance rather than economic capital. His

declaration of ambition “*Main shehar jaakar itni daulat kamaunga*” is repeatedly recast in terms of comic misadventures that serve to bring out the absurdity of metropolitan promises. Street scenes, public interactions, these are carnivalesque spaces in which social norms are suspended. In these spaces, laughter functions as a group experience which for a brief period of time equalizes people across class boundaries, allowing Sohna to ridicule employers, landlords, and social elites who normally enjoy unquestioned authority. (FILMAZIA URDU, 2025)

The precariousness of dwellings, which is expressed in Sohna's mother's terror- "*Makaan girvi rakha hua hai, karza lene wale ghar se nikaal denge*" -further places the carnivalesque in a position of material instability. Moments of humor do not abolish this precarious situation but make it possible to express without despair. Through exaggerated situations and fanciful dialogue, the film converts the anxiety into laughter providing a short respite from the constant threat of dispossession. This fits in with Bakhtin's claim that carnival laughter is not a denial of suffering, but a rearticulation of suffering through a common and regenerative humour. (FILMAZIA URDU, 2025)

Mistaken identities and performative misunderstandings in the film are important mechanisms of temporary inversion. Sohna's comic persona enables him to cross social thresholds - to enter spaces of respectability, affection and visibility that would otherwise be unavailable to him. But these crossings are conditional and so temporary. Salma's comment, "*Kya Tumhri surat iss kabil hai ki tumse mohabbat ki jaye, maine tumhe maskara samaj ke ahmiyat di thi*" is very telling in revealing the limits of this inversion. While Sohna's humour at first offers him recognition it also

locks him into the position of the '*maskara*' demonstrating the power and the powerlessness of carnivalesque laughter. (FILMAZIA URDU, 2025)

Musical sequences in the end, Rangeela increase this carnivalesque suspension. Song moments obliterate iron social distinctions and create a festive moment with dignity restored for a brief moment by moving in unison with collective joy. Yet in accordance with Bakhtin's structure, such moments do not end in structural change. The carnival being over, social hierarchies reassert themselves. Sohna's economic insecurity and class position are not resolved, pointing to the persistence of inequality.

Thus, Rangeela uses the carnivalesque not as a revolutionary force, but as a mode of diagnosis. Laughter reveals the contradictions of urban modernity, where aspiration and dispossession, dignity and performance, go hand in hand without having the potential to provide permanent answer. The temporary inversion of hierarchy throws light on the persistence of class barriers rather than the collapse of the class barriers. In this sense, the film's satire is grounded in the realism of everyday life: it uses carnivalesque moments to show the intersection of three issues - unemployment, housing insecurity and social respectability - to demonstrate, in the end, the structural constraints within which it is necessary for the marginalized to continue to fight to negotiate their dignity.

5. *Insaan Aur Gadha* (1973)

The titular character of the film is the famous comedian Rangeela in the 1973 film *Insaan Aur Gadha*, a Pakistani Urdu language satire comedy. The film was directed and produced by Syed Kamal, and it was a film of sarcastic comedy. The book '*Gadhay Ki Sarguzasht*,' written by Krishan Chandar, is one such work that is known

all around in Urdu literary circles for being an article of satire on the human condition (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b). It was on August 31, 1973, when *Insaan Aur Gadha* was made available to the public in major circuits like Lahore and Karachi. (pakistan film magazine, n.d.)

5.1 Plot and Satirical Framework

It is humorous and metaphorical in nature, but the basic idea of *Insaan Aur Gadha* is that a donkey prays to God to be turned into a human being because he feels that human life is of a higher level and endowed with dignity. With the words "*Dhang insaniyat ka Sikha de, Aye Khuda mujhko insaan bana de*" the Donkey expresses his sentiments. (Old is Gold, 2019) Nevertheless, as he goes about his life in human society, he comes to the realization that human existence is more problematic than his life as a donkey. He says, "*Main Insaniyat ka Dushman hoon, Maine logon ko woh aaina dikhaya hai jisme insaan ki sabse bhayanak surat nazar aa gayi hai.*" (Old is Gold, 2019) This is because the human behavior, social obligations, greed, hypocrisy and moral confusion are all factors that contribute to human existence (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). The donkey turned man, who is played by Rangeela, comes to the realization at the end that his moral purpose, his clarity of existence was greater while he was an animal as per the current discussion and evaluations that follow, He even asks God to turn him back to a donkey, with the song "*Aadmi-Aadmi ka hai Dushman Aye khuda mujhko haiwaan bana de*" (Old is Gold, 2019) He describes his dissatisfaction with the moral void that exists in the world on account of humans. (Paracha, 2020)

The scene in which the changed donkey delivers a parody of political oratory in the presence of a horde of fellow donkeys in which he promises to fight for their rights

and critiques the style of the populist leadership is one of the most significant scenes to receive attention. This grotesque inversion, in which an animal is lecturing its own ilk on its rights and human hypocrisy, is the nub of the film's satire on human politics and social order. The animal says, "*Main insaan ban kar duniya ke tamam gadhon ke haq ki hifazat karunga aur un insano ke haq ki bhi jo jaanwar se bhi badhtar Zindagi jee rahe hain*" (Paracha, 2020; Old is Gold, 2019)

5.2 Political and cultural reception

Protests broke out almost soon after the movie was released due to the fact that it had satirical elements particularly the speech that was a parody of political rhetoric. Reports indicate that it was the administration of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who banned the film within a few weeks of its release. The government said the speech sequence in which the donkey-turned-man addresses a crowd, making fun of the general population by presenting them as a group of donkeys found objectionable in its view, which was one of the reasons it was banned, (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b). Film historian and critic Mushtaq Gazdar saw in his writing the day that the sequence took about a month after the controversy and revisions that was made around the concerns that the picture was permitted to return to theaters despite the fact that it had been banned (Paracha, 2020) (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b). As an early case of a political picture being restricted because of its perceived criticism of leadership and mass politics, this happening is frequently pointed out in the context of Pakistani movie censorship. This is because it is regarded to be particularly controversial. (Paracha, 2020)

5.3 The Interpretation of Genre and Themes and Genre

Allegory and anthropomorphism occurred in *Insaan Aur Gadha* which is one of the first clearly satirical Pakistani films. The purpose of it was to question human social systems, hypocrisy, and political rhetoric. This film occupies a special position in the history of Pakistani film industry known as Lollywood. These traditions of social satire might be seen in literature, notably the South Asian variants of allegories of animals that comment on the relations of power. The story's storyline, which includes a donkey that assumes the form of a human, but becomes disillusioned, is reminiscent of these traditions. Exaggeration, contradiction and inversion are the three pillars on which the humour of the film is built. The film situates itself in a long history of satire which is marked by the marginalized voice exposing bigger truths about the failure of society. This is done by giving an animal human speech and exposing the moral dilemmas that human beings face. The performance that Rangeela made as the changed donkey man was generally acclaimed as being unusual and unforgettable. It proved to be his success not only as a comedy artist but also as a social satirist, who engaged the audience with both his humorous and serious criticism. (Paracha, 2020)

5.4 Accolades and Acknowledgments

Insaan Aur Gadha was also recognized in the industry for its quality comedy. Rangeela won the Nigar Award for Best Comedian (1973), the then most prestigious cinema award in Pakistan. This success is a testament to the industry realization of his performance as well as the film's wide popularity (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b).

5.5 Legacy and Significance

As a result of its controversial response and its use of satire to make a point about human behaviour and political discourse, the film is considered to be part of a select group of Urdu films from the 1970s that aimed to push the bounds of story beyond melodrama or romance. An additional reflection of the ways in which cultural works were in the process of bargaining with state authority during a time of political transition is the fact that it was temporarily banned and subsequently reinstated. film *Insaan Aur Gadha* is a fascinating case study in Pakistani cinematic satire due to the coexistence of elements of fantasy, comedy and sociopolitical allegory. It is also an example of what filmic critique can and cannot do in the entertainment industry at large in the early 1970s.

6. *Aurat Raj*

Rangeela's film *Aurat Raj*, which he directed and produced in the mid 1970s is a rare and unique example of deliberately satirical, gender-centered popular cinema in Pakistan. Rangeela is well known as a famous comedian and actor but here he displays himself to be a brave satirist who uses fiction and exaggeration to criticise the deeply rooted patriarchal norms. *Aurat Raj* is frequently referred to as a satirical fantasy in movie databases, film catalogs and retrospectives. It dares to envisage a fundamental change in the way the gender roles are set up. The movie uses magic and allegory to turn the power relations of the society upside down so that the males have to deal with the same constraints, monitoring and moral discipline that the women have always had to deal with. (Wikipedia contributors, 2025c). The basic premise of the film is speculation: the historical onus of women who have been attacked by the structures of power unite politically to seize power. This thought is the political ideology of *Aurat Raj*. Through the use of charged dialogues, the film

gives voice to the anger of women and the historical grievances of women. For example, when Sophia is confronting her husband and she says, "*Aurat hamesha mardon ke Zulm ka shikaar rahi, mardon ne pehle usey darbaaron mein Nachaya to kabhi bazaaron mein, ab tumhari baari, ab tum humare kadmon ke neeche ho.*" (Pakistani Bblockbuster Movies Channel, 2025) This sentence sums up the main point of the movie: patriarchy is not natural, and it is not commanded by God, it is a historical construct that is maintained by violence. The conversation is a time of catharsis and gives voice to the anger that women have built up for hundreds of years of being dominated. (Wikipedia contributors, 2025c). The plot twist of the story occurs when a "bomb," a symbolic weapon, which disrupts the existing gender order is invented. The bomb does not function as a weapon of physical destruction, but functions as a metaphor that obliges males to confront the experiences of women. *Aurat Raj* uses this creative method of describing how power works in everyday life, such as controlling movement, appearance, voice and moral reputation. Men, now facing the same public-private restrictions and social invisibility that was once imposed on women, face shame, anxiety and loss of autonomy. The film takes abstract feminist criticism and makes it real. (Pakistani Bblockbuster Movies Channel, 2025). The plot is purposely simple and symbolic. Women who have been held back get together, start a movement, and gain political power. This simplicity makes the satire easy for a lot of people to understand while yet making a complicated point about how gendered power works. The change in roles is not subtle, it is over-the-top, it is dramatic, and frequently silly. The movie employs a lot of different funny techniques, such slapstick, parody, farce, musical numbers, and strange locations, to create a universe that is both funny and scary. These methods have two purposes: they make a spectacle and demonstrate how vicious and arbitrary

are the patriarchal standards. (Rabe, 2017). Many modern and historical reviews agree that role reversal is the primary way in which the movie makes fun of things. Men are forced to act and appear excessively "feminine," and women take charge in public life. This reversal renders the traditional movie images of men and women less stable. In mainstream Urdu film so, male star is generally perceived as heroic or powerful, but in the film, they are perceived to be playing subservient, decorative and dependent roles. Women, on the other hand, are viewed as strong, outspoken and politically active. By turning these commonly known stereotypes on their head, *Aurat Raj* reveals the ways in which gender norms are perpetuated by repetition rather than in differences that already exist. (Rabe, 2017). The movie combines popular tropes of movies such as music, melodrama and celebrity appearances with campy styles and obvious mockery. Musical numbers are very important in making the film seem to be a carnival. Song and dance performances contribute to the feeling of excess and drama which makes it possible to mock and turn societal systems upside down. Clothing reversal, overacting and visual extravagance become mechanisms of defamiliarization which make patriarchal standards seem as peculiar, nonsensical and contingent rather than inherent. Film catalogs and archive descriptions also mention that the movie is long, and has a lot of actors, which makes it seem like a series of little plays. (Pakistani Bblockbuster Movies Channel, 2025). Scholars and critics who have read *Aurat Raj* have again and again emphasized its interventionist aims. The film presents the "what if" scenario that makes sexism obvious by having males assume women's societal roles. In this way, *Aurat Raj* is like other feminist speculative satires that use made-up universes to criticise the way things are now. In his popular article, Nate Rabe describes the movie as "a grand statement on women's rights delivered in the form of bizarre slapstick." He speaks

of its campy style, its melodic flights, and most importantly the image of men wearing dupattas which is a funny yet powerful signifier of gender inversion. This picture has since become famous, and it is usually mentioned when people speak about the legacy of the movie. (Rabe, 2017). Even though the movie had a very innovative idea, the political situation at the time had big impact on how people reacted on it. *Aurat Raj* came up around the early years of General Zia-ul-Haq's rule which was a time when Islamization and moral policing was on the rise. During the dictatorship of Zia, the artistic expression became more and more controlled under the pretext of "public morals." Stricter censorship restrictions such as changes in the Motion Pictures Ordinance made it more difficult for filmmakers to try new things, especially things that went against established gender roles. Histories of Pakistani film and later press retrospectives of it often suggest that the Zia period significantly narrowed the acceptable limits of criticism. (Rabe, 2017) In this historical setting, *Aurat Raj*—a film that openly portrayed female political leadership and ridiculed patriarchal masculinity—was philosophically at odds with official cultural policy. This conflict helps explain why the movie didn't perform very well at the box office and why people were so angry about it in later reports. Women in the movie screamed slogans like "*Aurat Raj, zindabad!*" and "*Aurat raj jab aayega, phir aurat apne zulm ka hisaab legi.*" (Pakistani Bblockbuster Movies Channel, 2025)

These slogans seem like calls to action, but they also show why the movie was seen as dangerous. These phrases express a vision of responsibility and fairness that was far different from what the government wanted, which was obedience and moral compliance.

Looking back, *Aurat Raj* has a complicated place in the history of Pakistani cinema. It is both praised for its boldness and pushed to the side because of its political

timeliness. The film finally ends its story via comedic closure rather than systemic revolution; yet, its creative criticism remains essential. *Aurat Raj* uses humour, fantasy, and role reversal to show that patriarchal control is something that has been created throughout time and can be questioned. Its lasting importance is not in its immediate effects but in its ability to make people think about gender, power, and the limitations of cultural resistance during times of ideological suppression.

Comparative Analysis: Satirical Techniques and Goals of Society

Rangeela, *Insaan Aur Gadha* and *Aurat Raj* A comparative analysis of the three texts *Rangeela*, *Insaan Aur Gadha* and *Aurat Raj* shows the function of satire in three interrelated levels: (i) Quotidian social existence, (ii) Political power, and (iii) Gendered hierarchies. Each of the films employs unique story techniques, tonal nuances, and artistic styles, though all three of them are linked by a common commitment to uncovering the moral paradoxes inherent in Pakistani culture in the late 1960s and 1970s. Together, they show how satire as seen in Urdu movies worked as a way to criticize things that was understandable to people in a culture where censorship, political instability, and entrenched sexism were all commonplace.

Rangeela: Satire and Real Life

In normal social life, *Rangeela* incorporates satire based on social reality rather than easily identifiable fantasy or metaphor. Humor is created from common reality problems - unemployment, housing insecurity and the precarious balancing of dignity inside metropolitan settings. (Gazdar, 1997; Ahmad, 2016) Instead of directly attacking the authority of the states, the film is more concerned with micro-social interaction, showing how class inequality is reinforced through everyday

contacts with landlords, employers and social elites. Here, satire works through humour that makes people feel bad. The cleverness of the main character and their ability to act promptly allows them a tiny break from their problems without any breakdown of systems that have caused it. Laughter is a means of surviving, showing how those who are on the outside may deal with humiliation without losing self-respect. The movie makes fun of a moral economy in which looks, job and social performance holds more importance than moral content. By doing this, Rangeela demonstrates the contrasts of the modern city life: individuals desire things while others steal them, individuals have to continue negotiating their dignity in the strict hierarchies of the class.

Political Authority and Satire: Insaan Aur Gadha

Insaan Aur Gadha takes satire one step further and turns it into a clear political allegory, while Rangeela remains faithful to the spirit of social realism. The main idea of the story is that a donkey becomes a person. This is rooted in ancient literary traditions of anthropomorphic satire questioning leadership, political rhetoric and mass obedience. The video uses outrageous exaggeration in order to demonstrate how silly authority is and how empty populist speech is. Satire in this case works in a large scale, making fun of politics as a whole. One of the best parts of the movie I remember was when the turned donkey and human gave a speech that made fun of political speeches. This is a sign of the way in which slogans and emotional appeals are substituted for moral or intellectual content. Authority is made to appear foolish not by direct attack but by turning things on their heads: an animal says things that people won't acknowledge as true. (Wikipedia contributors, 2025b).

In contrast to Rangeela, which maintains a local and soft nature of satire, Insaan Aur Gadha could lead to a head-on fight with the government. The very fact that it was banned for a while after its release demonstrates how satire can be politically detrimental when its targets are obvious examples of modern power systems. In this movie, comedy is more of an avenue to criticize rather than to deal with problems. It demonstrates how weak government legitimacy can be. (Gazdar 1997)

Satire and Male-Female Power: Aurat Raj

Aurat Raj is the most radical of the three films because it is about the gendered power dynamics. By carrying gender reversal to an extreme, it envisions a future when women are in charge of politics and males are treated like women have always been with fetters, moral surveillance, and social shun. (N. F. P. Paracha, 2018) This hypothetical reversal shows that patriarchy is a made-up institution and not a natural or divinely approved institution. The satire of Aurat Raj is obvious, over-the-top and intended to be funny. Musical sequences, the aesthetics of camp, and over-the-top performances help to create a show that shakes up traditional ideas of gender (Wikipedia contributors, 2025c). Men who in the past were considered strong and heroic are now being made fun of and feminized, while women are taking over and speaking up instead. The comedy is confronting and makes people feel the discomfort of the power dynamics that have been turned upside down. Satire in Aurat Raj is different than Rangeela's short-lived inversions in the way that it attempts to expose ideas rather than fit in with society. It is a questioning of the foundation of morality. But it came out in the nascent years of General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization, which put it to the pitch with the rising conservative ideas. The pushback and

marginalization in the film demonstrates how difficult it is to in a more moralized culture to use feminist satire. (M. Rehman, 2016)

Strategies which are the same and different registers

All three movies use inversion, exaggeration, and performance as their main satirical tools although they all are quite different. Satire plays a role by making things that appear to be natural, unavoidable, and morally right appear wrong. This can be done through the comic underdog (*Rangeela*), a grotesque allegory (*Insaan Aur Gadha*) or a feminist dream (*Aurat Raj*). But their registrations are not too different. *Rangeela* uses warmth and familiarity in discussing class disparity without making people feel bad. *Insaan Aur Gadha* uses humour and metaphor to demonstrate the hypocrisy of politics. *Aurat Raj* uses conflict and spectacle in an attempt to fight against the power of male. These differences reveal not only creative choices, but also the different dangers that come with the criticism of social, political, and gendered areas of power.

The Limits of the Satire and the Restoration of Order

A large area of meeting is in the limitations of satire. In all three of the movies the inversion is momentary. Social hierarchies, political power and gender roles are portrayed, ridiculed, and shook up, but not fundamentally altered. This restoration of order demonstrates the limited popularity of movies since they have to deal with censorship and strict rules of society.

Satire, therefore, works not so much as a transforming tool, but as a diagnostic tool. It shows paradoxes, makes people laugh, makes them think critically, but it doesn't go so far as to make revolutionary change. This restriction does not diminish the

significance of satire, however, but highlights its historical role as a cultural mechanism for dealing with a dissident within acceptable ways.

Censorship, satire and the Pakistani state are all discussed.

There is not any period when satire in the Urdu film was living in a political vacuum. Since the beginning of time its power to make people laugh has been inextricably allied with its potential to shake up established authority, bring to light hypocrisy and question preexisting moral establishments. The censoring histories of *Insaan Aur Gadha* (1973) and *Aurat Raj* (1979) throw some light on how satire became politically dangerous at the same time as its objects became identifiable. Taking a look at these films throughout the Bhutto and Zia periods, it can be seen that the Pakistani government was only ready to accept comedy as long as it was not a threat to the political legitimacy and patriarchal ideology of the country.

The Era of Bhutto: The Era of Sensitivity and Populism

The fact that *Insaan Aur Gadha* was forced to be banned in 1973 gives an important insight into the limits of satire when it comes to populist governments. The movie, which was published at the time when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was in power and whose government officially championed socialist and progressive ideas, was a spoof of political rhetoric that made use of allegory and anthropomorphism. It was apparent that the state was very sensitive to mockery, notwithstanding the language that was used. According to recent reports in *Dawn*, the movie was given a ban soon after its release due to fears that a speech sequence where a donkey transformed into a person will be deemed to be making fun of the governmental leadership and the general public gathering.

Despite the fact that it claimed to be representing "the people," Bhutto's government remained intolerant of comedy that sought to undermine the spectacle of power. This instance raises a paradox of populist politics. The satire in *Insaan Aur Gadha* crossed an invisible border; it ceased to be metaphorical or abstract, rather it turned into something that could be understood as criticism. The restriction was only present for a short period of time, but the symbolic value was retained. The fact that it mimicked the language, gestures and emotional appeals of real political power constituted a warning sign that something very bad might be at work in satire.

This occurrence shows that humor was a test case for the political tolerance, which is something that can be confirmed from the standpoint of cinema studies. Based on the answer given by the state, it appears that the only time comedy was allowed to occur was when it was kept safely vague or when it was focused upon general characteristics of society. Once it became clear that satire was mocking leadership in and of itself, it opened the door to repression. To the contrary, this response underscores the power of humor as a means of political criticism, not limiting its power.

The age of moral policing and withdrawing of the culture in the Zia's era.

It was during the time of Bhutto when the political sensitivity of humour was brought forward; however, the period after the military takeover of Zia-ul-Haq was a much significant cultural change. Zia's initiatives towards Islamization created a major shift in the relationship that existed between film and the state. The depictions of gender, sexuality, and public behavior were tightly regulated due to the introduction of new censorship systems, morality, and regulation systems. The adherence of films

to a "Islamic" moral code became an increasingly important factor in determining whether or not they were appraised for their political content.

The year 1979 saw the appearance of *Aurat Raj*, which was set in this setting. In contrast to *Insaan Aur Gadha* which used allegory to attack political discourse, *Aurat Raj* explicitly attacked patriarchal power by picturing a society in which women were in charge of governing. As a consequence of its role reversal to such an extreme, musical mockery, and visual inversion - where men are subjected to surveillance, clothing regulations, and public humiliation - this made patriarchy visible and comical. This kind of a satire was not only hilarious, but rather seriously uncomfortable in the context of the kind of ideological milieu that was prevalent during the Zia administration at the time.

It is necessary to see *Aurat Raj*'s marginalization and financial failure in relation to the bigger machinery of moral policing, even though it was not legally proscribed in the same way as *Insaan Aur Gadha* was. The movie was in direct opposition to the developing conservative discourses that put an emphasis on the submissiveness, domesticity, and modesty of women. A disruption of the gender paradigm then, which was being aggressively locked in place by the state, was brought about by *Aurat Raj* through the staging of female political leadership and male fragility. During this time period the space for female expression in popular film was becoming more limited and its reception reflects this tendency.

The Danger of Satire

These cases of censorship, if considered as a whole, throw some light on a fundamental contradiction of satire in Pakistan, which is that it is only allowed when its targets are vague. The reclassification of comedy as harmful is a case where it is

able to be viewed as a criticism, whether of political leadership or of patriarchal control. A pattern like this is indicative of the ambiguity of satire as both a safeguard and a constraint for the expression.

Development of Film and Culture Studies as a Contribution

By recasting the role that the satire plays in Urdu cinema, where cinematic humor is located in the context of Pakistan's political history over time and where *Aurat Raj* is put on the frontline as an early feminist intervention, this work is a great contribution to the field of film and cultural studies. Collectively, these contributions constitute a challenge to the prevailing trends in academia that tend to marginalize the role of humor, depoliticize popular cinema, and overlook gendered criticism in the popular film cultures.

A Revaluation of the Genre Concerning Satire as a Prime Mode in Urdu cinema

The first thing that this research does is make satire an important form of Urdu film and not a marginal form. The extant body of research on Pakistani cinema has, for the most part, given the status of dominating genres to melodrama, nationalism, and realism. On the other hand, humor and satire have tended to be viewed as forms either escapist or motivated by financial concerns. This study uncovers the fact that satire was a progressive and purposeful aesthetic approach through which the filmmakers expressed their criticism of society through films such as *Rangeela* (1970), *Insaan Aur Gadha* (1973) and *Aurat Raj* (1979). This was achieved through a detailed analysis of such films. These movies illustrate that satire was not just a decorative element, but rather, was actually integrated in the design of the story, the way the characters were built, and how they acted.

This research adds to the growing genre theory in the area of South Asian film studies by placing the narrative and ideological activity of satire in the foreground. Filmmakers were able to interact with issues of class disparity, government power, and moral hypocrisy in ways that were not possible via the use of realism. This is demonstrated by the use of comedy, exaggeration and inversion. A larger view of popular film as a venue of critical discourse is encouraged by this reappraisal. In this context, laughter represents a cultural language of dissent that is intelligible. As a result of this, the research contributes to the ongoing debates in the field of cinema studies on the political capacities of popular genres and challenges the hierarchy that accords "serious" types more importance than comedic ones.

Humor, censorship and moral regulation are all placed in the context of history.

Second, the research situates instances of comedy in films within the context of the peculiar political history of censorship and moral control in Pakistan, notably, in the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s. It is the study that puts stress on the historical contingency of satire, rather than viewing satire as a form that is eternal or universal. Films like *Insaan Aur Gadha* and *Aurat Raj* were made in an era when the state had a greater level of control over culture. In these times, movies that criticized political issues outright ran the risk of being banned or censored. Within the framework of this situation, satire developed as a way of indirect dissent, which was strategic in nature, a way of criticism that was masked in metaphor, imagination, and humor. Through the process of locating satirical films relative to moments of political transformation, such as populist politics and the first few years of authoritarian Islamization, the research shows how humor worked to negotiate the limits of what was acceptable. By giving a picture of how aesthetic form responds to regulatory

settings, such a historical contextualization contributes to the field of cultural studies. It shows that because of the ambiguity of satire, the fact that it is capable of amusing whilst being upsetting, it was possible to pass critical ideas in public arenas that were very restricted, through film. By the same token, the research acknowledges the shortcomings of the satire, noting how the end of a tale so often leads to a reordering of the society. This reflects the demands that are imposed on filmmakers who work inside censorship regimes.

Scholarship on media and power is made richer by this method since it creates a link between genre analysis and political history. It underlines the fact that comedy in Urdu cinema is impossible to treat independently of the institutional frameworks that governed what could be seen, stated or suggested on screen. These frameworks include censorship boards, moral discourses and state ideology.

A Study of Feminist Cinematic Intervention in Film Aurat Raj

The third and most important contribution that this research does to offer is in terms of contributing to a gendered interpretation which places Aurat Raj in the spotlight in the form of an early feminist cinematic intervention that is worthy of serious scholarly consideration. Aurat Raj has often been found to be a curiosity or a financial failure, even though it includes the expression of an ambitious idea and explicitly engages with the authority of gender. This study reclaimed the film as a pioneering work that exposes the patriarchal standards through the use of the speculative fiction and role reversal by interpreting the film through the lens of feminist cinema theory and satire studies.

According to the findings of the research, Aurat Raj uses gender inversion not only for a comedic effect, but also as an important tactic that makes patriarchy obvious.

In order to make it clear to the viewers the creation, performance and situationally of gender hierarchy, the movie has male characters go through the experience of being restricted in the same way that women have been restricted throughout history. This reading contributes to the field of feminist media studies by bringing into attention a forgotten example of South Asian feminist imagination in the context of popular film. This example precedes many of the current discussions on the portrayal of gender.

More than that, the fact that *Aurat Raj* is located within the cultural politics of the Zia period brings out the dangers that are inherent in the feminist satire that it contains. The marginalization of the film is not understood to be evidence of the failure of the film but is interpreted as an indication of the hostile ideological environment against which the film fought. This research brings into focus the significance of *Aurat Raj*, the contribution toward the growth of the archive of feminist cinema history in the South Asian region. Additionally, it highlights the need for more academic attention to be given to popular genres of satire as sites of gendered criticism.

Conclusion

Indirect dissent in 1970s Urdu satire is a humor and exaggeration (and inversion of narrative) used to get around censorship, morality, and politics. Satire housed criticism within popular cinematic genres allowing the dissemination of social commentary to remain ambiguous. *Rangeela*, *Insaan Aur Gadha*, *Aurat Raj* demonstrates the way Urdu cinema's laughter delighted the spectator and exposed social, political and gendered inconsistencies.

Rangeela is a satirical film in which the satire is societal. The film sees the humor in the unemployment, the constant instability of housing, and the fragile quest for dignity in an inhospitable metropolitan environment. It is aimed at micro-social interactions between the poor and landlords, employers or urban elites in order to reinforce class hierarchy as opposed to government power. Antagonism is replaced by empathetic laughter. It allows poor characters to suffer but not to lose social respectability and dignity. Satire becomes a survival tool and reveals the moral dishonesty of a culture in which looks, appearance and social performance are valued more than ethics without suggesting of structural change.

Insaan Aur Gadha politicizing satire. The video is a parody of political rhetoric, leadership spectacle and mass obedience as it turns a donkey into a human. Grotesque inversion makes authority ludicrous, demonstrates lack of moral clarity in political systems. This film is openly a film against governmental legitimacy, unlike Rangeela's delicate social satire. After its publication, the authorities banned it for a while, demonstrating its displeasure with political comedy. Satire demonstrates the ease with which mockery can destroy power.

The most extreme form of satire is Aurat Raj. With extreme gender reversal and speculative imagination, the film fantasizes about a world run by women with males subjected to the same moral scrutiny and constraints as women. Extravagant satire employs camp aesthetics, musical extravaganza and exaggerated performances in an effort to challenge gender conventions. In place of comfort, humor presents viewers with inverted hierarchies. The film was marginalized during the first years of authoritarian moral control, and this is reflective of the shrinking space for female criticism in popular culture.

In all three of these films, satire uses temporary inversion. Narrative closure reasserts social order after ridiculing hierarchies and subverting power. Under censorship, popular movie is limited structurally. Despite these limitations, however, satire is important. Instead, they place emphasis on its fragility. Satire is a deadly weapon where the objects are known and laughing creates identification as opposed to distance. Revisiting the Urdu Satire of 1970s and popular film as archive of protest. These movies illustrate that comedy, even when tempered, can expose inequity, challenge authority and expose power. Satire has retained recognition even after metamorphosis. Laughter directed at authority is powerful, if dangerous, cultural criticism.

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