

Poster culture of bollywood essay sample

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Apart from developing an audio and video language to reach to the audience, the popular Hindi Cinema or Bollywood as it is popularly called, developed a unique visual language too, during the 1930s, through the magnificent, larger-than-life hand-painted film posters. The large banner paintings, either in the form of a collage, or over-sized cutouts of actors and actresses, were the first major tools to promote a film. Although, the exact origins are relatively unknown, but it is widely believed that the first movie to use a poster for its publicity was KALYAN KHAJINA (1924), whose poster was designed and painted by the Director, Baburao Painter himself. In the ‘Golden era of Bollywood’, when classics such as Mother India (1957) and Mughal-E-Azam (1960), were made, the hand-painted posters were the major way to promote a movie before and after its release.

These larger-than-life movie posters were created by talented film poster artistes, who laid the foundation for hand-painted poster culture. The hundreds of film poster artistes used a wide array of locally available colours and by mixing them with linseed oil, they created magnificent designs having broad visible brush strokes and with an interesting use of colours and typography made such posters which captivated the onlooker’s attention. These artistes attempted to capture the essence of the plot of the film and used to portray certain characters with specific colours and hues, for example:-pink was the colour of love and was used liberally on the leading couple, whereas blue was the colour given to the villain. Later, when the hindi cinema was drifting towards the action genre, these artistes started using bright and bold colours such as red to give a more dramatic look to the posters.

The bollywood film poster artistes not only played with colours but also added highlights of the such as the dancing figures of songs . During the 1970s a new graphic style was started which used bold exaggerated brush strokes , creating expressive image which suited the high emotional intensity of the films of that era. One of the major techniques was to potray the Angry Young Man look of Amitabh Bachchan. The superstar's young man image is widely credited to being created by these artistes who used a unique style, that of painting with a knife instead of a brush. Thus , it may not be wrong to say that Bollywood film poster artistes catapulted actors to superstardom and cult recognition, and gave bollywood films the grandeur that they continue to be identified with.

The hand-painted posters created by the bollywood film poster artistes , after being approved by the film production house, were translated into hundreds and thousands of film poster prints on low quality paper via the most commonly used printing techniques available-lithographic and later offset printing, and eventually sent out to distribution houses. Up until the 1950s, lithographic printing was the means to print the posters, which eventually gave way to offset printing up until 1980s. These printed posters were then distributed to bollywood film publicity agents as well as distributors and cinema theatre owners, who plastered them on every available inch of wall space. Theatre walls even used to have posters of upcoming films. These posters were the only and the most popular means to promote upcoming films. Apart from cinema houses, these posters also used to adorn the walls of barber shops, paan shops, public urinals, dhabas , etc.

And publicity was also done by hand push carts with posters on them and the man pushing the cart used to announce the names of films and the actors. Some better off cinema houses used cars with carrier and the posters used to be mounted atop the carrier. They even had full illumination during night hours and announcements were made over a mike. Over time these posters acquired regional elements to suit to the local population. As a “one size fits all” concept could not be applied all over the country, localization was necessary, from both a textual (writing the film title and starcast in local dialect) as well as graphical perspective (highlighting those characters that were most popular in that region). Most local distributors and cinema houses even designed re-release posters as these re-release poster prints typically announced the success of the film; such as awards or the number of weeks they have been running in cinema halls. And these prints also portrayed the characters with whom the local audience had started to relate to.

The poster artistes who created such masterpieces quickly shot to fame and many even attained a cult status. Some bollywood producers would agree to pay any amount deemed fair as a compensation of their work. Some of the well-known names are: Balkrishn Laxman Vaidya, Diwakar Karkare, Sheikh Rehman, Infact Internationally renowned painter Late M. F. Hussain started his career as a bollywood poster artiste. Hand-painted format of poster making continued in bollywood until the 1970s after which the cut-and-paste technique came into being. The poster creators would just cut the images of the actors from still photographs and then paste them in a collage fashion on a canvas board which used to have a hand-painted background, which was then eventually replicated in print. As this technique required less

creativity and took much less time, the posters transferred from hand-painted format to photographic format, this technique spread like wildfire throughout the 1980s.

The practice of plastering the posters on every available inch of wall space continued unabatedly until the late 1970s when the government imposed restrictions on outdoor advertising on walls. Areas (walls) on which posters had been plastered for decades were now declared no-bill zones, and the act made a punishable offence. And with this , publicity through posters saw a marginal decline in urban areas. The cut-and-paste method of poster making too phased out when leading publicity designer Rahul Nanda brought in digital technology in 1992, which eventually ended the old school publicity design and through the 1990s the hand painted posters disappeared from the streets of India. The vintage film posters of bollywood have travelled a long journey. From being the most popular means of promoting a film in the Golden Era of Bollywood , it has become an object of curiosity among art lovers, historians, antique collectors, interior decorators, etc.

Their kitschy bohemian images are a visual treat are accessible today via museums, exhibitions and commercial establishments such as restaurants, cafes, DVD stores , etc. These posters have come full circle; from being displayed outside cinema houses , tea-stalls, dhabas, etc to the priceless museums and art galleries of today. Although , initially this poster culture was not regarded as an art form because they were being used for commercial advertising, but today with the non-existence of hand painted poster, the poster culture has transferred into an art form which is now

taught across the world as a unique culture which has no parallel to it. The poster culture has also opened up new markets such as antique and home and commercial decor space. One of them being Mumbai based Hinesh Jethwani who runs an online store Indianhippy. com and sells hand-painted customised bollywood posters and accessories and furnishing items, etc. He has a team of 12 poster artistes of yesteryears , who were doing odd jobs because their work was not in demand in the film industry.

Today the industry does not need these hand-painted posters and the poster artistes but as Mr. Balkrishn Laxman Vaidya, owner of a studio in Mumbai recreating posters of classics point out , these posters are much in demand abroad , which is a sign of popularity of this art form. Although digital posters seemed to be the nails on the coffin of hand painted posters but with the release of certain posters in hand –painted fashion of movies such as Rockstar starring Ranbir Kapoor and Nargis Fakhri and Rowdy Rathore starring Akshay Kumar and Sonakshi Sinha, it cannot be said that this art form has totally died in bollywood. Afterall the vintage bollywood film posters hold the true historical essence of Hindi Cinema.

Other tools of promoting films of yester years

Lobby photo cards

These displayed in foyers and lobbies in cinema halls carrying photographic files that inform the prospective audience about the film.

Song booklets

These contains the lyrics of the film in Urdu and/or Hindi are no longer in use, but were used in 1960's. These were sold for a paisa or two.

A song booklet of Kaagaz Ke Phool, from 1959.

The designs on these objects differ significantly from film posters. The highly innovative and decorative art that embellish their body provides a visual treat.

Modern day bollywood movie posters are designed digitally using computer graphics software and printed on vinyl. Today's posters lack the bold use of colours , but with a focus on good design and concept and the creation of vivid “ real” posters by the digital printers , the posters of today have been welcomed as a mark of advancement and technology.

The latest addition to this advancement in technology is the creation of “ Motion Posters.” These are posters posted on social networking sites such as Youtube and Facebook. The pioneer in doing so has been Yashraj Films which released a motion poster of their forthcoming film Ek Tha Tiger starring Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif on 10th August 2011, although the film releases on 1st June 2012. The contents of these posters are shown in motion complete with a sound track and the entire presentation does not exceed more than a minute.

Aamir Khan also launched the motion poster of his much awaited film Talaash. Techniques and technology in poster making have changed drastically over the decades, but posters have remained as the first tool through which information about forthcoming films is presented to the audiences. Shah Rukh Khan's RAone released on 26th October but the first

look of the film was launched through posters in December 2010. Thus posters are one of the tools to promote the films even today.