

Portrayal of child labour in Iranian Cinema by Majid Majidi and the Impact of Religion on his Movies

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Abstract: Cinema, as a powerful instrument of socialisation in the modern world, has a significant function in public life today. Over the past several decades, Iranian Cinema, through the use of themes and stories, shots and pacing, has developed a narrative style outside of Western-dominated cinematic forms. Variety of studies are conducted at a cinema for children as well as educational facilities for proper depiction of the behaviour and character of a child-friendly environment. This study illustrates in detail how Majid Majidi's films depict the hardships faced by labour children? In addition, there is a description of Majidi's inspiration from the Quran's verses has dominated throughout his films.

Keywords: Children, Majid Majidi, Iranian Cinema, Family, Religiosity, Quran, Childhood discourse in cinema, Ali, Zahra.

1. INTRODUCTION

Iranian film reflects and examines the multifaceted nature of Iran, its people, and its problems, so it is critical to acknowledge it as a separate entity from the censors. Many films have distinct cinematic movements; therefore, it is in debate with its own art cinema. Iranian films can create a sentimental humanism through a neorealist lens, and allowing them to have political and ideological discord without being restricted by the Iranian regime. "Iranian films have established a cinema of resistance by providing realism while asking political questions" (Mulvey). Iranian films are the most divisive topic among international audiences. Majid Majidi, a filmmaker born in Tehran in 1959, is one of their most accomplished. His films have received widespread recognition around the world. For 'Children of Heaven', he is the first Iranian director to be nominated for an academic prize for best foreign language film (1995). His films usually have strong family ties and socially relevant topics. Moreover, *Baduk* (1991) is his first film, premiered at the Cannes Directors' Fortnight. This study also examines Majidi's most recent film, "Sun Children (2019)," in depth from the standpoint of audio-visual language and creative style.

Moral Values in 'Children of heaven' and 'Sun Children'

The basic element and idea that Majidi always kept in mind while writing and directing films like: *Children of Heaven* (1995) and *Sun Children* (2019) were to portray the struggle and compassion through the eyes of children. Both of these films depict sibling relationships, and childhood recollections. In other words, Majidi's films serve as a mirror for our spiritual growth. His films have an undeveloped grasp of the world but are emotionally rich. They brilliantly capture the essence of infancy, with basic storyline narration and really meaningful and poetic experience for the audience.

Despite having a simple plot, "Children of Heaven" is capable of affecting everyone's emotions, regardless of country or age. With its simple stories and sensitive young characters, Majid Majidi flicks have enchanted audiences. The narrative of two little siblings who are forced to share the same pair of shoes is told in *The Children of Heaven*. Instead of informing his parents, Ali loses his younger sister Zahra's shoes and accepts responsibility for them, which depicts the conflicts between children and their parents, as well as other family issues.

Ali and Zahra rush to meet each other every day so that one of them can wear shoes to school. Even though they are both facing challenges, both young characters demonstrate maturity and accountability. For example, Ali arrives late to school or Zahra losing a pair of shoes in a pond. Majidi never dismisses his characters' hardships or refuses them as inconsequential. He remains faithful to the children's point of view and allows us to properly sympathize with them. As a result, he crafts an authentic portrayal of childhood that conveys an important message. "For all our proclaimed concern about the lives of children, we still deny to embrace the truth that they have spiritual lives not dissimilar to our own, and that they suffer as profoundly and deeply as we do," Mari Garcia noted in her review of the film.

When Zahra stands behind the shoe store window, unfortunately, looking at the red shoes, we can see it, or Ali who is heartbroken about the loss of her younger sister's shoes. Majidi brilliantly conveys the attributes and problems that every child faces; their intuitive understanding and sensitivity to severe concerns such as attachment, poverty, and disease; and their remarkable perception of joy, love, and compassion; and their vulnerability and perseverance.

Children of Heaven: Inspired by Quran and Religion

The sincerity of the Majidi's movie (children of Heaven) illustrates a specific verse in the Qur'an: ". . . it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know" verses 7. In the movie, Ali loses his sister's shoes so the two children need to share one pair of sneakers between them. Now Ali must run very fast in order to be on time for school each day. At first glance, this seems like a very bad situation, but, in fact, all the running is beneficial for Ali. In fact, because of all his running, Ali is able to win the race. Later in life, Ali becomes a professional athlete.

There are other references to the Qur'an in this story. For instance, at the foot race Ali tries to win third place because he wants to win the sneakers. So when Ali accidentally wins first place, he becomes upset because he thinks this is a bad situation for his sister and him. However, while the crowd is watching the race, everyone sees Ali's father carrying new shoes for Ali and Zahra, and everyone knows it is a good situation for them. As a result, Ali becomes a double winner. He wins the first place prize, and he receives a new pair of sneakers from his father.

Ali's victory illustrates another reference to the Qur'an: "And that man can have nothing but what he does." Verses 8; Worth noting that Ali wins the first place because of all his running to get to school on time, and being a good neighbour is also very important in Islam. Ali's earnestness and Zahra's alluring, but entirely oblivious feminine wile, is the focus of the film.

Majid Majidi's exquisite film captures the elegance of Islamic traditions. The characters are "upright and religious Muslims," according to Gregory (2008), and Ali's father helps build good "Amal" (action) in his children. For instance, while cutting a sugarloaf into small pieces no sugar cube is taken because it was "Amanat" (trusted responsibility) from the mosque and can only be served there. The most important requirement mandated in the Shariaah regarding the seeking and holding of wealth is the Shariaah-approved goal and method of acquiring it. Every noble aim is considered a good "Amal" if the means to achieve it are likewise ethical.

As a result, the effort and work put in are seen as acts of "ibadat" (worship). Human people must also have a sense of responsibility in their dealings with money before God. All responsibilities expected of wealthy people and property owners must be met. Hence, God ordered us to stop spreading evil in the world through wealth. Instead, mankind should try to do good works and assist others in order to obtain mercy (God's pleasure) in the future (AL 'Quran 28:77). God also orders our commitment be generous toward others, particularly our families. However, immorality, wickedness, and evil attitudes are prohibited (AL 'Quran 16:90). In Children of Heaven, Ali's mother encourages him to contribute a bowl of soup to their sick neighbour, which is an example of their social network. Ali also offers his sister, Zahra, his pen, which was a present from his father. Humans should use their assets, even little donations, according to God's will. one's success in the life of the hereafter, therefore, depends also on how well a person manages to be a good trustee of God's bounties in this world (AL 'Quran 28:76-9). Hence, we should strive to spread goodness to other people, specifically through the bounties bestowed on us by God.

Government's Impact on the Society and Labour Children

Challenges of the child labour, such as surviving in the middle of large gangs of child smugglers and other forms of crimes against children, have always attracted government attention. Children living on the streets are common in Iranian cities including Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz. Many are the children of Afghan refugees; others are from Iranian families that have crumbled into a crowded state of poverty and incapacity due to unemployment, drug addiction, or disease. Street children are a particularly vulnerable group of people. To put it another way, their lives are lived in dangerous situations

that put them at risk of drug use and HIV transmission. Sadr, Hamid Reza (2002). Furthermore, children who work or who do not have complete personal documents (refugees) and children who are homeless have less access to school education and are more likely to be abused. This involves sexual exploitation and abuse by criminal organisations.

Both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Iran have been very active in addressing these children's concerns and attempting to gather them, offer shelter, medical treatment, and basic education. They also educate kids "survival skills" along with communication skills, and they have to deal with horrific abusers as both sellers and buyers. They also gave some assistance to help them safeguard themselves (Ejlali, 2005).

Majidi and his Inspired Method for his Movies

Observing the daily struggles of special children in Iranian society, and seeing how these small children are involved in such incredible stories just to stay alive and protect their families, inspired Majidi, a well-known writer and director has gathered his courage and start working on "The Sun Children" (2020) which is Iran's Oscar submission. This film dedicated to the 152 children who have been forced into child slavery, as well as all those who fight for their rights. Ail, played by (12-years-old Rooholla Zamani), and his three companions, work together to make ends meet and support their family by doing menial tasks in garages and committing little crimes to acquire money in less time.

They are miraculously marvellous in their acting style, body language, emotional expression, and knowledge of the plot nature as the events progress. Ali is tasked with discovering a treasure hidden underground in the sun school beneath the water tunnel, despite the fact that none of them come from an educated household or have taken any acting training. First and foremost, they had to enrol in the Sun School [(a non-profit organisation) that is made up of volunteers, who dedicated to educating street children and child workers, who are left alone in their world and ignored by Iran's official school system. These are the people who are most at risk in our society]. Ali and his gang enter the tunnel through one of the back rooms in the school, which is near to the prize.

Majid Majidi's use of the typical narrative method of putting gallant and courageous but fragile children on a quest much beyond their comprehension is one of the most fantastic techniques he has employed while casting his characters. Majidi always emphasises on tiny situations that may not seem momentous to adults but are significant to youngsters.

The plot in Sun Children, on the other hand, is substantially more intricate, but it is enough related to keep the story on track, since Majidi has maintained the focus on a small group of young people who are challenging throughout.

Local mafia lord Hashem (Ali Nasirian) understood exactly how to arouse Ali's curiosity and persuade him to accept his offer and continue his search for the wealth. Ali blindly got faithful to Hashem when Hashem inquired about his mother (Tannaz Tabatabaei), who was admitted to a psychological institution. His mother's thoughts drove him to do whatever it took to uncover a treasure. Ali was sent to the Sun school by Hashem using this trap. Ali is a rough youngster, like one of the teen gangsters in Luis Bunuel's seminal "Los olvidados," an early example of sincere morality-driven neorealism set in Mexico, to which Majidi has devoted his entire career.

In compared to the director's previous works, Sun Children is more polished. He shot the majority of the film on location with a combination of highly skilled but rough adults and untrained young performers. His core protagonists have always been clumsy kids. This is the reason that it is a bonus for the film's perception that they could provide a wealth of experience as the Iranian nationalist and immigrant youngsters obliged to work in order to assist and support their families in the face of adversities.

Ali with the knowledge that he only needs to take a few more steps to rescue his mother from the psychological institution and build her a dream life; he has an incredible ability and inner feeling to impress the school principal. When they are forced to leave the school, Ali howls in the school courtyard, watching from the windows and screaming furiously, and says, "What is the difference between us?" Isn't everyone equal? The lads' drive to learn inspires Rafie (vice-principal). As a result, Rafie, earnestly requests the administration make an exception in their favour. However, Rafie fails to recognize that these kids aren't genuinely interested in learning. In fact, this drama is a ruse to carry out Hashem's latest scheme. However, Majidi has revealed this mystery to the spectator from the beginning of the film.

In conclusion, we learn how Majidi carefully and meticulously raises awareness for government and society throughout the movie by promoting the selection of two of these labour children as exceptional math and football skills. Majidi gives a socio-political message here by highlighting the significance of treating youngsters with a greater sense of humanity and responsibility. It is our responsibility to safeguard and care for these children, just as we do for our own, and don't allow felony convictions or adversity ruin or devour them.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the qualitative research, I used the narrative technique for analysing the selected films with the goal of gathering data about Iranian cinema, with an emphasis on family difficulties and child bonding. Narrative theory is changing qualitative inquiry in almost every human science subject and profession. Oral, written, and visual stories of experience and social representation processes such as feelings, pictures, and time are well-suited to narrative methodologies. Narrative approaches have the potential to handle ambiguity, complexity, and dynamism in the psyches of individual characters in films.

Narrative analysis, stories, and storytelling have all gained popularity among sociologists in recent years. Narrative is a social science interpretive technique that involves storytelling as a methodology. The story becomes a research topic. We can make sense of behaviour, emotions, and their natural and realistic lives by focusing on individuals or groups. It can be both socially and psychologically distressing.

A story can be perceived as a way to organise a series of events into a whole, with each event's significance determined by its relationship to the whole. The meaning of events is conveyed through narration in this way. The study of narrative can be addressed in three ways: The first is structural analysis, which focuses on story grammar and encompasses a story's setting and events. Second, there's the sociology of story methods, which focuses on the cultural, historical, and religious contexts in which stories are recounted and to whom they are told. The third approach is a functional one, which focuses on the roles that characters play in a story (Griffin 2009). Clearly, the second strategy is the one we use.

3. CONCLUSION

Islam holds the bond between parents and children in high regard as a moral that serves as the most solid foundation for all communities. In 1999, the film "Children of Heaven" was nominated for an Academy Award as the best foreign language film. Its most cherished achievement is the clarity with which it describes a variety of Islamic family values, especially in the face of adversity. This film not only strengthens family ties and interactions, but elevates honesty and penetrating insights with contemplations of a spiritually based worldview. The film's outstanding portrayal of its characters teaches viewers to accept adversity without whining.

"Children of Heaven" also paints a candid picture of Iranian culture, which is beautifully conveyed in terms of family loyalty, social ties, respect for the elderly (especially parents), and trustworthiness toward one another. The shared positive values that are central to both cultures, as exemplified by "Children of Heaven," make it a most deserving contribution of cinematic art for all Muslim families. It is especially filled with Islamic values as a result of the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, and since Malaysia has a Muslim majority following the teachings of Al'Quran, the common positive values that play a critical role in both cultures, as impressively displayed in "Children of Heaven", make it a most worthwhile contribution. The latter assertion, which means that the film has educational value in association with the Al-Quran and is brilliantly demonstrated for all those concerned with teaching their children in accordance with Islamic family values, is the most noteworthy part of this review.

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