

Framing Diasporic Elements in Purab Aur Paschim

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Abstract:

The present paper seeks to investigate diasporic life abroad in the selected movie Purab Aur Paschim, directed by Manjo Kumar, which was released in 1970. Bollywood cinema, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, has historically played a vital role in shaping and reflecting the cultural identities of the Indian diaspora. Through its narratives, characters, and thematic explorations, Bollywood not only addresses the experiences of Indian expatriates but also fuels a dialogue about globalization, cultural hybridity, and belonging. This paper examines the significance of diasporic discourse in the movie Purab Aur Paschim, outlining it through characters, settings, lifestyles, and events.

The concept of diaspora refers to the dispersion of a population from its homeland, a phenomenon that has become increasingly relevant in a globalized world. With increasing migration, individuals often find themselves straddling between cultures, grappling with their identities in multifaceted ways.

"Purab Aur Paschim" (1970), a Hindi film directed by Manoj Kumar, is a significant cultural artifact that explores the themes of identity, belonging, and the complexities of diasporic existence. The film's narrative unfolds around the character of Bharat, who navigates the dichotomies between Eastern (Purab) and Western (Paschim) cultures, making it a rich text for analyzing diasporic discourse. In a nutshell, this paper aims to dissect the nuances of identity formation, cultural conflict, and the portrayal of the Indian diaspora through the lens of the film while also examining its implications within a globalized context. Thus, in Purab Aur Paschim, the hero Bharat becomes a symbol of the Indian diaspora's struggle to reconcile tradition with modernity.

Keywords: diaspora, Bollywood, identity, east-west conflict, homeland belonging.

Introduction:

In contemporary literature, diasporic discourse has emerged as a vital lens through which themes of identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation are coherently expressed. In *Purab aur Paschim*, the interplay between Eastern and Western sensibilities not only illustrates the complexities of cross-cultural experiences but also highlights the profound impact of migration and displacement on personal and communal narratives. Through its portrayal of characters navigating their identities in a globalized world, the movie encapsulates the tensions and connections between traditional values and modern aspirations. As the dialogue between the 'Purab' (East) and 'Pachhim' (West) unfolds, it invites readers to reflect on the multifaceted nature of diasporic existence, ultimately illuminating the struggles and triumphs that define the journey of individuals straddling multiple worlds.

"Purab Aur Paschim" intricately explores the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural dislocation through the lens of diasporic discourse. Set against the backdrop of a post-colonial narrative, the film engages with the tensions between tradition and modernity as characters navigate the complexities of life in two contrasting worlds—India and the West. This convergence of cultures serves as a fertile ground for examining the experiences of the Indian diaspora and the challenges and negotiations of maintaining cultural roots while adapting to new social landscapes. Through its rich storytelling and multifaceted characters, "Purab Aur Paschim" not only reflects the struggles faced by those caught between geographical and emotional borders but also invites audiences to engage with the broader implications of diaspora, making it a provocative entry point into discussions on identity and belonging in an increasingly globalized world. Bollywood cinema, often considered a vibrant reflection of Indian culture, has played a pivotal role in shaping and expressing the experiences of the Indian diaspora. As millions of Indians migrated across the globe, the representations and narratives surrounding the diaspora in Bollywood films have evolved significantly, offering insights into their lives, challenges, and identities while also influencing the cultural dynamics between India and its diaspora communities.

Diasporic Narratives in Bollywood Cinema

The Indian diaspora has a long history, with significant migrations occurring during the British colonial period, which established Indian communities in various parts of the world, particularly in the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia. The modern wave of migration, particularly after economic liberalization in the 1990s, has seen a substantial Indian presence in Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Bollywood, historically a product of Mumbai's film industry, increasingly began to reflect these diasporic narratives in its storytelling, leading to a cross-pollination of cultural themes and cinematic influences.

Identity and Belonging

One of the central themes in films depicting the Indian diaspora is the exploration of identity and belonging. Many films portray the struggles faced by first-generation immigrants trying to balance their Indian heritage with the pressures of assimilation into their new environments. Movies such as "The Namesake" (2006), an adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, highlight the complexities faced by immigrants and their children in navigating dual identities. The protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, embodies the tension between his parents' Indian cultural values and his desire to fit into American society.

Family and Relationships

Family dynamics within the diaspora context are frequently examined in Bollywood films. The portrayal of family ties, conflicts, and the immigrant experience often serves as a narrative vehicle to explore broader social issues. In "Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge" (1995), the intergenerational conflict between Indian parents and their children who have grown up abroad is dramatized, showcasing the clash between traditional values and contemporary cultural influences. Such narratives not only resonate with diaspora audiences but also encourage dialogue on familial concepts within Indian culture.

Nostalgia and Cultural Displacement

Nostalgia plays a crucial role in the representation of the Indian diaspora in Bollywood films. Many stories emphasize the longing for India and its cultural roots while contending with feelings of dislocation. Films like "Bend It Like Beckham" (2002) and "Bride and Prejudice" (2004) blend traditional Indian narratives with Western contexts, embodying the longing for a lost homeland while addressing the

realities of life in multicultural societies. The visuals, music, and motifs often invoke a romanticized view of India to counterbalance the diasporic challenges.

Notable Films and Contributions

Several films have significantly contributed to the discourse on the Indian diaspora in Bollywood cinema. Some of them are listed below.

1. **"Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge" (1995)** - Often regarded as a landmark film, it explores themes of love, family honor, and the challenges faced by NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) caught between their cultural values and western lifestyles.
2. **"The Namesake" (2006)** - This film delves deeper into the immigrant experience, showcasing the impact of cultural identity on personal relationships and the navigation of two worlds.
3. **"Bend It Like Beckham" (2002)** - Though a British film, it features prominent Indian characters and touches upon the cultural dilemmas faced by diasporic youth, reflecting global trends in storytelling.
4. **"Pardes" (1997)** - This film addresses issues of assimilation and the struggle to retain cultural identity in a western context— a common theme faced by the Indian diaspora.
5. **"American Desi" (2001)** - A groundbreaking film in the portrayal of Indian-American experiences, it focuses on a group of Indian college students and their attempts to forge their cultural identities.
6. **"Aa About Laut Chalen" (1999)** - Directed by Rishi Kapoor, the movie is a story of Rohan Khanna who migrates to U. S. A. for better future and eventually fails to achieve his dream. The movie displays nostalgia, cultural assimilation, identity conflict and loneliness.

The representation of the Indian diaspora in Bollywood cinema has played a significant role in shaping perceptions of Indian culture both in India and abroad. These films serve as cultural bridges, allowing audiences to engage with issues of identity, belonging, and diaspora experiences. They also contribute to a broader understanding of multiculturalism, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more nuanced narrative of Indian identities.

Furthermore, Bollywood's depiction of the diaspora has influenced the way Indian culture is perceived globally. The diasporic narratives often emphasize universal

themes of love, conflict, and aspiration, making them relatable to diverse audiences while simultaneously celebrating Indian traditions.

Script overview of Purab Aur Paschim

The film opens with Bharat, a patriotic Indian man who is returning to India from England after having studied there. Upon his return, Bharat is appalled by what he perceives as the erosion of Indian culture and values, particularly in the behavior of the younger generation. He encounters a number of characters who represent different aspects of society— both conservative and modern.

Bharat's primary conflict arises when he meets a British woman, Susan (played by Ursula Andress), who embodies the Western lifestyle that Bharat criticizes. Despite their cultural differences, Bharat and Susan develop a romantic interest in each other. This relationship serves as a microcosm of the larger cultural clash depicted throughout the film. Bharat is torn between his love for Susan and his duty to uphold Indian values.

As the plot develops, Bharat tries to educate Susan about Indian culture and traditions. His efforts are twofold: he aims to win Susan's heart while also fulfilling his mission of preserving Indian identity. The film showcases various incidents that demonstrate the transition between Eastern and Western ideologies, ultimately culminating in Bharat's realization that love transcends cultural boundaries.

The climax occurs when Bharat must confront societal expectations while making a choice between his personal happiness with Susan and his allegiance to cultural traditions. The film concludes with a reaffirmation of Indian values as Bharat opts to embrace his identity and influence others around him.

Diasporic Discourse in Puran Aur Paschim

"Purab Aur Paschim" (1970), a seminal movie in Indian cinema, intricately explores the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural dislocation through the lens of diasporic discourse. Set against the backdrop of a post-colonial narrative, the film engages with the tensions between tradition and modernity as characters navigate the complexities of life in two contrasting worlds— India and the West. This convergence of cultures serves as a fertile ground for examining the experiences of the Indian diaspora and the challenges and negotiations of maintaining cultural roots while adapting to new social landscapes. Through its rich storytelling and multifaceted characters, "Purab Aur Paschim" not only reflects the struggles faced by

those caught between geographical and emotional borders but also invites audiences to engage with the broader implications of diaspora, making it a provocative entry point into discussions on identity and belonging in an increasingly globalized world.

Cultural Dichotomy: Purab vs. Paschim

One of the primary themes of "Purab Aur Paschim" is the cultural dislocation experienced by the protagonist. Bharat embodies the aspirational immigrant—educated, knowledgeable, and ideally situated to bridge the gap between East and West. However, he also faces an identity crisis, grappling with the expectations tied to his Indian heritage against the allure of western modernity. The film's portrayal of Bharat's struggle is emblematic of many migrants who find themselves between two worlds, often feeling alienated from both.

The film highlights important diasporic issues such as maintaining cultural ties, the nostalgia for one's homeland, and the anxiety of assimilation. Bharat's interactions with western characters reveal a tendency to view western culture with both admiration and critique; he sees it as a symbol of progress while also recognizing its potential moral shortcomings. This reflects the dual perception of many diaspora individuals who navigate their new realities filled with both opportunity and loss.

The film poignantly depicts the struggle for identity that often accompanies the diasporic experience. Bharat's journey symbolizes the broader experience of many Indians who have migrated to Western nations, where they not only grapple with cultural differences but also the pressure to assimilate. This theme is particularly relevant in the context of the 1970s, as post-colonial societies began to define their identities amidst global influences. Throughout the narrative, Bharat's attempts to introduce traditional Indian values into Western society evoke a sense of nostalgia for his homeland. This exploration of cultural contrasts serves as a commentary on the loss and reclamation of identity within a diasporic framework. The film's climax reveals that, despite his struggles, Bharat remains deeply ingrained in his cultural roots, challenging the notion that assimilation is a prerequisite for acceptance.

The film's title itself indicates the fundamental cultural dichotomy that underpins its narrative. "Purab" represents traditional Indian values, encompassing the rich tapestry of customs, familial ties, and a collective identity grounded in history. Conversely, "Paschim" symbolizes the Western world, characterized by individualism,

modernity, and often perceived as morally ambiguous. Bharat's journey, both in India and abroad, epitomizes the conflict between these two worlds.

Representation of India

"Purab Aur Paschim" reinforces the concept of cultural superiority through its portrayal of Indian values. Bharat's father, who embodies the traditional wisdom of India, serves as a contrasting figure to the materialistic ethos of the West. His teachings emphasize humility, respect, and the importance of family – virtues that Bharat must reaffirm during his encounter with contemporary Western lifestyles. The film's climactic moments often return to the assertion of traditional Indian values, suggesting to the audience that one's cultural heritage provides a critical foundation for navigating foreign environments.

Moreover, the film features a strong moral message: an Indian must always prioritize their cultural identity and home over foreign influences. This becomes particularly poignant in scenes showing Bharat in adversity – when confronted with western immorality, his adherence to Indian values becomes a source of strength.

In the film, India is portrayed as a place of moral integrity, cultural richness, and familial bonding. Bharat's initial engagement with his homeland reflects a deep-seated pride in Indian values. The picturesque settings, folklore, and music reflect a longing for home, deeply embedded in the lives of the diaspora. The cinematography often contrasts the vibrancy of Indian culture with the starkness of Western materialism.

Purab Aur Paschim is steeped in nationalist sentiment, with Bharat consistently emphasizing pride in Indian heritage. This melding of nationalism and diaspora is significant, as it reflects the longing for cultural preservation in the face of globalization. The film suggests that a strong national identity can coexist with diasporic experiences, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and purpose regardless of their geographical location.

The depiction of India as a land of enduring values and moral strength stands in stark contrast to the perceived moral weakness of the West. This binary framing of East and West diminishes the nuances of cultural exchange and presents a simplified view of diasporic life. However, it also serves to empower those who feel dislocated and marginalized in a foreign land, reminding them of their roots and fostering a sense of collective identity.

The Encounter with the West

As Bharat travels to the West, he is met with a society that embodies both allure and disillusionment. The film presents western culture as a double-edged sword, offering modernization and progress but also a sense of moral decay. The encounters with western characters serve as a foil to Bharat, challenging his values and leading to complex introspections about identity and assimilation.

The film poignantly explores the tension between tradition and modernity, a recurring theme in many post-colonial narratives. The protagonist's internal struggle reflects the larger societal debate about preserving cultural heritage while embracing modernity. On the other hand, as Susan grapples with her feelings for her British counterpart, she is also torn between two worlds that represent conflicting values.

Identity Formation

In the film, Bharat's character serves as a prism through which the complexities of diasporic identity are examined. He is portrayed as a guardian of traditional values, yet his experiences abroad force him to confront the shifting dynamics of his cultural identity. This leads to the question of authenticity: what does it mean to be truly Indian in a foreign land?

The film poignantly depicts the struggle for identity that often accompanies the diasporic experience. Bharat's journey symbolizes the broader experience of many Indians who have migrated to Western nations, where they not only grapple with cultural differences but also the pressure to assimilate. This theme is particularly relevant in the context of the 1970s, as post-colonial societies began to define their identities amidst global influences.

Throughout the narrative, Bharat's attempts to introduce traditional Indian values into Western society evoke a sense of nostalgia for his homeland. This exploration of cultural contrasts serves as a commentary on the loss and reclamation of identity within a diasporic framework. The film's climax reveals that, within the cultural struggles, Bharat remains deeply ingrained in his cultural roots, challenging the notion that assimilation is a prerequisite for acceptance.

Conflict and Resolution

The tension between Bharat's Indian roots and Western influences creates internal and external conflicts. The film illustrates how diasporic individuals often face pressure to assimilate while simultaneously clinging to their cultural heritage.

Bharat's resolution lies in his ability to embrace aspects of both cultures, ultimately advocating for a balanced approach that honors tradition while recognizing the realities of globalization.

The Role of Family and Community

Family plays a central role in navigating diasporic experiences in "Purab Aur Paschim." The importance of familial support and communal ties emerges as a vital theme in the film, emphasizing how family's emotional network can help individuals bridge the cultural gap. Bharat's relationship with his family serves as an anchor, reinforcing his sense of identity during his tumultuous journey.

Conclusion

"Purab Aur Paschim" serves as a microcosm for understanding diasporic discourse. Through the conflicts faced by Bharat, the film speaks to broader themes of identity, belonging, and the tensions inherent in navigating multiple cultural landscapes. The film's exploration of the dichotomy between East and West continues to resonate, making it a pertinent text for discussions about diasporic identity in an increasingly interconnected world as globalization continues to blur the lines between cultures. Thus, "Purab Aur Paschim" remains an essential cinematic endeavor that prompts reflection on cultural heritage, identity, and the complexities of the diaspora.

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