

## Realism and Religion; Realism in Cinema as an Expressive Capacity in Relation to Religious Concepts

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### **Abstract**

*Although cinema among other artistic media has more capability in conveying the sense of reality to the audience, the reality that is presented in the film is basically different from the reality that exists in the world outside the film. Cinematic reality is more rooted in internal recreation of the filmmaker instead of being originated in outside world and finally it is the manifestation of a reality that the filmmaker has abstracted from the outside world. In the present research we seek to analyze and evaluate reality in cinema by a descriptive-analytic method referring to various ideas and theories. In doing so, we also intend to assay the place of religion in the medium of cinema via an analysis of the intellectual foundations and philosophical ideas and theories concerning the discussion of realism and reality in cinema. Our theoretical studies as well as evaluation of examples of this kind show that given the features of religion and realist cinema, this cinema as we can see in some films has an appropriate capacity for exhibition of religious themes.*

**Keywords:** Cinema, Realism, Realist Film, Religion, Religious

### **1. Introduction**

Man in his course of evolution was craving for a device that could record the details of the surrounding realities and in 1895 he succeeded to invent the cinema. The concept of realism in the same time and in nineteenth century emerged as a movement in visual and narrative arts the goal of which was exact grasp and representation of contemporary world.

As to the difference and similarity between what one finds in life and in cinema, one should say that in real life our vision is controlled by our attention; but the contrary is the case in the cinema; it is this vision that controls the attention. In other words, in daily life we see what we notice, but in cinema we pay attention to what we see. What we see in cinema is indeed the same thing that the director shows to us by his own will and selection.

In cinema, one can combine the events of three or four or even five corners of the world in the form of a complicated action. These cases suggest that what we see in film and cinema is not objective and tangible reality rather it is a product of a creative mind that combines pictures. The viewers of film and cinema do not declare the events inside the film as a seamless whole and real events. In cinema no active physical reaction takes place and the viewer's reaction is limited to expression of emotions (Stevenson, 2004, p. 232). This reveals the clear difference of the external reality and recreated reality.

Film more than any other art due to the power of cinema in recreation of motion, exhibition of objective and visual pictures, and said differently, due to its being more objective, is able to convey the sense of presence and material reality to man. This truth has caused this art to be considered a comprehensive and perfect art and even it has caused individuals to think that artistic perfection lies in the fact that we come closer to material reality. While cinema is hugely different from material reality. Of course, the artistic power of cinema lies in this difference.

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Thus, important issue in cinema is the phenomenon of delusion of reality. In cinema, efforts are made in order to build confidence in the cinema screen and this implies understanding the work as a real life which itself has a double relationship with the reality. On the other hand, it is supposed to induce the viewer in an encounter with the work that is seen on the silver screen of cinema as a reality. On the other hand, the viewer already knows that he is facing imaginary events. In fact, it needs to be noted that if the viewer does not forget that he has the silver screen ahead of himself or he continuously thinks of the makeup of the actors and the director's intention, then it is natural that the viewer is not touched by the touching scenes and does not experience other emotions associated with the states of real life. On the other hand, if he does not distinguish between the scene and real life and forgets that a handmade entity is before him, then he will no longer understand the artistic sense of the work. To put it otherwise, artwork will give rise to a double sensory experience in the audience as well as a clear contradiction.

## 2. Realism of Film in Theories

The problem that is raised directly regarding the film and its essence consists of the idea that cinema contains unique notions and elements. Thus, cinema theoreticians seek to describe these qualities either based on the features and capacities of this media or in view of the experiences of the viewer. Film and cinema have been generally an object of paralleled types of secondary discussions and theories. Among the film scholars and theoreticians, some questions have always been at issue, i.e. whether film should be a visual media or it needs to have all means that can be effective in its becoming more realistic and use 3D voice, color and effects? Where does the art lie in this mechanical production and combination of voices and pictures? What is the nature of artistic participation in creation of a film? What is the relationship between cinema and reality?

This theoretical output has also been considered from the point of view of Muslim thinkers. The reality depicted in relation to film is regarded an intellectual outcome of Cartesian philosophy. Mohammad Madadpur in his book entitled "Spiritual Initiation in Cinema" describes the quality of reality in film as recreated by the filmmaker as follows: "Reality in the world of cinema ... is in fact a result of development of Cartesian metaphysical thought of world. Space, place and time and the events that take place in the space, place and time are similar to reality; but they have been manipulated insofar as all events despite the insistence of the filmmaker on unity have found an artificial and strange unity. Anyway, cinematic reality is a subjective reality" (Madadpur, 1994, pp. 62-63). In fact, these connected pictures are excerpts of the real world which just seem to be integrated by the unity of action. There are no few ideas like this among the scholars in the domain of cinema.

Munsterberg's notion of art is an independent and at the same time more valuable of the reality itself. Thus conceived, he considers the value of film to be superior than the mere representation of reality and evaluates it based on its distance from the reality. "Munsterberg argues that the value of art does not lie in the recreation of every single element of the reality rather in art by ascending to a world beyond material world we create our own world in which the aesthetic object is in-itself" (Obrien, 1994, p. 16). Munsterberg believes in the aesthetics of Kant and thinks: "In artwork, things and events in their utmost essential perfection are presented as being delivered from all relations that end up in limits beyond their own limits, i.e. perfect solitude" (Obrein, 1994, p. 16). In order to reach this perfect solitude in which he believes, the cinematic artist needs to distance his own work from the real and ordinary world. Thus, according to Munsterberg, film not only has its origin in reality and achieves its own perfection in aesthetic self-sufficiency and sufficient distance from the reality, it is an art of mind (Munsterberg, 1982, p. 91). Then, one can state that in its own course, film leaves the reality behind in order to reach its own desirable target.

The film theory of Eisenstein is known as the part-whole theory the basis of which is constituted of montage (cf. Carol, 1992, p. 77). Since this theory has the utmost nearness to real films and of course been founded based on a whole consciousness of the history of cinema, it is discussed in full details. Brian Handerson delineates the ideas of Eisenstein in the following words: "Eisenstein, and also Podfekin and Malro, believe that the montaged pieces of the film are nothing more than mechanical reconstruction of reality and as such they cannot be an art. Only when these pieces are

arranged according to the montage pattern, the film changes into art” (Handerson, 1991, p. 36). Given what was quoted by Handerson from Eisenstein, he has just sufficed to the indication of reality and turned to other issues that consist of what lies beyond the reality, or said differently, the relationship of reality with cinema.

Anyway, though Eisenstein considers every piece of film part of reality, he can neglect the equality and relation of every piece of the film with reality, because he believes in a montage in which pieces of real pictures are recreated via combination. Eisenstein insists on montage and this is why he pays lesser attention to shot and its artistic categories like combination, light, situation of the actors/actresses on the scene and so on and so forth.

Since he cannot neglect the importance of all these categories, then he tries to include them from various ways in his theory of montage. Therefore, he considers shot to be a montage cell, i.e. a smaller unit that is defined based on a larger unit (Eisenstein, 1949, p. 37). Though Eisenstein begins his own theory with reality, he leaves the reality aside so that the film can change to an art. He takes advantage of montage as a Broadway that leads him to his objective. In fact, montage consists of arrangement of the frames of a film that changes them into art by means of parts of reality. Perhaps this is the greatest problem and challenge of his theory. This passage from reality to the category of montage leads his theory more to formalism instead of realism.

Rudolph Arnheim another theoretician of cinema considers what is seen as the fundamental feature of the media of cinema and underlines the point that application of the measures of theatre, painting and literature will lead to incorrect judgment of cinema. He enumerates the basic features of cinema as follows: “Those features that distinguish the cinema from daily understanding of reality are as follow: reduction of depth, exhibition of solid objects on flat and one-dimension plane, lack of color, lack of temporal/spatial continuity and elimination of all senses but the sense of sight. After enumeration of the fundamental shortcomings of cinema, he proceeds to deny the claim that film is merely a mechanical reproduction of real life” (Stam, 2004, p. 62). Thus conceived, cinema is no longer merely an imitation of reality by means of mechanical apparatus of it, rather it emerges as an independent art in the eyes of Arnheim. Art begins where machinistic reconstruction ends and the conditions of representation puts the object within a special framework (Arnheim, 1957, pp. 57-58). Arnheim argues that what is shown to us in film is not mechanical reproduction of the reality, because in fact the reality is neither presented to us in the same way that we perceive it in physical form nor we have such a capability. In fact, Arnheim seeks for the origin of this incapability and lack of correspondence between physical reality and what is presented in the film, in the difference of film understanding and perception of reality. Given the differences between human sight and camera shot as well as the temporal and spatial continuation, he explains how our perceptual actions are distinguished from the activities of camera in copying the reality in a considerable fashion (cf. Obrein, 1994, p. 56).

Arnheim takes stance against such phenomena as color and voice that can lead to higher degree of realism of the film: “Natural colors which are identified to be so clear in colored film to such an extent appear to be more effective in black and white film, because the artist has overcome the limitations of his own media” (Obrein, 1994, p. 59). He was against voice and its presence in cinema because he believed it would harm the purity of authentic silent film. In fact, adding voice to the film was the first step towards the increase of naturalism.

Balazs the Hungarian theoretician of cinema considered exhibition of the reality of surrounding world in a different manner to be one of the tasks of film. He contended that the main function of film is presentation of all aspects of the world to us. “The important, decisive and historically fresh issue was that in film other things are not exhibited rather the same things are presented in different way” (Obrein, 1994, p. 49). Indeed, he considered cinema and film to be equal to the writings of literary critics. “Balazs defended film as a means for seeing the essential nature of things and believed from this perspective it can be compared with the writings of major literary critics like Aristotle. Thus, Balazs refutes the Platonic idea that art distances us from reality” (Obrein, 1994, p. 49). Balazs opposes the formalistic and surrealistic approaches that lead to the change of the nature of reality and essentially the film. For he believes that art and its various types are not “essential” in reality in an “a priori” fashion, rather they represent the methods used by man to approach reality (Balazs, 1952, p. 260). He does not express any sympathy with the works that have

no relationship whatsoever with the external reality. Balazs argues that film is a medium for uncovering the nature and man for the audience.

Andrew Bazin like Eisenstein begins his theory from the reality but contrary to the latter he does not cut his relationship with reality. In Bazin's theory, art of film in itself is perfect and is achievable even in one shot. If shot of reality establishes a correct relationship with reality, then it can be declared an art. "For Bazin, in the domain of the form of film and art of cinema, there is no unit or category larger or nobler than shot" (Handerson, 1991, p. 49). According to Andrew Bazin, even in film the reality still has a fundamental aspect not art. Art can reflect reality. "Art of cinema does not have any universal form of itself, rather the form belongs to the reality itself" (Handerson, 1991, p. 51). Thus, it seems that Andrew Bazin in his own writings and theories presents a theory of reality instead of a theory of art and aesthetics.

Andrew Bazin has chosen his own theory of picture and exploration of the essence of picture as one of his focal points and believes that picture shares the reality or it is part of it. According to Bazin, aesthetic features of photography should be sought for in its capacity for uncovering the reality (Bazin, 2005a, p. 15). Bazin in another place has described cinema as a reflection of external reality regardless of extortion. "Belief in reality implies letting the reality that is presented to the viewers to be recorded by camera without any modification or excessive distortion or reform. This need to an intact and original reality is one of the basic needs of humanity" (Obrein, 1994, p. 66). He continues to note that even technical developments in cinema in the domain of voice and color are in the service of more precise recreation of reality.

Kracauer is one of the other theoreticians of cinema who insists on the role of camera and its invention for recording the surrounding realities and believes that contrary to traditional arts like painting that change the reality by changing its nature; in film nature is merely divulged through recording it. In fact, by pictures our vision regarding reality is strengthened. Zigfrid Kracauer has discussed the nature of cinema and refers to self-found story as the key form of cinema. Self-found story is watching the affairs on the surface of river over which some designs are created by the flow of wind. This is the process through which the beholding of reality becomes possible. This act of beholding the events through the chaotic and unpredictable course of life is a method of realism (Kracauer, 1960, p. 243-246).

Kracauer in most of his theories argues that the best method for promotion of the artist is overcoming the nature in raw form in a realistic fashion. Meanwhile he does not disregard the use of formalist elements and aspects for promotion of reality (Andrew, 1986, pp. 203-207). In fact, he considers film to be an essentially appropriate media for searching and exploration of the physical reality and he calls the reality depicted in this fashion "camera reality".

As previously mentioned, diversity of approaches to the category of reality and cinema is visible among the theoreticians and such approaches have their origin in the worldview of their owners. Human continuous interest in classification of affairs and division of levels and approaching or distancing oneself to/from the reality in film and attribution of the category of art to such works is an effort for explanation of multidimensional concept of realism in film.

### **3. Realistic Film and Religious Concepts**

So far many efforts have been made in the domain of cinema and film for establishing a relationship between it and religion and using religious concepts in cinema. Among all efforts for depiction of the relationship of religion and cinema and in other words, creation of religious cinema it seems that the most correct belief is that the religiously grounded cinema consists of a combination of technic, form, content and religious concepts in a way that a unique form emerges in the event of lack of attention to part of it or exiting part of it from the unique system the whole form collapses and the totality of work becomes insufficient.

Meanwhile it seems that expressive features of realist film due to its appropriate background form, away from exaggeration, abstract and imaginary ambition, provides the ground for the audience and even the filmmaker to have access to a familiar and non-divergent medium to express religious concepts and present them via alterantive artistic forms. In fact, one needs to state that among various artistic methods in cinema, realism can be closer to Islamic philosophy and

worldview to a considerable degree. This nearness and this distance to/from other artistic patterns like symbolism, expressionism can be discovered via comparison of the features and theoretical foundations that give form to these patterns. On the other hand, so called Islamic philosophy differs from idealistic philosophies in that it suggests that this world exists and will continue to exist whether with us or without us – with human mind or without human mind; therefore, one can claim that Islamic philosophy in its general spirit is in one sense realistic. From this point of view, one can redefine the depiction and explanation of religious notions in the domain of the aforementioned concepts within the framework of realist artistic style from which one expects consistency of thought and art in the domain of religion.

In this approach the true reality belongs to God, then eternal being belongs to Him and world is a small portion of the vast gamut of reality. This perspective contributes to this artistic pattern and this vision distinguishes this artistic method from other alternative mental and abstract artistic methods. It is by this ontological perspective and under the shadow of this thinking that artistic method can approach to Islamic discussions and religious thought of Islam and grow under the banner of this thinking. To put it otherwise, if we explore the features and capabilities of this artistic pattern in the field of cinema, we can find numerous potential elements that are close to the principles of religious thought and notions. Though this perspective has not been sufficiently taken into account in creation of artworks, it provides us with possibilities that can allow a proper measure to be taken for promotion and propagation of religious thought.

Thus conceived, we can redefine the depiction and explanation of religious notions within the framework of previously mentioned concepts in view of the realist artistic style in which one expects union of thought and art. In doing so, we might be able to think of the bedrock of explanation of religious notions in the medium of cinema as much as possible. Thus, to explain the latter view, we need to refer to the works in which religious notions have been presented from a realist point of departure. Our study of such films can strengthen the ground of this view that this artistic method is a significant and proper vehicle for presentation of religious notions.

On the other hand, study of the action and reaction of two domains of film and religion towards the presentation of religious notion including reflection on the capabilities of the domain of film as well as mutual interaction of these two domains. This interaction can be expected among intellectual and practical domains of religion like epistemology and jurisprudence and even ontology.

#### **4. Possibilities and Limitations of Realist Film in Expression of Religious Notions**

To understand the relationship between realism in film and religious notions and knowledge of its potentialities we need to study the intellectual framework governing the perspective underlying the correct notion of realist artistic method in expression of religious concepts in the category of film and its role in conveying the religious concepts. In our encounter with the problem of realism in cinema and what forms the stylistic features of it and in our effort for expression of religious notions free from the interpretation and analysis of its meaning and the presence of the real in cinema, we are faced with possibilities and restrictions. Said differently, there are certain limitations in expression of the real in cinema that in a way lead to the distortion of reality. To put it otherwise, each one of the restrictions plays an undeniable role in distortion of the external reality. Thus, one can conclude that these elements represents the ups and downs through which one can reach the reality. Paying attention to the problem of reality without referring to these restrictions will be an abstract problem. Through expression of these elements, we can understand that depending on the existence of each one of them, analysis and evaluation of artistic works as realist will have its own particular definition and measures will be different in it. In fact, we cannot assert that the problem of reality is solved without taking these into account.

On the other hand, in teaching and propagation of religious notions we need to concretize pure rational or mental educational content through different methods including design or other artistic methods like sensory and tangible film. This process of assimilation of the intelligible to the sensible based on the philosophical and religious books has been a prevalent process for propagation and presentation of religious notions. This perspective can provide the ground for

further concentration of the domain of film which is a very functional model in the domain of colonization of reality. In other words, from a religious point of view, an art is desirable that provides the ground for better explanation and conveyance of religious notions with the ideal goal of human initiation in the path of true perfection. Naturally this path is not extended through a confused mind and inefficient imagination which can be seen more or less in the formalist works.

An artistic style with all the idea and philosophy behind its formation and the traditional contracts in the course of history of its birth and life presents potentialities whether in thematic, formal and stylistic domains. This theme was investigated in previous part in order to make the reader familiar with such potentialities in the domain of presentation of religious notion and provide the ground for creativity and proper use of it in the domain of committed filmmaking. We already referred to this issue and its outcomes in the course of the research in a cursory fashion but in this part we give an outline of the negative and positive aspects of this issue in an articulated form.

A) From Islamic point of view, man is Allah's caliph in the universe. Universe in this context represents a comprehensive reality in two circles of existence referring to the entities existing in the surrounding world and what is sensed as well as the circle that includes what goes beyond the existing entities in the domain of moral oughts and ought-nots and legal and jurisprudential laws. Such an approach to the knowledge of existence is a ground for understanding the issue that existing realities are just one part of the universal reality. This is exactly the focal point of the ideas behind the artistic works. Accordingly, adopted worldview determines which artistic method will be modified by means of the potentialities and in view of the existing restrictions. Therefore, empiricist thought and sensory knowledge with man as the conscious subject will lead to the emergence of a method that will deprive from other sources of knowledge like intuition and revelation. By studying the realist artistic methods which are presented in neorealistic works in an evolved form, reality appears as affairs that have their origin in social system and nature. This perspective makes these works to be limited to a restricted circle which naturally turns a blind eye to the wider scope of the universe. This is the bitter and barren view that emerges at the end of these films. On the other hand, depiction of such notions as moral oughts and norms in films cannot be neglected; this can be fathomed by referring to early considerations of the works that adopt this artistic method. This refers to a process through which the film can cast a look at a cosmic circle by means of patterns and principles of artistic method in which nobler notions than sensory facts can be studied and thought in human domain.

B) On the other hand, as to the issue of reality and the creator of artwork, one can say that the problem of understanding of reality by the author and creator of the work serves as a medium through which the real emerges in the artwork. Accordingly, if we conceive reality as a sensory fact that belongs to the outside world and is perceived by human mind, then this mechanism before things and facts the mind proceeds to find logical relations among its own perceptions. In fact, mind in its perceptual explorations searches after causes and effects. Meanwhile the issue of presuppositions and background information which themselves are in some way the product of time and space and human social conditions affect human understanding of facts. Thus, we can say that human perceptions vary depending on times and places. This is also the case with the artist. Then, the artist in general, and the cinematographer in particular, depending on which geographical region and in which time he lives, finds specific perceptions of his own; because the totality of his own perceptions of the surrounding world constitute the reality by him and his thought. This can be easily understood from his notions, thoughts, perspective, and behavior of the cinematographers, e.g. Europeans as compared to the easterners, particularly in their works; because every film in one sense is the product of the encounter of the filmmakers as man with their surrounding world. Accordingly, any partial perception on behalf of the creator of the work can be considered as the first factor of distortion of reality. Therefore, having said these, one can state that the reality depicted by the mind of the creator of the work if it is a comprehensive notion that includes the sensory and nonsensory and can convey the notions related to these two domains can turn part of this limitation into opportunity; in other words, the artist who accepts just the mental world and neglects a major part of his own surrounding world, he has seen only part of the facts in the world. This choice deprives him from a major part of the notions in the world. By overcoming

this shortcoming, the artist can perceive and present the universe as a whole. Meanwhile religious concepts in view of their scope ranging from beliefs to valuative and moral norms are part of this world that can be a theme and subject-matter for a film. In fact, from the point of view of Islamic thought and realist philosophy, religious notions are part of all concepts that the creator of the work can refer to in choosing the reality. This choice is before the artists who have prepared themselves for understanding such notions and from this perspective are ready to create and recreate an artwork.

C) If we conceive art as a method for expression of ideas and views or better said, a method for expression of knowledge that is in practice a representation of what an artist thinks, then the concept of representation of mere reality in the sense of mirror will be left aside and the interpretative perspective behind this emerges well. Thus, one can say that in an art like film the artist does not intend to represent the reality as it is rather there is always subjective view that is involved in the selection of shots and even the method of expression. Art reaches its true meaning by interpretation; selection and highlighting facts and finally presenting realities that remain unknown at first sight. With such an approach, film will turn to a collection of notions and propositions that can be identified in the circle of artistic style constituted of narrative elements, style, theme and also what has been said and passed in silence. Thus, we can enter a domain where such works with such features serve as a vehicle which by its potentialities and limitations provides the ground for an extensive expression and is properly used in its domain.

D) Theme of realist films has a social and deep-rooted domain in society. This thematic view with such an approach has taken advantage of various techniques. By changing objectives in selection of theme beyond accidental social events and via development of themes in this kind of works, we can expand the scope beyond the chosen subjects of realist and neorealist works. It is here that some patterns and principles of realist film appear to be inefficient and filmmaker experiences stylistic limitations. To state the matter differently, by expanding the notions of film to the circle of the notions beyond sensible facts and into the domain of oughts and ought-nots, stylistic capacities of realist film will lose their own efficiency. This has led to use of different methods in some realist works. Here we are witness to stylistic development. Majeedi's film "Children of Heaven" has exactly taken this route and "Color of God" from the same director has led realist pattern toward poetic realism. Then, one can remind this point that goals redesign and recreate the current and required methods. Insofar as stylistic elements of the film are used for expression of concepts. This is a process that not only does not leave the logic governing the film rather it acts within an organic whole.

E) Although many consider story-telling in cinema to be outside reality and a kind of manipulation of the reality and turn to such works as documentary, there are still some people who approach the issue with a wider perspective. They accept a specific story based cinema by adding certain limitations and refer to it as realist. These limitations begin with the selection of subject and continue with elimination of narration techniques like flashbacks to past and future as well as refusal of the use of professional scenes and artists. This group although remains away from artificiality and contracts by selection and determination of such mechanisms, on the other hand, they become bogged down in other rules in filmmaking which in addition of restricting the reality, they change themselves to other contracts. In other words, reality and real things are required to observe them and define a framework for itself and in some other way restrict and distort the reality. However, within the domain of narrative form of film, presentation of a pure objectivity not only engages the mind of the viewer with relations, it also expresses a paradoxical quality by objective presentation of everything in film; but we need to take it into account that re-experiencing encountering the facts in a totally familiar fashion not only sets the ground for immediate agreement with lesser mental resistance, it also depicts the possibility of expression of affairs which are in line with the ideas of the director. This process by hiding the narrator or filmmaker within the circle of transparency presents itself without any partiality. This possibility is very useful and is underlined and in some cases even in ideological field has its own function. Narrative form due to the features it has – including story-telling – provides the ground for turning to human and divine affairs (religious notions) in the form of story and covers most of human affairs. Strengthening and supporting narrative form by stylistic elements provides a consistent continuum

like a spirit breathed into human body in the totality of a film. Selection of issues can create artistic capacity as a charter in different aspects, new situations and in the perspective of the audience that adds to the capabilities of the artistic style of realist film.

### **5. A Study of a Case of Realist Film; Coexistence with Religious Themes**

As we discussed it in the title devoted to possibilities and limitations, goals and required methods will recreate the subject in which case we shortly alluded to “Children of Heaven” and “Color of God”. Therefore, taking the goal into consideration, one can state that stylistic elements of the film are used towards the expression of concepts. This is a process that not only does not wholly trespass the logic governing the film, acts within an organic whole. “Children of Heaven” is an appropriate example of coexistence between religious notions and realist method.

“Children of Heaven” which was directed in 1996 by Majeed Majeedi due to its specific features in realist content seeks to present religious themes within a realist context. We intend to explain and evaluate the place of this film in realist style and its capability in presentation of religious notions. This process given the totality of film in the field of theme and performance is shortly studied.

“Children of Heaven” seeks to explain a new simple reality “in search of a lost shoe” in a realist fashion and via the medium of cinema. In this film, although poverty can be easily seen in the whole fabric of the work and within a working social context, it is not a social film of a social subject like poverty. Although we are apparently encountered with the issue of a lost shoe, the character of Ali is not depicted in a way that he would borrow the shoe from his friend or even decide to pick it. The film is supposed to be an expression of a noble poverty that goes beyond need. In other words, the hero depends on himself and does not intend to spur the sense of pity in the audience. For this reason, this film cannot be considered a merely neutral realist film without any perspective. This film by exhibition of the loyalty to tradition and authenticities explains poverty but is not ensnared by it and does not lure the story within its circle. This film contains the elements of social realism. “Children of Heaven” struggles to provide a new reading of the situation of working class in the society based on daily reality from a different perspective. In fact, discussing social and economic conditions of life which in special social layers and class have been usually a resort for presentation of social good in the works of social realism in this film change into a vehicle for expression of human-divine belief. The scene of setting the shoes in order at mosque is not arranged within the framework of a social perspective so that it may be the unavoidable result of poverty and theft. Even the style of the film does not bring this thought to the mind of the audience. Rather stylistic elements and the vision from above by means of the camera strengthen the belief of the character in the film.

“Ali and Zahra as the competent representatives of a – still – renowned and prominent class of this society are presented as the symbol of self-respect, humanity and belief. Those ragged sneakers used by Ali and Zahra together are the objective identity card of this class. But Majeedi gives a valuative notion to this harsh objective reality” (Tusi, 1999: 215-216).

In this film, the director seeks to present the course of transcendence of the main character of the story, i.e. Ali, based on a human-divine system. On the other hand, this film can also be considered as containing stylistic elements of poetic realism. Although not all elements of it are in line with this style, this work can be still described as a poetic work due to the events that occur in *Mise En Scene* of the film.

“No location has been left to be just real and nowhere we see mere photography of the reality. Remember the pool and the flowers around it that resist the poverty and smooth the environment. Such a natural freshness is not expected from a poor house based on the rules of social realism. In the schools in south of the city, the schools of Ali and Zahra, everywhere there are flowers and trees. The clothes of children particularly the girls with their white scarfs turn them to small happy angels. In this way, poverty does not find any opportunity to impose itself and become heavy and the man does not become repressed and passive. The film does not remain in the level of reality. Nothing in the film is left in its realistic mode rather it transcends” (Farasati, 2005: 213-214).



Although the subject-matter of films based on poetic realism was daily ordinary issues, the filmmakers pictured these issues with a poetic approach and by emphasis on a specific *Mise En Scene*. This style of filmmaking is more a product of historical events of 1930s in France as a result of which an idealistic obsession emerges regarding scene decoration and light. Then, this can be called a type of recreated realism. Although in an excessive approach this very artistic style by relying on studio and a deterministic narrative proceeds to take a symbolic action in exhibition of objects that bring it closer to the method of abstraction (Howard, 2002, p. 123). Anyway, we can describe “Children of Heaven” as a poetic work in view of the precision used in the details of scenes and its different approach in narration of the work. Though we need to insist that there are certain major differences between this film and poetic realism as a whole.

“Remember the brilliant scene of the dialogue of Ali and Zahra in the yard of their house; when Ali returns home from school while he is tired, Zahra is washing the dishes. Zahra takes a look at the ragged sneakers of Ali and says: I feel embarrassed when I wear these shoes. Ali kindly answers: No problem! We wash them. Then by a light music they start to wash their school shoes with the soap foam with which Zahra washes the dishes. By playing with the soap bubbles, they create a happy symphony. Note that how a sad scene turns to hope and happiness with the same elements. Despite its shortness, this scene dominates the whole work. All technical elements are arranged in a smooth way without taking a tangible step. These elements together overcome the heart of the viewer. The camera works with all smoothness and the shots are medium and medium close and they establish the *Mise En Scene*. Design of scene, voice, music, act and montage in this scene together succeed to create a complete and effective scene that is cinema; a fresh and national cinema. It is for this reason that this scene in the whole cinema of Iran is unique in view of its form, conceptualization and content and the perspective that governs it is a perspective that in my view is human without any obsession and ideal not black or class based” (Farasati, 2005: 210-211).

The picture of touching the wounded feet of Ali by the goldfish inside the pool in the final episode of the film conveys the same poetic notions that remains in the mind of the audience.

“Ali pushes his tired and blistering feet into the pool but not just for resting. Because he is greater than sufficing to pushing a foot inside the water. There he seeks after something else; another hope. He understands the fish, the pool and he had shown this in previous scene when he decides to participate in the competition and starts to splash the water out of happiness. The pool that is shown from the the above represents the center of the world. As if the fish have turned intelligent and are dispatched to kiss the belief, sacrifice and mercy of Ali and complete his worldly reward. With a reward and call from beyond. The last shot lives forever and the final titles make it eternal. Thus, the extasy of this shot turns double. It is in this scene that we say that the film goes beyond the reality and reaches the truth. An eternal moment is created. From a pool from which we have left a footprint in the water. The rotation of the fish around these two strong luminous pillars – and two small legs of Ali – creates an authentic happiness that gives energy and purifies the spirit. The music takes us with itself. This scene in my view is a true realism that has one foot in reality and the other in truth” (Farasati, 2005: 222-223).

Majeedi’s film though does not have any claim of spiritualism, it strongly contains formal, narrative, stylistic and convergent elements with religious concepts. Themes that can be seen in this film are a combination of poverty in the face of honor, religious poverty, hopeful life which exist in the whole narrative and stylistic form of the film and strengthen side themes and such concepts as human good nature and avoidance of evils resulted from economic poverty and insistence on belief and resistance in life. Such notions not only are visible and audible serve as the preliminary themes that have led the director towards such issues and of course due to this perspective he has succeeded to create such a film. The notions underlined in this work have succeeded to set this film in a wider and more progressive context of realism in western sense. Anyway, Majeedi’s works have shown that they are not hypocritic. In his films, ethical message and spiritual sense do not associate the film like inappropriate patches and have always been struggling to present proper form and content. Therefore, in his works the form is not separated from the content and both are intended to express the truth. To this end, a series of pictures and combination of visual shots are used. One can claim that Majeedi contrary to many does not suffice to the surface and in the path of his efforts aims at somewhere beyond the film itself. Behind these

appearances, as the magic of cinema, he has always been after a deeper kernel resulted from human and religious notions. Majeedi's approach in choosing the subject of his films is deeply human. Despite the presence of religion or spirituality in his films, this presence is respectful and kind. This process can be seen in such works as *Children of Heaven*, *Color of God*, *Rain* and etc. This function emerges in different form within the framework of realism in *Children of Heaven*. Not only he observes the rules of this method rather he promotes them in line with his own objectives and this is of course why this film has been taken into account in this research.

## 6. Conclusion

Although the reality of film has one of its root in real affairs, it creates a world with its own regulations and contracts. Then, one can state that the reality inside the film is special. In fact, the reality inside the film is a reality that is recreated by the creator of the work and in one sense its common aspect shared with the outside reality is the debt that it has to the elements of the outside reality. On the other hand, if we accept that film and cinema with numerous techniques and possibilities that everyday their number is increased take steps towards creation of delusion, we will surely have no expectation of pure realism and presentation of spiritual discussions and what is real. The worrisome point is that in exhibition and representation of reality in cinema, sometimes it is unreal and false representations or baseless delusions of its content that distance man from the path of truth seeking not the mechanical delusion that has been depicted for the cinema. Although we have accepted the point that every man reaches an understanding of reality when he encounters it, this perception would be influenced by the change of perspective and even understanding of some temporal distances and situation. The process of understanding in filmmaking is that film is presented to the audience within a certain framework. It is still noteworthy that the closer is this perception to true reality, a movement takes form indeed towards the ideal perfection of mankind. Likewise, if this structure is distant from the reality it will act in a divergent fashion. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that from an Islamic point of view, desirable art moves towards a direction where the artistic foundation or work has taken form and the film has been produced in line with the true ideal of humanity.

If we deem human ideal as perfection and ascension to human origin and consider the man to be after the reality that is separated from him beyond his own mind, then it is this sense of truth seeking that has caused man to take step towards adoption of religion and knowledge of God. In fact, these cognitive and imperative notions proportionate to every religion that constitute the realities of the religion at issue though they would be diverse they still refer to the same unique head truth. Man by his nature seeks after truth.

Anyway, the problem is recreation of real things on silver screen which are special entities and affiliated to an independent group of reality that just owes its external appearance to nature. We do not expect two features of authenticity and believability from natural things the way we expect them from artwork. In our view, twofold worlds of art and reality differ from each other. Material world is more related to our senses than to our imagination contrary to the art. By correct understanding of the logic governing the film which relies on believability, we can expand the circle of the subjects of realist film beyond the circle of experience and sensory objects. This function paves the path for numerous potentialities through discussing many oughts and ought-nots and moral values and norms. This capability can be fulfilled via acceptance of these concepts within a context for its presentation via this medium and this artistic method.

Accordingly, cinema and art along with other fields in which religion leads man towards perfection are one of various domains of human life which are under the shadow of religion; but we need also not to forget that cinema is not merely a representation of the objective world. Rather film in this framework presents its worldview and represents it too. Then, the efforts of thinkers in the domain of cinema and art for overcoming technic as such leads in some way to denial of the meaning of affairs that force contemporary man to leave the habits associated with mechanistic life plagued with technic; therefore, we should not expect that this would be possible without a hard historical effort and numerous ups and downs.

On the other hand, invention of an alternative artistic style with a set of pictorial signs is a wish that would never become true. Then, designing abased on the existing styles and observation of general principles for acquisition of new creativities is a prevalent function and from this perspective we can approach the artistic styles and the media representing it and pave the ground for their reform. Thus, paying attention to artistic styles which are more in line with Islamic civilization and thought will set the scene for formation of new styles as subsets of the main discipline.

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