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# ‘Remaking’ the Genre Cinema of South Asia

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The genre cinema in the context of South Asian cinema can be categorized with two broader terms: indigenous and non-indigenous. Indigenous genres are produced by local culture, folklore and myth whereas, non-indigenous genres are adopted and maintained from foreign industries, primarily the Hollywood Industry. Within that context, horror and science fiction genres are non-indigenous genres for South Asian audiences. The current study aims to focus on horror genre that is considered as concoction of both Indigenous and non-indigenous genres. Arguably, the horror genre can be called a by-product after remaking of and redefining of many other genres in process. In this process, the foreign cinema contents are adapted and modified with the Indigenous cinema contents containing its own culture. As a result, a unique and rare brand of genre is created. The South Asian cinema industries particularly Pakistani and Indian cinema upgrade their version of horror cinema by relying on the binaries of east versus west, old versus new and good versus evil. Likewise, these cinemas also marginalize the subject matter as religious or secular. In that frame of reference, the horror genre of these cinemas backs and assists the belief in God, evil and religion. Thus, the believers, towards the end, are pulled out of the fire and the monsters that are shown as non-believers, are punished. Thereupon, the superiority is maintained by the religious protagonists in both Indian and Pakistani cinema industries.

## Literature Review

Grant sees the genre movies as “those commercial features films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar situations.” (Grant, 2003, p. XV). André Bazin and Robert Warshaw introduced the concept of genre through their essays for gangster and western films in 1950s. (Grant, 2003, p. XV). This concept of genre influenced the cinema industries around the world, particularly

Hollywood. However, the South Asian film industries remained unexplored, thus faces deprivation for its genre assessment. Some of the literary light has been thrown on Indian cinema whereas, an oblivious eye has been shown towards Pakistani cinema. The current study is a discourse about how South Asian cinema endured the process of making of genre cinema. As mentioned earlier, Indian cinema has been widely discussed under the discourse of its respective genres. Therefore, considering its close affinity with the Pakistani cinema, this paper will establish a link between both Pakistani and Indian cinema, which are the two most popular cinema industries of South Asia.

The fact that Indian cinema and Pakistani cinema were both considered as 'Indian cinema' before the partition of 1947, is an essential part of the research. Rashna Richard(2011) talks about how Bollywood has been taking its prompts from Sanskrit drama and ancient religion text and then interweaved with the fibers of Hollywood. (Richard, 2011, p. 323). Pakistani cinema has gone through the same path with Indian cinema, likewise the restricted homegrown individuality to Bollywood cinema has cleared out its way to Hollywood, South Korean and Hong King Cinema. This "inspiration" (Thomas 1985) supports to adopt the close remakes of the films in Indian style, For instance, *Bichoo* (Scorpion) by GudduDhanoa. The film is a remake of *Lèon*(1994) by Luc Besson, as Lèon denotes something as "unacknowledged", or a "disguised" remake. (Verevis, 2006, p. 9). The current formation of remaking process has risen more aspects and facets to the process of remaking. As Sheila J. Nayar and TajeswiniGanti have approached and brought into light the matters of preference and disaffirmance of certain foreign contents to maintain the Indigenous cinema industry. Richards (2011) has also addressed the aspects of cross-culturalism and cultural diversity in her study while explaining remakes of films. (Ganti, 2002; Nayar, 2004). The left-out element in these studies is the influence these non-indigenous genres have, like that of horror and science fiction, on the genre cinema. In the afore-mentioned context, this paper will aim at how the non-indigenous cinema of South Asia has been influenced by the Hollywood cinema's process of remaking. The affiliation between the film genres and remakes is incarnated with a "corpus of works" in excess, "a set of textual structures" and the "existence of audience activity." (Verevis, 2006, p. 2). This relation between the two can be explored well along with another similarity that is commercial motivation for both.

Ninety percent of films in Bollywood, according to Anupama Chandra (Nayar, 2004), were the remakes of Hollywood, being highly influenced in the year 1993. There were also the remakes of Hong Kong cinema and other Indian films. Thereupon, this research tends to analyze the compact relation between genre cinema, film industries and their remakes, the influence on the remakes and the establishment of new genres in the post-2000s. This research peruses theoretical groundwork of Rick Altman's model (2003). The model examines "multiple connections between semantic and syntax" of a film. (Altman, 2003, p. 36). The study particularly emphasizes the semantic elements. It answers how the remakes of a genre links its semantic and syntactic elements.

## Pakistani Cinema and Remakes

Pakistani cinema has appropriated Hollywood cinema contents. The example of which is *Zinda Laash* (1967) as a first attempt by Khwaja Nasim. The film was a reshaped form of *Dracula* by Bran Stoker. (Khan and Ahmad, 2010, p. 151). *Zinda Laash* has “unusually high production values. Elaborate fight and chase scenes with impressive stunts and camera work; state of the art special effects and costume design (including specially imported fangs); elegant wardrobes, and well-choreographed dance routines (Khan and Ahmad, 2010, p. 151). The film was impressively borrowed with artistic cinematic value which established the horror genre in Pakistan and it endured the process of adaptation in its own way. Another evident example is *Sar Kata Insan* (1994). The title literally meant a “*Beheaded Man*”, which was also a remake of a Hollywood character “*Headless Man*”. Pakistani cinema has not been promoting horror genre except Pashto films as put into discourse by Ali Khan and Ali Nabil in their essay. Another noteworthy example is *Zibahkhana* (Slaughterhouse, 2007), that is “a witty translation of the modern Hollywood horror movie as it has evolved since the 1970s.... [and] draws heavily on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)” (Khan and Ahmad, 2010, p. 158). The remaking of these three films along with others on the broader terms explain how the genre of horror is created through the process of remaking and borrowing from Hollywood and other film industries.

## Bollywood and Remakes

The acknowledgement of Bollywood for remaking is evident with the assessment of Sheila Nayar (2004). According to Nayar, Bollywood has also been making and remaking its own context by taking tunes, the plots, dance numbers and even the titles. Thus, the frequency should not be considered here but the process of adaptation and remaking that gives Bollywood an individual value in cinema is what should be recognized by the audience and the critics.

Neelum Sidhar, while reviewing Bollywood remakes, demonstrates why foreign contents are adapted by Bollywood. She reckons it as “a product and vehicle of modernization, globalization and global post modernism” (Wright, 2009, p. 200). In her view, the Indian filmmakers settle for convenience and translation in their remaking films. It also comforts the audience to see the film and its story in the Indian context from a different perspective. Thus, creating a new outlook for the film. Sidhar believes that reverse-colonization is one of the motivations for borrowing foreign content. Secondly, it motivates the filmmakers to acquire new ideas and admixing with Hollywood content and thirdly, to exhibit before the audience the Hollywood films in a new way, highlighting the mutually encountered issues with social and cultural background in Indian native language. The phenomenon continues to instigate the Indian filmmakers to Bollywoodize the

Hollywood films, particularly the horror films. Sangita Gopal (2011), in the same context, mentions Bakhri, a pioneer in integrating horror genre in India, who used to contend for the horror elements in Hollywood films to recycle and create new line of work in the field.

Richards (2011) and NeelumSidhar possess the same opinion about Bollywood taking contents as quotes, chunks from the scripts, imitate the creation and production, transforming them in the cultural context and producing a film neither fully imitated nor fully Hindi cinematic in nature. The adaptation and appropriation reflect different time zones, eras, different locations and different cultural backgrounds of the ones that are imitated and also the imitations. Gopal (2011), explaining the term "Hollywoodization" as a counterfeit, maintains that "the remaking of horror and the introduction of genres like romantic comedies, action-adventure and science fiction represent a process of "Hollywoodization" that makes Hindi cinema's taxonomy much more in tune with cinema elsewhere" (Gopal, 2011, p. 92). The lens of Hollywoodization helps to analyze the adopting, replicating or ignoring a content and comprehend the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Following case study will further demonstrate this phenomenon.

William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) and its Indian adaptation *1920* by Vikram Bhatt (2008) have been undertaken as a case study for the paper. Also, the visual affinity between *The Haunting* by Jan de Bont and its Indian counterpart has been demonstrated to provide the accurate linkage between the adopters and adaptations to fit their local context. *The Exorcist* "drew the horror genre into mainstream commercial cinema and found a major audience which were not merely horror fans" (Wells, 2000, p. 84). The film brought into attention a new angle of horror genre for many scholars and it was also the first horror film to be nominated for an Oscar award. It has marked a significance in the horror genre history, as Mark Kermode (2003) argues, "for the first time in mainstream movies, audiences witnessed the graphic desecration of everything that was considered wholesome and good about the fading American Dream - the home, the family, the church and most shockingly the child." (Kermode, 2003, p. 9). Kermode chalks down the issues that are raised by the character of the protagonist - Regan - in the film, as her "urinating on the floor, vomiting on the neighborhood clergy, battering and humiliating her mother, lewdly abusing religion artefacts, [and] obscenities". He notices that *The Exorcist* highlights the issues that are recognizable. The issues that "deeply troubled the conservative elements of America" such as "rebellious children, the breakdown of the family, the lack of respect for religious traditions, the destruction of home." (Kermode, 2003, p. 10). Likewise, "it is in this tension between the progressive and the regressive, the divine and the apparent, that the power of *The Exorcist* lies." (Kermode, 2003, p. 10). Thus, *The Exorcist* reflects the binaries mentioned and exhibiting the issues brings it closer to stand with contemporary horror genre.

The analysis of *1920* in this context helps us to have the knowledge of and infer how the Bollywood film directors successfully secure their own brand of genre

which is still in the transitional phase. Being a middling in standard, the Bollywood cinema cannot be identified with any particular cinema but an individual new genre in itself that the present age cinema still has the same value for Bollywood industry since 1970s. "Horror is the only contemporary genre that predates liberalization. The other new forms that are emerging now - comedies like *Mujh Se Shadi Karogi?* (Will you marry me? David Dhawan, 2001), action films like *Dhoom* (Uproar, Sanjay Gadhvi, 2004), and science fiction works like *Koi Mil Gaya* (I found someone, Rakesh Roshan, 2003) are new inventions that have devolved from masala's demise and do not have horror's extended genealogy. (Gopal, 2001, p. 115). Gopal holds forth the notion that these newly emerging genres, such as action, comedies and science fiction are "new inventions" and cannot be called "horror's extended genealogy." This view somehow contradicts either the other researchers in the field. They oppose the assessment about these genres to be the result of "masala's demise", as all these genres have emerged themselves in the past-2000 period and they have their own characteristics instead of being limited to masala genre constituents. Films like *Jawani Phir Nahi Ani* by Nadeem Bait (2015), *Punjab Nahi Jaongi* (2017) from Pakistan, whereas *Dabang* (2010) by Arbaz Khan and *Sultan* (2016) by Ali Abbas from India are the masala films that are popular even today in South Asian film industry, having emerged lately as a genre.

### Case Study

The main axis for the study is Vikram Bhatt's *1920*, that has a fictive association with *The Exorcist* (1973) and a visual affinity with *The Haunting* (1999) by Jan de Bont. Bhatt's films have been following a pattern of Hollywood films. For example, *On the Waterfront* (1954) has a remake as *Ghulam* (Slave, 1998), *Jagged Edge* (1985) as *Kasoor* (2001), *What Lies Beneath* (2000) as *Raaz* (2002), *Fear* (1996) as *Aetbaar* (2003) and *Cellular* (2004) as *Speed* (2007). Bhatt tries to infuse other elements into the content of these films to create his own contemporary horror genre however, these films are the explicit copy of the original.

The film starts in the year 1920 with the protagonist as the narrator, tracing an event with the life-long consequences. In the opening scene, a character, Mehta, is on way to a manor house in a horse carriage. Mehta, an architect, wants to rebuild the house. However, he dies in the same house after happening some unnatural and mysterious things that night. Next starts the love story of another architect Arjun Singh and Lisa, played by Rajneesh Duggal and Adah Sharma in the film. Arjun, a Hindu devote, is denied an approval to marry Lisa because of her mother marrying an English man being an Indian, which was considered as evil act in the eyes of Arjun's family. Lisa is seen as a culprit by Arjun's family and they attempt to burn Lisa alive while Arjun trying to protect her, becomes an atheist. Yet, Arjun approves of Lisa in following Christianity. The plot develops when Arjun marries Lisa and they move to a house given by Arjun's company to demolish and rebuild it for a hotel in Palanpur. This is the same house where Mehta has lost his life.

After their arrival, dreadful and horrifying things happen but only Lisa can experience them. She hears someone whispering her name, and the shouting of an injured man. The situation gets severe when Lisa is dragged into a dark empty room by supernatural force when she gets possessed by an evil spirit. The story covers ground when Lisa shows no retreat to her normal condition and even the local priest fails in his efforts. It is shown in flashbacks scenes that Gayatri was a young woman, who endured losing her chastity in order to deceive a traitor to be captured. The traitor is an Indian subsisting as a British spy at the time of freedom movement of 1857. The spirit of that spy has now come to take revenge on Gayatri who is said to be reborn as Lisa. The story closes when Arjun turns to be a religious devotee again and is helped by Hanuman's Chalisa. He kills the evil spirit with the religious strength inside him and frees Lisa after failing in other methods like medical treatment and exorcism.

In the *Exorcist*, on the other hand, Regan is taken to hospital four times to give her medical aid. She is given a hypnotism session, but all goes in vain. Finally, the medical board advises Chris, Regan's mother, to go for exorcism for Regan and that only could treat her condition. Chris is shown a secular person, who first denies the existence of any evil spirit and contacts a witch-doctor. However, Chris is compelled to call up a priest after seeing Regan's worst condition. Father Kerras is called to her exorcism but his beliefs also seem to be shattered when he says, "I'd have to get them into time machine and get them back to the 16th century." It depicted his mind, believing exorcism to be centuries old method that does not suit modern society. Yet, Chris forcibly asks Father Kerras to grant permission from a senior priest, Father Tom towards the end. Father Kerras also proves his faith in evil and thus religion and sacrifices his life in order to save Regan.

The notable scene at the end suggests Regan's faith too, when she along with Chris meets Father Dyer on way, and she gives him a kiss, showing her certain belief in the priest and church as her protectors.

The narrative, on account of religious beliefs, in both *1920* and *The Exorcist*, is on the same path. The character of Arjun in *1920* and Father Kerras in *The Exorcist* are in accurate conformity with each other; both show lack of faith and towards the end are shown to regain their beliefs by practicing Hanuman Chalisa and exorcism respectively.

Another aspect can be noticed in *1920* of Hindusim to be the superior religion in India. This is evident by the resolution scene when Lisa cannot be treated back to normality by exorcism, but it is Hanuman Chalisa that Arjun uses to release her from the evil spirit. It proves the notion that the hierarchical framework of faith in religion has been the focal point of the film. Bollywood films support and assist the national ideology and religious beliefs by punishing the non-believers and relieving those who believe or start believing in religion and the existence of good and evil. While, the disruption in these beliefs disturb the normality in people's lives, thus in the film stories.

According to this argument, Lisa's condition and being possessed is not due to her arrival at an old empty house but her being the daughter of an Englishman and her

religious beliefs (according to Hinduism belief system). Noel Carroll (2002) further supports the argument saying:

“the real drama in a horror story resides in establishing the existence of the monster and in disclosing its horrific properties. Once this is established, the monster, generally, had to be confronted, and the narrative is driven by the question of whether the creature can be destroyed.” (Carroll, 2002, p. 35).

Father Merrin, in *The Exorcist*, accidentally releases a devil in Iraq, after doing so, he returns to Washington without any delay. It is on the audience to decipher the plot of the film whether the devil possess a girl in the city where Father Merrin is the only priest to carry out exorcism on her. This havoc, due to the factor of revenge, is also shown in *1920*, when the spirit of the spy stays in the manor house of Palanpur to wait for Gayatri to come, who is reborn as Lisa now. Rachel Dwyer (2010) argues that “Indian cinema likes familiar stories and historical stories that allow for ritualization, repetition and overvaluation of the past. These historical stories suit the melodramatic mode of Hindi cinema as they focus on crisis and conflicts over power, legitimacy and identity through encounters with sickness and medicine, morality and the law, morals and religion in a way that stirs up emotions. The films focus on topic which are common to historical narratives of struggle, sacrifice and patriotism.” (Dwyer, 2010, p. 387).

The characters, in both original and the remake, on general terms, are classified as the devil or the ghost, the protagonist that is affected by the devil and the priest or the religious personage. In *The Exorcist*, the conflict is between the first and third category mentioned while in *1920*, the conflict is shown between the first and the second category of the characters. The difference in categorization is termed as Bollywoodization as the Bollywood film remakes tend to appropriate the situation to their audiences’ apprehension. The catalyst force behind those horror films is the religion and the visual representation of devil when Lisa and Regan are shown possessed. It proves the belief of Hollywood and Bollywood filmmakers in the existence of supernatural and evil forces. The direct encounter between the evil and the priest, and the destruction of the creature through religion and folklore methods is the depiction of religion as the only truth of nature. Also, the reflective picturization involves audience to visually experience the horror element by showing the Outlook of Chris’ house first; the dark shadow on the house, the camera moving to show the shaking branches of the trees and the thrilling essence of wind, people walking and talking normally and meanwhile Marry’s statue is brought into focus. Adhaan as diegesis is heard after some non-diegetic sounds and feeble shrimps are heard with which the film starts. Subsequently, the appearance of full moon and the sky turning red alongside the sound of Adhaan, shows the semantic progress of the story. These scenes feature the sequence of the story in a phenomenal way that the scenes need less dialogues to be conceived. For example, some manual workers digging land and finding a Christian medal at a pre-Christian site. This shocks Father Merrin and he further finds a stones amulet of demon

Pazuzu. These signs create an anguish on his face. The scene catches strength of understanding when a local officer calls these signs as "evil against evil". This sudden appearance of signs breaks the ice of normality and arouses fear and threat which is expressed by Mark Kermode as, "the normal flow of the present had been interrupted by a force from the past." (Kermode, 2003, p. 24-25). However, the scene proceeds when the same officer tells Father, "I wish you didn't have to go." To which Father Merrin answers, "there is something I must do". In the next scene, Father Merrin is shown to have gone to another place where there is a dark shadow over him which is to be deciphered as of Satan's. There are some frightening sounds in the background that get louder and louder which increases the angst in the scene and in Father Merrin's expressions. Towards the end of the scene, Father Merrin and the devil are shown standing face to face in a close up scene. In this way, the first ten minutes' prologue in the film gives a signifier of the audience's expectations from the film. On the other hand, the same prologue is followed by *1920*. The first ten minutes do not give a religious reference but in contrast, the presence of devil is only shown. The opening scene shows the manor house and Mehta approaching the house in his horse-carriage. There are eerie sounds while showing a pathway through the midst of a forest towards the house. The lower camera angles and the house being isolated along with the voice over of a narrator tells what is going to happen and following that, Mehta gets killed by the supernatural forces when he is inside the house at night. In *The Exorcist* are shown that the priest are shown standing face to face, challenging each other's superiority however in *1920*, it is after the ten minutes' prologue that religious references are shown when Arjun offers 'pooja' and reads Hanuman Chalisa, along with the bleeding picture of Christ.

Although, the remake of *The Exorcist* is not an exact copy of its original, both the films possess similarities and differences between them. The director has added his own stylistic traits to the film and has blended elements from other films too e.g. *The Haunting* (1999). In either way, it is not advisable to compare the original and the remake scene by scene, but the similarities must be taken into consideration. The similar point in our case study is the use of religious references for the salvation. Some of the similarities are briefly discussed between *1920* and *The Haunting*.

The film *1920* uses traditional horror yet striking scenes while the houses are shown. For instance, long dark corridors, a lofty staircase, and white curtains, mysterious silhouettes being shown through the curtains, eerie sounds and expressive paintings in the isolated manor house. It has a marked comparison with the description of the haunted house in *The Haunting*. Also, the low lights, a leader atmosphere and the use of only candles in *1920* follow the same pattern as *The Haunting* did. Treatment of religion in both of the films is different and presents the films bearing different facets thus explaining the rare expression of Bollywoodization. For instance, in *The Haunting*, abusive language had been used for Jesus Christ and blasphemous acts are shown which is not the case in *1920*, rather respect for all religions is a must entity of the process of Bollywoodization.



Even in the realm of the films, the picture of Christ is showed bleeding that shows despair and distress on the part of religion instead of religion being directly challenged by the supernatural forces.

Besides the visual representation, *1920* alters some other essential features as in, the blasphemous content in *The Exorcist*. Although, the religion Hindutva is shown to have the power to altercate and win over the evil, yet Christianity is embodied as a reputed religion too. In accumulation, the course of the songs, and the elements like reincarnation and ethnocentricity are also appended to the plot in order to adapt it to the expectations of the local audience.

Carolyn Jess Cooke (2009) points the narrative conviction for both of the films to be corresponding with each other except for the scrim of nationalism and Hindutva. According to her, “recent Bollywood ‘remakes’ do not so much remake or copy Hollywood, but are much more involved in processes of resistance, subversion and globalization”. (Jess Cooke, 2009, p. 117). It implies the fact that the films carry infinite similarities, however the resolution of the tension in the films maintains the difference between the ends of the films. Cooke (2009) argues for the process of remaking in Bollywood as “localizing cultural concerns within a global framework, or by signifying, rather than repeating, the global within the local.” (Jess-Cooke, 2009, p. 120).

These films of India and Pakistan are not only emblematic of global pedigree of horror but simultaneously carry the indigenous content in them as discussed previously. On this account, Rashna Wadia Richard (2011) labels these films as “global masala”, a term reflecting the words ‘local’ and ‘global’ through it. However, our disagreement with Wadia’s assertion of this idea lies in the use of the word ‘masala’ for these remakes. Proclaiming these films to be masala films will confine them for the field of reference in terms of analyzing them. Hence, these films should be recognized for their individual identity reflecting Bollywood and Lollywood’s elements respectively for the matter of fact that they have their own cinematic and cultural compact to present in their plots’ construction and represent the specification of their film industries. As Nayar says in supporting this notion; “[the] finished products adapted from foreign works are less remakes than extracted skeletons: plot repositories molded and shaped for a more sufficient and efficient cultural refiling. Even given the filmmakers’ borrowing, stealing and blatant plagiarism these finished products are indisputably India.” (Nayar, 2004, p. 74, 75)

## **Conclusion**

The Bollywood and Lollywood films retain their absolute identity in accord with their culture and nationalism in the industry along with the borrowing, remaking and in other words, plagiarizing from the other industries. The only element in contrast is the use and relevance of religion between the remake and the original. India and Pakistan’s point of convergence in the films are Hindutva and Islamic

traditions respectively. These cinemas maintain their genre specifications along with the 'plagiarized' content and localize them according to their own cultures. In this context, the textual meaning of the films becomes of paramount importance than the linguistic meaning. These textual meanings are established and indigenized as a local style along with the adapting of the linguistic elements. Thus, in occurrence with horror genre, Bollywood and Lollywood acquire the linguistic meanings of the demons or devil that influence the semantic elements and also practices a pack of textual meaning for the films.

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