

Female Image and Pakistani Cinema

Abstract

Human history whether it is recorded or not, cannot breath through time without images. The only deciphered information that has travelled from the darkness of history to the contemporary age is through surviving images. So, an image maker is just like a story-teller and no story of this world, even beyond this world, can be completed without the subtle, idealistic yet realistic image of woman. The matter of Indians tales is mostly derived from their mythological taste, which is a usual tradition of nearly all the ancient civilizations. Since Indian mythology revolves around goddesses, which shows the overwhelming status of female image in this part of the world, the image of woman from Ajanta and Elora caves to the Miniature of Gujarati to Mughal miniatures, has been the core feature of male image makers. On the other hand the western part of the globe also relied on the mythology of their gods and goddesses. And there comes the female stronghold in the imagery and images of western convention of image making. Owing to the visual assimilation caused by the cross-cultural influences, many female icons got their place in each mythology. This is because the Indian female image absorbed some western characteristics concerning their goddesses. Modern or contemporary image of female in the subcontinent is crafted on the patterns, the Vedic rhythm might have provided through centuries. Acculturation is another factor, caused by the continuous invasions from Aryans to the Britons, which influenced this female image consequently. When the stationary images, in the early twentieth century, got momentum on a 35 mm film, the female image started to move on the silver screen. At that juncture of time, under thrust of hidden and apparent desires about the femininity, exposure and revelation shaped up this image on concrete grounds which were redone on the cinema hoardings, for attracting of the eyes of trespassers.

Female Image and Pakistani Cinema

Pakistan is a country with expressive but, confined society, reluctant in expressing what is actually there to say. This instinctual desire, to put on display the hidden and psychologically sharpened emotions, force the individual of the society to give vent to all emotions, without considering the aspect of acceptability. Certainly, cultural influences form the physically nearby regions, and from electronically assimilated acculturation, sometimes forced the acceptability of exotic forms.

Image, as it gets rooted in the collective as well as individual scruples past or present psychology, is an important possession of human being. The concept of image could be related and traced back to the beginning of any kind of human groups that could be called society or community.

These images served human instinct and ethics to give shape which can only be perceived with the help of a properly evolved system of symbols. These symbols were not taken from an alienated world but extracted from the things, human psychology was deeply involved with, and interested in. Apart from that we must find out the conditions under which images were created at any given period, remembering that the development of visual rules followed its own largely independent path alongside social changes.

Whilst, keeping in view the other side of the same picture extrinsically, human's most primitive artifacts, dating from the late Paleolithic period, are coarse and unsophisticated figurines of pregnant women. These findings of numerous female figurines, in many locations, also support the fact that during ancient times the female was much honored.

“Mankind’s worship of, and reverence for, the divine figure of mother, is a religious phenomenon far deeper than creeds, councils and dogmas”.

(Warner 36).

The contemporary image of modern woman, it seems far away from the ancient image of a goddess, in many ways. Historically the female imagery can be divided into two categories; secular and sacred. Although, the contemporary art belongs to a category different from these iconographic images, but even then the historical linkage, somehow, creates some similarities.

“Since the historical basis of the concept that surrounds the Goddess cannot be established, one might suspect that her religion was created to fit the requirements of modern women at a time of shifting values, as assumed, for instance, by Mary Lefkowitz. ‘The fervor with which the concept is upheld surely testifies to its religious validity. The great mother who nourishes the body and the soul truly belongs to the faith of modern time.’ (Motz 38)

Woman’s image, in terms of physical appearance as well as in relation with sentimental outline has been a topic worth discussing in all aspects. Centuries old traditions and doctrines found in ancient scriptures in linkage with earliest known civilizations, display in detail, the apparent and hidden contours which make this image and shape up an icon that was to lose its originality under the influence of acculturation and rigid absorption of diversities. We must find out the conditions under which images were created at any given period, remembering that the development of visual conventions followed its own largely independent trail beside, social changes.

“The goddess has also had a vivifying impact on women’s art. By contemplating the prehistoric forms of female divinity, artists discovered new dimensions and awareness of the female body”. (Page 37)

Worship of the goddess, so it is asserted, reaches back to the dawn of human existence; at that time she was the sole all-encompassing deity in which earth and all its creatures had originated (page 24), the shaping of the female figure and figurines continued in the Neolithic period.

Rudiments of rituals, animals and women were the possessions that have always been in popular acceptance owing to the continuity related to the ever old concept of fertility.

Women especially attracted the crafts of mankind as there were other factors behind her rendering, one was the concept of beauty and other, undoubtedly, the sensual attraction as most of the artists or artisans were male. Women didn't portray themselves, instead they were portrayed since the dawn of history, and women have been the preferred subject of the image makers. Whatever the reason, it appears that the dominant impulse came from the male interests and their purpose was to add sensuality according to the tastes of the period.

Sequence plays a vital part in the images when put as an array of series. Artists of every age followed their memory and remembrance to develop a thread-like connection linking different images. Sometimes, this linkage was abstract and sometimes, chronological, the best example of both of the mentioned characteristics could be traced in the images carried out on *Jatakastories* based on Buddha's life.



Later on, in the modern world when images of a sequel, got the speed of 1/16 per second on a rolling wheel, moving the 35 mm film, it was the beginning of bioscope. The revolution of cinema started to move with the restlessness of modern human psychology, which was surrounded by different political and ideological movements around the globe. British rule from the mid-eighteenth century marked the beginning of an era unlike any other in India's history. Their education, however, was based on western curricula and ideology. The goddesses enshrined in Hindu temples were only meant for orthodox religious believers, not for the British system.

The stereotyped image of the Indian woman during this time was a dutiful and oblivious housewife and it was British colonial period in subcontinent, when

the foundation of cinema was laid, amid the political radicalism. It was a time when outdoor tasks, to no surprise actually, (due to set social patterns), were assigned to man. It was woman in front of the camera lens a heroine and a vamp, but behind that focusing lens was a male eye. The art of poster painting and hoardings was enjoying the skills of artisans where no woman could ever indulge as part and parcel of this crew. Many bigwigs, who later emerged as renowned artists were also found guilty of this beautiful sin.



The art of portraying main characters on large scale hoardings, took inspirations not only by the story or theme of a film but it also gave vent to the instinctual temptations and sumptuousness of centuries, the male psychology was under influence owing to mythological, religious, social and moral compulsions that sometime applaud female image as 'goddess' and some time as 'concubine'.

The large size of these cinema hoardings, exposed to the public, and the foremost requirement of advertising certain topics, themes as well as films, enforced the 'visual place' of such big-canvases. Yet the aim of their patrons not to create great art works but to advertise their merchandise. The onlooker, may or may not be interested in a devotional image meant for a pious consumer. "Of course, the power of images changes with time according to the importance of the body and of beauty in the sexual market place or social scene, and in accordance with the amount of visual promotion by the advertising media."

(Duby, Georges, and Michelle Perrot 177-178)

Apart from these issues, cinema hoardings exaggerated many aspects especially which, were addressing female image and female characterization. These cinema hoardings and billboard art is a major and authentic expression of 'people's art'. The modern techniques, modern theories, modern visual concepts found their way towards subcontinent from the west along with the cinematography and its modus operandi.

Grotesque in size and in the rendering of figures make these hoardings improbable and artificial for a common viewer and their immediate appeal is visual rather than conceptual.

Worship of the goddess, so it is asserted, reaches back to the dawn of human existence; at that time she was the sole all-encompassing deity in which earth and all its creatures had originated (page 24), the shaping of the female figure and figurines continued in the Neolithic period.

In south Asian tradition of cinema, the female image was crafted, keeping in view the traditional, cultural and adopted female icons that were presented on the silver screen for entertaining visual desires of a viewer. The heroin or other young female characters of a film were always used in this regard. This is where, the female image, in the eye of a director, was to be attractive as well as seductive. The revealing scenes of a movie were often captured in connection with female body where, according to the taste and level of the director, her contours were used from a range of subtlety to the harshness, whatsoever could be conceived. Traditional Rajasthani dresses served the cause with exposed torso and arms, since these dresses as were used in the Gujarati and Rajasthani tradition of miniature paintings as visual and panoramic paintings elements. When they were used on the large screen of cinema, they not only fill in the



colorfulness but also enriched the prominence of female young characters.

On the other hand, western influences, regarding visual exploitation of female body, also inspired the local taste. Western couture, as it was spotlighting the beauty of females in the corporate and industrialized 'modern' period. This beauty, since it was also related to the advertising world, was to sell products. This dogma might have also tempted the conception of the movie directors, and the lusty, revealing, seductive and sensuous feelings were aroused in viewers through the modern attire and dress design.

For this purpose, cosmopolitan lifestyle with pubs, discos, clubs, and party scenes were in vogue where the possibilities of model-like female characters were to be inducted inevitably.

The vision of a hoarding painter in the early years after Pakistan came into existence, is found, interestingly more mature and respectful towards female body as compared to later era when this image was brutally distorted. One could feel this respect and maturity of that artisan through his painted image where he, by force of some hidden relation of respect and woman, contoured the female image close to a goddess like posture, occupying most of the space at the hoarding surface in an authenticated and powerful manner. Suggestiveness and seduction were the visual tools that were adopted later on for attracting viewers on sensuous grounds. There arises a question about the need of that very change?

At the same time, Pakistani films, though they were being produced in different culture and atmosphere, were adopting all the fashion consequently. The dance dresses were in similarity with Rajasthan or Gujarat styles, despite the fact that there was no such acceptance for these fabricates in most of the geographical cultures of Pakistan. Then what objection on western idealization of female icons was adopted vigorously as the whole world, under the industrial influences, and especially, due to the colonial supremacy of the west.^{f4}

But in any shape, the female body and revealing skin was the target of film producers as well as of film goers.

Pakistani cinema has developed, changed and to some basic standards, it evolved from its early days, be it a theme, or technique or the ever changing censor policy. The first Pakistani film *Teri Yaad* was released in 1948. Just one year after Pakistan was created.

Noorjehan was not only acting but producing films in the early fifties. Noorjehan and SabihaKhanum were the female stars of the fifties and Deeba, Neelo, Saiqa, ShamimAra, Zeba and Shabnum were of the 60s. The 60's were dominated by romantic love stories. The import of Indian films was banned after



the 1965 war with India, but in the 1980s video cassette recording and the trade in pirated videos brought Indian cinema back again, but this time on the small screen. During the Zia period, the cinema industry took a near fatal hit, and 'Loolywood' survived only because of the innumerable low quality Panjabi films that continued unabated.

Today, Pakistani cinema has a new generation of actors: the heroines are svelte, more sexual. However, interest in Pakistani cinema is fast becoming a cult amongst the new urban generation.

The international Kara film festival has made a point of displaying cinema posters, bringing Pakistani film to the attention of a new generation. A new wave of socially-engaged, urban and experimental films, facilitated by widely-available, high-quality digital technologies, is once again altering the face of Pakistani cinema and cinema hoardings as well.

As, for an example, look at the photo on the right. In this billboard of the movie called 'aurat raj'(rule of women) a gladiator lady (**Rani**) is shown controlling a 4-horse chariot. All the horses have faces of men. The second horse from the right is none other than Lollywood's chocolate hero of 70s, WaheedMurad. The poster/billboard is very creative regarding the female, shown here in a very dominating role close to a goddess, who has power over the whole universe.

Other than conventional and cultural factors, modern economic patterns also influenced the silver screen phenomena. International standards and globalization, precisely in the late 90s, caused our heroines to wear brands that were selling around. Back in 70s, the female torso was the main feature of all the film hoardings and posters. When, in the regime of Bhutto when elite class of the country actually entered into politics, the scenario of advertisement changed and western style of presenting female full-length image was now in vogue.

Though it is very interesting that most of the western hoardings were not displaying the female image as sensuously as it was done in our side where the film-hoarding was considered as the tempting tactic to attract the viewer. Whether it was a poster, a hoarding, or a newspaper, all the inspirations were just falling naturally.



The 80s were marked with the tortures and bloodshed by the violent hero like Sultan Rahi. Here the heroine started to serve as filler in the movie as she was just a silent spectator or an idle showpiece to entertain viewers with her inactive presence but pleasure-giving kinesics and movements either they were part of a dance or just as the semi-romantic atmosphere.

Why women are primarily regarded as models whereas, in reality, they were highly respected persons. There seems to be no dreadful need to project their anatomy on screen and in print. Half of the population of the world is not interested in the nude forms of the likes of them. In that case, why cater; rather pander, to the brash tastes of the other half.

This tendency of overexposure has resulted in the lowering of the standards of morality and disregard for the time-tested human values. Negligence in this regard can strike a fatal blow to the aspirations of the younger generation, which wants to scale new heights in the days to come. Else it can bog down their

forward march and tempt them to opt for demeaning search. It is not wise to drive a wedge between the sexes by presenting one as the victim and the other as tormentor.

Eroticism is the most talked about, and exploited doctrine in almost all the women related issues. It has been considered and exercised for the arousal and anticipated attempt of the feelings that may lead to sexual activity.

Since the etymology of this word is not always considered the true meaning therefore, possible vastness has always been overlooked. Though, Eros, the Greek god of love is behind the craft of eroticism, but Eros is god of love hence, the sex drive related to love or lovemaking is marked precisely with eroticism. Making pictures is more than any other thing about the making itself, about the lines, the marks, the sweep of the brush, the layering of colours. This is what carries meaning in pictures and makes them different from any of the other arts. Toulouse-Lautrec may have drawn luxuriantly fleshy prostitutes, but the lines in everything he drew, whether circus performers or a horse on the racetrack, were imbued with an extraordinary energy that somewhere at its core was erotic.



This journey will continue with the passage of time and may reincarnate in many other shapes as social, moral, ethical, economic and human interpretations and opperhentions get changed.

The image of women undoubtedly got twisted and molded, whenever it was conceived to be given vent, in words as well as in visuals. Cinema in particular, since its relationship with that very image and the viewers, was self-motivated and ever-changing in its



nature; therefore, cinema hoardings displayed the exaggerated form of woman. The females painted on cinema hoardings were even louder than the original characters of the movies those hoardings were expressing the crux of! The difference between psychological and aesthetical approach of a film director and the hoarding painter was another factor which generated the noisy and piercing effects on the hoardings. People, in the capacity of viewers accepted this diversity as they were always passing by that hoarding in no time. The female image that was divine in myths got human touch in paintings, while the visual emotionality got blended with it when the movie makes portrayed the same image on silver screen. But as soon as the less educated artisan put his hands on this very image, the tonalities of color, sharpness of features, and the divinity of the female image as a whole, got blemished. Along with other reasons, the global cinematic influences were just the base of the change, but the construction of female image on a cinema hoarding, was as aboriginal as it could be.

Bibliography

Duby, Georges, and Michelle Perrot, trans. *Power And Beauty: Images of Women* In Art. France: KEA Publishing Services Ltd, 1992.

Motz, Lotte. *The faces of the Goddess*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Pearce, Lynne. *Woman Image Text*. North Amerca: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

PuwarNirmal and ParvatiRaghuram , edited. *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*. UK: BiddlesLtd,King's Lynne, 2003.

SaeedFouzia, and Adam nayyar, *Women in folk theatre*. Pakistan: LokVirsa, 1991.

Wyche, Karen Fraser, and Faye J.Crosby , edited. *Women's Ethnicities*. United States of America : Westview Press, 1996.

Interview

Adil, Umer. Personal interview. 18. August 2008.

Saleem, Muhammad. Personal interview. 28. August 2008.

*Dr. SumeraJawwad, Assistant Professor, College and Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore.