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### Why *Sudigadu* Fails to Attack the Status Quo of Indian Films

When was the last time that you watched a truly GREAT movie in theaters? A booming spectacle beyond belief with exhilarating action, enticing plot threads, and engaging drama? Perhaps you stopped going to theaters after the lockdown – personally, I would not blame you. After all, it seems that other than the *Barbenheimer* saga, there have not really been any monumental movie moments to write home about. And yet, the factory line-esque production of Bollywood films (or just Indian films in general), does not seem to be slowing down any time soon. You may have seen clips of bizarre acting in Bollywood films online; for example, the scenes in Indian serials (AKA sitcoms) where the camera starts to inexplicably zoom in and out of the characters' faces, in a manner almost meant to overstimulate the audience.

Recently, however, Indian films have been transitioning from these over-exaggerated tropes to more down-to-earth films that instead try to tell the story of just everyday people. This shift is much easier to see in the “indie” film genre, which usually consists of lesser-known Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, or Malayalam-language films. Still, it is easy to find mainstream films that go directly from a dance scene to the climax of the film. Therefore, the director Bhimaneni Srinivasa Rao decided that he would make a film that satirizes these Bollywood tropes. And thus, *Sudigadu* (2012), was born. Specifically, this analysis is looking at this scene from *Sudigadu*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFp7t4AwikY>



. As a satire normally does, *Sudigadu* takes the main foibles of Bollywood films (such as overaction or illogical scenes) and drags them to the extreme, trying to convince the viewer of the preposterous nature of Indian cinema.

It is also clear that many people feel the same way about Indian films. One of these like-minded people is Siona Chibber. While it is highly unlikely that, being a Hindi speaker, she saw a random Telugu film from 2012, she does seem to share many of the same positions about Indian films as *Sudigadu*'s director. Chibber's thoughts are most well-presented in her work for The DePaulia titled "The future of Bollywood is bleak". In it, Chibber points out the vices with Indian cinema as it is now and gives rationale as to why they exist and how we can fix them. As a Horatian satire, the satire itself is quite humorous. However, the movie *Sudigadu* fails to capture the underlying vices that are ruining the Indian films of today. On the other hand, Chibber's piece does an excellent job of analyzing both the foibles and vices with appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos, and by picking at all the flaws of Bollywood films.

For as interesting and funny as *Sudigadu* is, it fails to specifically point out why Indian films tend to be as absurd as they are or really think critically about these films, both of which are things that Chibber's piece excels in. By now, most people in India know that the films they are watching are often illogical and over-the-top. *Sudigadu* laughs at these films but never seems to explain why these films even exist, which is that, simply put, they are fun and make a whole lot of money. Chibber, being a big fan of Bollywood films, seems to understand this very well. As she puts it, "For a while, the stability in concepts, storylines, and familiar faces allowed for comfort and safety in watching. Indians would find pleasure and nostalgia seeing the same ideas over and over again" (Chibber). In this paragraph, Chibber uses a listicle format (which she often does and continues to do throughout this piece) as well as an appeal to pathos, her trying to get the audience feel warmth and nostalgia for movies of the past. She tries to do this because she wants to develop a personal connection with the reader and wants to use their nostalgia for Indian films of old to attack those newer films. On the other hand, *Sudigadu* almost wants to avoid critical thinking, calling out these already well-known to be bad tropes rather than looking at why these tropes exist. In the clip shown above, we can see just how *Sudigadu* satirizes the unrealistic nature of Bollywood/Indian films in general. The bullet heading towards the hero's family takes so long to reach them that the hero himself can have an entire training montage in the middle, which is obviously unrealistic, and quite funny. There comes a point, though, where such an over-exaggerated film like *Sudigadu* starts to feel as repetitive as the films it is satirizing. *Sudigadu* does have a lot of the aspects of a good satire, such as having the audience cross the line of consent, and using humor in a meaningful way, but it just does not work when the pieces that are being satirized are already as absurd (if not more) than *Sudigadu* itself. An analytical

piece like Chibber's, however, can similarly attack these tropes while appealing to logos and pathos rather than just making a joke out of the whole ordeal.

While it is not easy to compare the structure and choices of a satire to an analytical piece, one can assess that the choices used by Chibber in "The future of Bollywood is bleak" will stand the test of time, whereas the humor in *Sudigadu* falls flat. One of the most powerful parts of Chibber's piece is how she goes about some of the more serious vices with Bollywood films currently – that they perpetrate a sense of colorism, sexism, and misogyny. As Chibber puts it, "Many actors are forced to appear fair-skinned through various filters, lighting, and editing... In contrast, many darker skinned Bollywood actors are repeatedly cast as villains, antagonists, unlovable characters, or comedic relief characters... Even with movies that involve female leads... the women are always portrayed in a distasteful light" (Chibber). Chibber specifically uses this listicle framework (i.e. "filters, lighting, editing", "villains, antagonists, unlovable characters, or comedic relief characters") as a way to drill her point home. Similarly, Chibber alludes to films such as *Mary Kom* or *Kahaani* to provide logical evidence to where these problems occur. Chibber also uses appeals to logos and pathos by stressing just how dangerous these tropes can be towards the society that perpetrates them. For example, Chibber writes, "This [The over-sexualization of Indian women in movies] in turn creates an issue with consent, sexuality, and intimacy for Indians worldwide. With high rates of rape and sexual assault among both men and women in the country, the warped depictions of sexual relations and behaviors creates a damaging environment and encourages negative perceptions of sex" (Chibber). Chibber makes an appeal to pathos and logos here by showing just how bad the over-sexualization of women has caused the rates of rape and sexual assault in India to get. In the next line, Chibber uses an appeal to Ethos by talking about how an article by CNN backs up this claim. Analyzing

what problems currently exist in the industry and picking them apart as Chibber does here is absolutely required for change to be made. As unfortunate as it is to say, these three vices have been alive for quite a while now, and it does not look like they will be dying in the near future. Therefore, it is quite difficult to attack these vices with a humorous tone like *Sudigadu* attempts to do. Whereas one can laugh at the sheer stupidity and logical fallacies present in current Bollywood films, most people cannot really ignore sexism and colorism by just laughing at its existence. One of the most deeply frustrating things about *Sudigadu* is that it really is not a bad satire. Rather, it made one great mistake that led to the film not being as cutting and interesting as possible. It chose to tackle the foibles of Bollywood and Indian cinema as a whole, while disregarding the underlying vices that are slowly killing the genre. Chibber knows that one cannot fully understand the current state of this industry without looking at all of the flaws that make it what it is and therefore chooses to address them as they are.

As a piece meant to satirize current Indian film tropes, *Sudigadu* does a frankly good job. The appeals to logos by pointing out just how unrealistic Indian films can be are excellent, and the mocking of over-acted and overly dramatized scenes by singing a children's rhyme in such a climactic scene works really well. Unfortunately, (at least from what I have seen in the clip), *Sudigadu* was doomed from the start as a satirical piece. Rather than challenging the status quo, it adheres to it and is viewed more like a comedy piece than satire. By choosing to tackle the problems with current Indian films from a Horatian standpoint, *Sudigadu* cannot feasibly address the underlying vices of nepotism, colorism, sexism, and misogyny that Chibber's piece breaks down so effortlessly. While there is nothing wrong with a film like *Sudigadu* (it is overall a fun movie), it is highly unlikely that its existence would ever convince its audience that Bollywood films are on the decline. On the other hand, Chibber's analytical piece cleverly uses the reader's

nostalgia, as well as parallelism, appeals to logos and ethos, and a call to action at the end to engage and convince her audience of a very interesting point. While Bollywood films may be on the decline currently, if we work to improve upon their ideas and remove some of the common, often derogatory tropes, then perhaps in the future, we can enjoy the same feelings of warmth and nostalgia again.

## REFERENCES

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