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Representation of Pashtun Culture in Pashto Films Posters: A Semiotic Analysis

Abstract:

The purpose of the research is to investigate the representation or misrepresentation of Pashtun culture through the study of different signs and to inspect that how these signs relate to Pashtun culture by employing semiotics as a tool. To achieve the goal, twelve distinct Pashto film posters that were published during 2011-2017 were selected and categorized under poster design, dressing, props and titles, as these aspects act as signs for depicting cultural insights. The research was guided by the Pierce triadic model for analyzing the type of signs and their interpretation. Various iconic, indexical and symbolic signs were discovered representing the Pashtu cultural traits through certain signs, e.g., traditional dressing, chivalry, male dominance and women segregation, etc. On the other hand, certain extraneous signs were explored, distorting the purity of Pashtun culture by utilizing various signs that were interpreted as referring to violence and vulgarity, which are not acceptable in real Pashtun culture.

Key Words:

Pashtun Culture, Pashto, Films, Semiotic Analysis

Introduction

It is in the nature of human beings to infer meaning out of every word they hear, every object they see and every act they observe. It is because whatever we hear, see or observe may suggest deeper and broader interpretation than its explicit representation. All of these can be taken as distinct signs, which is anything that indicates or is referred to as something other than itself. Signs hold the meaning and convey it to the interpreter for inferring meaning out of it; for example, the traffic lights direct the traffic without using verbal means of communication, i.e. written or spoken words but still manage to convey the required information through the use of certain signs in the form of colorful lights. Moreover, a packed box with an image of glass over it signifies that it must be handle with care. The image of glass does not explicitly convey the required message but acts as a sign through which we infer the meaning of the object's fragility. Hence, the concept of sign can be understood by considering the two parts which constitutes a sign, i.e., the image, word or object and the meaning it conveys as Abrams (1999) suggests in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* that: A sign consists of two inseparable components or aspects, the signifier (in language, a set of speech sounds, or of marks on a page) and the signified (the concept, or idea, which is the meaning of the sign. (p.280).

Every object we see around, and every word we hear is a kind of sign which encodes information and requires an understanding of it. Pierce lays out the importance of signs by suggesting that; 'we think only in signs' (Peirce, 1931-58, p.302). Most of these signs acquire a meaning by associating them with

a certain idea. With only the knowledge of those notions, the codes can be deciphered because signs, either verbal or non-verbal, may not generate or communicate explicit meanings. The concepts that are associated with signs are not merely created by the interpreter in a vacuum; instead, the meanings already exist and come from the pre-established cultural ideas. Hence, culture plays a vital role in the meaning generation and is the signifying system, e.g., in non-verbal signs, the color red symbolizes danger, passion, excitement, purity and love in eastern and western culture. But South African culture associates it with color of mourning (Wang,

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2015). Moreover, if we take verbal signs, the word “*ghairat*”, which is the Pashto translation of the word “valor”, connotes a different and much wider concept in the context of Pashtun culture than its English translation because of the massive cultural influence.

Signs and symbols are considered as one of the major components of the culture since they are predominantly culturally constructed and are embedded in its various elements. To understand the complexities of any culture, we peep into their literature, architecture, dress code, religion and media, etc. All of these elements incorporate signs which provide an interpretation for the understanding of the particular culture. For example, English literature, through the use of different signs, gives us an insight into the English culture, the Mughal architecture incorporates different Islamic signs which depicts the prominent status of religion in their culture, the *keffiyeh* is the headdress worn by Arabs, is a sign which indicates their association to Middle-East culture. But apart from all these elements, media has gained the potential of orchestrating society as a result of the enormous growth in the technology sector in the twentieth century. It has become a powerful and influential source for representing and molding perceptions about a culture by merging different signs in its various genres. Riddle (2009) explored the cultivation theory, which surfaces the impact of media text in shaping perceptions about social realities. According to his study, extended exposure to TV makes the viewers believe the information presented on the small box and hence, their perceptions are heavily determined by the portrayal. In the same way as Riddle’s study, other forms of media can also be considered to perform a similar function.

Media conveys the message to the audience in two different ways, i.e., electronic or print media, which employ the signs of distinct nature. Electronic media encodes through visual or audio-visual signs, while print media communicates through words or still images. Besides other genres of media, a film with its audio-visual signs acts as a window to the understanding of culture effectively. Films are chiefly made to provide entertainment with information integrated into it. In Pakistan, the rapid growth of electronic media has also paved its way for the film industry to expand its scope and influence. However, Pakistani cinema represents its own culture but has always remained under the influence of Bollywood and Western media. With such domination of the alien cultures and depiction of something which does not fit within the margins laid down by Islam and society, Pakistani cinema has faced downfalls and an enormous rate of criticism.

Similarly, the posters of the films as Gray (2010) states are the “pre-texts” of the particular film, that are capable of rendering the content and theme of the film in an eloquent manner. Posters come under the umbrella of print media as it encodes the information in the form of visual images and text inscribed on the posters, which impart a set of clues to decipher the subject matter of the film. The main function of posters is to grab the attention of the audience, and they serve as a vehicle to provoke the viewers to watch the film as they become curious to find out the complete story. Besides advertising, posters also incorporate signs and symbols which illustrate the cultural dimensions. Hence, with this vital and crucial power of representation and building perception regarding culture, poster designers deliberately or accidentally also make use of such signs, which results in the portrayal of an alien and fallacious culture.

In this research study, considering the impact of posters on the minds of viewers, we have intended to find out the ways in which Pashto film posters sketch the culture of Pashtuns through the use of signs.

Statement of the problem

The posters being the pre-texts, functions as a salient key for an open interpretation of the film, hence, hold the capacity of depicting variant patterns of culture. Pashto film posters impact the image of the culture as the poster scheme can either contradict the real culture or is relevant with the acceptable traits of Pashtun culture, which needs to be explored.

Research Questions

The following Research questions are constructed in order to achieve and justify the objectives of my research study:

1. What are the different signs used for the representation of Pashtun culture in Pashto film posters?
2. How these signs in Pashto film posters correlate or contrast with the Pashtun culture?

Literature Review

Culture is a term that is widely discussed, and a lot of work has been done in exploring it as it is a multifaceted and ambiguous term in its definition and concept. Primarily, the word culture with its modern technical and anthropological meaning was established in English by Tylor in 1871 in his book *Primitive Culture* (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Up till now, different anthropologists and social sciences' scholars have defined it in different ways from one or other perspective to merge the broad spectrum which culture encompasses under one singular definition. Culture, according to Lindsay, Robins and Terrell (1999), includes all those aspects through which we identify ourselves as member of a certain group. It makes us identical with our group members and distinguishes us from the out-group. Similarly, Spencer & Oatey (2008) argued that culture is a fuzzy and opaque concept that includes all basic assumptions, values and also the beliefs and social conventions that are shared by the members of the society. One of the most concise and comprehensive definitions of culture from a descriptive perspective is suggested by (Tylor 1920, p. 1) as "culture and civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as the member of the society".

The culture of Pakistan is quite rich and complex that has a history that goes back to ancient civilizations. Weiss (1886, p. 21) identifies that Pakistan is one of the very few countries that were founded "to fulfil a religious ideal" to create a better place for Muslims of the Indian-subcontinent to live their life according to the teachings of Islam. Jalibi (2008, p. 06) puts it as "Pakistani culture is actually grown on the Islamic values and norms." Amir (2016) summarizes that "Our culture is Faiz and Faraz as much as Friday prayers and Eid celebrations; it is *Ajrak* and *Soosi* as much as *hijab* and *sherwanī*; it is Qawwali and *tappayas* much as *naat* and *majlis*".

Pakistan is a multicultural state which is comprised of numerous ethnic groups. Pashtuns being one of them, have a rich and distinct culture. They are densely populated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan along with other small non-Pashtun ethnic groups, constituting almost one-third of the province. The term Pashtun is spelled in different ways as identified by Tarzi and Lamb (2011, p. 02), including "Pakhtun, Pakhtoon, Pashtoon, Pakhtoon and rarely as Pukhtun" depending on the speaker's dialect. While mostly non-Pashtun Pakistanis prefer to use the term Pathan for referring to a Pashtun.

The culture of Pashtuns is embellished with unique characteristics that make it different from the other ethnic groups' cultures. It is predominantly governed by Pashtunwali, which according to Rzehak (2011), can be translated as "Pashtunness" or the way of Pashtuns. It is more elaborately defined by Karrer (2012), who proposes that Pashtunwali is an ethically correct standard of living in the Pashtun culture. It is an unwritten code that contains certain rules and regulations, laws and customs, notions and values that are considered compulsory to follow in order to lead an honorable Pashtun life.

With the advent of modern technology, media too has deepened its roots in the world around expressing and portraying the culture as well as building perceptions about a particular culture. There can be print media or electronic media. The poster is one form of print media. With the foundation and establishment of cinema, the requirement of promoting the films also become necessary. Film posters are one of the significant ways for advertising and selling the film. Therefore, the film posters are designed in such a way to grab the attention of viewers and to fulfil the task of advertising the particular film.

Film poster as Burty (2013) suggests, incorporate certain signs which illustrate and direct the thoughts of an audience for deciphering the theme of the film before watching it. In the context of Hollywood movies, Glad (2011) proposes that with the social and technological changes, the poster designs also have emerged along with the evolution in films.

Shahid, Bokil & Dharmalingam (2015), after analyzing the Bollywood film posters, concluded that film posters mirror the manifoldness and diversity of culture, traditions, religion, and social status of their audience through all the elements integrated into the poster design. Similarly, film posters communicate through signs as they perform the task of representation through those signs used in the poster layout.

Methodology

The study of the research falls in the domain of semiotics as it has analyzed the representation of Pashtun culture through different signs and symbols used intentionally or unintentionally in Pashto film posters. In order to achieve the research objectives, we have selected twelve different posters released during 2011-2017 for analyzing the signs encoded. The data is collected through purposive sampling, i.e. the posters that had rich material in the form of signs representing culture as required for the research study are selected.

We have arranged them thematically under four major themes, i.e. poster design, dressing, props and titles. Furthermore, in order to avoid clutter, we have made a cluster of posters for every theme rather than taking and interpreting each poster individually. The study is guided by a triadic model of signs, drawn by American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce for analyzing the signs and their relation to the signification and meaning it. Peirce presented his own model contrasting Saussure's theory of signifier and signified. He proposed three parts of a sign, i.e., Representamen, Object and Interpretant.

The representamen [R] is the terminology used by Peirce for the physical form that signs take. It acts as the signs vehicle or signifier as in the Saussurean dyadic model. The object [O] serves like the signified of the Saussure theory, also termed as referent, is the part that is beyond the sign but to which it refers. Peirce laid more importance on the interpretation [I] of the sign than the signification of it, which is the sense or perception the interpreter built out of the sign. This can be understood through the example of the female silhouette painted on the door of a room [R], which refers to the women [O], through which one can interpret that the male entrance is not allowed or the room only belongs females [I].

Moreover, Peirce also gave a distinction between the type of signs on the basis of the nature of signs by presenting three different categories, i.e.,

1. Iconic signs
2. Indexical signs
3. Symbolic signs

Iconic signs can be recognized as being similar to the object or what it signifies, for example, photographs, portraits, statues, onomatopoeic words etc. The indexical signs can be fairly distinguished for having a causal link between the sign and the referent; for example, the ringing doorbell suggests the presence of someone at the door, the human footsteps in sand conveys that somebody has gone through the same path etc. While symbolic signs are only deciphered by virtue of their interpretation. There lies an arbitrary relation between sign and object; rather, they are learned either through culture or observation; for example, the pause sign has no resemblance or relation to the function it performs, but they are learned through observation.

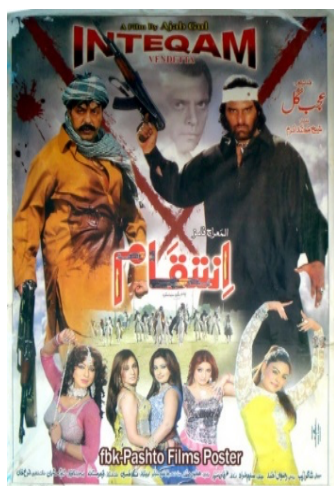
Analysis and Discussion

In the selected posters, there are multiple characters of both genders shown together with variant gestures and attitude that import meanings to be decoded. The color scheme, background and layout of the characters also lead us to suggest significant meanings. The poster designs as whole acts as a symbolic sign, which generates abstract ideas and conveys the meaning only by virtue of its interpretation. The images of the characters, however, are the iconic signs, as they resemble their referent or object.

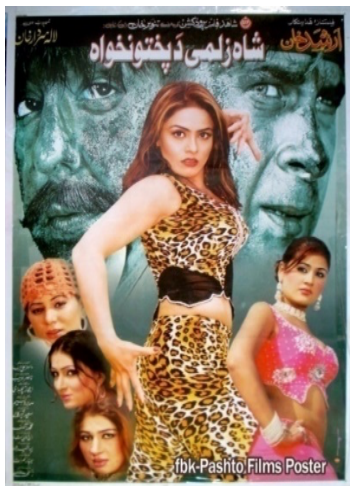
The layout of the characters is taken as a symbolic sign, which gives us an insight into the social patterns of Pashtun culture. The gestures exhibited and the facial expressions worn by the characters portrayed on

posters are taken as indexical signs, as they refer to the attitude of the characters and hold a causal link for the mood and feelings of the characters portrayed.

Similarly, the color scheme and the background of the posters are significant sign for the representation of culture. Moreover, it also sketches out the theme of the film or the genre to which it belongs. The color used in the posters is a symbolic sign, which leads to an interpretation of it that is socially constructed.



Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3

In Poster 1 and 2, the male characters are centered and made prominent in the entire poster scheme. The female characters in poster 1, though wearing radiant attire, are moved aside towards the bottom, while in Poster 2, though they are presented at the top, they have occupied less space and are at the back of the prominent male character. However, if we analyze poster 3, the female characters in attractive bright colors are centralized in the layout scheme, which makes them prominent. The alluring hues of the dressing at the dull background make the female characters noticeable at first glance. The layout of the first two posters is the representamen, which suggests or refers to the notion of male dominancy, strong control and supremacy over females. This is interpreted as the representation of the foremost characteristic of Pashtun society. The Pashtun culture is mounted on patriarchal system where women are submissive to men and are not supposed to indulge in severe and solemn issues. Hence, male members of society have a prominent role and are supposed to lead the female members of the family. This characteristic of Pashtun culture can be vividly understood through the layout of the poster. However, in poster 3 the layout refers to the notion of using females as nothing more than as mere decoration pieces just for the sake of attraction in order to grab the attention of the audience. Even the title is moved to the top of the poster contrasting the other two posters in order to portray the full image without any obstruction. This is interpreted as the misrepresentation of the Pashtun culture, where women are dependent on men and are considered as the honour of men. They pay respect to their family men by gracing shawls and by covering their faces in the outside setting. Women of Pashtun culture take great pride in keeping themselves modest and prudent.

In poster 1 at the centre, certain characters are shown riding horses holding sticks and weapons advancing in the form of a large group representing their chivalric attitude and preparation for the encounter or a battle. This symbolic sign is interpreted as a signification of the martial valour in Pashtuns and their readiness to fight against inequity and immorality in unity. However, in poster 2, misrepresentation is interpreted through the signs in the form of male characters shown dragging and pulling a woman forward in an outside setting, which signify their anger towards her and the situation. While Pashtunwali demands respect and honor towards

women, in which the attitude of disrespect in front of other male members is not justified even if the women are subjected to some punishment because of an immoral act.

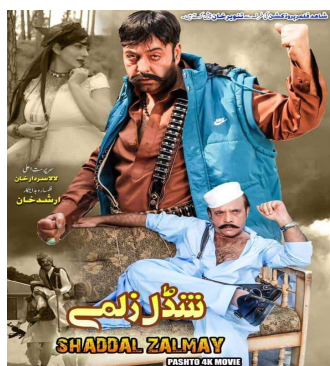
The gestures made by the male characters in all three posters show their aggressive and violent nature. In poster 1 and 3, the male characters have severe and rough facial expressions with a harsh look in their eyes, which are the representamen of their anger, violence and fierce attitude. This is interpreted as a misrepresentation of a Pashtun culture where readiness to fight back is expected in the required situation but on the other hand, nobility and peace forms the code of Pashtunwali. In poster 2, the body language of the male character represents his strength and power that he holds as being only man in the society, which is further highlighted by his black dress that mainly signifies power and authority. Moreover, the presence of an eagle on the top of the male character also adds up to the representation of his power and independent nature. This display refers to the reality of male being the dominant and authoritative gender in Pashtun culture, where he is seen as the epitome of power and plunging into fights for the cause of protecting family honor. While the female characters are shown in colorful attire with humble and innocent looks, which correlates with their compromising nature and delicacy. These gestures signify the behavior that is mainly associated with genders and is culturally constructed as men are expected to be warriors and dominating, while females are expected to be humble and polite in manner. But their body language in the poster on the other hand, represents their carefree nature towards the violence, which is opposite to their counterparts, who are busy in revengeful activities and are shown in dominance. This is interpreted as the misrepresentation of a Pashtun culture where women, though they cannot accompany the male members of the family in war or battle but still manages to help them in many other ways by staying at homes.

Suppose we analyze the color scheme of the posters and the pattern of the background it also signifies meanings. In both posters 1 and 2, the misty grey and dusty background signifies the battlefield and war like situation. The red color in poster 1 is used not only for highlighting the title but it is also used in cross mark and the blood spot in the background which signify violence, bloodshed and killing. It signifies the love for violence in Pashtuns which is a total misrepresentation and misconception about Pashtuns. While in Poster 3, for seeking further attention towards the female characters the background is made black and white which make the female characters prominent in the poster which acts as a representamen. This too adds up to the misrepresentation of Pashtun culture where women conceals their self rather than exposing for drawing attention.

Dressing

Dressing is an important part of the material culture as it is visible and easy to detect, but it has many meanings concealed. Through culture, one constructs and expresses not only the personal identity but also the customs, values and traditions that make up their culture. The dressing is a window to the cultural patterns as Perani and Wolf (1999) asserted the importance of dress in defining and sketching culture because of its association and affiliation with the cultural norms. Manwa and Ndamba (2011) are of the view that a culture is a form of non-verbal communications which speaks to the interpreter in a way or another. In a country like Pakistan, where religion is of primary importance and has a strong impact on the material and non-material culture, the dressing acts as a sign or code that holds information and details about culture a religion. Similarly, in Pashtun culture, dressing is a significant tool for displaying the codes and values of Pashtunwali and Islam.

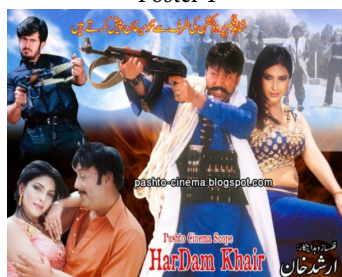
As per Pierce distribution of signs, dressing can fall in the category of both symbolic and indexical signs. As in Pashtun culture, the men and women's attire is completely different from one another. This distinction in dressing makes it an indexical sign, which refers to the traits of masculinity and femininity. But the way the dressing is done performs as a symbolic sign as it refers to or symbolizes the personality, the social class, the personal identity etc., that is depicted through the way dress is carried out.



Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3



Poster 4

In all the selected four posters, the basic dressing of prominent male characters is in accordance with the traditional dress code of Pashtun culture. However, there are certain deviations from the standard in the dressing in one way and the other, which signify particular meanings and refer to the misinterpretation of Pashtun culture. If we analyze the posters, the male characters though shown wearing *kameez shalwar* but the collar and sleeves buttons of the shirt or *kameez* are left undone. This symbolic sign suggests the barbarous behavior, characterless disposition, rebellious conduct and unconcerned attitude of men towards the social conventions, which in a way is referent to the misrepresentation of Pashtun culture or Pashtunwali, that demands dignity and nobility in character, and Pashtun men takes the responsibility of their families.

In poster 1, the male character is shown sitting on the sofa wearing light blue *kameez shalwar* with folded cuffs and a white kufi or *topay*, which is the traditional cap of Pashtuns, but it tilted at one side that gives the impression of his vile and obnoxious nature which is a culturally constructed perception for such deviation from the standard style of wearing kufi. He is shown wearing *chappal* or *saplay*, which are the traditional footwear and mostly worn by Pashtuns, as mentioned in chapter 2. This symbolic sign signifies the connection and association of the character to the culture of the society.

The blue colored dressing of the prominent male characters in poster 1 and poster 3 acts as a representamen here. Blue signifies calmness and confidence, as proposed by Fagerholm, C. (2009). It is interpreted through the signification that male characters in the posters have a calm and composed nature on the inside but are compelled by the situation or circumstances to be vicious and violent. As in Pashtun society, men who are not commanding and authoritative are considered disgraceful and shameless.

The male character at the bottom background of poster 1 and the character on the right of poster 3 and are shown wearing grey and white colored, stripped turban, which is the part of Pashtun culture. Culturally, it signifies honor, respect and authority. Respectable Pashtun men in command who have the power to make decisions e.g. land owners, wise men leading a tribe often wears a turban or *Patkay* as in Pashto as mentioned in chapter 2. But the different ways of wrapping turban works as indexical signs that leads us to different

interpretations. In poster 1, the cloth of the turban is swirled around the forehead and tied in such a way that one piece of fabric is draped down at front while the other makes a diagonal tie above the head. This type of wrapping signifies honor, dignity and status in Pashtuns. While in poster 2, the way the character throws one of the ends of the turban cloth on his left shoulder is the representamen which refers to his rough and rebellious attitude towards cultural traditions that can be interpreted as the misrepresentation of a Pashtun culture where honor and dignity in character are considered part and parcel of Pashtunwali. Moreover, the stains of fresh blood on his shirt have left a prominent mark that signifies his aggressive nature and his attitude that is inclined towards violence and bloodshed. Similarly, the second character to his left is having a bandage covering his forehead, which is an indexical sign having a causal relationship with its meaning of curing and concealing the wound or damage, which too is interpreted to be caused as a result of his violent temperament. There is a misrepresentation of Pashtun culture as this culture is not about violence or foul plays rather hospitality and peace.

The second character in poster 3 is portrayed in a western outfit wearing jeans. As culture is dynamic, so it tends to move towards modernization and, more specifically in the Pakistani context, towards westernization with the passage of time. Western clothing is socially acceptable in urban areas of Pashtun society. It is a symbolic sign, which refers to the association of a person to an educated, new-fashioned and modern environment, which is a socially constructed perception. Despite his association with the modern literate background, he is depicted as being inclined towards violence and war.

All the male characters in the selected posters are portrayed with aggressive looks and holding weapons, standing with intense attitude, but the male character in poster 4 is neither displaying any threatening expressions nor exhibiting any signs of being indulged in any combat. He is portrayed as having passive and non-authoritative nature as compared to the female character in the poster, which is considered non-masculine and womanish in Pashtun culture. The pink color signifies delicacy, and softness is associated with females. The dress color here is the symbolic sign that is attributed to the soft nature of the character, which in Pashtun culture is considered unmanly.

While the dressing of female characters also imports meanings but they by some means disassociate with Pashtun culture. All the female characters in the selected posters are dressed in shiny, glittery and vibrant attire, but on the other hand, the clothes are quite revealing, vulgar and skintight. Such scantily clad female characters are portrayed for captivating and grabbing the attention of the audience, which represent their bold and outrageous nature and hence demonstrate the misrepresentation of a Pashtun culture where females don't wear exposing and bold clothes neither the Pashtun culture gives a permit for vulgarity and indelicacy.

In poster 4, the female character at the center of the design is holding a weapon settled in attitude at her right shoulder. She is wearing men's attire with a pink turban gracefully swirled around her forehead, and the remaining clothing is draped in front of her left shoulder. The dressing and expressions on her face are unique in terms of being distinct and dissimilar to other female characters in all 4 posters. Her contrasting costume is representamen of her rebellious and alienated stance. This symbolic sign can be interpreted as referring to the idea that women in Pashtun culture lack freedom and independence, which make very few of them rebellious towards the cultural norms. They associate liberty with male dressing, so in order to feel free from cultural ties, they opt for wearing men's attire, but such women are unacceptable in Pashtun culture. However, on the other hand, the female character is shown wearing a pink turban, and her sleeves are buttoned, which signifies that despite her mannish dress, she cannot be cruel or harsh like men because of her feminine nature.

Props

Props are all the objects in the films or portrayed on posters, which are used by the characters or displayed in the background on purpose. The prop acts as the ad-on or the extensions of the character's nature or the type of situation. It enables the viewers to develop subconscious cues of how to perceive or feel about the character

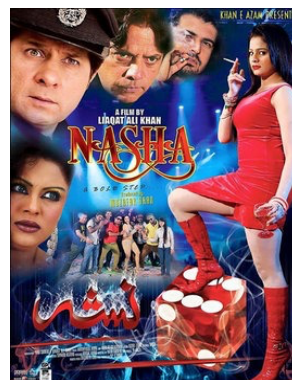
in a particular context. The props manipulated in the poster designs can be taken as symbolic signs as their use hide meanings for something else, which is beyond the sign.



Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3

As most Pashto films are based on action theme, the props displayed in posters are mainly weapons and tools of armory, as observed in the posters selected for all themes. In poster 1, the prominent male character is shown holding a heavily bloodstained chopper in his hand and with anger oozing out of his face. The chopper is the prop, which acts as a representamen that refers to fights and bloodshed. The two male characters are holding Kalashnikov rifles, pointing at the target with an aggressive and wicked attitude. Their body language represents here the power that the characters feel by holding the weapons firmly. Likewise, the central male character in poster 2 is also shown holding Kalashnikov aiming at the target with threatening gestures. He is also shown wearing a bullet belt around his shoulder, all ready to be a part of the massacre. All of these characters are presented with props that represent brutality and ferocity. It is a misrepresentation where violence is shown as the part n parcel of a Pashtun culture that is a contrasting idea to Pashtunwali and its standards.

The central male character in poster 2 is wearing a brownish maroon ring, which also acts as a symbolic sign. In Western culture, a man's ring proposes his marital status. But in Pashtun culture, rings with bulky stones are worn mostly by men, which is culturally associated with masculinity and strength. While the female character at the back is shown wearing a nose pin or *pezwan* as in the Pashto language, which is a traditional ornament. It is associated with femininity and worn to enhance beauty hence represents their feminine, delicate and fragile nature.

In poster 4, the female character is shown standing in an unethical dressing holding a glass of red wine in one hand, which matches the color of her dress and a cigarette in the other hand. But as compared to the male character at the back of the poster, who is shown smoking the cigarette and puffing the smoke in the air, the female character is holding an unlit cigarette and is not even sipping the wine. The difference in utilizing the props signifies distinct meanings and interpretations. Smoking and drinking is considered a wrongful act and is not acceptable in Pashtun society irrespective of gender. But in the poster, the male character is shown with a lighted up cigarette which signifies his courage to break the cultural norms and is not anxious about getting stigmatize. However, the female character is holding an unlit cigarette, which signifies that though she is holding these drugs in her hands but does not has the bravery and audacity to indulge her in this objectionable act. An immoral act done by a Pashtun woman not only stigmatize her but also bring dishonor and disrespect to the whole family. Therefore, in Pashtun culture, men may collect the courage to be rebellious, but women are tied more firmly to the culture limitations, as her dishonor is a family dishonor.

Moreover, the female character is shown standing with bright red dice at her feet which too is matching with her dress color. The dice is representamen, which refers, in the context of the title *Nasha*, which means drugs, to the tool used in gambling and other acts of wagering money. Gambling is a game of chance, which is an unethical and unjust way of spending and earning money. It is a social calamity, which demands to pour money deliberately into nothing. Pashtun culture is based on Islam and Pashtunwali, which do not allow such wastage of money or property as it leads to many social problems complications. This here is a misrepresentation of Pashtun culture as there is no place for gambling in it, while the one who participates in gambling is considered to lack moral and ethical strength.

Title

The title of the movie is the verbal text, which connotes the theme of the film in a word or phrase. They are the symbolic signs, which are usually formulated out of social context and can only be deciphered through knowledge of its cultural association for interpretation.



In poster 1, the title of the film is mentioned twice, once in Roman English at the top of the poster design and then in the middle of the poster in the Pashto writing system. *Inteqam* is the Pashto translation of the word “revenge”. The title is written in prominent font with red color, which grabs the attention of the audience and refers to violence, bloodshed, killing etc. Even the script *Inteqam* has Kalashnikov and bullets inside the font, referring to the violent theme of the film depicted through the title and its design. *Inteqam* holds a wider concept than its English meaning, i.e. revenge that is culturally constructed. In Pashtunwali, the concept of revenge or *inteqam* is quite noticeable. It is synonymous with the concept of *Badal*, which I have discussed in chapter 2. *Badal* or *revenge* is the characteristic of Pashtun culture where any harm brought to the family is retaliated, but the poster is exaggerating the concept of *badal* by portraying violence for taking revenge at any cost, which is not the fragment of Pashtun culture or Pashtunwali.

The title in poster 2 is written in Pashto writing system in bold font with red and blue color, which makes it prominent on the background. But the title is only mentioned in the Pashto language, unlike poster 1 where it is also written in Roman English, which suggests that the film poster is meant to grab the attention of only the Pashtun audience. The title *ujrati* is related and parallel to the concept of *badal*. *Ujrati* refers to “someone who is hired to fulfill the task that one cannot accomplish”. Usually the dispute of revenge or *badal* in Pashtun culture is settled through the decision made by a group of elected wise men i.e., *jarga*, in order to avoid violence, as mentioned in chapter 2. But sometimes, the family takes on the task of taking revenge in their hands which ends up in a chain of murders and episodes of violence. However, very occasionally, the affected family seeks someone to take revenge on their behalf by offering them a handsome amount of money.

In poster 3, the title is written at the middle bottom in bright yellow color on black background, which instantly catches the eyes of the audience. Yellow in combination with black, according to Fagerholm (2009) is mostly used in order to give some warning or to aware of any kind of threat or risk. The title *badmashi ba manay* which means “acknowledge the false power” also refers to the peril and hazards as a result of violence associated with the illegal and forceful authority of founts and criminals. This is interpreted as a

misrepresentation because the title is contributing in distorting the image of Pashtuns by representing something, which is unacceptable and denied in real Pashtun culture.

In poster 4, the title in Roman English is moved to a similar position, towards the bottom, as in other posters. The bright red color with white outlined, bold font makes it distinguishable on the background. The title *zama da kharho jamo yara* acts as a symbolic sign which literally means or refers to the utterance; “my friend in brown attire”, but it holds a wider meaning if interpreted in cultural context. In Pashtun culture, the phrase *kharho jamo yara* is associated with a companion, confidante or friend who is always there through every thick and thin, who is down to earth and uncomplicated, who does hurdles up his ego to help in times of inconvenience or need. The title manifests a culturally associated phrase that acts as a sign, which cannot be deciphered without any knowledge of the association created inside the culture.

While in poster 5, the title *ghulam* is written both in Roman English and Pashto language with a yellow brown hue, which is similar to the background color scheme of the poster, which depicts a war-like situation filled with fire representing destruction and chaos. The title, which means “slave”, has ironically portrayed with a muscular hand replace by the letter L in *Ghulam* that symbolizes power and strength. This ironic depiction somehow manages to convey the traits of Pashtuns, who are known as one of the most chivalric and fearless groups and those who never surrender or submit themselves and their brimming prestige or honor. Pashtun culture amalgamates soaring courage and fighting potential for the rights, which do allow a true Pashtun to give up and accept the enslavement and subservience.

Conclusion

The in-depth examination of the selected posters brought different findings under consideration. Various iconic, indexical and symbolic signs were discovered, which associate with cultural depiction. The hero of Pashto films was mostly portrayed, wearing traditional dress code but in unbuttoned shirts and unstrapped shoes, with flowing moustaches, having piercing looks, aggressive personalities, and with a psychological inclination towards brutality and savagery. They were represented, making a mockery of the law by indulging in exercising foul power by making wrong use of Kalashnikov and other weapons, which are indexical signs, signifying loud violence and bloodshed. In most of the poster designs, male characters were centralized, symbolizing the male dominance in Pashtun culture, while females were portrayed as an object of the gaze and taken only as a source for uplifting the visual flamboyance of the poster. The camera angles to capture the female characters, and the gesture they made symbolizes vulgarity and obscenity. Moreover, the revealing dressing of the female characters enfolds the crass representation of Pashtun women and the standards established by norms and customs. Some exceptions were also observed, where a woman was portrayed in men’s attire which is not socially acceptable in Pashtun culture. The written inscription or textual, symbolic signs in the form of titles also conveyed the insight of Pashtun culture by referring to the non-material culture, i.e., the beliefs, values and characteristic features of Pashtunwali or the culturally constructed phrases, which hold a symbolic meaning. But few titles projected an alien culture through its irrelevancy or stance of brutality and violence.

After discovering the various cultural signs in Pashto film posters, it was founded that though the culture presented in the posters via signs relates with the real Pashtun culture in some aspects but it also obscure and blurs the sober characteristics of Pashtunwali by representing the distorted image of the culture through the use of the irrelevant sign. Deducing from the findings, it can be concluded that film posters have immense power for representing the characteristics of any culture. This lays a heavy responsibility on Pashto film production houses and poster designers to evaluate the consequences of a particular depiction before publicizing any content.

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