

An Ideal Love in an Ideal Punjab: Shifting Notions of Punjability

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Abstract

The Punjabi language revivalist movement has pushed for the de-marginalization of Punjabi within Pakistan. The insistence on the revival of Punjabi was rooted in the need to challenge prominent language ideologies around Punjabi as being “low-class, backwards and vulgar” (Kirk 18). Its origins can be traced back to the 1960s, when writers belonging to the Lahori literary elite began to promote the use of Punjabi by publishing works that propagated new notions of Punjability¹. The “spirit of Punjability” (Ayres 67) is a core historical and literary truth that the use of Punjabi must disclose. The early proponents of the Punjability movement derived their characters from Punjabi folklore, who represented strength and resistance against hegemonic state and foreign authority. Among Punjab’s folklore the most popular *qissa*² is Waris Shah’s *Heer Ranjha*, which is now perceived to be authentically Punjabi. The popularity of the *qissa* can also be gauged by its prevalence within Pakistani cinema. Between the years 1947 and 2015, 10 cinematic renditions of the *qissa* have been produced. Its continuing popularity can partially be explained through the image of Punjab and the ideas of Punjability that it offers to the audiences. This essay seeks to compare the ideological constructions generated by these two spheres of cultural production—literature and film. It will compare the notions of Punjability generated by the Punjabi literary elite and how those notions relate to cinematic renditions of *Heer Ranjha*, to see where they intersect, depart and reach consensus. In doing so, it will consider two renditions of *Heer Ranjha*; one produced in 1970, and the other produced in 2012. The essay is an analysis of these movies in the context of Punjability in Pakistan and its related socio-political and historical groundings.

Keywords: Punjabi Cinema, Qissa, Punjability, Language Ideologies, Identity

In understanding processes of identity-making within Punjab, it is vital that one consider the genre of the *qissa* because of its importance as a genre responsible for cultural creation, before visual modes of storytelling emerged. While the genre originated in Persia, it was adopted in

¹ The spirit of “Punjability” was first used by one of the proponents of the Punjabi Language movement, Fakhar Zaman, to refer to “an archeological call to excavate some deeper historical and literary truth, the “spirit of Punjability” to which the Punjabi language must lay claim. (Ayres 67). Another definition of the term defines it as “the characteristic of being Punjabi” (Kirk 223).

² The *qissa* literature refers to a genre of storytelling. The genre was overwhelmingly oral, though literary productions of stories were also popular.

South Asia and by around 17th century, it was in circulation in textual and oral forms, and had been incorporated into local idiom in oral and textual traditions. The subject matter of these *qissas* varied greatly, with many of them centering around a pair of lovers³, and many which focused on powerful figures like Dullah Bhatti⁴, who openly resisted hegemonic foreign powers. They were passed down orally and through text, but the former mode of transmission was the most popular and accounted for its popular dissemination and appeal. Due to their widespread presence within the region, many of them provided good storylines for cinema, because the audience's familiarity with them ensured a certain popular appeal. The *qissa* of Heer Ranjha, for example, has been adapted for the screen more than 10 times between 1947 and 2015. These renditions adapted the *qissa* for mass audiences and simultaneously advanced an image of Punjab as a pre-modern, rural and traditional space.

This essay seeks to understand how the idealized constructions of Punjab in these films compare with popular notions of Punjabinat put forth by the Punjabi movement, which challenged the marginalized status of Punjabi within Pakistan and produced works that called its readership to embrace Punjabi and a Punjabi identity. It found its roots in the 1960s, when intellectuals like Najm Hossain Syed created new literary works in Punjabi. Syed borrowed characters from popular Punjabi folktales, like Dullah Bhatti (Ayres 85) to advance the ideal Punjabi hero as a valiant, heroic figure (Ayres 76) who challenged authority instead of being "submissive" (Kalra and Butt 542). His most pressing contribution to these ideas of Punjabinat is the possibility of using Punjabi as a language most suitable for this cultural expression. The movement that Syed and others sowed the seeds for rose to prominence in the 1980s when the local Punjabi literary elite began producing more works in Punjabi, and these ideas on Punjabinat became more pronounced and concretized. To explore how these ideas are reflected in cinematic renditions of folktales, I will consider two adaptations of the Heer Ranjha *qissa*: the 1970 version (dir. Masud Pervaiz) and the 2012 version (dir. Shahid Zahir). Both films are placed at different points of the development of the Punjabi literary movement, and thus offer us differing notions of Punjabinat. Through a textual and visual analysis of both films, this essay seeks to show how different Punjabi identities are constructed.

The choice of these two films is rooted in the fact that they were produced in two different periods in the development of the Punjabi literary movement. The notions that were advanced by the Punjabi literary elites in the 1960s had not been concretized and popularized till the 1980s, when the movement really became prominent. Between these two decades, the status of Punjabi within Pakistan also changed significantly so the attitudes of the two movies to the Punjabi language are different. The choice of using films to identify patterns of identity-making owes primarily to their widespread appeal and accessibility to the population of Punjab, as compared to literary works. Alyssa Ayres notes that 55 percent of the population of Punjab is not literate, thus the appeal of films over literary works is understandable (32). Furthermore, the dissemination of Punjabi literary works within Punjab is limited, with most of these works being produced in urban centers like Lahore. However, it must be noted that access to films is also limited to a demographic that can afford to watch them. Such a limitation is difficult to determine, given the dearth of official statistics. Nevertheless, films in Punjab can be more

³ Examples include *Heer Ranjha*, *Shirin Farhad* and *Sohni Mahiwal*, among others.

⁴ Dullah (Or Abdullah) Bhatti is the account of a man who revolted against Akbar, to protest unequal distribution of wealth, slavery and dowry. The figure was refurbished in the Punjabinat movement texts.

accessible than literary productions to the general public. The choice of using Heer Ranjha as the subject of analysis is due to its popularity as a story. Its significance lies in how it has been invoked by writers to comment on their times. The story has a political and social significance as an identity-marker for the Punjabi community. Amrita Pritam (1919-2005), a Punjabi poet who lived through the tempestuous partition of the subcontinent, and had to migrate from Lahore to Delhi, wrote in her famous poem:

Today I call on Waris Shah—from beyond the grave—speak!
 And turn, today, a new page in the Book of Love!
 Once wept a daughter of the Punjab [Hir], your pen unleashed a million cries.
 Today millions of them weep, and to you, Waris Shah, they say:
 O sympathizer of sufferers! Rise, and look at your Punjab!
 Today corpses lie in the thickets and full of blood is the Chenab [River].
 Somebody mixed poison into the five rivers,
 And those waters watered the earth.

.....
 Lost is the flute where once sounded the pipings of love.
 Ranjha and his kind have forgotten how to play.
 Blood upon the earth has even seeped into graves.
 Love's princesses cry today in their mausoleums.

.....
 Today where can we find another Waris Shah?
 Today I call on Waris Shah—from out of your grave—speak!
 And turn today a new page of the Book of Love!

(Pritam, qtd. in Mir 3)

The reference to Waris Shah's Heer Ranjha alludes, in the aftermath of Punjab's partition, to its importance as symbol of Punjab; its relevance as text used to articulate and interpret the present has also been referred to by Malik Ahmed Bakhsh Sirani, who published a version of Heer Ranjha himself. He states that it can "open the history of the times" (Sirani, qtd. in Mir 86). In a writer's rendition of the same story, they have the ability to advance social commentary on their own times. Even if that is not the writer's stated purpose, the methods and language used to articulate the story may inadvertently index to the writer's times. Similarly, a director's rendition of the same story may reveal larger concerns within the writer's times. This forms the premise of this research. Both the films chosen for analysis are embedded within the specific socio-political events of their time. Additionally, most academic works on Punjabiyyat have considered the Maula Jutt genre of Punjabi films to analyze how themes of resistance are represented through the movies. This essay considers renditions of Heer Ranjha because they are renditions of Punjabi folktales, which are considered as 'respectable' because they derive from a literary tradition. This is similar to how popular figures within Punjabi *qisse* are used by Punjabiyyat writers to claim respectability for Punjabi.

The 1970 version was produced at a time when the Punjabi movement had not garnered widespread support outside of Lahore's literary elite circles. By the 1980s this was to change, as

Punjabi cinema came to garner a popular viewership, and went on to dominate other cinemas. Punjabi cinema, with it has been viewed as the phenomena that achieved what the language movement could not—the popularization of Punjabi. These movies acquired a specific form as Sultan Rahi, through his role as Maula Jatt, emerged as the “iconic revenge-seeking peasant-warrior” (Ayers 93), who defied normative image of the Pakistani hero. This “vernacularization of the cinema” (Ayers 94) meant that the “handsome, well-spoken, educated, often dressed in Western suits, and clean-shaven” Urdu movie hero was replaced in popularity by a Punjabi-speaking hero who was “rough, dressed in the lungi-kurta of a Punjabi peasant, a skilled horse rider as well as master of the *gandasa*⁵, possessing an enormous and obviously hypermasculine moustache, and given to demonstrations of brute physical strength” (Ayers 93). Maula Jatt and its subsequent imitations all contributed to ideas of Punjabiyat in how they defined Punjabi heroism. The Punjabi hero, who stands up to foreign domination, is loud and unapologetic. This characterization has a proletarian ethos, in how it depicts the average Punjabi standing up to structures power, and how it chooses Punjabi as the language of this resistance. While this genre of Punjabi films “show political awareness, pro-Punjabiyat, and a strong streak of anti-state resistance” (Kirk 18), it has not been accepted as a genre that can be used for cultural expression. It has been undermined by promoters of the Punjabi movement on the grounds that it propagates a “low-class, backwards and vulgar” (ibid.) idea of Punjabi language and people. Punjabi cinema, even within the Punjabi literary elite is questioned and not considered a legitimate cultural expression for reclaiming the language. After a long period of cinematic success, it gradually edged towards a decline as the number of Punjabi films produced reduced considerably after Sultan Rahi’s death in 1996 (Kirk 69).

The 2012 version was produced by Yousaf Salahuddin, for PTV⁶ as a TV series and later shortened into a film. I will consider the film version for this essay. The producer of the film, Yousaf Salahuddin, is popularly known for his family lineage which links him to Sir Muhammad Allama Iqbal, the renowned poet and philosopher credited for articulating the Two Nation Theory, based on which the subcontinent was split into India and Pakistan. Salahuddin has earned himself a reputation for being a ‘guardian’ of cultural heritage in Pakistan, through his active interest in conservation work and events targeted at preserving Pakistani heritage. His interest in reviving a cultural heritage is reflected in the film, because of the shoot locations (mostly *havelis*)⁷, backdrops and costumes used for the film. This spirit of “revivalism” (Kalra and Butt 542), which determines how the movie imagines Punjab will be discussed later in the essay. By 2012, the sense of culture shame associated with Punjabi, propelled by the language ideologies mentioned above had been established considerably, and were supported by popular ideas about Punjabi cinema being ‘vulgar’ and ‘crude’. Thus, how the movie presents Punjab and Punjabiyat is heavily determined by these ideologies. To identify notions of Punjab and Punjabiyat in the two movies mentioned above, I will employ a textual analysis of these films. This textual reading will be centered around the *mise-en-scène*, language and sound. The research plans to look at visual elements, costume, props, settings, dialogues, background scores,

⁵ A long-handled axe used to cut sugarcane.

⁶ Pakistan’s state-owned broadcaster.

⁷ Havelis are traditional mansions in the Indian subcontinent, usually with some historical and architectural significance.

accents and language. The purpose of considering these is to show how they are used by the directors of both films to construct and propagate a particular Punjabi identity.

The Roots of Punjabiyat

The roots of the Punjabi's marginalization can be traced back to colonial era during which a linguistic hierarchy privileging classical languages in India was constructed. For the purposes of improving administration within the region by understanding local languages, Fort William College was established in 1800 at Calcutta. Its sole aim was understanding and documenting local languages and imparting this knowledge on company officials to improve administration. It is here that a distinction between supposedly literary languages and others was established. Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic were privileged as classical languages because of their history and rich textual traditions. Regional languages like Punjabi were considered rural "patois" (Rahman 75), which were seemingly ill-equipped to conduct administrative affairs in. For everyday administration, Hindustani, later called Urdu, was adopted as the "language of command" (Cohn 33) at the lower levels of administration in the region. By favoring specific languages and ignoring others, a linguistic hierarchy was created that undermined regional vernaculars and cast them outside the official administrative domains of the colonial government. Locals who did not know the language of administration were disadvantaged in how they could not occupy positions in the colonial government. Individuals who were required for their knowledge of the language of administration, were recruited at the lower levels of administration. This class of people is what Hamza Alavi calls the "salarial" (Alavi qtd. in Kazmi 119), which eventually had a determinative part to play in the formation of Pakistan. This class of urban-based professional became the economically dominant class after the formation of Pakistan due to their involvement in the colonial state apparatus, their identity, and their cultural capital being determined by their use of Urdu. Because of their involvement in the Pakistan Movement, Urdu became the voice of Pakistani nationalism. Thus, its primacy over other languages continued after partition, as members of the "salarial" became the class of people who gained control over Pakistan's principal state institutions.

The marginalization of Punjabi, however, did not immediately lead to a movement calling for its revival. The state's support for Urdu, in order to unite the new nation, meant that many of Pakistan's regional languages were excluded from official domains. The first traces of some activity acknowledging this marginalization and calling for its revival can be traced back to 1948, when a group of Punjabi intellectuals including M. D. Taseer and Faqir Ahmed Faqir, held a meeting at Dyal Singh College at Lahore, to call for Punjabi-language education and publications (Rahman 76). This was followed by a monthly publication "Punjabi" (Rahman 76) being started in 1952. These early developments calling for a revival of Punjabi, however, cannot be categorized as widespread movement. The tangible foundations of the Punjabi movement, as stated previously, can be traced back to the 1960s, when writers like Najm Hosain Syed and Ishaque Muhammad, began publishing works in Punjabi and pioneered a new way of understanding the language and its link to an idealized Punjab (Rahman 77). In his writings,

Najm Hosain Syed used Punjabi literary forms like the *var*⁸ which popularised the Punjabi individual's identity as valiant and strong, usually resisting against larger structures of power. This negated the belief that Punjabis were a "submissive" (Ayres 75) community. In his work, Najam Hosain Syed identifies key figures like Ahmed Khan Kharral and Dullah Bhatti who became upholders of resistance against hegemonic structures. Through these characters, he proposes an ideal Punjabi, one who voices protest against a hegemonic power. The use of Punjabi folklore in the Punjabiyat movement is significant because it harks back to "authentic" Punjabi literature in a bid to reclaim respectability for Punjabi. His legacy was upheld by activists in the 70s, but it was only in the 1980s, under the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq that the movement with writers like Hanif Ramey, Fakhar Zaman and Masood Khaddarposh voicing their opposition to a lack of institutional support for Punjabi (Rahman 82).

While the Punjabi movement has largely been understood as a movement initiated by the Lahori literary elite, it has clear links to leftist politics in Pakistan. Syed's own involvement with the Mazdoor Kissan Party emphasizes this link. The use of Punjabi facilitated mobilization of the rural demographic into leftist politics in Pakistan (Kazmi 228). While most academic works understand the Punjabi Language Movement as an ethno-nationalistic movement. This has been critiqued in recent works which argue that such an understanding undermines its connection to class politics in Pakistan. (ibid.; Kalra and Butt 538) Encouraging the use of Punjabi was meant to empower the rural populace of Punjab, who were structurally marginalized by their lack of knowledge of Urdu and English. The issue is addressed in the works of Punjabi literary elite, who have identified that Punjabi faces a different form of subjugation within Pakistan. Its marginalization cannot be measured through a comparison with other ethnic languages like Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi, but in its relationship with Urdu and English. The matter of explaining nationalism in such a way is complicated by the fact that Punjabis form 55 percent of the Pakistani population, and Punjab enjoys a "center" status within Pakistan. Punjabis occupy prominent roles in Pakistani state institutions. Punjab has often been referred to as "Punjabistan" for the political hegemony it enjoys within Pakistan. A communal identity for Punjabis, thus, was not aimed towards achieving greater political autonomy and representation, neither was it used to garner political support for its early proponents, who all belonged to influential socio-political backgrounds. For them, Punjabi has been "sacrificed" for the national project, whereby it is eliminated completely from the official spheres.

Before attempting to analyze these films, I will briefly describe the narrative of Heer Ranjha. The story of Heer Ranjha follows Ranjha, who after his father's death, is cheated by his brothers of his portion of the inherited land and is berated by his sisters-in-law. Ranjha, who was his father's favorite child, feels cheated and leaves his hometown of Takht Hazara in search of a renowned beauty called Heer from the Sial tribe who resides in Jhang. On his journey to Jhang, he is met with the *Panj Pir*⁹, who support him in his journey to find Heer. After crossing the river Chenab, he finally reaches Jhang and the two finally meet each other. They are instantly smitten with each other and Heer manages to get Ranjha appointed as a cowherd at her father's farm. The two continue this relationship until Heer's uncle Keido discovers their liaison and tells

⁸ A *vār* as an epic poem or the narrative ballad of resistance.

⁹ The Panj Pir, or the five holy men refers to five Sufi saints— Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chishti, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Baba Farid Ganjshakar, Baha'ud din Zakariya, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar.

her parents. Heer is forced to get married to Seida Khera by her parents, who they think is more suitable for their daughter because they believe Ranjha is a cowherd. Heer maintains her fidelity to Ranjha by not consummating her marriage to Seida. Ranjha, meanwhile, is heart-broken and decided to become a Jogi¹⁰ wandering the countryside. He soon finds the village where Heer lives and reunites with her. The two are able to trick Seida and escape the village but are later brought to the court of the Adali Raja, the local ruler, by the Kheras. He decides to let the two lovers go, and the two go back to her village to seek her parents' permission to marry. The parents agree, but on the day of the wedding, Keido poisons her food. Ranjha, on learning about Heer's fate, dies from grief. The sequence of events varies in both film versions but follow most of the narrative elements.

Language and Nostalgia

The opening scenes of both the stories are significant in foreshadowing how the filmmakers articulate Punjabiyaat. The 2012 version begins with a voice over, voiced by Naseeruddin Shah, a famous theatre and film actor, in which he talks about spirituality and divine love. The voiceover sounds poetic and elegiac in its praise of the legendary love between these individuals and the immortality of their stories. These sounds are compounded by visuals of artistic depictions of the *qissas* that he talks about in his voiceover; Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, Shirin Farhad. The paintings include those depicting Heer Ranjha rendered by Ustad Allah Bakhsh¹¹. In addition to this the background music includes slow rhythmic sounds of a *chimta*¹² and *matka*¹³. These sounds and visuals compounded together inculcate a feeling of melancholy and nostalgia in the audience, who are bound to look back to this time as one of simplicity and authenticity. However, the voice-over is voiced entirely in Urdu, and not Punjabi as one might expect. The language used is rich and alludes to the kind of accent used by Urdu-speaking Mohajirs¹⁴ in Pakistan. The use of accented Urdu, instead of Punjabi may allude to status of Urdu, and the culture shame associated with Punjabi. It is also possible that Urdu was used to cater to a wider audience, because it was broadcasted on PTV. Such a reasoning is provided by the producer in an interview, where he states that “a lot of plays nowadays are in Urdu, and on occasion, use Punjabi slang”. However, it must be noted that according to a 2008 census report, Urdu is spoken by percent of the population, while Punjabi is spoken by 44.17 percent. Thus, it does not become clear why Urdu would be used to reach a wider audience. In the depiction of these paintings and their rural imagery, and in the sounds that play in the background, it is clear, that one of the aims of the movie is to revive a certain authentic Punjabi culture. Kalra and Butt describe this sense of “revivalism” that contrasts with the movement's left-leaning motivations, which seek to empower the rural peasant class (542).

In a complete contrast to this, the opening scene of the 1970 version opens with a visual of what appears to be heaven. White clouds are used to outline the frame, within which the audience sees

¹⁰ A jogi is a wandering wandering mendicant.

¹¹Ustad Allah Baksh (1895-1978) was a realist painter who was known for his renditions of mythological characters and rural life.

¹² A *chimta* is a tong-like instrument.

¹³ A *matka* is a large ceramic drum, often used as a percussion instrument.

¹⁴ The term is used to refer to people who migrated to Pakistan during the partition in 1947.

figures wearing long white gowns. The set itself is fluid and airy, through the use of smoke machines. These visuals are compounded by the sounds of organs, chimes and an orchestra. Within the smoky, airy space, the audience sees multiple white marble statues and hears Punjabi poetry being recited. The two figures, Heer and Ranjha, stand together in the middle of this smoke. Their union is disrupted as other figures in this heaven start to gather and bow down in supplication towards an unseen God. They are separated and disappear behind two marble statues of a man and a woman. The visuals themselves are reminiscent of Christian imagery, with the emphasis on the color white, the sounds of the organ and chimes, and the long, flowy gowns. Aside from the Punjabi poetry being recited, there is little in the visuals to allude to the story's 'Punjabi' character. Within this version, there isn't the same nostalgia of a Punjab that the 2012 one espoused. However, unlike the 2012 version, it uses Punjabi as its mode of communication, which is a central tenet of the Punjabiyyat movement.

The language used in both versions is emblematic of the times that both movies were produced in. In the 1970 version, all the characters converse in Punjabi, the original language that Waris Shah wrote the text in. The 2012 version predominantly uses Urdu, with some phrases of Punjabi. The Urdu itself is highly tinted with a Punjabi accent, in a bid to make it more 'authentic'. This language can be considered to be an Urdu equivalent to what Kirk calls "Filmi Punjabi", in that it does not show any connection to specific geographic locale. (209) From the accent, it is difficult to discern which dialect of Punjabi it is trying to inculcate within Urdu. It's a standard way of depicting 'Punjabiness' without aligning with a specific dialect or region. Additionally, in using Urdu, it distances itself from Punjabi and simultaneously distances itself from the characteristics popularly associated with Punjabi. It upholds a linguistic hierarchy where Urdu is placed above Punjabi. The reason behind the use of Urdu instead of Punjabi can be rooted in the language ideologies that characterize both languages. Punjabi is considered to be a 'loud' language, usually associated with people belonging to the lower classes. Urdu, on the other hand, is considered to be a more sophisticated, polite language. These language ideologies stem from the colonial language policies outlined by Farina Mir (50). The use of Urdu in the movie, thus makes it seemingly more palatable for the audience, which is limited to the TV-watching populace of Pakistan.

The Imagined Punjab of Cinema

Waris Shah's Heer Ranjha refrains from naming a Punjab, but refers to important places within Punjab: Takht Hazara, Jhang, Tilla Jogian, Rangpur. These places present themselves as an "imagined ensemble of natal places within a particular topography (rivers, riverbanks, forests, and mountains) and religious geography (Sufi shrines and Hindu monasteries)" (Mir 134). The connection between a place and an individual is highly "localized." (Mir 139) An example of illustrating this connection is how Ranjha, in Heer Ranjha texts, refers to Takht Hazara as "*des*¹⁵" and Jhang as "*pardes*¹⁶", establishing a connection to his birthplace, and delineating difference from Jhang. Similarly, the connections between a community of people and a geographic location are illustrated by how Jhang is referred to as the "the land of the Sials"

¹⁵Country

¹⁶ Foreign country

(138). There is no reference to a Punjab at large, and it does not provide any basis for an individual's or a community's identity. Similarly, in Najm Hossain Syed's *Takht Lahore*, in which he focuses on Dullah Bhatti's rebellion against Emperor Akbar, Punjab is not referred to directly (Kazmi 116). In his work, the focus is not to assert an ethno-nationalistic identity, based on an association with Punjab. It is the articulation of political resistance against a foreign hegemon. It is interesting to note that both the texts have been interpreted as emblems of Punjabinyat.

The 1970 version refrains from making any direct references to Punjab. Even when Punjab is depicted as a space, there aren't any specific symbols that have now come to be associated with a Punjabi culture. The 2012 version, while refraining from making direct references to Punjab, makes explicit references to an ethno-nationalistic identity. The elaborate sets often include backdrops with hand-painted ceramic pots, elaborately carved wooden arches, large carved brass pots, traditional wooden low chairs, wooden *charkhas*¹⁷, patch-work fabric set against a colossal haveli. Additionally, with its inclusion of Ustad Allah Bakhsh's paintings at the beginning. In comparison, in the 1970 version, the sets are simple, and do not contain visual elements that specifically emphasize Punjabinyat. The 2012 version is conscious of its own Punjabinyat and creates a physical landscape according to the popular imagination of a Punjab. The emphasis here is not the authenticity of the Punjab it creates, but the awareness of the physical landscape, of the Punjab that it aims to depict. It recreates a nostalgia for this imagined space and calls upon an ethno-nationalistic identity. In this setting, the "rural and 'traditional' is valorized over the urban and the 'modern'" (Kirk 209). This differs from the actual *qissa* itself, which situates belonging in specific localities, and does not engage a larger sociality.

In conclusion, the two films considered here show different conceptions of a Punjabi identity and of Punjab itself, and differ in how they use language to connect to this to this identity. The need to construct such an identity in 2012, as opposed to 1970, shows how it is commonly perceived that a Punjabi culture is threatened. The motivation for producing the 2012 version is a regeneration of an 'authentic' culture, that stems from the perception of this threat. However, in trying to preserve this culture, it divorces Punjabi from its articulation, and tries to make this culture palatable for its audiences.

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¹⁷ Spinning-wheels

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Filmography

Heer Ranjha (dir. Masood Pervaiz, 1970)

Heer Ranjha (dir. Zahoor Shahid, 2012)