

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE EVOLUTION OF PAKISTANI CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore significant changes in Pakistani cinema over the years. Since its beginning, Pakistani cinema has faced numerous challenges, including censorship and competition from foreign films. Despite these challenges, the industry has continued to thrive, producing a wide range of films that reflect the diversity and complexity of Pakistani society. This study suggests various ways, that may lead Pakistani films to glory and global recognition and Pakistani government and upcoming aspiring filmmakers need to take some more innovative steps to upgrade technology and content development in Pakistani films.

Keywords: Evolution, Pakistani cinema, Challenges, Filmmakers, Future, Revival.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistani film industry has been referred as Lollywood. It is regarded as the centre of Urdu feature films along with regional languages (Punjabi, Pushto, Balochi). Before 1971, there were three main film making centres in Pakistan, such as, Dhaka, Karachi and Lahore. Pakistani cinema lost its peak with the fall of Dhaka, when it lost one of its important production hubs and stayed limited to Lahore, during 1980's in the era of Zia-ul-Haq. (Naz & Mehmood, 2017)

This study will explore the facts and reasons on what caused Pakistani cinema a downfall, while it was playing an integral part in the promotion of Pakistani culture and was introducing other cultures to the people of Pakistan. Before the downfall of the Pakistani cinema, it was considered as one of the best film producing industry and Pakistan used to be considered fourth largest film producing country. After facing a near to never ending downfall, cinema in Pakistan has finally started to flourish, with an aim of providing entertainment and education to the audience. (Naz & Mehmood, 2017)



This study aims to explore the evolution of Pakistani film industry over the years. Identifying the causes that led to the downfall of the film industry is very important, which will lead to the study where it will determine the key factors of the revival and what other factors can bring more betterment in the future of the Pakistani cinema. (Hafeez, 2015)

The evolution of the Pakistani film industry will be explored decade by decade, divided into six distinct periods as follows:

The serious downfall in the mid-1980s was a big upset for the whole Pakistani film industry. But, the combined efforts of the new generation of the entertainment industry made the revival of cinema possible. And this effort resulted in the creation of some films that marked a long lasting impact within Pakistan and even globally. (Naz & Mehmood, 2017)

Continuous downfall of the industry caused the revival of the Pakistani film industry. After 2005, many private channels were made to promote film, because some of the filmmakers started coming

forward making sensible films on different and unique subjects. Besides making people attracted towards art, objective behind making new private channels was to create awareness as well.

For the sake of promoting art, Indian director and producer Mahesh Bhatt came to Pakistan to provide opportunities to talented Pakistani singers and actors to work in India for his films. At that time 3rd Kara Film Festival was being held in Pakistan, he participated in it and screened his movie “Paap” after which he approached Atif Aslam and Meera for other film projects in India. After some time, Film Producers Association (FPA) and Cinema Owner Association (COA) were demanded to remove the ban from Indian films on Pakistan and the government considered that demand. After the ban, Mahesh Bhatt said, “Now Pakistan is on new lease of life”. (Naz & Mehmood, 2017)

The production of short films with good storylines and updated film making technology started by the new generation of film makers which led them to an exploration of an alternative form of Pakistani cinema. The Pakistani film industry has now progressed on a bigger scale. Reliable and quality scripts are being written by the most talented, efficient and capable writers. Films are now being liked by Pakistani people and even globally the Pakistani cinema is emerging to be an upcoming big thing. (Parveen, Tariq, & Siddiqui, 2015)

This research article is about the evolution of the Pakistani film industry and discusses the history of Pakistani cinema, its decline and underlying causes, the factors contributing to its ongoing evolution, and the effective platforms available for emerging young filmmakers to grow. Qualitative research will be conducted. For qualitative research, in-depth interviews will be conducted with different media personnel and filmmakers and film lovers and cinema goers.

Research Statement:

This study evaluates the exploration of highs and lows of the Pakistani film industry. Timeline and journey of Pakistani cinema from producing films like Armaan and Andaleeb, to the production of films promoting “Gandasa Culture” and to the

2022 release of “The Legend of Maula Jatt”. This research will more explore the current trending culture, the art of filmmaking and the nature of script and screenwriting.

Research Objectives:

- To study a clear timeline of Pakistani cinema from old culture to new culture.
- To explore the factors behind the ongoing evolution of the Pakistani cinema.
- To explore the effective platforms for upcoming young filmmakers to grow and explore Pakistani films globally.

Research Questions:

- What factors caused Pakistani cinema a downfall after 1970's?
- What factors helped sustain Pakistani cinema during its lowest phases?
- What factors need improvement to make Pakistani cinema a worldwide success?

Literature Review:

Cinema is an astounding storytelling tool, which creates entertaining environment in a society through a proper mechanism of visual communication that is quintessential in terms of its strength and potential. It is an immediate way of conveying the message through a combination of audiovisual. Cinema is considered as the cultural identity worldwide, since the very beginning which controls our social mechanism in a community through film. (Hussain, Ejaz, & Shabir, 2019). While mentioning and discussing culture and storytelling the importance of storytelling and cinema in the culture of Sub-continent (India & Pakistan) cannot be missed. After partition, both the countries inherited cinemas, studios and film culture. Pakistan is culturally rich and storytelling and cinema has been a part of Pakistani culture since very beginning. It's been 75 years since the formation of Pakistan and still the Pakistani Cinema is struggling to establish. Financial and regulatory issues have been a major reason of keeping Pakistani cinema disturbed since 1947. Shortage of resources and lack of filming equipment and expertise disabled Pakistan's film industry. (Parveen, Tariq, & Siddiqui, 2015)

Post-independence, Lahore became the center of Pakistan's emerging film industry. Teri Yaad (Remembering You) was the first Pakistani film, released on August 7, 1948. Directed by Dawood Chand, it starred Asha Posley and Nasir Khan, Dilip Kumar's younger brother. Teri Yaad ran in cinemas for five weeks but did not impress audiences, as they were accustomed to the higher quality of Indian films. Before Partition, Shorey Studios and Pancholi Pictures were two leading Hindu-owned studios; both relocated to India after Partition, which caused a major setback to the Pakistani film industry. A shortage of resources, skills, and funding, along with nationwide political unrest, made producing Teri Yaad difficult and prolonged. Despite its ordinary production and poor audience response, Teri Yaad marked the beginning of a new era for Pakistani cinema. The release of Teri Yaad motivated other filmmakers to produce movies locally, and by the 1950s, the Pakistani film industry began to truly connect with audiences. (Desk, 2018)

Pakistani films have been struggling to build an audience for themselves, which has been a long struggle. The film industry has been an unstable journey full of successes and failures in 75 years. Despite all failures and difficulties, it has been established over the years that there is a lot of talent in all aspects of film production, including acting, direction, technicians, script writing etc. Still, Pakistani cinema failed in creating a significant impact. Different studies have given different reasons for the downfall of the Pakistani film industry, which includes lack of creative ideas, abundance of repetitive subjects, lack of modern facilities and video piracy. (Hafeez, 2015)

A lot of attempts were made by some film producers to portray the cultural face of Pakistan through cinema by intervening in the availability of Indian movies in the market. This idea worked and was a bit of success as well but the accessibility and availability of Indian content in Pakistani film market in the form of cassettes was uncontrollable. This marked an influence of Indian films on Pakistani audience and on the other hand local/Pakistani films were slowly and steadily declining quality and content wise. Throughout, Pakistani cinema tried hard to maintain or make

place in the Pakistani market beating the influence of Indian content, but it failed. Post 2000, a lot of development started in terms of releasing films. Pakistani actor/director/producer came up with a film "Yeh Dil Aap Ka Hua", this 2002 release brought hope in Pakistani film directors in terms of a possible profitable business. Pakistani filmmakers started thinking of investing in films. All this happened with the release of only one movie, the results and the profits this movie earned was a new ray of hope in Pakistani film industry, because since a long time before the release of this movie Pakistani film industry was facing a crucial time. (Rasheed, 2022)

Few years after the release of "Yeh Dil Aap Ka Hua", a movie "Khuda Kay Leay" came out like a divine help, and as a rescuer of Pakistani film industry. It released at a time when, political instability and religious extremism in Pakistan was on its peak. Film lovers were not visiting cinemas and the use of VCR, VHS and DVD was on its peak. Because of its content and a brave attempt of releasing it on a right time, this movie proved to be the first crowd puller in couple of decades. Unfortunately, due to a lot of political and extremist reasons there were only 30 screens available to show this wonderful piece of art. Shoaib Mansoor's "Khuda Kay Liye" proved to be a historic event. After 40 years of gap, it was the very first Pakistani film to release in India. At that time the box office collection of this film was 7crore, which was a big deal. Internationally the film was recognized and appreciated. This film stood out because of its subject and the message it carries as well. This film addressed the flaw in a global mindset and cleared a lot of myths. (Mehmood, 2019)

Over the passage of time, a lot of technological changes have been made. Over the passage of last 20 years the quantity of multiplexes has raised in Pakistan, which on majority targets educated and upper middle class. Though, these multiplexes are expensive for common lower middle class people, but still it helped in boosting the footfall in cinemas. These multiplexes are technically sound and also have 3D facility. Because of the rise in multiplexes, single screen cinemas started decreasing. With all the technological advancements that are made in the betterment of

Pakistani cinema, we need to revise and set some policies as well for the boost in the evolving process of the Pakistani cinema. Policies should be made in the light of raising the quantity of screens as per the population of Pakistan. Trainings and education on film making, workshops and trainings regarding conducting film festivals should be started on an extensive level. Films should be included in national archives. Government involvement should be there for the emergence of film industry. (Kalhor & Zulfiqar, 2020)

A significant shift in media discussions about the future of Pakistani cinema was observed in 2013, following the release of several new digital films. Directors duo Meenu Gaur and Farjad Nabi came up with the film *Zinda Bhaag*, which, over five decades, became the first-ever Pakistani film to get selected into the Academy Awards. Director Bilal Lasahri wrote and directed *Waar*, which drew global attention and became the highest-grossing Pakistani film in the industry's history. The success of these two films revived hope among cinema-goers and film lovers, and critics started writing positively about the industry and started celebrating the arrival of cinema in Pakistan. Indian media praised the revival and named it "Pakistani New Wave", and the British Film Institute (BFI) in May 2014, hosted a special event in London to assess the legitimacy of this claimed resurrection. (Ahmad, December 2016)

Despite the revival of the Pakistani film industry, a lot of hurdles still exist. Inconsistent and insufficient government support in raising the number of cinemas in the country, piracy and restricted access into global markets. Still, the rise in global demand for the regional films has created an opportunity for Pakistani creators to present their films on international streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime. In short, Pakistani cinema is still in the revival phase. A dynamic new wave of filmmakers is trying to bring back the golden era of Lollywood that possessed innovation, skill and passion. (The Evolution of Pakistani Film Industry - FROM GLORY TO RESURGENCE, 2024)

According to the available literature, culture and society are highly integrated in Pakistani cinema which makes it relevant globally. Important social

issues like, gender equality, education, poor governance and poverty are tackled in the stories which effectively raise the awareness among the audience and inspire the audience to bring positive social change. This makes cinema a strong medium for both cultural reflection and social transformation. Pakistani films remain closely tied to their societal roots because of the effective use of symbolism, expressionism and realism. Realistic theories suggest that a lot of contemporary Pakistani filmmakers are effectively working on creating impactful and dynamic works of art. (Bilal, 2024)

In 2022 release of a new film proved that the Pakistani film industry has a bright future and potential to move the Pakistani cinema to new heights. A film like "The Legend of Maula Jatt", which became Pakistan's only movie to cross 100 crore mark, emerged as a new torch bearer in the journey which the film industry has to embark. A new wave of filmmakers such as Bilal Laahsari, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, Nabeel Qureshi and Nadeem Baig are the reasons behind our hopes of witnessing Pakistani cinema on a rise. This whole journey showcases, just how far Pakistani cinema has come and it proves that the future of the Pakistani cinema is bright.

Over the years, Pakistani films have achieved international recognition for highlighting social, national, emotional and intellectual issues. Films such as *Manto*, *Anarkali*, *Zindagi Tamasha*, *Maalik*, *Ramchand Pakistani*, *Dukhtar*, *Bulandi*, *Jinnah* and *The Legend of Maula Jatt* are the perfect examples of Pakistani cinema's constant contribution in telling impactful stories despite of limited resources. (Bilal, 2024)

Methodology:

This research has been conducted through qualitative method and the tool used is semi-structured interviews. During this study, relevant individuals were interviewed, who have been a part of Pakistani cinema directly or indirectly. Exploring the whole journey of the Pakistani cinema's evolution required different school of thoughts to put light on the factors involved in the rise and decline of the film industry.

Findings and Analysis:

It is analyzed that there are several factors that contributed to the decline of Pakistani cinema in the 1980s. Pakistani cinema survived the sub-continent partition and was on top by the 70's. It is analyzed that the rule of Zia-ul Haque changed everything for the Pakistani cinema and played a huge role in the decline of Pakistani entertainment industry in the 70's. Though, the process had been started way back through different factors such as cost cutting practices, frequent bans and the fall of Dhaka. (Rizvi, 2017) During the research it was explored that one major factor was the shift in government policies towards the film industry. In the 1970s, the government provided financial support and incentives to the film industry, which helped to stimulate its growth. However, in the 1980s, the government began to withdraw this support and instead implemented policies that were detrimental to the industry. This included the introduction of high taxes on film tickets, which made it more expensive for people to go to the movies.

It is analyzed, that another factor which contributed to the decline of Pakistani cinema in the 1980s was the rise of video cassette recorders (VCRs) and home theaters. With the advent of VCRs, people began to watch movies at home rather than going to the cinema, which resulted in a decline in cinema attendance.

The piracy and illegal supply and broadcasting of the foreign films in the form of pirated DVD's and cassettes was also one of the reasons behind the decline of Pakistani cinema. It became easier for the audience to enjoy the Indian and American films at minimal costs. This results in the less number of audience footfall in the cinemas and caused a decline of the cinema industry. (Rizvi, 2017)

According to this research, the decline of Pakistani cinema in the 1980s was also due to the increased competition from foreign films. As the country opened up to the rest of the world and foreign films became more easily available, Pakistani cinema faced tough competition from Hollywood and other international film industries. This made it difficult for local films to compete and attracted fewer audiences. This study found that the industry was hit by a series of economic and

political challenges, including economic recession, political instability, and rising costs of production. These factors made it difficult for filmmakers to finance and produce new films, leading to a decline in the number of films being made.

Since the very beginning Pakistani cinema was identified for its emotional and romantic films. But in 1979, a violent film about feudal vengeance "Maulla Jatt" was released in theatres. The film was released in the rule of General Zia, who already had imposed a lot of censorship policies, despite of all the cinematic restrictions by then government, the film was a big hit and was up on display for around 310 weeks, and on the other hand the emotional and romantic films were wasted because of the restrictions. The film's depiction of violence, crime, and the gandasasubculture had a significant impact on Pakistani society and contributed to the emergence of the gandasasubculture. (Kapadia, 2015)

During the study, it was explored that Gandasasubculture plays a significant impact on the journey of Pakistani film industry which refers to a type of film genre that was popular in Pakistani cinema during the 1980s and 1990s. These films were characterized by their violent and action-packed themes, often featuring heroes who used gandasasubculture (a type of short, curved sword) as their weapon of choice.

It was analyzed that the films falling under the umbrella of this particular genre were quite liked by the audience. One reason was the success of similar types of films in other countries, particularly in India. Moreover, the themes and storylines of Pakistani films during this time period touched on social and political issues that resonated with audiences and allowed for emotional release or catharsis. The gandasasubculture resonated with Pakistani audiences, who were drawn to the themes of violence, revenge, and machismo that were prevalent in these films.

However, the gandasasubculture genre began to decline in popularity in the late 1990s, as the Pakistani film industry underwent significant changes. One reason for this decline was the rise of alternative forms of entertainment, such as television and video cassettes, which provided competition for the film industry. In addition, the increasing influence of globalization led to the emergence of

new film genres and themes that were more in line with international trends. As a result, the gandasa genre lost its appeal to Pakistani audiences and its popularity began to wane. (Kamran, 2020)

One aspect that needs attention is that it was discovered during the interviews that mindset of the people of Pakistan towards arts and culture (particularly film) is the most important factor that creates hurdles in bringing improvement to make Pakistani cinema a worldwide success. The majority of Pakistan's population consists of the rural and feudal areas where the idea of watching films is not even a consideration because of their day to day struggles to earn bread which is the priority in those areas. Taking out time to go to cinema and watch a film is not in their list of priorities. The remaining part of Pakistani population consists of urban areas, big cities like Karachi and Lahore. In these areas a lot of groups take filmmaking, watching film and opening a cinema prohibited in Islam. A fraction of the population of Pakistan believes in the film as an art form to consume for the entertainment or educational purposes. This number is so less, that it discourages a lot of investors to invest in films because they don't foresee an effective profit out of it.

Towards Revival:

As per this study, it has been explored that Pakistan has a rich history of cinema, and the Pakistani film industry has produced many critically acclaimed and popular films over the years. However, in recent years, the industry has faced challenges such as a decline in viewership and a lack of investment, leading to a downturn in the production of new films. (Global Vilage Space, 2018)

To revive the Pakistani cinema, a number of measures have been taken by the government and private sector and these factors have contributed in the ongoing evolution of Pakistani cinema. Some of these measures include:

- Investment in infrastructure: The government has invested in the construction of new theaters and the upgrading of existing ones, to improve the viewing experience for audiences.

- Tax incentives: The government has also introduced tax incentives to encourage investment in the film industry.

- Digital distribution: The proliferation of streaming platforms and online content has provided new opportunities for Pakistani filmmakers to distribute their work to a global audience.

- Funding for new projects: The government and private sector have also provided funding for new film projects, to support the development and production of new content.

- Training and development programs: There have also been efforts to support the development of new talent in the film industry through training and development programs.

Overall, these measure are aimed at helping to revitalize the Pakistani film industry and encourage the production of high-quality content that may engage and entertain audiences and proving to be a contribution in the ongoing evolution of Pakistani cinema.

Ongoing Evolution and Future of Pakistani Cinema:

During the study, it has been analyzed that it is quite difficult for Pakistani cinema to sustain in a stable position for coming years, but not impossible, because of the upcoming young talent. Young aspiring filmmakers are trying to contribute their efforts in brining Pakistani cinema on the global stage. Some of the efforts for the same intent have been there over the years post 2000's. Since, year 2001 till now, slowly and gradually we have been witnessing some good cinema. Though, the progress is not constant, but still there has been a spark which may progress in the coming years. (Hafeez, 2015)

Since the turn of the 21st century, there have been a number of Pakistani films that have played a role in reviving the Pakistani film industry. Some examples include:

- Khuda Kay Liye (2007) - This film was a major commercial and critical success, and helped to re-establish Pakistani cinema both nationally and internationally.

- Bol (2011) - This film was a major box office hit and helped to generate renewed interest in Pakistani cinema.

- Waar (2013) - This action film was a major commercial success and helped to boost the profile of Pakistani cinema.
- Mah-e-Mir (2016) - This film was a critical and commercial success and helped to bring renewed attention to Pakistani cinema.
- Cake (2018) - This film was a major commercial success and helped to generate renewed interest in Pakistani cinema.
- Laal Kabootar (2019) - This film was a critical and commercial success and helped to raise the profile of Pakistani cinema.
- Quaid-e-Azam Zindabad (2020) - This film was a major commercial success and helped to generate renewed interest in Pakistani cinema.
- The Legend of Maula Jatt (2022) - This film was a major commercial success and helped to generate renewed interest in Pakistani cinema. This study, highlighted a few steps that young filmmakers in Pakistan can take to produce quality content and introduce Pakistani films globally.
- Develop a strong concept: Before you start working on a project, it's important to have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. This can help you stay focused and ensure that your final product is of high quality.
- Build a team: Filmmaking is a collaborative process, and you'll need a team of skilled professionals to help bring your vision to life. Consider hiring a director, writer, cinematographer, and other key crew members to help you bring your project to fruition.
- Choose the right equipment: Quality equipment can make a big difference in the final product, so it's important to invest in the right tools for the job. Look for cameras and lenses that will help you achieve the look and feel you want, and consider investing in lighting and audio equipment as well.
- Find funding: Producing a film can be expensive, so you'll need to find a way to fund your project. This can be through grants, crowdfunding campaigns, or other forms of funding.
- Network and seek support: Filmmaking can be a challenging field, and it's important to have a supportive network of people to help you along the way. Attend film festivals, meet with industry professionals, and seek out mentors who can provide guidance and support.

Overall, the key to producing quality content as a young filmmaker in Pakistan is to have a clear vision, build a strong team, invest in the right equipment, and seek out funding and support. With hard work and determination, you can create meaningful and impactful films that resonate with your audience.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study suggest that there is a lot to do for making Pakistani cinema big enough to be recognized on a global stage. It has to be formed as an industry to grow and to promote opportunities for the aspiring filmmakers. The kind of efforts young filmmakers and government is making to revive the cinema is ray of hope, but this ray of hope need a constant push in order to achieve sustainability. To attain profitability, number of cinemas need to increase, and normalizing the cinema going culture in Pakistani society is very important. Overall, it won't be wrong if considered that Pakistani cinema needs investments, stories and dedicated attention to achieve its lost glory.

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