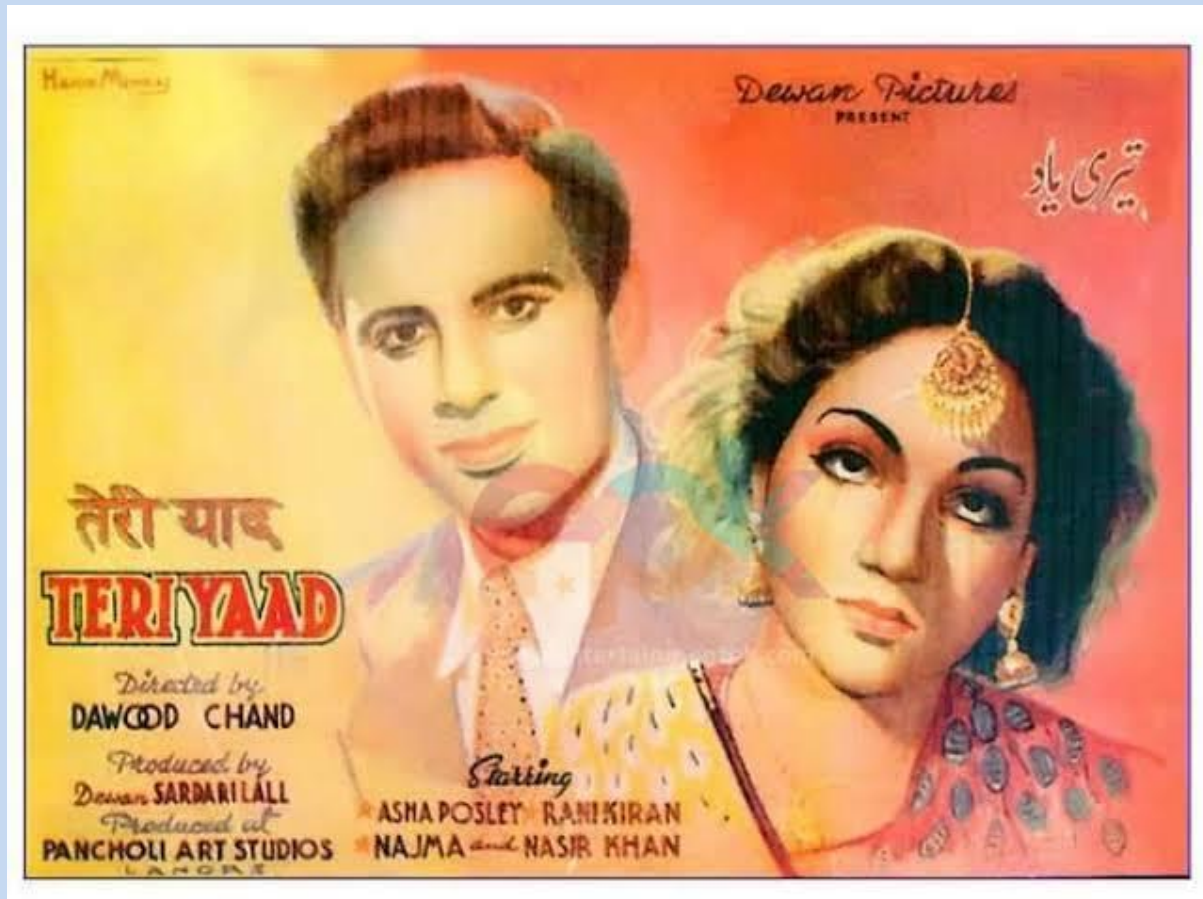


Article

Aijazz Gul

Pakistani Cinema: Past, Present and Future

1st Pakistani Film TERI YAAD (1948) - Asha Posley and Nasir Khan

Experiments were underway for invention of motion picture in many countries during 1870s and 1880s. Black and White Photographs had already been introduced. Cinema was born in the West in 1895. The inventors of this modern art included Lumiere Brothers (France), Thomas Edison (United States), Paul (England) and Max (Germany). Soon cinema arrived in other countries.

Lumière Brothers brought films to the sub continent in 1906 with two-minute silent shorts of mother feeding the infant, lawn being watered and workers coming out of the factory. These shorts were screened in Marston Hotel Mumbai. Dada Sahab Phalkey made first 40-minute silent film *Raja Harrish*

Chandra in 1913. It was on the life of Buddha. Sound came in 1930 with director Ardeshir Irani's *Alam Ara* which also had close to dozen songs.

History of cinema for what is today Pakistan, goes back into the thirties. Film making began in Lahore in the early-thirties when the city was a major center for films in general, and Punjabi films in particular. This part of the subcontinent in film trade was known as Northern Circuit of Indian cinema with studios, cinemas, distributors and lot more. There were major directors, actors, composers, producers, distributors and singers working at Lahore. Directors A. R. Kardar, Shaukat Hussain Rizvi, actors M. Ismail, Noorjehan, Pran and composers Master Ghulam Haider and Chishti were notable names working in Lahore before Independence.



Noorjehan

1947 Independence came with mass migration. Entire film talent and financiers from Hindu community left for Mumbai. Few notable names like Swaran Lata, Nazir, Noorjehan, Shaukat Rizvi, Subtain Fazli and composers Master Ghulam Haider, Feroz Nizami and Khawaja Khursheed Anwar migrated from Mumbai to Lahore. Film property was damaged in the 1947 riots. Studios and cinema were repaired, renovated and refurbished. First Pakistani film *Teri Yaad* came in September 1948 in Urdu and what followed later in 1948-49 with titles like *Shahida*, *Hichkole*, *Sachai* and *Ghalat Fehmi* could not stand the onslaught from imports from Mumbai. Filmmakers turned to Punjabi films. Two Punjabi films *Larey* and *Pherey* by Producer-Director Nazir and his actress wife Swaran Lata were box office hits in 1949-1950. This was a boom for Punjabi films and more with *Ghabro*, *Chunway* and *Sheri Babu*. Shaukat Rizvi and his singer-actress wife Noorjehan repaired and renovated Shorey studios as Shahnoor. It thus became first functional studios which came into being after Independence.

Director-Producer-Screenwriter Anwar kamal Pasha turned out to be our first "Auteur" film maker who scripted all his films: *Ghulam*, *Do Ansoo*, *Gumnam*, *Qatil*, *Sarfrosh* and *Anarkali* during the fifties. He is also to be credited for introducing and training new talent in every discipline of filmmaking ranging from direction (Khalil Qaiser, S. Suleman, Altaf Hussain), editing (M. Akram),

Camera (Rasheed Chaudhry, Nabi Ahmad), acting (Musarrat Nazir, Bahar, Nayyar Sultana, Aslam Pervaiz) and playback singing (Mala). However, with repeated failures, Anwar kamal Pasha lost confidence, and by early-sixties, faded into oblivion. Luckily, many other names emerged during the fifties, sixties and seventies both in Urdu and Punjabi films. Masood Pervaiz (*Beli, Intazaar, Jhomar, Koel, Heer Ranjha*), Hassan Tariq (*Neend, Sawal, Shikwa, Umrao jan Ada, Anjuman, Sangdil*), Nazarat Islam (*Kajal, Ehsas, Aina, Bandish, Nahi Abhi Nahi*), S. Suleman (*Gulfam, Baji, Lori, Zeenat*). Writer-Director Pervaiz Malik who had earlier returned from United States with M.A. in Cinema from the University of Southern California, joined hands with actor Waheed Murad, scriptwriter Masroor Anwar and composer Sohail Rana to establish Karachi as another film capital with box office hits like *Heera Aur Pather, Arman, Ehsan* and *Doraha*. Karachi had earlier produced first Sindhi film *Omar Marvi* in 1956, directed by Sheikh Hassan. First Pushto film *Yousaf Khan Sher Bano* (1970) also came from Karachi and turned newcomers Badar Munir and Yasmin Khan instantly into superstars, However, Pushto filmmakers later moved to Lahore.

Mid-fifties also brought the then East Pakistan on film map with Dhaka as center of Bengali films. Film Finance Corporation was also set up in Dhaka. A.J. Kardar made art film *Jago Huwa Savera* (1959) which showed the life of fishermen in Bengal. The film was scripted by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. The film did not do well at the box office but won extremely good box office reviews and was shown in prestigious film festivals. In 1962, East Pakistan made history with Urdu box office hit *Chanda*. This was followed by *Talash, Quli* and *Kajal*. How films from East Pakistan were different from what was being produced in Lahore and Karachi! Bengal has always been gifted with talent in literature, painting, sculpture, drama, music and dance. This was evident in their low-budget realistic films, shot on location with no false production values (which at times overburdened films from Lahore and Karachi). *Akhri Station* based on Hajra Masroor short story, was entirely shot on railway Station about a rape victim who has lost her balance. This powerful role was played by Shabnam who won Nigar Award as Best Actress in 1965. East Pakistani films introduced us to several talented directors (Khan Attaur Rehman, Mustafeez, Ehtesham, Qazi Zaheer), actors (Shabnam, Rehman, Nadeem) and composers (Robin Ghosh, Subhal Das). Color and cinemascope to our cinema first also came from East Pakistan with *Sangam* in 1964.



CHINGARI(Shamim Ara, Santosh Kumar)

Lahore came out with its first color film *Naila* in 1965, based on Razia Butt's potboiler love triangle produced by G.A.Gul, directed by Sharif Nayyar and composed by Master Inayat Hussain. *Naila* also owed its enormous critical and commercial popularity to good performance by Shamim Ara, Santosh Kumar, Darpan and six hit melodies by Mala. Two major directors who rose from Lahore in the sixties include Khalil Qaiser

and his screenwriter/partner Riaz Shahid. Together they produced *Shaheed* and

Farangi, socially and politically relevant films about British Imperialism. Khalil Qaiser was murdered. Riaz Shahid went on to carry the torch of socialism and down- with- imperialism in *Zerqa*, *Susral*, *Gharnata* and *Yeh Aman*. He too passed away in tragic circumstances after censor problems with his Kashmir freedom-struggle epic *Yeh Aman*.

1965 War with India brought a ban on Indian films. This promoted cut and paste copies of Indian films. Quality of our films deteriorated. However, new talent surfaced in every discipline from directors (Masood Pervaiz, Khalil Qaiser, S.Suleman, Pervaiz Malik, Nazrul Islam) to scriptwriters (Riaz Shahid) to composers (Rashid Attrey, Inayat Hussain, Khursheed Anwar, Sohail Rana, Robin Ghosh and Nisar Bazmi).



DIL KEY TUKREY (Shamim Ara, Habib)

We were now in early -seventies. Pakistan was dismembered in 1970-71 and East Pakistan became Bangladesh. This was tremendous loss to film trade in terms of loss of hundreds of cinemas, studios and film talent. Karachi also lost its gloss as actors avoided to travel from Lahore to Karachi. Lahore now became the only center of film making. Illegal uncensored, smuggled and pirated video entered the scene. People now preferred to watch films at homes on VCR . Cinemas and studios

raised on prime real estate began to crumble and were replaced with shopping centers, stage theatres and wedding halls. With strict martial law in the country, film makers found refuge in sex and violent orgies like director Yonus Malik, Producer Sarwar Bhatti and screenwriter Nasir Adeeb's *Maula Jatt*. The film was banned several times and re-exhibited on stay order from the court. Javed Jabbar made Pakistan's first English language film *Beyond the Last Mountainors*. President Zia ul Haq invited film industry twice in Islamabad to honour them and later show them their deeds in porn, vengeance and vendetta. Censor certificates of hundred of films were cancelled and registration of producers became mandatory.



Shamim Ara

Government dissatisfied with these state of affairs in film industry, had earlier set up NAFDEC (National Film development Corporation) under 1919 Company Act in 1973. NAFDEC was to build cinemas, studios, import raw film, feature films, publish film magazine, make children films, install film sub-titling unit, hold film festivals here and abroad. NAFDEC constructed two cinemas in Islamabad and took one cinema at Lahore on long lease. These were largely film promotional efforts without profits. On objections of film trade, service charges of 7 % earned from import of raw film and feature films were waived by the Federal Government. NAFDEC was brutally crippled without any source of earning. It was later disbanded in 2002 and 14-kanal complex sold out for twenty eight crore rupees by the Ministry of Culture.

Meanwhile, video piracy with illegal, smuggled, uncensored and pirated video, CDs , DVDs and Cable TV was creeping into the film trade and destroying habit of film going. Cinemas constructed on prime real estate were turning into shopping centres, theaters and wedding halls. Producers lacking professional credentials turned to violence and sex. Film trade suffered. This went on for

about ten years. 1998 did see two god films: Syed Noor's *Choorian* and Samina Peerzada's *Inteha*.

In 2007, Syed Jamal Shah under Hunerkada arranged two-day film conference in Islamabad. Hunerkada was able to invite and assemble notable members from all disciplines of film making, nationwide. Problems and issues faced by film industry were discussed in details and submissions presented to the Prime Minister in person by Hunerkada film conference delegates. The delegates openly supported open import of Indian films to create a sense of healthy competition and encourage better films more cinemas .

It was outcome of Hunerkada Film conference organized by Syed Jamal Shah that by 2008-2009 film activities began in Pakistan. Creative talent from TV , music video, modeling, and TV commercials entered film trade with films like *Khuda Key Leye*, *Bol*, *Ramchand Pakistani*, *Waar*, *Mei Hoon shahid Afridi*, *Chameli*, *Jawani Phir Nahi Aani*, *Na Maloom Afraad*, *Moor*, *Dukhtar*, *Maalik*, *Wrong Number*, *Ho Mann Jahan*, *Bachana*, *Karachi Sey Lahore*, *Lahore Se Karachi* and *Manto*. Syed Jamal Shah, notable artist, earlier won fame as an actor in international film productions like British Channel 4 production *Traffic* and American production *K2*. His directorial debut *Badal: Revenge of the Worthless* released in 2016, was a bold and courageous attempt on Swat insurgency and won positive critical reviews. Some of new films have done well at the box office but they would have to be different from the past. With our limited budgets, we cannot make third-rate mediocre copies of others with



Sabiha Khanum

chorus dances (item numbers). Ban on Indian films was waived in 2007 as recommendations by Hunerkada Film Conference and this led to boom in new cinemas with Multiplexes and renovation of single screens and zero cinema entertainment tax policy. One can see a better, if not, glorious future for films.

After disbandment of NAFDEC, the role of promotion and

development of films now lies with PNCA. Film Club, liaison with the members of film industry, Film Archives (saving around five thousand films from being lost forever), Film Galleries, Film Museum, establishment of National Film Academy, holding film festivals here and abroad and liaison with the film industry are some of the goals assigned to PNCA.

Syed Jamal Shah, CE/DG , PNCA, has set up Film Division. One of the major priorities of Film Division would be to set up Film Finance Fund. This fund must support independent filmmakers in producing a diverse range of films which is integral to the promotion of films here. It would finance feature films, animation and documentaries. All this would inform and entertain, diversify film making approach, enhance technical and commercial viability and showcase our films abroad on a wider scale.

Many of the above assignments are film development and promotional activities and schemes which should not have commercial motives and they should not be calculated in terms of Rupees. Assignments like Film Finance Fund would take some time to yield results. One should not expect instant remedies and overnight bright sky with changes.

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