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Adaptation as Archive: Contesting Punjab's Social Realities

JASKIRAT SINGH

Assistant Professor

Sri Guru Gobind Singh College, Chandigarh

Email: singhjaskirat461@gmail.com

Abstract: Punjabi cinema has tried to engage with the agrarian crisis and the social changes that reshaped Punjab after the Green Revolution. While popular films often present rural life as prosperous and idyllic, independent cinema has adapted literary works that reveal dispossession, cultural fragmentation and the pressures of modernization. This paper places Punjabi cinema within adaptation studies, focusing on Gurbinder Singh's *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, *Adh Channi Raat* (based on Gurdial Singh's novel) and *Chauthi Koot*.

These films foreground the struggles of marginalized farmers and labourers, caught between feudal hierarchies, urban displacement and the rise of capitalist values. They also evoke the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty during moments of social and political upheaval. The study probes their relevance within Punjabi cinema, asking how they reveal, reimagine and contest the social realities first articulated in literature and how filmmakers envision transformations brought by modernization, capitalism and urbanization. In doing so, it questions whether cinema sustains cultural values or shifts toward endorsing new ones shaped by changing times.

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's ideas of adaptation as reinterpretation, Elaine Scarry's reflections on representing pain and Tarja Laine's notion of cinema as embodied experience, the analysis explores whether these films move beyond depicting external hardship. It examines how adaptation becomes a site where violence, alienation and cultural change are negotiated and how cinematic engagements reshape or challenge Punjabi cultural identity. In this sense, Punjabi cinema emerges as a contested archive, where adaptation opens space to evaluate whether the screen preserves lived realities or risks transforming them into narratives aligned with commercial or ideological demands.

Keywords: *Adaptation Studies, Punjabi Cinema, Agrarian Violence, Literary Adaptation, Trauma Studies*

Introduction

The historical trajectory of post-Green Revolution Punjab is characterised by socio-ecological fractures, capitalist transformation and the dismantling of traditional agrarian societies. The state-sponsored narrative of agricultural modernization and technological development promised regional prosperity. However, the material consequences manifested as systemic dispossession, severe economic indebtedness and the fragmentation of organic communal structures, especially for the subaltern classes such as landless Dalit labourers and marginalized peasantry. There is a significant paradox in the realm of Punjabi cultural representation: mainstream commercial cinema frequently sanitizes these structural wounds, showing a prosperous, festive and picturesque rural landscape to create a collective fantasy of agrarian abundance. Conversely, the independent cinema of filmmaker Gurvinder Singh such as *Anhe Ghore Da Daan* (2011), *Chauthi Koot* (2015), and *Adh Chanani Raat* (2022), function as a "contested archive" that challenges this romanticized erasure. Gurvinder Singh brings these historical and bodily traumas to life on the screen by adapting the realist literature of Gurdial Singh and Waryam Singh Sandhu. Combining Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, Elaine Scarry's political materialism of physical suffering and Tarja Laine's film phenomenology provides a strong academic framework to study how the independent Punjabi cinema reconstructs the "language of pain" (Scarry, *Body* 169) under the pressures of modernization, capitalism and urbanization. It also aids in exploring how regional cinema presents and resonates the alternate socio-economic realities of peasantry, caste and class conflict and discrimination, often ignored by mainstream media to the audience.

The Language of Pain: In Literature & Cinema

The movement of marginalized trauma from literature to independent Punjabi cinema marks a significant intervention in the historical archive of postGreen Revolution Punjab. Gurdial Singh's novel *Anhe Ghore Da Daan* portrays the economic and social devastation of rural Punjab with a clear depiction of class and caste conflict. It emphasises upon the discrimination of landowning *Jat* landlords, the alliance of local elites with the rising urban and industrial agents seeking to seize the agrarian land and the sharp inequalities between the powerful and the dispossessed. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, this shift from text to screen is not a passive transfer but an active, creative process. Hutcheon describes adaptation as an "interpretive act of appropriation and salvaging" that recreates a narrative for a new medium (Hutcheon 8, 172). This transition requires a shift from the "telling" mode of literature to the "showing" mode of cinema. Whereas prose fiction is based on symbolic language and imaginative decoding, cinema functions on direct visual and auditory perception, which the spectator experiences in real time (Hutcheon 22).

Gurvinder Singh's cinematic approach uses this ontological shift to turn Gurdial Singh's sociological critiques into an immersive aesthetic of "the ordinary" (Singh, *Space*). Where the novel 'tells' the reader of feudal and industrial conspiracies, the film 'shows' the psychological impacts of these structures through the mundane and everyday routines of daily life. The film's dialogue is intentionally plain and stripped of theatricality. The characters engage in bland, general, and usual conversations without any ideological declarations. This flat, minimalist style does not weaken narrative depth but instead it reflects the dichotomic, confused and paralyzed psyche of the colonized subaltern. Singh uses realtime pacing, silent glances and the physical weight of weathered faces, respecting cinema's ontology where "a house is a house... and a table is a table" (Singh, *Space*), instead of dramatic dialogues. Ordinary acts of silent waiting, walking through fog and eating simple meals become meaningful visual and gestural signs. This help in turning the unrepresentable trauma of agrarian displacement into a direct and sensory experience.

To understand how, Tarja Laine's distinction between affective appraisal and emotional evaluation proves to be significant in understanding the effect produced by these "bland" everyday scenes and minimal dialogues. Engagement with the film is cyclical, combining bodily affect and cognition rather than taking them separately (Laine, *Feeling* 1). Emotional evaluation refers to the "autobiographical self" and it includes the reflective categorization of events through historical and cultural memory (Laine, *Feeling* 2). In contrast, affective appraisal belongs to the "core self" and is intuitive, which strikes the spectators "in and through the flesh" before conscious thought (Laine, *Feeling* 1–2). Singh avoids mainstream methods like suspenseful music, fast editing, emotional climaxes, preventing the viewers from retreating into a detached evaluation of Punjab's crisis. Instead, his slow shots, usage of natural lighting and long takes of daily routines trigger an immediate affective appraisal. The flat, routine and everyday conversations and heavy silences function as an "affective glue" (Laine, *Feeling* 6), directly linking the spectator's body with the exhaustion experienced by the characters. Here, the viewer does not remain simply a distant observer but enters an "emotional dialogue" with the film's core of melancholy and quiet dread (Laine, *Feeling* 6).

This deliberate usage of 'bland' dialogue necessitates the viewers to cocreate meaning (Singh, *Space*). It enacts the French philosopher JeanLuc Nancy's idea of the "sharing of Being," where the filmmaker, subject and spectator mutually work together to understand and make sense of the pain (Laine, *Feeling* 8). The film, therefore, becomes an active partner in an ethical exchange rather than a passive object of study (Laine, *Feeling* 4). In this transactive space, the viewer cannot remain passive. Laine's method of "making sense with instead of making sense of cinema" encourages the spectators to open up to affective sensitivity, allowing the film to "speak back" as a cocreator (Laine, *Feeling* 11). Thus, the sensory materiality of fog, sunlight, the darkness of the night, the silences of empty village alleys and

the lingering shots form a “healing body” (Laine, *Reframing* 10), enabling the spectators to share existence with Punjab’s marginalized underclass across the barriers of class, language and history.

Singh’s style is also characterised by “glacial pacing” and “glacial historical drama” (Weissberg). By resisting fast narrative movement of mainstream media, this slow tempo extends time and emphasizes the desolate rural spaces and “crushing unease” of their inhabitants (Weissberg). Laine’s phenomenological analysis of Aronofsky shows how such formal devices make a direct affective impact, treating the skin as an organ of emotional experience (Laine, *Bodies* 191, 193). Singh’s trilogy works on a similar pattern: it allows the spectators to “see feelingly” through slow tracking shots and Satya Rai Nagpaul’s lowcontrast cinematography (Ramnath). By ignoring commercial pacing, Singh synchronizes the natural bodily rhythms of spectators with agrarian exhaustion which creates a “somatic memory” of trauma (Laine, *Reframing* 32).

Social Realities of Punjab: A Comparison

The translation of rural socioeconomic struggles from literature to cinema highlights both the differences and continuities in how these media represent exploitation. The novels of Gurdial Singh very precisely show the land dispossession, caste hierarchies and capitalist greed. His prose carefully outlines the conspiracies of landlords, the structural problems of the government machinery and the historical continuation of discriminatory traditions which inevitably pave way for subaltern defeat. Rather than simply describing class or caste struggles from an intellectual distance in his films, Gurvinder Singh lets the audience physically feel the pain and societal pressures through tight, enclosed spaces and a heavy, silent atmosphere (Singh, “Space”; Laine, *Feeling* 2). In this way, independent Punjabi cinema functions as a “palimpsestuous” archive: haunted and shadowed by its adapted literary texts at all times, where the prior literary work continues to echo and shape the spectator’s direct perception (Hutcheon 6). This palimpsestuous doubling of Punjabi cinema creates a creative space for active, intertextual memory-making in the spectator’s consciousness. It helps in connecting the “told” historical traumas written on the paper with the viscerally “shown” reality of the screen (Laine, *Feeling* 1). By doing so, it successfully provides a visible and audible body or a tangible form to suffering which is otherwise silent. It also actively resists and shatters the artificial, sanitized images of rural life shown by the mainstream commercial film industry (Scarry, *Body* 14).

To grasp this intervention, we must compare the independent Punjabi cinema with the dominant Bollywood cinema. Popular Hindi films have long worked to sanitize the fractures of postGreen Revolution Punjab. Bollywood constructs an illusion of rural abundance using stylized images such as lush mustard fields, festive dances and benevolent patriarchs. Elaine Scarry’s concept of “analogical verification” or “analogical substantiation” explains this process (Scarry, *Body* 14). In moments of

“crisis of belief,” when ideologies such as capitalist modernization lose credibility, the physical body is appropriated or seized to provide these constructs a false sense of certainty (Scarry, *Body* 14). Bollywood cinema enacts this ideological piracy by using healthy, dancing Punjabi bodies to validate the fiction of prosperity and development while disconnecting them from the factual ground realities of ecological decline, indebtedness and systemic humiliation of landless Dalit peasants (Scarry, *Body* 27).

This systematic erasure creates an epistemological barrier. Scarry makes a distinction between the certainty of pain for the sufferer and the doubt experienced by the observer (Scarry, *Body* 4). Mainstream films and media make use of this ontological gap, allowing the audiences to deny or doubt the pain and suffering of agrarian subaltern while maintaining a safe, detached and distanced relationship with agrarian trauma. Independent films such as *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, *Chauthi Koot*, and *Adh Chanani Raat* are politically important because they dismantle this manufactured doubt. They force the audience to confront this otherwise foreign and ‘othered’ pain and suffering directly. The immediacy of cinema’s showing mode helps translate the “felt attributes of pain” into visible and audible presence, breaking down the spectator’s denial and doubt (Scarry, *Body* 13). Gurvinder Singh uses a minimalist aesthetic of slow pans, long takes, ambient soundtracks and other elements to restore the undeniable presence of the suffering body. Instead of dramatic manipulation, his films use a materialist language of extended time and silence to transform the private and languageresistant anguish into a shared ecosystem of sensory perception.

The most destructive impact of urbanization and capitalist modernization in rural Punjab is the displacement of landless Dalit workers from villages to cities. In Gurdial Singh’s novels and Gurvinder Singh’s films, the supposed promise of urban opportunity is revealed as another site of exploitation, disillusionment and distress. Melu, the injured rickshaw puller in *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, personifies this change and his daily struggles exemplify the precariousness of the migrated subaltern. Elaine Scarry’s concepts of worldunmaking and the loss of voice explain the foundation of such alienation. Scarry argues that extreme physical and psychological distress “unmakes” the human centre; breaking and dismantling speech, language and the psychological structures that sustain both the self and the world (Scarry, *Body* 19–20). This systemic oppression destroys the primary site of human creation (making) and protection i.e. home. It results in a “world contraction” where the individual’s universe shrinks to the immediate vicinity of the suffering body (Scarry, *Body* 144, 145).

In *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, this unmaking begins in the village with the demolition of Dharma’s shelter and the refusal of Jat landlords to give complementary crops from their fields etc., destroying the domestic sphere as the basis for human protection. This violation of the home echoes as the recurring theme throughout the trilogy; such as the military and militant invasions of Joginder’s farmhouse in

Chauthi Koot, where the home is ‘turned upside down’; and the repeated failure of Modan’s attempt to rebuild his ancestral house in *Adh Chanani Raat* due to persistent landbased feuds (Dhar; Sahani). When displaced peasants migrate to towns or cities in search of opportunity, their “world contraction” is only deepened when they encounter these urban centres as alternate grounds of exploitation and distress. Under such economic and physical distress, the subaltern’s body is viewed as “enormous vermin” to which the self is bound yet it lacks or feels any relation (Scarry 31). The landless worker becomes alienated because their labour is severed from its natural conditions like land, tools and objects of creation (Scarry 250). They can no longer “sell what they make” but only sell their “truncated activity of making,” i.e. their labourpower, to survive day by day (Scarry 250).

The failed and desperate attempt to rebuild a fragmented world is reflected through the alternate transformation of organic village kinship into “unities of occupation” in the cities by the rickshaw unions. Yet this collective framing remains trapped in nearobjectlessness, existing in the immediate vicinity of pain and exploitation (Scarry, *Body* 262, 280). The “promised land” is revealed as a capitalist machine that consumes the subaltern body and denies any authentic selfrecreation. Gurvinder Singh’s cinema depicts this devastating pain through nonverbal and languagedestroying states. When the language “runs dry” (Scarry, *Body* 4), the film uses the “language of agency” (Scarry, *Body* 15)—the slow, repetitive movements of the rickshaw or the wordless, unshown confrontations of workers—to externalize the quiet, unshareable reality of subaltern suffering.

This aesthetic method of somatic containment continues throughout the remaining films of Gurvinder Singh’s Punjab trilogy. The historical trauma of the community is imprinted directly onto the sensory environment. *Chauthi Koot*, set during the militarized atmosphere of 1980s postOperation Blue Star Punjab, depicts the fear of violence as an affective appraisal that affects the spectator’s inner self (Laine, *Reframing* 1). The film is an adaptation of two short stories by Waryam Singh Sandhu that depict the discomfort of a region caught between the violence of Khalistani militants and Indian paramilitary forces (Gupta; Wiki). The family dog, *Tommy*, whose continuous barking risks exposing the militants to the military, becomes the focal point of an agonizing, choiceless conflict (Gupta; Wiki). Singh’s camera emphasizes the peripheral “edges of the frame” and offscreen space which imitates the precise “structure of traumatic memory” (Laine, *Reframing* 25, 26). Singh avoids processing historical trauma and the pain of the past at a safe, cognitive distance by enabling the camera to act as a silent observer. Instead, the film’s tense silences and prolonged shots of the rural landscape evoke a prereflective “somatic dread” which compels the spectator to experience the “crushing unease” of the era from within (Laine, *Reframing* 5)

The parallels between Gurdial Singh's 1976 Punjabi novel *Adh Chanani Raat* and Gurvinder Singh's 2022 film adaptation highlight this dynamic. Both works focus on Modan, an ex-convict who returns to his rural Punjab village after serving time for murdering his father's tormentor (Sahani; Dhar). Gurdial Singh's novel has profound sociological implications, immersing the reader in the structural realities of agrarian exploitation, caste oppression and the multi-generational dominance of landlords (Sahani). The novel contextualizes Modan's personal anguish within the broader socio-economic hardships experienced by the peasantry. Whereas the film narrows its focus on Modan's internal psychology and damaged pride (Dhar). Gurvinder Singh's adaptation focuses intensely upon Modan, his fragile relationships with his mother and new wife Sukhi and his struggle with retributive masculinity (Sahani; Dhar).

Stylistically, the novel highlights the oppressive landlord class and the complex network of village politics, whereas the film keeps these forces on the periphery: almost like a distant or metaphysical threat. Instead, Gurvinder Singh contrasts bright winter sunlight with the decaying rural landscapes to portray Modan's fragile hope and sudden outbursts of restrained anger (Dhar). This transition shows how independent Punjabi cinema turns the sociological critique into a sensory register: the repressive structures remain present but are refracted through atmosphere, silence and embodied performance (Laine, *Feeling* 6). Modan's cycle of revenge and domestic hope does not represent a clear narrative path; rather, his rigid adherence to the patriarchal honour codes traps him in a deadlock. Tarja Laine refers to this as "identity deadlock" of trauma, making his subjective recovery "inaccessibly remote" to standard empathetic sharing (*Feeling* 9).

Because extremely painful historical events aren't processed by the brain's semantic memory, the underlying trauma of land dispossession is stored as sensorimotor sensations in the somatic memory of the characters (Laine, *Reframing* 5). This somatic containment is illustrated through Modan's silent, tensed physical frame and his mother's profound discomfort and anxiety in her restored ancestral home (Dhar). Her silent, fuming unease and inability to reorient herself to a space haunted by a violent past show how the home functions by means of a "negative spatiality" in which the ruins of historical trauma disturb the present and embody a continuous past through the eternal return of unresolved events (Laine, *Reframing* 5). By shifting the cinematic focus to these non-verbal bodily traces, Singh's adaptation transcends the descriptive bounds of Gurdial Singh's prose, utilizing the material weight of the screen to transform a personal crisis of masculine honour into a collective, experiential witness of subaltern containment (Hutcheon 22; Laine, *Feeling* 321).

The sharp contrast between mainstream Indian cinema and independent Punjabi adaptation reveals a deeper ideological struggle over Punjab's historical archive. Bollywood films often rely on a sanitized,

hypervisual aesthetic of celebratory abundance to perform what Elaine Scarry terms “analogical verification”, adopting the sensory “realness” of the Punjabi landscape to validate state fictions of postGreen Revolution progress (Scarry 14). In contrast, Independent Punjabi cinema deconstructs this romanticized screen. The viewer’s experience shifts from cognitive “doubt” to visceral, prereflective “affective appraisal” (Laine, *Feeling* 2). It translates the structural violence of agrarian dispossession, precarity and militarization into an undeniable sensory register. Films like *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, *Chauthi Koot* and *Adh Chanani Raat* use visual and aural strategies to portray this physical and spatial entrapment. They somatically communicate what Tarja Laine defines as the sensations of a “restrained, traumatized body” (*Reframing* 5). This approach preserves the regional archive by connecting contested social realities back to the vulnerable, historical bodies of nonactors (Singh, “Space”; Hutcheon 8). Gurvinder Singh’s adaptations replace the conventional narrative closure with heavy silences and the “bland” textures of everyday existence, refusing to let subaltern suffering be easily consumed. Instead, it creates an ethical, cocreative space of shared, somatic witnessing (Laine, *Feeling* 11).

The Triadic Interrelation: Adaptation, Cinema and the Co-Creative Spectator

The contemporary practice of adapting Punjabi literature into independent cinema creates a dynamic relation between the text, the film medium and the spectator. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation is a complex “system of relations among works” and a “system of diffusion” shaped by the cultural context, rather than a oneway transfer of narrative (Hutcheon 171, 187). In this framework, the spectator is no longer a passive consumer but an active participant in an ongoing, intersubjective encounter. This viewpoint also aligns with Tarja Laine’s view that audiences are fundamentally “part of cinema in its emotional eventfulness” rather than mere outside observers (Laine, *Feeling* 1). Independent Punjabi cinema moves beyond the boundaries of “fidelity criticism” by using literary texts as a base to present a shared, embodied encounter. In this encounter, the private, languagedestroying reality of subaltern suffering enters public discourse. This allows those not in pain to “speak on behalf of those who are” and makes marginalized bodies viscerally visible (Scarry, *Body* 13).

Gurvinder Singh also insists on the audience’s role as a “cocreator” rather than a passive receiver of meaning (Singh, “Space”). Mainstream Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, often acts as a manipulative “emotion machine”, using melodramatic music, rapid editing and forced narrative closures to prepackage emotions and maintain a safe experiential and aesthetic distance (Laine, *Feeling* 3,11; *Reframing* 18). Singh’s minimalist aesthetic deliberately avoids these devices. His films use long takes, natural lighting and ordinary conversations to create a productive anxiety, rather than “spoonfeed” the viewer (Singh, “Space”). This restraint generates what Laine calls “emotional

dialogue” or “emotional resonance” (Laine, *Feeling* 6). As the narrative does not resolve quickly, it requires the spectator’s “core self” to engage with the silences and weary gestures of the nonactors (Laine, *Feeling* 2).

This active investment fulfils JeanLuc Nancy’s idea of the “sharing of Being” (Laine, *Feeling* 8). To watch Singh’s cinema is to enter a space of “mutual exposure,” where filmmaker, subaltern subject and the spectator all “exit themselves” to make sense of the pain together (Laine, *Feeling* 8). The “knowing audience,” familiar with the literary source or the historical trauma of the Green Revolution and the militarization of the 1980s, alternates between textual memory and cinematic immediacy (Hutcheon 120–21). The “unknowing audience,” however, must leave intellectual distance and encounter the systemic containment through direct, visceral perception (Hutcheon 120; Laine, *Reframing* 181).

Reclaiming the Vernacular Archive: Cultural Salvaging as Materialist Resistance

The contemporary practice of adapting canonical Punjabi literature into independent cinema is both an act of sociopolitical preservation and economic resistance. Punjabi has faced systemic marginalization due to statesponsored linguistic hierarchies and the dominance of English and Hindi in India’s educational and cultural spheres, particularly among urban and migrant youth (Singh, “Interview”). By adapting the key works of Gurdial Singh and Waryam Singh Sandhu, filmmaker Gurvinder Singh creates a critical “cultural capital” and a form of “reverse accreditation” (Hutcheon 91). By transposing these vernacular texts into internationally recognized arthouse spaces such as the Cannes and Venice film festivals, it challenges linguistic erasure and elevates the Punjabi mother tongue to a global platform (Singh, “Space”; “Interview”).

This initiative of cultural reclamation also includes the preservation of disappearing oral traditions of rural Punjab. The multiday performances of traditional balladeers (*qissas*) are losing popularity among younger generations due to the rise of digital technologies and capitalist lifestyles (Singh, “Space”). Singh creates a durable digital archive by incorporating regional dialects, folk melodies and oral performance formats into the visual and aural fabric of his films. This process of “reanimation” and “salvaging” (Hutcheon 8, 333) preserves fragile oralities, creating a permanent record that resists the disposable nature of contemporary media. By doing so, his films preserve what Elaine Scarry refers to as the “loyalty of the body” to its geographical origins (Scarry 130).

Crucially, this cultural preservation is linked to a strong resistance to global corporate capital. In latecapitalist culture, adaptations are susceptible to “economic lures” and the homogenizing “franchise” demands of the entertainment industry, which often sanitize and commodify subaltern trauma for mass consumption (Hutcheon 86, 189). Contemporary streaming platforms (OTTs) and

multiplex prioritize stardriven, bigbudget spectacles, making it difficult for independent filmmakers to release their works theatrically (Singh, “Space”; “Interview”).

By using lowcost digital recording and editing technologies, independent Punjabi cinema preserves artistic and financial autonomy, allowing the filmmakers to reject commercial “rules of the game” (Singh, “Interview”). Instead of relying on dominating capitalist networks, these filmmakers call for a “parallel system of distribution” that includes independent collectives and community screenings (Singh, “Interview”). This alternate network ensures that the representation of subaltern pain remains uncompromised. Independent Punjabi cinema prevents the exploitation of historical trauma as “analogical verification” for corporate systems, statesponsored progress or mainstream entertainment by over-simplification of the rural and agrarian realities (Scarry 14). Ultimately, this materialist resistance binds the regional archive to the fragile human body, requiring spectators to actively and ethically bear witness to Punjab’s social realities.

Conclusion: The Ethical Imperative of Embodied Adaptation

The ethical potency of independent Punjabi cinema lies in its refusal to participate in what Elaine Scarry calls “analogical verification” (Scarry 14). When suffering is stripped of its actuality or embodied presence, its undeniable “certainty” can be used to justify legitimize ideology or political fictions (Scarry 13–14). Mainstream Indian cinema often engages in this appropriation, showing idyllic images of Punjab while erasing the agrarian crisis and creating spectatorial “doubt.”

Films such as *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, *Chauthi Koot* and *Adh Chanani Raat* speak out against this appropriation. Gurvinder Singh’s use of local nonactors, whose faces bear the marks of hardship, creates a lasting connection with the human body (Singh, “Space”). His refusal of melodramatic closure or explicit political messaging denies audiences the opportunity to consume subaltern pain as spectacle. These adaptations are “palimpsestuous” works, haunted by their literary sources yet transformed by the cinematic ontology of showing rather than telling (Hutcheon 6, 22).

Singh’s minimalist approach which includes slow pans, natural lighting and ordinary conversations, rejects the mainstream emotional manipulation. Tarja Laine’s phenomenology explains how this restraint shifts the spectators from introspective “emotional evaluation” to immediate “affective appraisal,” striking them “in and through the flesh” (Laine, *Feeling* 1–2). Flat dialogues and silences create an immersive *stimmung* that attunes the spectator’s body to the somatic weight of trauma (Laine, *Reframing* 16). This active interaction aligns with JeanLuc Nancy’s notion of “sharing of Being,” where filmmaker, subject and spectator cocreate meaning through pain.

The trilogy exemplifies this experiential density. In *Anhe Ghore Da Daan*, urban migration is revealed as another form of exploitation, exemplified by the alienation of rickshawpuller Melu. *Chauthi Koot* reconstructs the pervasive fear of the 1980s through silences and offscreen space, evoking traumatic memories and bodily dread (Gupta; Laine, *Reframing* 13). *Adh Chanani Raat* portrays Modan's cyclical entrapment in land disputes, alternating between darkness and fleeting hope, capturing the unrepresentable pathos of dispossession.

Through these strategies, Singh's cinema transforms into an ethical archive. Scarry argues that pain unmakes the world but its artistic expression remakes it (Scarry 19–22). Singh prevents the erasure of lived realities by converting Punjab's silent trauma into shared visual artifacts. His ethnographic approach of using real spaces, dialects and routines creates a contested archive that defies both commercial formulas and state narratives of progress. Ordinary acts of eating, walking or waiting acquire tremendous significance, integrating cinematic temporality with the rhythms of everyday life (Singh, "Space").

Finally, independent Punjabi cinema insists that subaltern pain and suffering cannot be commodified or sanitized. It transforms the literature's structural accounts of exploitation into lived cinematic experiences that urge the spectators to bear witness. In doing so, Singh's adaptations ensure that the pain of marginalized communities remains visible, somatic and ethically irreducible; thereby preserving Punjab's contested realities as cultural memory.

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