



Humour and Identity through “Parodic Dubbing”: The Punjabi Adaptation of *Shanghai Knights*

Navneet Kaur*

Abstract

This paper explores the various forms of Punjabi humour through the popular medium of dubbing which has been used to disseminate laughter in the public-cultural sphere. Punjabi humour, which lacks a systematic evolutionary account for it being oral in nature, is scarcely documented. This research examines the oral folk customs and traditions of Punjab like *Boliyan*, *Tappe*, *Sithniyaan*, and *Taane*, along with the Punjabi parodic dubbing of *Shanghai Knights* (2003), which will form a base for divulging some of these humour forms. *Jugat Baazi* (witty banter), *Taahne marna* (sarcastic remarks), *Tezaabi Totay* (acidic bits), *Gapp Baazi* (bragging), *Samtavaadi Haasa* (egalitarian laughter) are a few such forms which derive their essence from folk, as folk culture is not fossilised in time. As new mediums emerge, they carry folk elements within them as part of an active cultural memory. The investigation of the relationship between oral humour and its method of preservation (dubbing) reveals a hybrid mixture of tradition and modernity that embraces the evolving dynamics of cultural expression, highlighting how traditional oral humour adapts and perpetuates within contemporary digital media platforms. The study also highlights how Punjabi humour with its egalitarian ethos and carnivalesque spirit; disrupts hierarchical forms; ridicules authority; replaces the formal with the colloquial; and fosters communal laughter.

Keywords: Dubbing, Humour, Incongruity, Localisation, Orality, Parody.

* Research Scholar, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Introduction

Dubbing is a creative act of appropriation of cinematic narratives produced across cultures. This phenomenon of convergence and emergence of cultures surpasses the typical linguistic exchange and goes beyond linguistic equivalence. Because dubbing from a source language to a target language incorporates certain cultural and linguistic biases including ethnocentrism, stereotyping, domestication, and standardisation, as the dubbing masters prioritise familiarity over equivalence. This research paper focuses on “parodic dubbing,” a phenomenon explained by Rocio Banos as a “union of two loathed but highly influential forms of cultural appropriation, used innovatively in the current digital era” (Banos 171). This act of interchange appropriates the other, in this case, Hollywood, while retaining the otherness of the other, as the very act of dubbing the other acknowledges its presence. Appropriation is usually associated with negative connotations, ridiculed as a superficial exercise in mimicry. Nonetheless, the Punjabi tradition, deeply rooted in folk, extracts its practices of parody and humour from it. When applied to film dubbing, this tradition of parodic reworking allows marginalised communities to engage with and subvert dominant cultural narratives. Parody, in its ability to blend humour with critique, aligns profoundly with the essence of Punjabi tradition, serving as both a mirror to societal dynamics and a celebration of the region’s rich cultural ethos. *Jugat Baazi* (witty banter), *Taane Marna* (sarcastic remarks), *Tezaabi Totay* (acidic bits), *Gapp Baazi* (bragging), *Samtavaadi Haasa* (egalitarian laughter) are a few such humorous forms which derive their essence from folk as folk is not fossilised in time; as new mediums emerge, they carry folk within themselves as a part of active cultural memory. Dubbing, as a carrier of parodic and humorous traditions of Punjab, serves as a medium through which the culture celebrates, preserves and promotes itself. This research paper will attempt to study a “parodic dubbing” of *Shanghai Knights* (2003) done by Sajjid Jani as *Butt te Bhatti* (ਭੱਟ ਤੇ ਭੱਟੀ) (2003).

Parodic dubbing relies heavily on incongruity. James Beattie, an eighteenth-century philosopher and the propagator of the incongruity theory of humour, linked humour with memory. According to him, our laughter “always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited

in mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it” (Beattie 304). The cause of humorous laughter is a dissonance between two circumstances, “considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them” (320). Sajjad Jani, a prominent *Jugat Baaz* and the dubbing voice of *Shanghai Knights*, explains *Jugat* as a conglomeration of these incongruous elements, *do mukhtalif cheezon ko milana, jo nahi ho sakta vo kehna par kahin na kahin link bhi ho, jaise ek jugat hai: yaar tu injh ein jida samundar ch kaccha rasta hunda* (“The Rise of Sajjad Jani” 30:05). Hence, this concept becomes metaphorical, analogical and a juxtaposition in its formation and style. Jani has imbibed this framework in the “parodic dubbing” of *Butt te Bhatti*, in which laughter arises from the incongruity between these elements: The original American-accented voiceover is replaced with a heavy-sounding Punjabi one; the female character is dubbed by a male artist, resulting in discordance; the serious is made comic (in exaggeration); and there is no regard for hierarchy, an all-pervasive tone of ridicule and mockery prevails.

Oral humour is ephemeral, as its fast-evolving pace hinders it from being documented for preservation purposes. The compilation of oral humour “was awaiting a medium and a moment to broadcast itself with full gusto” (Kumar 195). Technological enlightenment, with due credit to technology and gadgetry, made it possible to transcribe humour in visual and auditory forms. Punjabi, being a provincial language a few decades ago, needed to rely on a global medium to foster and disseminate itself to a mass audience. The dubbing of Hollywood into Punjabi seemed a fitting choice for it as it combined indigenous with the foreign, allowing a wider audience. Hence, dubbing became a medium to preserve and proliferate this humour.

Local artists often take liberties with the script and add their own impromptu elements based on the sensibilities of the local audience, making the dubbing more relatable. Everyday Punjabi slang and colloquial vocabulary is quite evident in these dubs, which varies from dialectical predilection to cultural references, societal, and religion-based nuances. This level of customisation does not only

enhance the local flavour but also makes the content seem less of a foreign product. “Foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language” (Venuti 20). The aim of this research paper is to explore the various forms of Punjabi humour, illustrating them through the dubbing of *Shanghai Knights*. For the purpose of this paper, all passages attributed to the film *Butt Te Bhatti* have been translated into English by the author.

***Jugat Baazi* (ਜੁਗਤ ਬਾਜ਼ੀ)**

The word *Jugat* has its roots in Urdu, and it means “a method.” *Jugat baaz* (noun) is a person who makes a witty use of his humorous abilities and engages in comic banter for amusement. *UrduPoint* describes such a person as an “epigrammatist,” someone who presents an insightful idea in a satirical, witty, compact, and concise manner. The *Jugat* culture lacks a structural historical account, yet its roots can be traced in the other oral folk traditions of Punjab like *Boliyan*, *Sithniyaan* and *Tappe*, which are sung during wedding ceremonies, resonating with the spirit of *Jugat Baazi*.

Such “non-formal humour had to undergo fundamental changes as it entered formally into the age of print capitalism” (Kumar 197), while much of it could not be recorded since it falls under the tradition of orality. Age-old themes of gender-based mockery, physical disabilities and appearance, caste and class-based derogation, domestic violence, fat-shaming, and sexually inappropriate remarks are apparent in them:

*Kithe gayian laariyan teriyan dadkeya,
Teriyan udhal gayian lariyaan, ve dadkeya,
Choohre chad chamaraan de gayian, ve dadkeya*
 (“Sithniyaan”)

(where are your wives gone, oh grandparents!
They have eloped, oh grandparents
They have eloped to charamars, oh grandparents!¹
 (“Sithniyaan”)

This is an example of a *Sithni*, an oral folk song sung at the time of marriage. These are usually witty and playfully sarcastic, oriented towards the bride/groom's extended families, often light-heartedly criticising each other yet at the same time, a derogatory subtext of casteism prevails in it.

*Sun ni kudie kaantean walie,
kaante naa chamkaiye,
Khooh tobhe te hundi charcha,
charcha na karviye. (Kaur 638)*
(Listen, girl with earrings,
do not make them shine,
People talk about them at every nook and corner,
don't let them talk about you)

In this couplet, a girl with earrings—ornaments traditionally associated with enhancing beauty—is made wary of the fact that the villagers have begun commenting on her appearance. Therefore, she is advised to prioritise her modesty over her physical charm. Such guidance is often given by the elders to encourage appropriate behaviour in young women.

Such an exchange is hegemonic in its essence and is “implicated in the discourse of power . . . in which people from the lower castes and women in general were the primary target of ridicule” (Kumar 196). Apart from these gatherings, *melas* (festivals) and *baithaks* (social meetings) were a few of the early spaces in which similar humorous exchanges would flourish. During the Mughal and Sikh periods, Maharajas held courts and invited court jesters to entertain them. Bhandsⁱⁱ and Mirasisⁱⁱⁱ during that era were “admired by people for their jokes, ready wit, satire, and repartee” (Jilani et al 4732). One such entertainer named *Karela Bhand* was a famous court jester during the reign of Muhammad Shah Badshah. The rise of *Nukkad Natak*^{iv} (street theatre) and *tamasha*^v (folk theatre) further popularised this style. *Jugat Baazi* can be considered a vital element of such performances that developed over time through folk performing arts of this sort. In the late twentieth century, *Jugat Baazi* made its way into contemporary Punjabi cinema. Comedians like Rangeela, Umer Sharif, Jaswinder Bhalla, Kapil Sharma, and Bhagat Singh incorporated it into their acts. In a long-running Punjabi

comedy TV show *Chankata* (2000-2007) starring Jaswinder Bhalla, *Jugat Baazi* remains an important comic element throughout the series although the focus remains on discussing the politics of the prevalent times.

Jugat humour is equivalent to the game of “Dozens” (common in African American communities) in terms of stylistic reliance on quick wit, verbal dexterity and exaggerated insults, serving both as a form of entertainment that has its roots in orality and a display of social intelligence within a communal context. The game of dozens is named after the colonial practice of grouping the Blacks in lots of “cheap dozen” for sale to slave owners and “in effort to toughen their hearts against the continual verbal assault . . . Blacks practiced insulting each other indirectly” through this game in order to keep cool when abused by the coloniser (Saloy). Apart from “Dozens,” many other cultures have similar practices like *Jugat* embedded in their folk history: “Picong”^{vi} in the Eastern Caribbean, “Flying”^{vii} in Britain, “Balagtas” in the Philippines, “Contrasto”^{viii} in Italy and the contemporary rap battles in America. While *Jugat* is occasionally unpolished, spontaneous and brash, most of the above-mentioned dialogic forms belong to the cultivated societies and hence, are poetic in style.

In the contemporary scene, *Jugat* has transitioned into a leisurely pursuit, serving primarily as a recreational outlet for communal engagement and entertainment. A popular *YouTube* channel named “Sajjad Jani” centres specifically around this type of humour. The premise of his thirty-minute-long shows revolve around a subject which is to be ridiculed for instance, *Jugats* on physical appearance or traits, behaviour or actions, social interaction, cultural or contextual ironies, and everyday situations. In a *YouTube* shot, Abbas Danish, a *Jugat baaz*, makes fun of his friend being an illegitimate child of his father. The joke goes like, *Enu isde abbu ne waaj maari, eh unnu jaake kehnda ji abbu ji? Oh apne dostan nu kehnda vekho mera hai vi ni meri kinni izzat karda (JugatBaziyaa)*. In another video, he makes a *Jugat* about his friend Faisal: *Faisal bhai ik bambrole de pichhe bhajji jaan, main kehda khair? Kehnda meri salwar vich reh gi (Jani 25:47)*. *Jugats* are seldom, but not always vulgar. In a comic discussion on fishing, a *Jugatbaaz* comments on

his friend's miserly nature, *Eni ku boti banh ke samundar ch sutt ke baitha, vicho machhi nikli, ohne boti dekh ke keha lakh lanat ae tere te* (Jani 32:45).

The videos gain millions of views and thousands of comments which indicate a general liking for this type of humour. A few instances of *Jugat Baazi* based on the appearance of the character are evident in the selected Punjabi dubbing of *Shanghai Knights*, *Butt te Bhatti*. Butt's (pronounced as Bhatt) buffoonery is amplified in the dubbed version when he makes jokes on ancestry, appearance and mannerisms of his adventure companion Bhatti (starred by Jackie Chan). The former makes passing references by calling Bhatti as *Budhi de mooh waleya* (the face that looks like that of an old lady), *Jackie Chan de najayaz bache* (illegitimate child of Jackie Chan), *khote jidda mooh bana ke tur peya, jalebiyan fadan wala chimta hunda e* (He walked away with a face like that of a donkey. It was like the tongs used to make jalebis) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 17:51). Butt justifies his jestering by saying, *O tuhanu pata mainu shugal karan di kini bhedi aadat ae* (Oh, you know I have a terrible habit of joking around).

Jugat Baazi is situational when it's not based on a person's physical appearance but rather is object-oriented. In a court scene, a caged tiger is presented to the English court from China as a gift to the Queen on the occasion of her fiftieth birthday. In the dubbed version, one of the members says, *Oye sher lai kea aye ne* (Oh, they got a lion) and another replies *Sher nai mainu te lagda kutte nu mehandi layi ae* (it's not a lion; to me, it appears as if a dog with henna applied on it) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 21:36). Another example of situational *Jugat baazi* is seen in a scene where Butt is trying to catch the attention of a British guard standing still, attempting to provoke a reaction. Approaching the guard, he quips: *Ah ser ki naayi de peepe chon kadeya?* (a remark aimed at the tall black fur cap worn by the British guards with the red uniform) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 36:51).

***Taahne Maarna* (ਤਾਹਨੇ ਮਾਰਨਾ)**

Characters engaging in a verbal duel of *Jugat Baazi* seldom make passing sarcastic remarks to each other. *Taahne Maarna* can be

considered as a subcategory of *Jugat*. This colloquial term that literally translates to ‘throwing taunts’ has its roots in oral Punjabi folk culture like the prevalent use of idiomatic expressions and proverbs that are woven into the fabric of everyday Punjabi discourse (Kumar 2014). The nuanced understanding of this type of humour lies in understanding the linguistic lineage of oral tradition. These examples illustrate it: *Khane choley, dakaar badama de* (when a person appears to be something he is not or when someone makes big claims about his status but can barely make the ends meet); *Sau siyane ikko matt, moorakh aapo aapni* (All wise men are of the same opinion but the opinion of the foolish vary); *Aap na wassi, lokan nu matti* (advising people to do something when the advisor is undetermined him/herself); *Siron ganji, hath kangian da joda* (when some possess something that he does not actually need). It is evident in these examples that sarcasm and satire prevail with an emphasis on social structures and societal vices and pretensions. There is an undertone of moral wisdom that prompts reflection, gently engaging the reader without the weight of a sermon. In the Punjabi dub of *Shanghai Knights*, playful taunts and witty retorts are a recurring feature of verbal exchange between the characters, Butt and Bhatti. These interactions are imbued with a distinctive element of *desi* humour, reflecting cultural specificity. In one particular scene, Butt, visibly upset with Bhatti, isolates himself at a bar. Bhatti approaches him and says *mareya kise ne tenu?* (did someone beat you?) Butt responds to him: *Oh chad yaar, mainu kinne marna naale jehda tere wargha yaar dost hove ohnu bahron koi maar sakda?* (Forget it, buddy. How could anyone from the outside ever harm me when I have a friend like you) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 1:02:11). An idiomatic example of *Taahne Maarna* is evident in this scene where Butt (Roy) and Bhatti (Wang) are in conversation about Bhatti’s (Wang’s) demised father who spent his whole life protecting an imperial seal (diamond) and expected his son to do the same. Bhatti (Wang) tells his friend: *Mera piyo mainu kehanda hunda si ki putt haiga tu confirm haramda e par eh heera tenu hi sambhna paina. Hun gal peya dhol te vajana paina bhai* (My father used to tell me that you are definitely a worthless person, but this diamond is to be preserved by you only. Now the time has come when I should pay heed to the matter) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 18:58).

Tezabi Totay (ਤੇਜ਼ਾਬੀ ਟੋਟੇ)

It translates literally to “acidic bits” for its sharp humour, biting social commentary, explicit language and compact content. It differs from *Jugat* in its tendency to often include a political edge. The humour is usually practiced in the *Lehanda* region of Punjab. This type of humour flourished in the Post-Zia era (late 1980s) when strict rules on censorship were lifted and comedy and satire became famous instruments of expressing frustration resulting from years of political repression. At the same time, cassette culture became widespread in South Asia and the methods of the proliferation of entertainment became cheap, accessible and easily available to the masses. *Tezabi Totay* draws its roots from the folk culture of Punjab, bearing resemblance with the crafts of *Jugat*, village jesters, street performers, and local comedians. In contemporary times, this form of humour disseminated through *YouTube* resembles that of dubbing: an original video (often that of a politician), is overlaid with a new audio track replacing the original dialogue. This new audio typically employs humour, satire, or parody to reinterpret the video, often providing a critique or commentary on the subject. Such dubbing is commonly used to highlight social or political issues in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. In a recent video titled “Donald Trump Winning Elections,” the host of the Channel, *Azizi* (also known as *Bhatti*), indulges in a back and forth witty and comical exchange with Donald Trump, whose voice is humorously dubbed in Punjabi by *Azizi*. The host asks: *Trump saab tuhade te v koi case chal rahe ne?* (Mr Trump, are there any cases filed against you as well?) and Trump replies *Oye je jattan te case na hove te inj lagda ki bagair savariyan di khali wagon ja rahi ae* (If Jatts don’t have cases against them, it feels like an empty wagon moving without passengers). The conversation mocks and subverts the authority on the surface, yet this mockery results from the age-old feud between the two nations that manifests in mimicking the political personas and linguistic country anymore. Reporter: But where will they go, sir? Modi: I don’t care even if they go to Pakistan). Manipulation with content like this reflects how the political “parodic idiosyncrasies which “reveals that the ideological manipulation occurring in the parodic dubbing affects both acoustic and visual components of the audiovisual source text” (Banos 182). In another video, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 2021

speech is edited and it was made about the Indian cricket team losing the test series that year. In one of the dubbed dialogues, he (Modi) says: *aj ton eh ohna da desh hi nai* and a reporter says *te janab oh jaan ge kithe?* Then Modi says: *mainu ki bhavein Pakistan chale jaan*. It's not their dubbing that resorts "to dialects, slangs, swear words, and overly colloquial registers which are not considered appropriate in professional dubbing" yet at the same time it is a subversive dialogue that serves as a tool for reserved political commentary on the adversaries (Banos 186). Moreover, it resonates deeply with its target audience who share a common ideological and cultural perspective, thereby functioning not only as a form of subversive commentary but also as a source of entertainment.

Bragging (ਗੱਪ ਬਾਜ਼ੀ)

Sohinder Singh Vanjara in his work "Punjabi lok Dhara Vihav Kosh," defines *Gapp* as a colloquial tool in which a thing is exaggerated up to such an extent that it lacks sense. *Gapp vich gall nu bahut vadha chadha ke dassia janda hai, gapp di birti ati-kathni wali hundi hai. Chote aakaar waliyan gappan chutkuliyan di seema ja chudiaan hai* (in mock bragging, a thing is often exaggerated and is told with a lot of embellishment. Compact sized bragging is equivalent to jokes or trivial matters) (Vanjara 763). Hyperbolic expressions are fundamental to the style of *Jugat*. Verbal humour like *Jugat baazi* relies on witty and spontaneous repartees, primarily for humoristic purposes, which involves exaggeration (*atikathani*) for a vivid and captivating impact on the audience and it grants the performers a sort of creative licence that allows them to be expressive and dramatic. The pragmatic impact of hyperbole relies heavily on the interpreter's part, hence, it becomes mandatory for the spectator/audience to be familiar with the cultural background of the performer. In her essay "Hyperbole as a Stylistic Device," Ruzimbaevna writes that by "exaggerating something in an extreme way, whether it is a character's traits, writer's tone, theme, or idea, hyperbole can capture a reader's attention" (Ruzimbaevna 328). The use of hyperbole in *Jugat Baazi* ranges from exaggeration of tropes like—physical appearance, over-the-top achievements, daily life dramatisations, mock fears, unbelievable comparisons etc. In one of the scenes, Butt (Roy O'Bannon) offers an exaggerated account of

the combat encounter involving himself and Bhatti (Wang). The dubbed dialogue goes as: *lao bai kudiyo mai tuhanu ik gal sunava: mai te mera ik yaar hunda c Bhatti, sadi ik din ho pi ladai, oh chaali-panjah hazar band ate assi dovein. Mai Bhatti nu keha ki nikal tu, mai sambhal langa ihna nu. Oh fer geya nikal, merko si pistol, mai fer kadeya fire. Bandoon kad layian sarean ne..eddi firing hoyi othe par mainu ik goli ni vajji* (Listen girls, let me tell you something. I had a friend named Bhatti. One day, we got into a fight. There were forty to fifty thousand people, and there were just the two of us. I told Bhatti to leave, I'll handle them. So, he left, and I had a pistol with me. Then I pulled it out. Everyone pulled out their guns, there was a lot of firing, but not a single bullet hit me) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 8:55). This scene is similar to an exaggerated account of valour that is often depicted in indigenous movies when hero tries to impress his female counterpart for courtship. In another scene, inspector Doyle mockingly predicts Butt's (Roy's) character and the predicament he is about to fall into. It goes as, *Eh ghari mainu vekh ke hi pata lag geya si ki ehda maaikl bohot laanti kisam da banda hai te eh naal kuteyan wali hon wali ae. Eh ghari mainu dasdi payi aa ki mera maalik bohot Jaleel kisam da aadmi aa, sharab, charas poori jindagi ch ehne koi chnaga kam nai kita, aapniyan char jawan behna ghar chad ke lokan diyan dheeyan-bhena wal dekhda rehanda je. Eh ghari dasdi payi ae ki ehde naal da begairat banda tuhanu poori duniya ch nai labega* (This watch immediately told me that its owner is a very despicable person, and he will be treated like a dog soon. This watch tells me that my owner is a very disgraceful man . . . Alcohol, drugs, throughout his entire life he hasn't done a single good deed, scoundrel. He left his four young sisters at home and kept looking at other people's daughters and sisters. This watch tells me that you won't find a more shameless person anywhere in the world than this one) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 30:46).

Egalitarian laughter (ਸਮਤਾਵਾਦੀ ਹਾਸਾ)

Punjabi humour usually disrupts the established hierarchical boundaries by challenging and reiterating the traditional convictions of power, respect, authority, rank and status. The roots of egalitarian comedy or flat comedy can be traced in Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "Carnavalesque" as it celebrates the "temporary liberation from the

established order, it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and positions” (Bakhtin 10). In “parodic dubbing”, the hierarchy is not only overthrown, but is also made more ridiculous than other characters. Lord Rathbone is a member of the parliament and the antagonist in the narrative. In the dubbed version, he is renamed *Thattha*, a scurrilous attempt to poke fun at his lisp (the character does not lisp in the original movie) which automatically leads to a decline in the depth and credibility of his character. In a court scene, Lord Rathbone gets up to address the court and says: *Laam naal beh ke meli gal sun lo sun ni te. Oh teen de vich jehra apna heera hunda c na, o toori ho deya* which literally translates to *Aaram nal beh ke meri gal sun lo sun nit e. Oh Cheen (China) de voh jehra aapna heera hunda c na, oh chori ho geya*” (listen to me quietly if you want to. The diamond that we had in china, has been stolen!) (*Butt Te Bhatti* 21:13). In the original version, Lord Rathbone is portrayed as a well-spoken, diplomatic gentleman who addresses the court gracefully in order to win their vote of approval to wage a war on China: “fellow lords, I’m afraid I bring disturbing news from the orient. The opium wars have ravaged the land the emperor’s enemies are organising” (*Shanghai Knights* 23:20). In a jail scene, Roy and Wang are scheming to get out by talking politely to Inspector Doyle, who is rather firm and unwavering in his stance. However, in the Punjabi dub, he calls them *Bhaji* (a term of endearment used between equals) and talks to them in a light-hearted, almost playful tone. There are other instances like the Queen asking for *Mitha paan* (sweetened betel leaf) during her golden-jubilee celebrations and gifting Yamaha and Nokia 3310 to Roy and Wang during their knighting ceremony. The “carnavalesque” nature of Punjabi humour also lies in its ability to create a space where opposites can coexist. Respect and irreverence, power and vulnerability, or tradition and rebellion, are all given equal importance within the comedic narrative. In this way, it becomes a vehicle for expressing what might otherwise be suppressed, enabling a temporary reordering of society’s values and expectations. In the dubbed movie, a few characters like Lord Rathbone, Inspector Doyle, and the Queen of England hold significantly prominent social positions due to their roles in the British parliament and monarchy.

Punjabi humour, in its innate cultural and linguistic formation, has a tendency to transgress the established moral and societal parameters, which sometimes provoke sentiments and bring the whole moral framework of the culture into question. The famous Punjabi comedian Jaswinder Bhalla faced the wrath of governmental and religious formations for his long-running social satire “Chankata.” “He was alleged by certain *ragi jathas* of making mockery of them and raised strong objections” against his album for the year 2003 (Bhalla). Similarly, in 2016, SGPC (Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee) pleaded to the Supreme Court of India to impose a ban on *Sardarji* jokes on which the court “expressed its inability to issue directions . . . observing courts cannot lay down moral guidelines for citizens and doubting their enforceability if they were to do so” (Sardarji Jokes).

When it comes to *Jugat Baazi*, a culture which openly mocks a subject’s appearance, insecurities and status, it is evident for it to receive some backlash from the society. Upon being asked about the nature of his comedy and its moral framework, Sajjad Jani talks about how comedy is often mistaken and considered a trivial and insignificant task. On the contrary, it demands substantial effort and a creative approach. He justifies his profession as a professional *Jugatbaaz* and derives his artistic freedom from the leverage and margin that his subjects give him around which he spins his jokes (“The Rise of Sajjad Jani” 33:37).

This creative freedom, however, is not without challenges. As humour often walks a fine line between entertainment and offense, it can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, especially when it touches on sensitive cultural or social issues. While *Jugat Baazi* thrives on poking fun at the quirks of individuals and society, it also opens the door for conversations about power dynamics, societal expectations, and the often-unspoken pressures individuals face in their personal lives. The ability of comedians like Sajjad Jani to navigate these complex spaces reflects the transformative power of humour, showing how comedy can be a mirror to society—one that not only entertains but also challenges and provokes thought. Thus, while the moral boundaries of comedy remain a contentious issue, its role in shaping public discourse cannot be underestimated.

Endnotes

- i. All the working translations have been done by the author.
- ii. Bhands are just like court jesters who would entertain kings with their comic performances and funny remarks. Bhands were actors, singers, dancers, mimics, etc. They had a very keen eye over social and political issues and would make funny but wise remarks about the world around them.
- iii. The Mirasis are a community found in North India and Pakistan. The community flourished in the nineteenth century under the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. They were performers and entertainers, usually serving as folk tellers, singers, bards, genealogists and musicians.
- iv. Nukkad Natak is a form of street theatre which addresses a wide range of socio-political and cultural dilemmas prevailing in society. The form was popularised by Safdar Hashmi, who founded an amateur theatre company named *Jana Natya Manch* which is dedicated to street theatre.
- v. Tamasha is a vibrant folk theatre form which combines music, dance, and drama with humour and social satire. It often explores themes from mythology to daily life, showcasing lively performances and colourful traditions.
- vi. Picong or Piquant is a form of comic exchange or banter prevalent among west Indians (Trinidad). The ability to playfully mock one another without taking the remarks personally is often valued in Calypso music tradition. “The Mighty Sparrow vs Lord Melody” is a famous Picong in Trinidadian culture.
- vii. Flyting is an insult duel that takes place in verse. It was popular during the Renaissance period in England. The insults thrown at both parties were extremely provocative, involving accusations of sexual perversions, cowardice and immodesty. “The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie” by William Dunbar is a prominent example of the duel.
- viii. Contrasto is a medieval Italian poetic tradition involving a verbal duel or debate performed by a pair of artists called *Poeti Bernescanti* or simply *Poeti*. Each poet takes a side on the theme chosen by the audience (Husband vs Wife, Science vs Arts, Aristotle vs Plato etc.). The poets would use rhetoric as a means to defend their sides.

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