Ahmad Bilal[*]

The Art of Handmade Movie Hoardings in Pakistan

Abstract

Handmade movie hoardings were made for the publicity of movies in the first five decades of Pakistani Cinema; however, with the introduction of computers, in 1990s, these were transformed into digital art works. In accordance with the changing technologies, publicity for cinema has also modernized, which is inspired from the old tradition and also trying to incorporate western design elements to generate a new visual language. These new visuals, made with the availability of digital media, has established the significance of handmade movie hoarding, as a powerful and vibrant visual art form. Indeed, those handmade hoardings had an indigenous style, which is still popular in Pakistan. It is used as a decorative element in number of restaurants and coffee shops in the big cities. This research paper is based on the hypothesis that handmade movie hoardings or their style of painting can be revived, as it is still a strong cultural form of South-Asia. It also highlights the new aesthetic of graphic design in cinema publicity as dictated by digital technology.

Introduction:

The United Nations while setting the Millennium Development Goals, in 2013, has placed culture in the center as, on the one side, it is a driving force for development through the strengthening of creative and cultural economy. On the other side, culture empowers skilled people to make their own sustainable path for growth (UNESCO 2013).

Hand-painted film hoarding is a dying cultural form, as a result of the downfall of Pakistan's established cinema and due to the technological transformations; the availability of digital billboards. The industry was producing an average of 100 films per year in the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps the largest of the Muslim world. At that time, the number of cinema houses was around 1,300. These cinema houses were decorated with manually painted huge hoardings, which were depicting the cast and action in the film. The names of the star cast along with the stylized name of the film were also part of the composition. The sizes of these film hoarding was extremely large, sometimes 200 feet in width and 40 feet in length, so this huge size is achieved by assembling smaller units, which were painted separately (Usman 2010).

The researcher, in the late 1990s, has witnessed the making of a few of these handmade movie hoardings; however, the art form has diminished in last decade or so. Dr Ejaz Anwar, famous Pakistani artist, chairing the session at research

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[*] Dr. Ahmad Bilal, Assistant Professor, College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

conference 2018, Kinnaird College, revealed that some of these movie hoarding artists were so unique and precise in their style that they were hired by the famous Pakistani artists, while involved in the commissioned work of making portraits of famous dignitaries. These paintings were later presented with the names of commissioned artists, rather than the name of hoarding artists who actually made these art works. He endorsed that their technique was exclusive and has an indigenous flavor, and these artists should be commissioned by the authorities, so that this art form could survive. Moreover, these art works should be restored and technique involved in the making of these larger than life display hoardings is needed to be documented; thus, it can be launched as a designed work of art compatible with the current trends of market. This research paper will identify the key billboard artists, and their work, to identify the significance of the movie hoarding: a colourful, original, and exclusive popular art form. The aim is to reemploy this art form, through a linkage with art and design institute, to achieve a sustainable model for these artists.

Literature Review:

Billboard art is a blend of art and advertising, which was first appeared in the late 1960s, when artists desired to take their work out of gallery and displayed it in public spaces (Gibbons 2005). The style of hand-made film hoarding is already having a liking in the public. A number of local tea spots and restaurants have been using the film images in interior and exterior. However, the survival of this art depends upon the possible sustainable model. Historically, this art form, was used to create awareness as it always had its roots in public. This medium can bring art closer to the community to raise social and political awareness (Gibbons 2005).

Entrepreneurship is considered to be business venture through innovative technologies. It is a procedure of "emergence" of a new organizational structure (Gartner, Bird, and Starr 1991). Entrepreneurship is defined as a creative process that can produce something valuable, by dedicating time and skill, which allows a financial benefit and individual freedom, while it also involves some financial and social risks (Hisrich, Peters, and Shepherd 2010). Davel & Fachin (2010) interprets entrepreneurship as both "a project based activity", as well as a "socially constructed events". Indeed, community based interactive events can allow a better understanding about the communal behaviors, as well as gives a better sense of specific individual's abilities and identities. "Social Entrepreneurship", is a kind of movement that can bring change, at the proletarian level, to address the social issues in an innovative and creative manner (Nicholls 2008). The idea of social entrepreneurship has been growing, in the last decade, and it has been considered as a mainstream subject in the universities (Bornstein 2007). This project involves the artists to apply their skill to find new possibilities with this medium as if at project based activity. It also enables them to develop a network within the social structures to redefine the context of their art.

Research Methodology

In the present project, the oral history method will be applied to get the life stories of the cinema hoarding artists related to Pakistani film industry, who used to paint hoardings. Most of them were working in the different cities of Punjab; once were

the hubs of cinema. For example, cities like Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, and Multan, and also small cities, such as Sargodha, Gujrat, Lalamusa, and Bahawalpur. Initially, the researcher traced handmade movie hoarding artists in Lahore, and find only two of the survivors. Riaz Mujahid, and Haji Muhammad Zafar Iqbal are two of the surviving painters of film advertising boards. However, both of them are practically not working anymore. Researcher just heard about Riaz and could not find him. Fareed Zafar, son of Zafar Iqbal, is running the studio of his father, as it has been converted to the digital medium. These painters and people related to them are interviewed for oral histories. This method is appropriate, because researcher wants to investigate the link between present and past, and reconstruct their shades of past into the present entrepreneurial realm for creating new economic spheres in Punjab. Oral history method is dynamic and interesting method of data collection, it reconstructs the past by testimonies of people (Reti, n.d.; The Library of Congress, 2015). It is an ongoing project; therefore, the researcher plans to get oral histories of the all available painters across the province in above mentioned cities, afterwards, to get more enrich understanding for the dying out purview of art in the Province.

Methods of Data Analysis

Mishler's approach to narrative analysis is appropriate for the present project because researcher is interested in the actual events and experiences of people related to this field of art, so they will be recounted in narrative (Breheny and Stephens 2015). The content of the narrative will be analyzed, firstly, at the "structural" level to achieve the chronological record of the history, previous happenings and experiences of the professional career, and secondly, it has the "evaluative" function that is to clarify the meanings of those happenings, experiences and practices to build the technical data (Labov 2008).

The chronological record and technical data about the set of skills involved in the making of these hoardings, both, will be beneficial for the learners, and will provide a base to develop a sustainable model for the future entrepreneurs. The structure or form of narrative will also be investigated because the researcher is more interested in the way in which the stories of these artists put together. Another concern is the performance of narrative; the interactional and institutional contexts, in which, narrative of these artists is created, recounted and consumed. The researcher's interest devolves in all the possible functions to understand the phenomenon and suggest the sustainable solutions in the age of digitization.

Manual Art Work for Films:

In sub-continent, films were publicized through posters from the very beginning of the 20th century, and later, with the development of modern cities particularly hoardings were considered to be the most effective outdoor media (Goswami 2017). Initially these posters and hoardings were hand-painted; however, by the late 1990s, digital media has been occupying the space of manual work, and most of the painters have lost their occupations. These painters were trained on job, and had no formal education, so the transformation of media had left them with no options.

Royal Park, Lahore is known for the offices of film distributors and exhibitors and used to have many art workshops of commercial artists; however, only a few of those art studios have survived. Zafar Art, at the second floor of a plaza at Lakshami Chowk, Royal Park, is one of those old studios which belongs to Zafar Iqbal; a painter who used to paint posters and boards for indoor display. He tells that instead of going to an art college, he learned the art from famous manual artist S. Khan. Iqbal started working under his teacher's supervision in 1968 and after three years of practice he was skilled enough to paint on his own. He takes pride in the hand painted work, as his painted indoor board for the film "*Babul Sadqay Teray*" were appreciated by the famous star Sultan Rahi, and it is still displayed at star's home. The style was so popular that he was commissioned for making portraits of some army officers in Kuwait. In 1970s and 80s, the volume of work was so large that Iqbal had to design for 8 to 10 films at a time, and charging more than 5000 rupees for each art work. According to him, at that time, he never felt that the film industry could ever collapse. It was not the digital media, but the downfall of the film has squeezed the opportunities for the film painters.

Farid Zafar, son of Iqbal, is a digital designer, unlike his father has never painted any of the boards and also has no interest in learning the manual art work. He learnt the digital designing from one of the students of his father, and making designs, which are printed on flexes, for films, theatre and television plays. Farid is using visual vocabulary from shutter stock and looking for international art works, which is acceptable to the film producers (Slide 1). Iqbal explains, while showing one of his art work for the film "*Maa Puter*" (Slide 2), that he followed the director's instructions and created a symbolic figure of mother against the rural backdrop. The red costume, covered head and waving of hand is representing the mother's appeal for help. However, that kind of symbolic representation and use of thematic colours is missing in modern digital art works. Digital designers have not been taking any inspiration from the traditional hand painted work, so their work is similar to international art works and has no significant style. Every designer is using pictures, and that is selling.

Munir Mani, S Rahi, M Younas, J Arfi and Sarwar are a few of the former painters of the larger than life film hoardings, who were practicing and also teaching their students (Usman 2010). Ustaad Ajmal, Ustaad Arif and Sarfraz Iqbal (aka S. Iqbal) were also mentioned as survivors, as Iqbal had also designed the art work of the movie Zinda Bhaag (2013) (Imran 2017). However, the researcher does not find any of these painters in Royal Park, as they are not in the profession of design anymore. In early 1990s, as an art student, some of these painters can be observed working in the vicinity. They paint huge hoardings to decorate the cinema building, or boards to be placed behind some vehicle for advertising purpose. So images of the prominent stars were shown, mostly in high emotions, to depict the main action in the film. In case of male figures the emphasis was given to body muscles. Female figures were painted in full and mostly objectified, with some part of the illustration could be in cutout. Visually portraits of the male actors shown some skill and style, while the female figures, in comparison, revealed the feeble understanding of anatomy. The title of the film was written in stylized calligraphy, while the name of director, producer and star cast were also written on these boards.

Tin sheets mounted on the wooden frames were their canvas. They divided their subject into pieces, drew each part on a separate piece of tin sheet, and joined all these parts after completion of the painting. For example, a gun would have painted it into three or four parts and then joined these parts to achieve a final shape. The final touches are given after the hoarding was placed at the specific location. First, they used to apply a specific graph on the given object, with two types of square boxes. One, showing the size of the tin sheet; second, the particular portion of the object. Sometimes a face was drawn on two tin sheets, so it was divided into two big boxes and then these two boxes into smaller blocks. Second step was to apply white primer on the tin sheet, and to draw the objects in outlines (Plate 3). It is of interest for the art students that these painters divided the drawn object into small portions on the basis of colour shades. For example a face drawn by a hoarding artist would not only have the lines depicting the form of eyes, nose or lips, but also showing a lot of lines, dividing the object into small portions. Third step, is to make different shades of colours from pigments, mixed with varnish oil, which was to make the colours bright and durable (Usman 2010). Fourth step, the application of flat colours in the forms appeared due to dividing lines. These colour patches would not make sense whilst viewing from nearby; however, overall picture look dynamic from a distance. Step five is to add details. Sixth is to join the tin sheets and to place it at the location. Seventh is to apply final strokes on the installed board. Indeed, it is a tricky art with no space for mistakes.

Hoarding design is an indigenous art, and has a nostalgic value. Recently, some of the cafes, due to its popular appeal, used the film theme in their interior (Shah 2017). One of these places has a huge wall painted with film images (Plate 3) of 1980s (Asif 2015). Maula Jatt (Sultan Rahi) and Noori Nat (Mustafa Qureshi), two characters from the film *Maula Jatt* (1979), are most prominent on the wall, along with the name of film Maula Jatt in Urdu. Sultan Rahi, painted by one of the billboard artist, is shown in Plate 4. The deterioration in the artistic understanding of form could be realized with the comparison of these two portrait of the Sultan Rahi. The billboard artists were much more conscious about the drawing; expressions, facial features and continuity, and tried to communicate the positioning of the protagonist and antagonist in the film through their art works.

Conclusion:

In the recent times, the cultural elements are converting into commercial products, and opening the possibilities of new job profiles in the creative sector, that means, creative entrepreneurs can evolve their artistic as well as managerial skills (Ellmeier 2003). Creative entrepreneurs are the main source to develop the creative economy. It is vital for the creative economy of Pakistan to develop case studies to gather contextualized data about professional practices and creative entrepreneurs (UNESCO 2005). Some efforts have been made to improve the financial status of the cinema billboard artists; for example, in 2010, an exhibition based on the work of four of the hoarding painters, was held by the Karachi School of Arts in collaboration with Gallery6 at Islamabad ; however, a sustainable model to earn them the status of entrepreneurs was not yet achieved (The News 2010). This art have all the possibility to be transferred on the smaller scale gift items; for example, frames, stands, and pots, and its thematic

possibilities can also be explored with interior decoration, like doors, chairs, and other elements in furniture. This art needs to be contextualized in a new manner, which will be helpful for these skilled people and for art and design institutes to incorporate the local traditions in the main stream curriculum.

Slide 1 (A still from video interview of Iqbal)
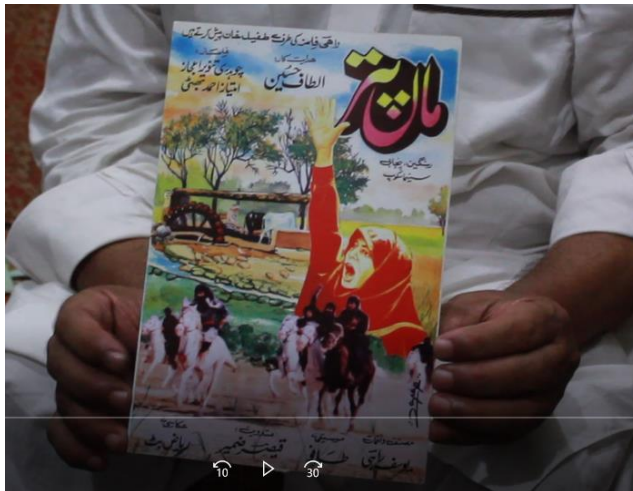
Slide 2 (A still from video interview of Iqbal)

Slide 3 (Asif 2015)

Slide 3 (detail)

Slide 4

Photos by Rahat Dar.(Imran 2017)

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