

Psychoanalytical Analysis of the Movie, *Amar Singh Chamkila*

Suresh Kumar

Assistant Professor, SLET, UGC-NET
Department of English
Govt. College Indora, 176401
Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India
Email: vijsuresh8890@gmail.com



Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amar_Singh_Chamkila_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amar_Singh_Chamkila_(film))

Abstract

Humans are social animals and in this respect they are bound to adhere to the norms of society. Socio-cultural norms prove crucial in maintaining decorum and harmony in society. If anyone does something which is against the codes of society is poked by various forces. In Freudian sense human behaviour is governed by three factors i.e. ego, superego and Id. Id represents all the desires whereas superego represents morality, values and ethics; and being social animals, the mind human beings use is ego which strikes a balance between the two i.e. Id and superego. This research paper explores how the abundance of Id results into clashes with the forces of ideology and power in the movie, *Amar Singh Chamkila*. This paper also showcases that how the

unconsciousness of the masses has been revealed under the predominating influence of superego. Besides this, it projects the protagonist struggling for survival attempting improvisation ranging from immoral songs, sublimation, devotional lyrics amidst the complex web of socio-cultural milieu sacrificing his life eventually.

Keywords: *Amar Singh Chamkila*, Socio-cultural norms, Ego, superego, Id, ideology, power, survival, sublimation.

Sigmund Freud divides the human mind of the psyche into three parts i.e. the ego, the superego and the id. The ego is the conscious mind. We use and work with this mind. We are aware of this mind in the present most of the time. It is the conscious mind that mediates between the unconscious id and superego to make decisions and rational thoughts. The Superego can be called our conscience. It represents socio-cultural values, ethics and morality. It influences the way the conscious works. The id is Sigmund Freud's favourite territory. The id is the area of instincts, dreams, and desires, and all that does not come to the fore in our consciousness, is unconscious. (Nayar 65)

A significant term emphasized by Freud is 'sublimation', where the repressed material is promoted into something grander or disguised as something noble (Bary 93). The artist person, for example, possesses an especially high degree of power to sublimate for example to shift the instinctual drives from their original sexual goals to nonsexual 'higher' goals, including the goal of becoming proficient as an artist. In simple words, an individual possesses the ability to shift socially unaccepted content into socio-cultural wilful acceptance. It is an ability to elaborate fantasized wish fulfilments into the manifest features of a work of art in a way that conceals or deletes their personal elements. This makes them capable of satisfying the unconscious desires that other people share with the individual artist.

Sublimation not only allows the artist to overcome personal conflicts and repressions but makes it possible for the artist's audience to obtain solace and consolation from their unconscious sources of gratification which had become inaccessible to them (Abrams 321). Althusser through his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" says regarding values that in order to bring desirable changes in the society or state uses either repressive structures or force i.e. police

force, army, prison, law courts etc. or ideological structures like schools, churches, family, art, media literature and so on. If the former uses power or force the later wins the consent of the masses, hence becomes hegemony (Bary 157-58).

The opening scene of the movie, *Amar Singh Chamkila* presents the crowd of the audience (men) in the pandal [temporary shed] whereas the women eagerly wait on the roofs of the nearby houses for the arrival of their singing stars i.e. Amar Singh Chamkila and Amarjot whom Chamkila calls Babbi at Mehsumpur near Jalandhar (Punjab) in India. Though collapsing of the slab of the house due to the overload of women can seem an exaggeration for cinematic effect, but an attempt has also been made to show the craze of the fans of the Chamkila couple. As they reach for the show and step out of the car Amarjot is shot first and as Chamkila hurries towards her to embrace he gets the second shot and both fall unconscious on the land. In this firing Harjit Gill, a harmonium player and Debu, a dholak player are also shot severely and all the four of this musical pop group die on the spot. The bodies of the singers are carried to the hospital by the surviving companions where they come under the police custody and later on their bodies are handed over to their Chamkila's father for cremation. Chamkila's father loses balance of his mind on hearing the tragic news of assassination of his son and daughter-in-law.

The plot has been narrated through flashback technique in case of the central character, Chamkila and through using the stream of consciousness of the characters directly associated with Chamkila like Kesar Singh Tikki, Chamkila's companion, Jatinder Jinda, the ribal singer and through other companions either in the fried circles while drinking or as the police officer enquires them about Chamkila. Chamkila's interview with the news reporter also contributes significantly to the plot.

The movie emphasizes that humans are the by-products of society. They learn whatever they see and experience in society. After the opening firing scene, the viewers are taken back to a childhood memory through the flashback of Chamkila. Being a child Chamkila happens to see a scene of arguments, almost a fight of two young women where all the women of the village crowd to see that particular scene. Chamkila is the only child to see this episode. In this particular scene, a woman while arguing with the other woman pushes her, as the situation becomes violent the husband of the former comes in his wife's rescue but he is left shocked and

speechless what he comes to know from the later women. The women inform him that his wife is having an affair with her husband for five years. She shouts at him in Hindi, “*paanch saal se tera khada nhi hua aur aaj khada ho gya?*” which hints at his impotency. As the child overhears this, he asks his mother honestly that what does “*khada*” [boner] means. His mother shouts at him to hush up and takes him inside her home (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 2:22:10-2:21:54).

Thereafter, teaching the students while writing on the blackboard and dictating the students to write down the same in their notebooks the teacher checks randomly the notebooks of students and as he reaches Chamkila, he notices something and he takes the notebook, the teacher reads twisting little Chamkila’s ears “Look at the Jat’s style. He got a boner like bamboo cart.” Then the teacher beats the boy with a stick and advises him not to write this sort of content again (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 2:21:43-2:21:22).

Drunken Kesar Singh Tikki while narrating the background of Chamkila to his friends claims all the credit for the reputation of Chamkila. He narrates that how Chamkila used to work in a socks factory and how he used to knit socks while music running in his heart and mind. How he helped him meet Jatinder Jinda, a popular singer of Punjab on his request. Tikki says that the song Chamkila sang for trial before Jinda which got appreciation and also job as a servant is:

The girl’s lyrics: Something sinful happened, it is very embarrassing. The unthinkable happened yesterday. It is not a lie. I slipped suddenly and my bachelor brother-in-law lifted me up as I slipped suddenly.

The boy’s lyrics: The veil slipped off your face. Your beauty left me dazzled. Your bachelor brother-in-law lucked out. You went to the field to bring saag [mustered leaves] and thing worked out well. Your brother-in-law was lucky and grabbed you in his arms. (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 2:08:34- 2:08:01)

Further, Kesar Singh Tikki narrates about Jatinder Jinda’s show scheduled in Chandigarh in 1978 as when the Pop singer Jinda became late as per the given time and how it became challenging for the host to control the crowd of audience. Although Jinda’s singing female partner, Sonia had reached on time but she denied singing solo on the stage as it was a dual

performance. In this tense situation the host gave Sonia a suggestion to sing with chamkila but the later denies singing with a servant. Finally as the host had no choices to engage the audience, he tells Chamkila to grab the opportunity for which the later consents although after confusion. The host asks for his nick catchy nickname for which he gets the answer Sandila but the host listens to it as Chamkila and he announces and calls the singer as Chamkila upon the stage until Jinda reaches. The lyrics of the song he sings are:

Female part: Quit your dirty tricks you old fart. You are done for. Your juice is all dried up now. Yet you try to act like a young buck. Male part: Chopped many trees in my youth. Turned many girls into women. Like lightening this oldie strikes his shots. I am strong enough to rip off this door. Well known I am in the neighbouring villages. (*Amar Singh Chamkila 2:07:17-2:02:56*)

The audience enjoys this song of Chamkila and as the pop singer Jinda reaches on the stage. The audience shouts that they want only Chamkila singing on the stage. At this Chamkila permits him to continue on the stage and he moves towards backstage. After this, Jinda goes to Canada with Kavita without informing Sonia, his singing partner.

Based on Chandigarh's performance and craze of the audience, Kashmiri Lal, the owner of that Musical group proposes the name of Chamkila to make a new singing pair in absence of Jinda with Sonia. Chamkila accepts the proposal and sings with Sonia, "What is the matter dude? What is going on? What are you looking for? What have you lost? Need to search your mother. My father has gone missing". Chamkila and Tikki become extremely happy when they listen to their Delhi recorded song in 1981 being played louder in Ludhiana. As Tikki instigates that the owner gives Chamkila just the wages for the show, the later rebels and demands for his share besides wages from the total benefit. At this, Kashmiri Lal claims that he has made the career of a *Chamaar* [a lower caste] as a singer and can destroy if he wishes. He gets Chamkila off his office and the later too leaves the office for the footpath from where he gets an offer for the show from other party where he shines. When Sonia and Kashmiri Lal return from Rajasthan trip find their office replaces by Chamkila for the casteist humiliation.

Now Chamkila searches a female singer Babbi also known as Amarjot with the help of Mr. Manak through a friend. This pair starts doing stage performances which are termed filthy and immoral by society. As their first show gets cancelled, Amarjot decides to leave for home but she stays as Chamkila requests. The song they sing in their first show is: “No need to be shy of me, you can drink me up. My youth is going out of control. Lick me! Lick me! Scoop me up and lick me. Darling! I am your suger. Hey! Indulge my yarning heart. Do not turn away from me. Hold me close to you. Why? Hold me. Oh! Sooth my poor fluttering heart” (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 1:34:18-1:33:15). In their second show the following lyrics become popular, “(M) Hey! Sleep in my arms, sister-in-law. I will keep you comfy by fanning. (F) He grabs my bed in the midnight. Drunk to his bones, with a mouth full of tobacco, his drunken stupor left me dumbstruck. Your brother is drunkard” (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 1:32:38-1:32:03). Almost after a year Amarjot’s father wishes her to join any other singer for more money. At this Chamkila’s friend suggests him to marry her to save this pair of singers. As he marries it is revealed later that he is already married. Panchayat is called by Gurmail, his first wife’s parents Chamkila is questioned and somehow matter gets settled. Later Chamkila is interviewed by a journalist and is criticized for polluting the society by his immoral and dirty songs. After this, Chamkila is advised not to compel Amarjot such songs.

Later on in 1985, Chamkila is called to a Gurudwara by the priests in Amritsar and is counselled not to sing frivolous songs and is advised to sing devotional songs. Now while performing in a show, he announces that he has renounced to sing filthy songs, and now he will sing just devotional songs. By this time his recordings, “Chant the Almighty name” and “Your Nankana” has already become a big hits. As he finishes these devotional songs, the audience demands an immoral song and he sings:

Your Elder brother!

My bachelor brother-in-law

Was peeping at me through a hole

As I lathered myself up

He ogled as I took bath at noon

If you real man's daughter

You would have taken an axe. (*Amar Singh Chamkila* 40:15-38:26)

By this time Chamkila was dangling like a pendulum. He was neither here or there. He was in conflict due to the forces of Id and superego. The Canada show in 1987 proves a big hit for the couple. Before performance, Chamkila is warned not to sing immoral songs, but he sings as per the demands of the audience. Therefore, he is summoned to the Gurudwara by the *gurus* [priests] and is questioned for his choice of songs and they advise him rather warn him not to sing this type of content. They say they can chase him up to Punjab too. They have four promises from him i.e. not to sing such immoral songs, not to eat meat, not to drink and not to smoke even from today itself. Chamkila consents to each promise in their presence, but as he steps into the car, he takes out a cigarette from his pocket and starts smoking. He starts becoming fearless in a sense. After reaching Punjab his show features all he has been warned for and in 1988, the hit singing pair gets assassination along with their two companions.

The movie projects the clashes of Id and superego. In these clashes the superego dominates throughout the movie. The instincts and unfulfilled desires of the unconscious mind irrespective of the binaries like moral or immoral are exposed through the scenes in the villages and most significantly through the songs. Mother's scolding Chamkila as a young boy asking for the meaning of "boner" on overhearing the fight of two women, Teacher's twisting the boy's ears for writing the sexual content on his notebook, Gurmail's parents rebelling against Chamkila and calling Panchayat to question his second wedding, Sister-in-law and mother-in-law's requesting Chamkila not to involve Amarjot in immoral and dirty singing, Journalist's questioning Chamkila for polluting society with his song choices, warnings by police and the Gurudwara priests to stop the evil, filthy and impious singing all showcase the prominence of superego to preserve morality, ethics and values in society.

If one overviews the life of Chamkila objectively, he seems practicing Charles Darwin's dictum, survival of the fittest. He starts his life as a labourer in socks knitting factory and follows

his passion for the music. Wherever he gets the opportunity for singing, he avails. He is humiliated for his low caste by Kashmiri Lal, his owner. From that point of time, he undergoes sublimation and becomes more demanding singer of the folks. For more stability he marries Amarjot and takes the responsibility of both the wives although with the initial unforgiving reactions. Overtime, he catches the nerves of the ordinary masses, i.e. the glorification of female body and immoral/illicit relations interchangeable with Chamkila. Although, he also tries his hand at devotional songs, the masses want original or the old Chamkila and how an artist can ignore the masses. In this pursuit of balancing the Id and superego, Chamkila gets assassinated.

As the movie, *Amar Singh Chamkila* trended on the OTT platform through its release on Netflix, the viewers or audience empathise with Chamkila for the circumstances he undergoes in that particular socio-cultural milieu. The viewers I interacted with for reviews are of the opinion that Chamkila wrote and sang whatever he saw in society. If he glorifies the illicit or immoral relationships, it results from his upbringing in that rustic culture. He represented the rustic masses in their typical dialect and sang what they desired. Therefore, he becomes the chief target of up-keepers or morality, values, his competitors i.e. rival singers. However, the assassination was unjust to him as he could have been banned or imprisoned. Moreover, the movie shows the failure of the administrative system as the assassins have not been traced out yet.

The above analysis showcases that in the context of the movie, *Amar Singh Chamkila*, superego or morality, ethics and values dominate the socio-cultural atmosphere. Anything undesirable men-women wish to do, they prefer to maintain privacy or in Freudian sense they use their ego i.e. their conscious mind which intermediates between ego and superego and comes up with almost a balanced or rational decision. Although superego succeeds in suppressing the undesirable content of the unconscious mind of society using ideological (religious priests) and state apparatuses (police) in Althusserian sense, it fails in rooting it out. However, the untimely departure of Chamkila couple from this world is the victory of superego irrespective of the unresolved mystery of their assassination. Moreover, contradiction of values emerges as an essential feature of the present society.

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