

# Comparative study of Iranian and Bollywood films on children: A semiotic analysis of mise-en-scene elements.

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## **Abstract:**

*In contemporary media scenario, media content has been altered drastically affected by the factors like globalization, commercialization or deregulation of media. Media including film has become market driven, hence glamour, sensationalism finds prioritized in the media. However, there are always an exceptions, Iranian cinema is one such example. The international fame of Iranian cinema has invited global attention to the new tradition of filmmaking that are based on simple, realist, yet powerful themes. In Iranian cinema children dominate the narratives of films. On the other hand, contemporary Bollywood cinema which is known for its melodrama is also now producing child centric movies. Hindi film representation of Children keeps on changing not only with changing perceptions of audience but also with socio-political condition of the country. There is need to understand and examine the structures of these simple story lines which are not the product of sophisticated technology and commercialization as much as of artistic potential of filmmakers.*

*The given research study 'Comparative analysis of contemporary Iranian and Bollywood films on Children' is qualitative study using film semiotics in the analyses of films borrowing ideas from early theorists Andre Bazin's ideas of mise-en-scene and among contemporaries film theorist Andrew Dix's terms of mise-en-scene. Further the researcher has also borrowed ideas from noted French semiotician Roland Barthes connotation and denotation of images and American Philosopher C.S pierces indexical and symbolic signs in the analysis of film text.*

**Key words: Films, Iranian cinema, Bollywood, mise-en-scene, Childhood discourse in cinema.**

## **Introduction**

A film is a major form of cultural expression. It is also an art of telling story through a system of signs. Films can reveal significant traits about the societies that produce and consume them. It mirrors cultural transformations and tensions in society. By situating films within an appropriate socio-cultural and historical context, we can increase our understanding of the films and cultures that produce them. Nevertheless, film is not an easy art when it comes to analyzing it. In the words of famous film semiotician Christian Metz, Film is too intelligible, this is what makes it difficult to analyze. "Film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand"<sup>1</sup>. Understanding a film means knowledge of its storyline while explaining the film involves the analysis of its codes and syntax which constitute the film text.

To understand form in any art we need to be familiar with the specific medium in which that art exists. As Bordwell and Thompson imply in their influential work *Film Art: an Introduction*, analyzing a painting demands knowledge of colour, shape, and composition; analyzing a novel demands knowledge of language; analyzing music requires music of sound. Similarly our understanding of a film's form must also consider features of a film medium.

According to Robert Kolker, film text is plural, complex simultaneously static and changing event produced by the filmmakers who put it together and the audience members who view it. It is unified by certain established ways in which shots are made and edited together.

The child in the film is a multifaceted, wide-ranging topic that considers historical, ideological, pedagogical and theoretical questions. Real and animated children have acted in films since the beginning of cinema in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Watering the Gardener (1895)* and *breakfast with Baby (1895)* by Lumiere Brothers were considered as earliest movies. (Andrew, 2015). Numerous books have been written on the negative and positive effects of media on children, who are so often considered vulnerable to media messages. Yet not as much time or effort has been expended in examinations of how children are represented by the films.

There have been strikingly few serious studies of how the children are portrayed by the adults who control media the world over. While European and American cinema has remained the centre of attention for both scholars and theorists, there is comparatively little attention paid to the history and theory of cinema from Middle East and India.

The international fame of Iranian cinema has invited global attention to the new tradition of filmmaking that are low-budget films based on simple, realist, yet powerful themes. There is need to understand and examine the structures of these simple story lines which are not the product of sophisticated technology and commercialization as much as of artistic potential of filmmakers. In Iranian cinema children dominate the narratives of films.

The main features that facilitated children to come to the forefront of the Iranian cinema after the revolution included the dropping of the majority of actors and actresses from the pre-revolutionary industry and the banning of sex, singing, and dancing. Accordingly, Iranian films constitute the fascinating reflection of these regulations and limitations, but they are also close to faithful reflection of social reality. The best example has been Abbas Kiarostami's and Jafar Panahi and Majid Majidi commitment to cinematic realism. These directors not only used filmmaking as an educational tool but also developed cinema as an art.

There are startlingly few academic accounts of children films in Hindi cinema more generally, historical or contemporary. Only a few academicians have theorized childhood in Bollywood cinema. Among the few studies that exist, focuses on off-screen childhood discourses about childhood, family, national identification and on-screen representation of children as metaphors for citizens. "Discourse on childhood in India underscored the fact that the family was envisaged as a realm that played the most valuable task of shaping the individual's life. (Saayan Chattopadhyay, 2011).

Children's' position within the film industry has changed since India push towards deregulation and economic neo-liberalism. One documented aspect of media liberalization in India has been de-stigmatization of the role of child performer. "Films with key child roles now reportedly audition hundreds of children, all carefully groomed by dance and academic schools accompanied by eager and enthusiastic middle- class parents,". This attitude stands in contrast with the Irani sisters, child performers from 1950 onwards who recount their experience of child labour in the film industry. Daisy Irani was famously quoted in the *Times of India* as saying 'Honey and I had no childhood, no education. We were pushed into acting by our parents. By the time we grew aware of our predicament our childhood was gone.

For instance, little anjali in *kuch kuch houta hain* unites her father with his lost love;as a pretext for adult violence *Utrak Sharma* plays tara's half-Pakistani son in film *Gaddar*.In many other films child actors are replaced by young adults who act out a mime of a very particular type of childhood. For instance, films like *koi mil gaya*.In these types of films role of child actors appear marginal. They did not dominate the narratives.Nevertheless, the decade 2000s showed transition in making of child-centric movies wherein children acted as main protagonists. A handful of directors inspired by French new wave cinema have started making films with the plots that focused on poverty, child labour, rural life and social injustice.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

The study is qualitative in nature using the method of semiotic analysis to study the Iranian and Bollywood films on children.

### The technique of Analysis:

#### 5.2.1: Semiotic analysis-Qualitative approach

**Qualitative study:** Qualitative method allows the researcher to study selected issues in-depth and detail without being constrained by pre-determined categories of analysis. While quantitative research values control, qualitative research values openness and flexibility.

Qualitative methods produce a large amount of detailed information about smaller data that results in rich understanding but reduces generalizability. (Creswell J.W, 1998)

Semiology as a qualitative method of research was successfully transferred to media studies by researchers who needed more approaches to explain media phenomenon. Semiology as a method borrowed from linguistics is highly used in media analytical-qualitative studies.

Semiotic analysis is a key element to understand and decode the significant visual messages used by the media in order to generate the meanings that refer to the socio-cultural and personal associations in the second level of signification which is connotation. Semiology can be applied in the context of media to analyse any media texts, films, television programs, etc (Bouzida, 2014).

**Mise-en-scene:**

The French term 'mise-en-scene' means 'Putting in the scene' or 'everything you see on the screen'. Mise-en-scene has its roots in theatre and is one of the key components within film language. 'For the student of film, the useful definition might be 'the contents of the frame and the way that they are organised' (Gibbs 2002: 5)

Mise-en-scene is an important part of film syntax and contains a wealth of meanings (both denotative and connotative) which can become important subject of film study. For the purpose of study the researcher has used following elements of mise-en-scene for analysis.

Location/settings

Lighting

Camera movements

Colour:

Props

Characters/Acting

Costume

The other parameters for film study will be indexical metaphors, symbols, gestures, and sound effects.

**Unit of construction:**

The film does not divide itself into easily manageable units. The fact is that film, unlike written or spoken language, is not composed of units as such, but is rather a continuum of meaning. The shot contains as much information as we want to read in it, and whatever units we define within the shot are arbitrary. (Monaco 2000:160)

Therefore, a film presents us with a language that:

*Consists of signs in which the signifier nearly equals the signified (denotatively)*

*depends on a continuous, nondiscrete system in which we can't identify a basic unit and which therefore we can't describe quantitatively.*

**Sample:**

Films portraying a lower-socio-economic section of Iranian and Indian society with diverse themes were taken as a sample.

The Iranian films undertaken for study included:

**Baduk (1992); The Apple (1998), Colour of paradise (1999), Children of Heaven (1997), White Balloon (1995).**

It was observed by the researcher that large numbers of Hindi films on marginalised children were made during 2000s as compared to 1990s. In this regard following films focusing the daily struggles of economically weaker sections of society were selected from a population of 12 films made during 2000s.

**Blue umbrella (2005), (Stanley ka Daba (2011), Dhanak (2016), Mere Pyare Prime Minister (2019).**

The present study is qualitative study using film semiotics in the analyses of films borrowing ideas from early theorists Andre Bazin's ideas of mise-en-scene and among contemporaries film theorist Andrew Dix's terms of mise-en-scene. Further the researcher has also borrowed ideas from noted French semiotician Roland Barthes connotation and denotation of images and American Philosopher C.S pierces, indexical and symbolic signs in the analysis of film text.

## Findings:

### Comparative study of Iranian and Bollywood films based on mise-en-scene elements

#### 1 Location/Settings

##### Location as signifiers



For the filmmaker, location plays a significant role in creating narrative spaces. The Portrayal of these locations in films informs an audience about the culture of people, the structure and architecture of their cities and villages.

In Hindi films on children settings acquires central position both in narrative and cinematic structure. Although the choice of location by Hindi filmmakers does not comes under the category of Italian neo-realism because filmmakers have used natural location with minimum to maximum alteration. Nevertheless, the film is partially realistic.

For instance in '*Mere pyare prime minister*, the director has chosen natural settings of Mumbai's slum area to convince the viewers that whatever they are watching can really happen in real life. The slum colony is constructed with messy housing system made of rags and other objects. In Hindi films there is an element of stylization in settings, though not predominantly present. The element of stylization is created with the use of lighting techniques and cinematography.

In spite of the fact that filmmaker has constructed an image of a slum with makeshift huts made of rags and some other signifiers of poor life, house of central child protagonist appears more dramatic and colourful with the use of lighting techniques. The recreation of Ghandi's statue in slum colony occurs as recurring leitmotif.

Unlike in Bollywood films, Iranian filmmakers use real locations in both realistic and metaphoric styles. This feature is typically reflected in the works of Iranian filmmaker Majid majidi. Although Majid's films, thematically, revolves around the difficult life of Iran's underprivileged, the Sufi canons of poetry underlie his films subtly. Majidi has also acknowledged the influence of classical Persian poets Shams-ud-din Hafiz, Sa'di and Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi on his films. The pervasive influence of poetry affects the way in which Persian filmmakers treat their social subjects.

In Iranian films characters and their relationship with each other are defined by their surroundings or places they live in or travel to. In *colour of paradise*, location has also been used by filmmaker to reveal the perceptions of son and father. The Filmmaker carefully casts his character Mohammed against visually stunning pastoral settings of streams, fields and the flowers of the landscape to show his closeness to nature. Mohammad runs through the vast richly colored flora of his family farm in spring.

A season of spring, a garden in full bloom, cypress trees all are used as emblems of beloved (God) in classical Sufi poetry. Blind boy's optimistic way of life is not shared with his sighted father Hashim who is cast against monochromatic landscape which lacks vibrant colour. Coalmine is a significant site used by filmmaker to cast his character, Hashim. Denotatively coalmine is a working place of Hashim. The darkness of coal mine signifies his pessimistic approach towards life.

In Iranian films 'home' occupies a significant site in film narratives. Each film accommodates parts of them which are expressed through different places and different characters. For Majidi in "Children of Heaven", the idea of home is the place of high moral values of the poor children living in old Tehran, reminiscent of the lost world of Childhood. The narrow alleys, old houses and neighbourhoods' of south Tehran, a place of warm community and the values of the older generations are contrasted with the isolating upper-class buildings of

north Tehran. Majidi presents locales plagued by poverty and pain. However the characters in those places are pious, able to transcend their circumstances and discover the beauty around them.

Hindi films, on the other hand, reflect the lost world of childhood. The idea of home is lost somewhere in between the daily struggles of child bearing the burden of family, doing odds menial jobs to sustain the life. In *Stanley ka Dabba*, the home of child and childhood experiences is lost in the kitchen of restaurant where the poor boy works. The restaurant's kitchen is a significant site in the film which speaks volumes about the pathetic plight of Stanley. It reveals that Stanley belongs to an uncouneted workforce of children, who work without wages. Formal schooling is an important signifier in the film. Children engaged in manual labour are irrevocably exploited that can be redeemed only through formal schooling. However, schools fail to recognize child as competent agents and are forced to live lives through childhood constructed by adults.

The film 'Mere Pyare Prime minister', while exploring the pressing issues like enormous disparity between rich and poor through the portrayal of life in slum, once again reinstates the fact that marginalized children loses their childhood in sharing the burden of adults. In Iranian films, poor children are portrayed as more mature and responsible who fight the odds without the knowledge of their parents.

Village is an appropriate place for the poetic films. The village landscape serves as a visual metaphor inviting multiple interpretations. Minimum distortions of village landscapes is peculiar of Iranian cinema. However, its reflection can also be found in contemporary Hindi cinema. The use of Zig-Zag path in the Hindi film '*the Blue umbrella*' serves as an example. Zigzag path on the beautiful hills is the innovation of famous Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami in the film "*Where is my friend's Home*". The repeated extreme long shot of the schoolboy in "*Where is my friend's Home*" running up the zig-zag hill path shows connotatively deeper search for the inner self. Denotatively the boy crosses the zig-zag hills to find his friend's home.

Denotatively, the film reveals the journey of a schoolboy to find his friend's home in order to return school notebook. Connotatively, the film is also about the loneliness of a child and his search for a friend. The boy lacks proper school and an alert teacher who can understand sensibilities of a child. At home his mother is lost in domestic chores; his father is lost because he keeps silent and only listens to radio. These people are lost except the young boy who searches his friend. In the end he does not find his friend home, but he finds a path for his inward journey, his inner self.

Vishal Bhardwaj in *The Blue umbrella* has made an small attempt to showcase the journey of main protagonist girl child Binia and an old man traversing the same zig-zag path. Binia ascended the zig-zag hills merrily while holding her own umbrella. The old man who is fond of keeping things adored by children, also traverses the same path while holding the same umbrella stolen by him. However, the umbrella is an issue of ego satisfaction for him and for girl child, it is an object of happiness. The shot is carefully composed, both to fill the middle space of the frame and to connect the characters, thus giving us landscape metaphor.

Locations also acts as visual metaphors in few of the Hindi films. In the film *Blue Umbrella* Filmmaker has cast child protagonist Binia mostly against aesthetically pleasing hilly landscapes of Himachal Pradesh to reveal that

she is a part of nature. Mountains and dark forests are binia's home. Whenever she is in the market town, jostled by the crowds, she felt nervous and lost. The filmmaker has established this contrast to showcase that Binia is nature's child. She liked to be alone along the hillside with her cattle's.

### A still from Hindi film Blue Umbrella.



In Hindi film '*tahaan*' the lush green forests, majestic mountains, vast snowy stretches, gushing water, icicles, burning coal and the various other elements of setting can weave through an entire film to form motifs within the narrative.

With his attempt to depict different shades of conflict, the filmmaker Santosh Sivan used silent streets, mosque inside the frame to give an impression of violence subtly. As it is evident from the scene in which announcement is made through loudspeaker inside mosque asking people to come out of their houses and assemble at one place during crackdown.



*(Stills from Hindi film Tahaan)*

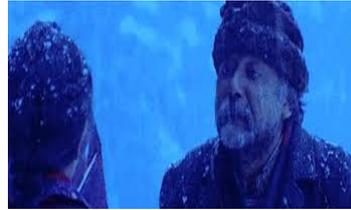
In the film *Stanley ka Daba* opens with close-up shot of sunny morning streaks falling on the leaves. The shot cuts to boy in school uniform entering the school. In next shots audience can see statue of Holy family and students playing in huge playground. These shots signify that the boy studies in Holy family school. Filmmaker used these signifiers not only to construct the outdoor environment of school, but also to subtly communicate the life of the main protagonist.

It is important to note that the sense of realism recreated in films cannot be deciphered only through locations, but all the other elements of *mise-en-scene* work together to give collective impression of the narrated authenticities. For instance, the Hindi film 'Dhanak' although presents authentic settings of Rajasthan, it is unauthentic in terms of the flow of narratives to convince the viewers whatever they are watching can exist and happen. The film 'Dhanak' turns in to an odd fairy tale. Any trouble eventually gets sorted out with the help of angels in human form. Bright colours, folksongs, heavy embroidered costumes, the beauty of sand-dunes, all seem like a leaf out of tourist brochures.

Landscape especially by means of semiology and meaning has been influential in characterization, identification and perception of place and time. Characterization in films by means of creating spaces and the realization of this point that through space we can realize the characters have been of importance for the Iranian filmmakers. In Majid Majidi's *Baduk* Landscape is configured in such a way that it stands in as a degraded metonym for the nation. The dry barren earth features first in the opening sequence also functions as a kind of allegorical framing story.

## II:Acting

One of the areas that remain untheorised is the role that performance plays in films. Debates about acting remain peripheral to the articulation of substantive theories about spectatorship, authenticity and realism. Discourses about film and realism have too often been tied up with the national cinemas, credible and believable storylines or authentic display of emotions in art and world cinema. Given below are images from film *colour of Paradise, Tahaan and Blue Umbrella*.



In Italian cinema of the post-war era, Italian neo-realist films attempted to address the ethics of realism utilizing social and political conditions as its subject matter. Eisenstein's idea was purposely inscribed as against the trained actors; real people were often used in this era of filmmaking. Vittorio De Sica's *"Bicycle thieves"* of 1948 does away with mainstream narrative of American model and based the whole film on the theft of bicycle thieves. The impact of this theft is felt by an entire generation of poor Italian who were driven to steal from one another in order to survive. The entire narrative of film is centered on theft of bicycle and the efforts of newly employed man who has been long term unemployed to find the thief. The non-happy ending sends the message for entire generation of Italians that was forced to emigrate, suffer from mal-nutrition and live out the non-happy ending in real terms.

In Iranian cinema we can find some repetitive tropes of Italian neo-realism in the works of Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi, Jafar Panahi and Samira Makhmalbaf. Re-performing narratives actually lived as well as performing 'live' experiences in front of the camera are both critical features of contemporary Iranian cinema. In *the Apple*, children, parents and everybody else perform the entire vision of events in front of the camera over the period of 11 days. However, mothers' attempt of controlling her own image can be understood through her utter refusal to meet anybody's gaze. The caged child's hand attempting to pour water on the dying plant signifies the inclusion of indexical metaphors to testify to the fact that film is an art as well.

The most intriguing questions that come to mind is whether the line between actual self and the performed self of the characters blur while imitating their own real life experiences.

The tradition of children as witnesses to the adult world reflected in Iranian cinema is typical feature of Italian neo-realism as well. In Hindi films on the other hand acting is performed by trained actors. Their performance appears more melodramatic than authentic. In Stanley ka dabba, it is the son of filmmaker himself who performs the acting. The absence of neo-realistic elements pushes the Bollywood films towards more stylish cinema, except in case of films like “Mere Pyare Prime minister .“It can be said that these film directors are to some extent influenced by Italian neo-realism and their films shows a small attempt to reflect the reality. However, in terms of narratives there is an element of diversion from the reality because of the inclusion of unrealistic features. Hindi films on children is the blend of realistic and unrealistic features. In film *tahaan* for instance, at times the weakness in acting prowess of the central protagonist is compensated by gestures of real children.

### III:Lighting:



#### Stills from Iranian film Colour of paradise

Hindi filmmakers have used both natural and artificial lighting to confer more meaning to the narrative. Most of Bollywood movies under study have used Chiaroscuro lighting in their films. Chiaroscuro is the blend of light and dark mostly used in noir film. Chiaroscuro is an Italian term and this technique was initially used by 15<sup>th</sup>-

century renaissance artists in their paintings. Later on this technique was adopted in photography and cinema. The filmmaker has used this technique when Sargam is raped by a local policeman in *Mere Pyare Prime Minister*. The given lighting is used to detail the dark sides of law enforcement agencies.

Most part of the Iranian film relies on natural light to create a sense of authenticity. Nevertheless; filmmaker has also used both high and low key lights to feature the different characteristics of characters. Low-key lighting often creates strong shadows that obscure parts of the principal subjects. Such type of lighting is usually used in noir films. Iranian filmmaker like Majid Majidi has used lighting as an important signifier in order to create mystical perceptions, illusion and feelings among many other human cognition manipulations. Majid Majidi has successfully used visual imagery to convey the perceptions of Father and son in the film "*Colour of Paradise*". Hashim, a coal worker, is an ungrateful father who can see only misery. He considers his gentle, God loving blind son as a burden and an obstacle in his upcoming marriage. The character Hashim capable of seeing visually stunning pastoral settings of streams, fields and flowers of the landscape around him is nonetheless blind to the beauty of nature. Hence Majidi casts his character Hashim against dark background and the blind boy Mohammad against bright colourful background. The lighting has also been used by Majidi as a religious allegory. In the last shot of film soft yellowish light illuminate Mohammad's hands. The warmth and brightness of the sun, emblem of divine love as detailed in the first words of film reaches at last to Mohammad. The lighting acts as signifier of mystical union. Similarly, mystic feeling is also evoked when the face of protagonist Aziza (grandmother) illuminates with bright natural light at the time of her death.

In Hindi films artificial lighting has been used by filmmakers to create dramatic effect. With the change in positioning of key lights, director has created a different effect which signifies different characteristics of characters and their situation. In one scene from the film *tahaan* wherein the grandfather of kids narrates the story in the mid of night, a filmmaker has used number of light sources and directions to create dramatic effect. Hindi filmmakers make use of frontal, side lighting, catch light and various other lighting techniques to make character look aesthetically pleasing and also signify mood and perception of character in particular situation. *Stills from Bollywood film Blue umbrella and Mere Pyare Prime Minister*



#### IV:Colour:

Colours influence our understanding of individual scenes. Colours can be used in highly artificial ways for particular expressive purposes. It can also be employed in an effort to achieve naturalism by recreating the colours of the real world. Benyahia, Gaffney and White writes in *As Film Studies: the Essential introduction*. “Colour as with bright lighting simply gives pleasure to an audience. Film literally can bring light and colour in to our lives. Particular colours or tints can also be used to suggest warmth or coldness, particular seasons, or emotions”. Colours are open to varied interpretations and are also studied in context. In the context of given film these colours signify the life of characters, their personalities, and relationships. In Hindi film *Mere Pyare Prime Minister*; Colour plays an important role in the transformation of Kanhu’s mother. Her skin turns from the red colour of Holi to a colour of blood as she is raped on the same night by police officer. In film *Tahaan* main child protagonist tahaan’s mother holds tangled dark red yarn threads in hand. Red is the colour of violence, danger, passionate love, etc. The image occupies the whole frame signifying her complicated relationship. Since her husband is missing for three years during the violence, she has no idea whether her husband is dead or alive. In another shot, Tahaan’s mother holds cupped hands towards a dark blue sky. Blue signifies tranquility, open spaces, vastness and heaven.

Iranian films have used colours in the context of their culture. In Islamic culture, green stands for freshness, purity. It is also considered to be the highest level of mysticism, while the colour black stands for lost and absence. The colour stands as symbol that varies regionally and culturally. In “*Colour of Paradise*” Filmmaker has carefully used the colours not only to set tone of the scene but also to invoke mystical feelings. The blind boy Mohammad is heir to an environment of vivid colour. When Mohammad returns village from school on vacations he gets delighted to experience the richly coloured flora of his family farm in spring. A season of spring, a garden in full bloom, cypress tree and rose all are used as emblems of beloved (God) in classical Sufi

poetry. Majidi has carefully used these motifs and symbols as mystical elements to evoke Mohammad's experience of optimism. On the other hand Mohammad's father is cast against monochromatic landscape which lacks vibrant colour. His scenes are plagued with a grey mist.

### V: Important Camera movements and shots:

Iranian filmmaker use deep focus shots and long takes which is the prime aesthetic hallmarks of mise-en-scene. For instance in film "*White Balloon*" Panahi uses several long takes like his contemporary Iranian filmmakers. The opening sequence appears documentary like showcasing frenzied neighbourhood market wherein sellers do last-minute business an hour and a half before the arrival of the new-year. The construction of time is established by the opening long shot, which cleverly brings in most of the later characters. Shot in real time, the film gains its attention from strict adherence to time. Director uses moving camera tracking shots so skillfully that they compare to studio shots undertaken on camera tracks. One film theorist, Andre Bazin, made it a major tenet of his aesthetic that cinema records "real time". In "*Colour of Paradise*" Majidi also uses several long takes for instances in one scene when a blind boy had found fledgling fallen from nest in the nearby park of his school. The shot details meticulously blind boys' struggle to returns a nestling to its nest. Long takes is a hallmark of neo-realistic cinema.

Hindi films on the other hand, hardly use long takes; instead the filmmaker uses frequent cuts besides pans, tilts and tracks as cinematic codes to mimic common everyday movements.

Focus is the next most important variable in the syntax of the shot. Shallow focus allows filmmaker's greater control over an image. In deep focus shots, foreground, middle ground and background are all relatively in sharp focus.

Both Hindi and Iranian filmmakers have used deep focus shots in the films under study. Moreso, Hindi and Iranian films have used all the three angles of approach, high angle, eye-level and low angle shots to generate meanings.

The film shot mainly in long shots emphasizes context over drama. The director has used all the three angles of approach, high angle, eye-level and low-angle shots. High angle shot is used in scene to diminish the importance of the subject, while low angle shot emphasize its power. In one deep focus shot from Iranian film "*Colour of Paradise*" father looks in apprehension at the school where his blind son has visited. While Mohammad enjoys the company of other normal children, father believes that Mohammad should not mingle with normal children because of his disability. The two different perceptions are reflected beautifully through this composition. A stills from film Hindi film mere pyare PM, Dhanak and Iranian film *Children of Heaven*.



## VI:Costumes:

The costume has a wide range of importance in the composition of character. Costume is a structured set of signs replicate with connotations. Clothes index national identity, class allegiance, gender position, social status, etc,” (Dix 2010, 16).In Iranian films costumes signify gender segregation, while as in Hindi films clothing remains an effective signifier of the characters socio-economic condition. Further, filmmaker matched the costume with their narrative context.

There are limitations on how Iranian women have to appear on screen. They have to wear long sleeved clothes and veil. Even the girl child has to wear head-scarf. Costumes in the film play a significant role in revealing the gender segregation. On the contrast men is often shown in contemporary outfit.

A still from Iranian film *white Balloon*

Image from colour of paradise

Hindi filmmakers have paid more attention to costumes and makeup as an important element of signification.. In “mere pyare pm”the filmmaker has used both stylised and natural costumes in the film. Mehra while staying away from his typical Indian mainstream dresses constructs his desired unbounded social and cultural space. He uses sari,salwar suit,shirt –pant for his various characters to signify any place of Indian society as the site of his story. In certain scenes costumes can be matched with their narrative contexts. For instance on the occasion of Holi, slum dwellers wore colourful clothes signifying joy and happiness.In Hindi film *Dhanak*,the self-styled holy woman wears orange dress and holds sacred bead string. . In Hindu religion red and orange is of utmost significance and the colour is most frequently used for auspicious occasions. Yellow is the colour of knowledge and learning. Her cruel character is matched with her excessive makeup.



## VII: Props

Props items can take on considerable significance for the whole film. They can in effect become symbols for some key idea or concepts. In Iranian films props exist symbolically and metaphorically in comparison to Hindi films. Samira Makhmalbaf introduces symbolic props (mirror and flower pot, ) to improvise scenes of *the film Apple* indicating willingness to tamper with the onscreen representation of the reality. Nevertheless, the use of mirror, scruffy potted flowering plant, hand mark on wall and many other symbolic props into the improvised scenes suggest multiple layers of meanings. The filmmaker has used the symbolic prop like “mirror” to indicate that girls had undergone delayed ‘mirror stage’

Symbolic signs have cultural and religious significance. These are used as important devices to create meanings within the films. In *colour of paradise*, golden bangles is one of the most important narrative leitmotifs in colour of paradise. It is invested with dual meaning that of marital happiness and material wealth. Cracked mirror in ‘*color of paradise*’ serve both as symbolic prop and indexical metaphor. The image in the cracked mirror is the logical metonymy. It has layers of connotative meanings. Hashim looks at his face in fragmented mirror. His image is split in to two revealing **his** conflicting personality.

In Hindi film *Blue Umbrella*, the object blue umbrella serves more as indexical metaphor than simply as prop. : It explores the moral failings of adults. It reveals greed, jealousy and kindness of villagers. It brings forth class division in the society and further reveals that even spiritual people are attuned to materialistic object. The

meaning of prop can be understood only in context of the narratives. In the realm of film it acts as a sign of modern life and everyone in the village aspires to have it.

As already discussed the meanings of prop can be extricated in the context of narratives. Props at times become symbols and possess cultural connotations. The meanings of symbols are embedded in culture. Sometimes props are strictly denotative in nature which is observed in most of the Hindi films. Props can also act as technical indexes.

### **VIII: Indexical metaphors:**

Indexical metaphors on the other hand are not necessarily symbols but deeper ideas associated with objects which are strictly connotative in nature. For instance in Hindi film *Blue Umbrella*, umbrella is a supreme metaphor, very subjective in its nature and connotes various things. In his novel Ruskin Bond has equated the blue umbrella with great blue flower that had sprung on the dry brown hillside. The cinematic metaphors based on the literary model tend to be crude and forced. The indexical sign may offer a way out of this dilemma. Here film discovers its own, unique metaphorical power, which it owes to the flexibility of the frame. Different shots of umbrella against beautiful landscape; its emotional attachment with Binia, signifies layers and layers of meanings. It was observed in study that Bollywood filmmakers use very less indexical metaphors as compared to Iranian films.

Iranian films possess a poetic spirit which can be found especially in the works of film director Majid Majidi. Using poetry in cinema depicts the story of the connection between arts in a cybernetic atmosphere. It plays crucial role in the selection of locations and mise-en-scene. Majidi's films interconnect the mood of the film with the blossoms of nature. In *colour of paradise*, the visually impaired boy Mohammad accepts all the reproaches from his father and goes to the steep hills, mountains, birds, river and every element of nature to find the answers.

In *children of Heaven*, goldfishes kiss the feet of Ali, in reverence to his pious characteristics. The action of the fishes metaphorically implies the praises of the almighty for the self-sacrificing nature of the boy. The filmmaker want to reinstate that moral values are preserved among children of poor families living in narrow alleys of an old Tehran. Majidi has used indexical metaphors in his films to signify that family relationships are of primary concern to Iranians. Siblings share a strong bond in Iranian society and show great responsibilities

towards each other. The film showcases that Iranian children are expected to be generous and highly respectful towards elders.

Majidi's films also show elements of nature in close relationship with children. Fish, plants, mountains, water serves as a religious allegory in his films.

Mohammad can read signs of God around him using Braille. His intense longing "to reach out" and "touch God" alludes to the effective yearning so characteristic of Sufi poet's condition.

Hindi films on children, on the other hand, do possess connotations but to a lesser degree as compared to Iranian films. Among the Hindi films selected for study, *tahaan* and *blue umbrella* showcase visual connotations. The film *blue umbrella* is an adaptation of Ruskin bonds novel which exists by the same name. The subtle meanings, hidden in the film can be more attributed to novelist rather than filmmaker who has only transformed to some extent those subtle meanings in to visual imagery.

In Hindi film '*tahaan*' the filmmaker Santosh Sivan has used natural settings with minimum distortions to stage an action. The lush green forests, majestic mountains, vast snowy stretches gushing water, icicles, burning coal and the various other elements of setting can weave through an entire film to form motifs within the narrative.



*Stills from film tahaan signifying cinematic metaphors.*



*Still from Iranian Film Apple.*

## Conclusion

The Iranian cinema has invited the attention of the world to the symbolic and ideological role of child actors against the backdrop of censorship and political surveillance. Within these constraints post-revolution moralist cinema has developed. Most of films under study details poor children struggle against social adversity and their transformation into morally conscious human beings.

India film directors, on the other hand, have also started making films on marginal childhood reflecting the child-centric vision. Many films made during the 2000s reflect this vision. The metaphor for orphaned, marginal, deprived childhood resurfaces in the contemporary Hindi cinema. During the study it was observed that connotative signs are predominantly present in Iranian films as compared to Bollywood films. This does not indicate that Bollywood films on children are strictly denotative. Iranian films possess a poetic spirit which can be found especially in the works of film director Majid Majidi. Hindi films on children, on the other hand, do possess connotations but to a lesser degree as compared to Iranian films. Among the Hindi films selected for study, *tahaan* and *blue umbrella* showcase visual connotations.

In Iranian cinema we can find some repetitive tropes of Italian neo-realism in the works of Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi, Jafar Panahi and Samira Makhmalbaf.

The analysis of films also indicates that these low budget films have strong potential to convey powerful themes through child actors which can have positive impact on audience. These films are not the product of sophisticated technology and commercialization as much as of artistic potential of the filmmakers. With the blend of artistic renditions and neo-realistic elements, new Iranian films have found their own unique style. While still maintaining a sense of realism, Iranian films are replete with deep meanings or connotative signs.

In Hindi films like *Tahaan* which is centred on Kashmir, the conflict has been showcased subtly without glorification of violence. In other Child centric contemporary films of Hindi cinema as well, there is reduction in melodramatic elements which indicates that with the 'gentrification of film content' Bollywood cinema has also potential to grow aesthetically.

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