

Pakistan Invisible: Migratory Realities of Dispersed Film Collections

A Critical Assessment of Pakistani Films in the George Eastman Museum Archives

by

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Abstract

The George Eastman Museums recently acquired a South Asian Film Collection containing 35mm exhibition prints of Pakistani cinema from the 1950s-1980s. The George Eastman Museum acquired the prints from the British Film Institute. The collection's origins come from UK South Asian film spectatorship before mass VCD and DVD transferring from 35mm prints. The migratory and diasporic nature of this collection of Pakistani film prints calls for a reassessment of colonial and post-colonial archival infrastructures since Pakistan is a state with no formal national film archive. This research paper attests that from 1950-1980, Pakistani cinema shares inter-cultural, ethnic, and migratory relationships between pan-South Asian nations, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

The George Eastman Museum's collection, one of the only existing archives that contain 35mm prints of Pakistani cinema, stands as a valuable collection of displaced South Asian film heritage. Given the migratory networks that this collection has travelled, which are like the migratory networks of Pakistanis, this research explores how diaspora communities allow and promote the inclusivity of popular Pakistani cinema from the 1950s-1980s. I also expand on how there has been dissensus over the film as a cultural heritage object in Pakistan, but there is more initiative in recent years to archive film. Furthermore, I explore how community appraisal methods can create a shared knowledge network between the community and the museum. This paper is just the beginning of the process of historicizing and contextualizing 35mm prints of Pakistani films in a formal film archive.

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Special thanks to the staff at the George Eastman Museum. This thesis could not have been possible without their generous support. Thank you, Erica Jones, and Lydia Creech, for providing me with the information likely to complete this research and for being such brilliant film archivists. In addition, thank you to George Eastman Museum's Collection Manager, Deborah Stoiber, for initiating the Pakistan Film Collection acquisition and uncovering an under-represented field of research.

I'd like to owe the most enormous thanks to my Mum and Dad for having made it possible to attain this level of education. I'll never complain about playing Pakistani music on total volume again since I can now appreciate how important it is to carry Urdu/Panjabi as a second language. Finally, DJ, thank you for your friendship throughout my time in NY.

1. Introduction

The first time I heard about a collection of Pakistani films at the George Eastman Museum was at the 2019 American Moving Image Archivist (AMIA) conference. I was networking with L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation students. They informed me that the George Eastman Museum (GEM) was looking for translators to assist in cataloging the Pakistani films recently acquired by the museum. I drew connections because I am ethnically Pakistani, but I have lived outside Pakistan my entire life. I became interested in researching the Pakistani films in the South Asian Film collection at the GEM as a diasporic Pakistani.

My second encounter learning about the “Pakistan Film Collection” was at the Fall 2021 AMIA conference. Erica Jones and Lydia Creech, film archivists at the GEM, presented their panel “In Focus: Preserving South Asian Films”.¹ The panel presentation showcased the status of Indian and Pakistani film prints acquired by the GEM; the films fall under the GEM’s permanent South Asian Film Collection. Their panel was aimed at “archivists looking for strategies on handling large amounts of misidentified material in less-than-ideal conditions within limited time frames.”² It was from this panel that I began the research process that has eventually become this thesis project. The panel activated a sense of nostalgia for old Pakistani melodies that my parents used to keep on CDs (usually pirated). I began to think more seriously about the preservation and migration of Pakistani cinema in the framework of the diaspora’s spectatorship.

¹ Erica Jones and Lydia Creech, “In-Focus Follow-up: Conserving South Asian Cinema Q&A,” *Medium* (blog), *George Eastman Museum*, September 20, 2021, <https://medium.com/george-eastman-museum/in-focus-followup-conserving-south-asian-cinema-q-a-5313f0e9a345>

² American Moving Image Association (AMIA), “Conference Program”, Amiaconference.net/conference-program/

The Pakistan Film Collection is possibly the most extensive available collection of commercial Pakistani cinema from the 1950s to the 1980s. The collection is currently being restored, conserved, and preserved for exhibition and educational purposes. After conducting interviews with GEM staff and surveying the preliminary catalog and inventory, I decided that this thesis will be a research paper discussing the material conditions and the culture of acquiring the collection. The Pakistan Film collection at the GEM from the 1950s-1980s has a purposeful belonging in the history of South Asian cinema. Cinema of Pakistan from the 1950s-1980s spans across borders in the Subcontinent, with directors, actors, and producers moving across India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, resulting in a kind of migratory cinema that has no state-funded archival infrastructure within Pakistan. In this research I explore the migration of the Pakistan Film Collection at the GEM, creating linkages with routes of Pakistanis and pan-South Asian nationalities, who carry with them copies of cultural objects like this collection at the GEM. Therefore, the collection at the GEM serves as a case study of the migratory relationship that South Asian cinema has with migrant and diasporic viewers.

Additionally, the research is intended to historicize Pakistani cinema, as it pertains to the collection, in its migratory and exilic framework, by using the South Asian diaspora as a network for discourse. Pakistan does not have any formal national state-funded film archive, there is a dissensus of film as a cultural heritage object. Hence, this thesis frames Pakistani cinema as migratory and exilic (its spectatorship is diasporic and global). Additionally, without a state-funded archive, Pakistani cinema has an impermanent home and sources like YouTube are the transient homes of the cinema. The impermanence of the cinema has also created this migratory discovery and diasporic viewership. I hope to find more 35mm prints of Pakistani films through the research conducted for this thesis. Importantly, provide support for private collectors of Pakistani film (both in the diaspora and in Pakistan), as this is how

we can increase the inclusion of the diversity of Pakistani cinemas into global South Asian cinema discourse.

2. Scope of the “Pakistan Film Collection”

I conducted a collection assessment of the Pakistan Film Collection by getting in touch with staff at the GEM. The staff also directed me to previous archivists who worked on the collection at the BFI. I provide a history of how the GEM acquired 35mm prints of Pakistani cinema from the BFI. Alongside provenance and acquisition information this assessment also investigates the management and maintenance of the collection. The GEM’s transparency of their preliminary catalog, preservation process, and future goals for the collection has allowed me to address pertinent issues regarding the preservation of the collection. The collection assessment report is intended to document the stages of completed preservation for the Pakistani Films in the South Asian Film Collection and how the films are being managed and maintained. Additionally, this chapter is intended to research the provenance of the collection, archival facts of the migration, preservation, and future possibilities of a permanent South Asian Film collection at the well-renowned GEM. The scope of the report may be valuable for researching South Asian films from the 1950s-1980s and their preservation.

Moreover, I examine a handful of films to better understand the rarity of these films and the importance of archiving these films from the 1950s-1980s. The staff at the George Eastman Museum who have either worked on the collection or are currently working on the collection provided much of the information for a collection assessment report. Using the preliminary inventory provided by the staff at the GEM, I examined the contents of the collection and social histories of a handful of films. Through my knowledge and conversations with family members, I was able to determine films that demand preservation, because of the film's historical and cultural significance. The scope of the collection

assessment does not entail a preservation workflow, where I would provide short- and long-term goals for the next stages of preservation, as the GEM has decided to efficiently digitize and preserve as much as possible after the cleaning, rehousing, and cataloging stage of preservation. Instead, this collection assessment report is intended to assess what is in the collection, how it is being managed and maintained, and what resources are being used by the GEM to create accurate intellectual control records for accurate preservation.

2.1. Provenance and Acquisition

I conducted interviews with Deborah Stoiber, the Collections Manager at the GEM who introduced me to Rosie Taylor, a graduate of the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation. Taylor also worked with the team handling the acquisition and storage of the collection at the BFI. These interviews helped inform the migration of these films from Pakistan to the BFI in the United Kingdom and then to the GEM in Rochester, New York.

The 35mm Pakistani films were used for exhibition purposes in the UK, like many moving image collections. In 2013 the Pakistani film was donated to the BFI by Sheik Taimoor, he donated them to the BFI after his father Anwar Sheik's death. Anwar Sheik collected the films. While in storage at the BFI the collection was named the "Sheik Taimoor Collection". The BFI called the collection the "Sheik Taimoor Collection" because according to Taylor, "some of the films went back to 1937", which was pre-partition and British India. Sheik Taimoor had found this collection in the garage of his father's home in the UK. At the time, the BFI had said that they would keep the collection in a storage area but could not officially preserve and create a permanent collection for it at the BFI because of the BFI's collection policy rules. The BFI's collection policy indicates that "Film culture is international, and the library will collect books and periodicals that reference non-British material. However, we will not systematically create information resources relating to world

cinema or non-British material released in the UK except where such works are included in the BFI's cultural programme."³

Taylor, and her research about the provenance of the collection, suggested that it is likely that the collection was a culmination of exhibition copies, and these exhibition copies were shown at local British South Asian community cinemas in the UK. Taylor suggested the exhibition copies were printed in Pakistan and brought to the UK. She had interviewed Sheikh Taimoor about his father's collection, during her time at the Selznick School. Sheikh was reluctant to give her information. or he didn't know what his father's business was with the 35mm prints. I got in contact with Sheikh Taimoor, and he noted that "I have little knowledge of the films, apart from they are iconic to Lollywood, they belonged to my father who has sadly passed away. The films were in his storage and rather than disposing of the history I decided to donate them to the BFI."⁴

It is unknown if Sheikh Taimoor's father Anwar Sheikh was an avid film collector or a businessman dealing with film exhibition and VHS distribution. Taylor mentioned that while inspecting the films at the GEM, during her studies at the Selznick school, a lot of the reels had VHS stickers stuck to the head and tails of the films. It may be that the films were used to transfer to VHS, and other home-video magnetic media formats like Betamax and U-Matic, for unlicensed distribution within the UK and abroad in Pakistan.

Furthermore, Taylor suggested that it is likely that the films made their way to the UK during the Windrush period (between 1948-1970), a time when the UK opened its borders to immigrants from former colonies (commonwealth colonies) for strategic ways to overcome economic downfall and labor shortages after World War II. The transfer of the Pakistan Film collection from the BFI to the GEM according to Taylor was "quite controversial", as the

³ British Film Institute, *BFI Collection Policy June 2014*, www2.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-collection-policy-2014-07-02.pdf

⁴ Email from Sheikh Taimoor, March 5, 2022

collection “could have revealed a lot about British film audiences”. These films were shown in the UK to the British South Asian Diaspora, one of the largest minority groups in Britain, with a long history of immigration to the UK since the 1660s,⁵ and Urdu and Panjabi are some of the main languages spoken in the multi-cultural country.⁶ The question of why the BFI did not process the collection as a permanent collection puts into question what the institute determines as its national cinema.⁷ So, from 2013-2016 the Sheikh Taimoor collection, consisting mainly of Pakistani cinema from the 1950s-1980s, and a few Indian film prints, lay in storage at the BFI. The BFI created a rough inventory of the contents of the collection that would be the preliminary acquisition inventory when the collection was transferred to the GEM in 2016.

In May 2016, Deborah Stoiber, Collections Manager at the GEM, went to the BFI to oversee the packing of the collection for shipment by company Ocean Freight to Rochester NY. The GEM was approached by the BFI in 2016 to discuss acquiring this collection after the GEM saved and acquired around 775 commercial Indian exhibition film prints on 35mm film from Naz 8, a multiplex in California. In 2017 Dr Tish Stringer donated more commercial Indian film prints to the GEM from another abandoned multiplex in Houston, Texas. The Indian film prints from the abandoned cinemas in Houston and California are mostly mainstream films from the 1990s-2000s. The Indian film prints were shown to the South Asian diaspora at the Naz 8 theater in California and the theater in Houston. The GEM’s holdings of one of the largest collections of Indian films, outside of the National

⁵ Minority Rights Group International, “South Asians - Historical Overview,” October 2020, minorityrights.org/minorities/south-asians/

⁶ Minority Rights Group International, “United Kingdom,” October 2020, minorityrights.org/country/united-kingdom/

⁷ I discuss the history of the BFI in the Indian subcontinent in chapter 2, specifically assessing the colonial legacy of the film institute

Archive of India (NFAI), prompted the acquisition of what was called the “Sheikh Taimoor Collection” at the BFI.

The Sheikh Taimoor Collection at the BFI had 441 titles. After the GEM acquired the collection, students at the Selznick School went through the preliminary inventory created by the BFI. In section 1.4 of this chapter, I will discuss how the GEM determined and differentiated the Pakistani films from the Indian films in the collection and created a list of a total of 295 Pakistani titles. Furthermore, I will discuss how the collection was renamed “Pakistan Film Collection” under the umbrella of the “South Asian Film Collection” which also houses commercial Indian films from abandoned theater in Houston and California.

The Pakistan Film Collection houses 295 Pakistani titles. In conversation with Stoiber, the Pakistani prints may be the only existing prints being formally archived and preserved. As mentioned above, the Indian and Bangladeshi National Film Archives, which are a part of the international consortium FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives), can generate state-funded projects for the preservation of film. Since there is a lack of archival infrastructure in Pakistan and international cooperation for the preservation of Pakistani film, the provenance of this collection comes from the diasporic spectatorship and memories associated with watching these films.

The migration of Pakistan’s labor class to the UK after the Partition of British ruled India founded the basis and business model for these 35mm film prints. As mentioned above the prints were likely shown in the South Asian districts across the UK and then used as prints for VHS distribution during the 1970s, when home video sales soared, and cinema culture declined. The further migration and acquisition of this collection to the GEM in New York create a new meaning for this collection. Even though the BFI’s collection policy, mentioned above, did not allow this collection to be preserved in the UK, the GEM’s resources and historic foundation can provide for the preservation of this collection. The

GEM's and the BFI's historic association with FIAF (which I discuss further in Chapter Two) makes this a promising archival collection for the preservation of film from an under-represented South Asian nation.

2.2. Management and Maintenance

The collection is stored at the Eastman Kodak facility in Rochester, New York, where the George Eastman Museum is renting 9000 square feet of space for adequate storage of the films. The storage facility is temperature and humidity controlled. In 1989 the museum-built film and photography conservation labs, including climate-controlled vaults and spaces for gallery exhibits. The GEM has the infrastructure to be able to store, inspect, rehouse, and clean these films.

In 2020 the GEM was awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) grant to catalog and preserve "1,285 Indian and Pakistani film prints", mainly from the 1960s to the 1980s. The films in the collection consist of "Bollywood, Lollywood, Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu productions".⁸ The grant funding began in December 2020 and ends around January 2023 (the funding lasts for a 26-month project). The project funded by the IMLS grant at the GEM aims to catalog, inventory, rehouse, preserve, and provide accessibility for the entire South Asian Film Collection. The GEM intends to provide listings of the films through the museum's online catalog and provide "archival screenings and film loans".⁹

The GEM hired film archivists Erica Jones and Lydia Creech to begin the first stage of preservation through funding from the IMLS grant mentioned above. Both Jones and Creech have film handling experience. Films are taken to the conservation lab, where film

⁸ Institute of Museum and Library Services, "George Eastman Museum Log Number," accessed January 2022, www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/ma-245614-oms-20

⁹ Institute of Museum and Library Services, "George Eastman Museum Log Number."

archivists Creech and Jones use professional workbenches to inspect, rehouse, and catalog the titles. This video supplies more information on the physical appraisal of the films. The GEM is still focused on the conservation, inspection, rehousing, and cataloging of the 35mm reels, as the IMLS grant started in December 2020 and ends around January 2023.¹⁰

As of March 2022, film archivists, Creech and Jones have inspected, repaired, and cataloged 407 titles of Indian prints and 141 Pakistani prints.¹¹ Jones and Creech have been recording their time in the conservation lab since December 2020 through medium blog posts. Their blog posts diary their strategies in inspecting, cataloging, and rehousing the collection. They also share how they are identifying the films, through online means such as YouTube and an informal archival database called PakMag.net. The archivists have cultural competency in the origin of the film's cultural, political, economic, and social histories and their outreach work has discovered more about the films in the collection.

2.3. Content and Formats

As mentioned, the GEM refer to the Indian and Pakistan Film collection under the umbrella term “South Asian Cinema Collection”, and this itself is understandable because the two have parallel cinema histories, but also differentiating Pakistani titles to Indian titles as they would for Bangladeshi titles because the hybridity of cinema culture of the GEM’s acquired collection attests to pan-South Asian separate and parallel histories. To differentiate the Pakistani films the GEM have considered the language that the film is in and where the production company is located for the release and distribution of the film. For example, the oldest Pakistani film in the collection is *Gul-e-Bakawali* [The Magical Flower], (1939)

¹⁰ George Eastman Museum, “South Asian Cinema IMLS Grant: A Conversation with Archivists after Year One,” *Medium* (blog), *George Eastman Museum*, February 16, 2022, www.medium.com/george-eastman-museum/south-asian-cinema-imls-grant-a-conversation-with-archivists-after-year-one-2a1c95783ce1

¹¹ George Eastman Museum, “South Asian Cinema IMLS Grant: A Conversation with Archivists after Year One.”

produced by Dalsukh M. Pancholi. Pancholi Pictures was a major distribution company in Lahore pre-partition and post-partition. I expand on the cultural significance and cultural hybridity of the film in chapter 3, section 3.1. The traditional folk stories, such as the one told in *Gul-e-Bakawali* are remnants of shared storytelling between Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and arguably other pan-South Asian diasporas.

Jones and Creech have provided important information on the Pakistani Film Collection in their blog posts. The collection consists of primary acetate based 35mm prints (also known as safety stock). Jones and Creech at the GEM have noted *Bin Badal Baarsat* (Zeenat Begum, Pakistan 1975), which has been uploaded to YouTube through an old VHS copy containing identical scratches and splices as the 35mm print held at the GEM.¹² The finding of an exact copy on YouTube of *Bin Badal Baarsat* insinuates that the films were used for unlicensed distribution in the UK by Anwar Sheik.

2.4. Physical Control: Format Specific Risks

The conditions of the films in the Pakistan Film Collection are more damaged than the Indian films because they mainly date from the 1950s-1980s. The prints were used for exhibition, so there are standard amounts of wear and tear. Some of the prints are also disorganized and located in cans with incorrect labels. In conversation with film archivists Jones and Creech, they said to have found pieces of film in cans of reels labelled with the wrong film. The organization of the films in the proper cans has been part of the work during the rehousing and cataloging phase of the archivist's job. They also mentioned that there are films that have missing parts of the film there is no sure reason for this, but it might be due to censorship.

¹² Deborah Stoiber, "Cinema Refugees: Conserving and Preserving South Asian Films," *Medium* (blog), *George Eastman Museum*, March 2, 2021. www.medium.com/george-eastman-museum/cinema-refugees-conserving-and-preserving-south-asian-films-d419aca9786c

I requested print condition reports from the archivists of films I discussed in the Physical Appraisal section to understand better the condition of these prints, which were probably copied around the 1960s-1970s. I requested print condition reports for the films: *Musafir* [Beyond the Last Mountain] (1976), *Dupatta* [Veil] (1952), and *Saiyan* (1970). The oldest film *Dupatta* (1952) had moderate levels of oil and dirt throughout the reels, visible rust, and wear and tear. All three of the prints I requested are acetate prints. Compared to polyester plastic film stock, acetate print stock is prone to vinegar syndrome if not kept at the correct temperature and relative humidity levels. Due to this preservation neglect, there is the risk of the films transferring vinegar syndrome to prints that are in good condition. However, the GEM is rehousing the reels of films and storing the reels separately to deter any risk of cross-contamination.

2.5. Intellectual Control

Presently, the archivists working on the collection are cleaning, rehousing, and organizing a basic inventory for the collection. Later stages will include migrating the information to the agreed software used by the museum's archives for aggregating intellectual control. The archivists working on this collection have used the American Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) conferences as an outreach platform to discuss the films in the South Asian Film Collection. However, for Pakistani films, the archivists use Gazdar Mushtāq's *Pakistan cinema 1947-1997*.¹³ The book is a comprehensive treatment of Pakistani cinema. Mushtāq discusses the social and political motivations of many of the films included in this archive. Film historian Mushtāq formed the task to publish 1997, the first book that chronicles Pakistani cinema history from 1947-1997. 1947 was the year that Pakistan gained independence from India. Mushtāq split the book of cinema into categories

¹³ Mushtāq Gazdar, *Pakistan Cinema, 1947-1997* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1997).

that establish the years in which the nation-state's political changes affected the production of cinema and quality. For example, 1947-1956 is the Decade of Endurance, 1957-1966 is the Decade of Reformation, 1967-1976 is the Decade of Change, followed by the Decade of Decadence and then the Decade of Revivalism.¹⁴

Additionally, the archivists use an internet resource called Pakmag.net. Mazhar Iqbal launched this database in 1999. Iqbal studied computer science and engineering in Denmark. The database is searchable, which makes it easy to search for the films through the website. A synopsis of the films isn't given on the website, but a list of actors, actresses, production house(s), and musical composers accompany the searchable database. The graphic user interface still looks like a remnant from 1999. Sometimes you must use the internet archives Wayback Machine because the website isn't regularly updated. Iqbal's database is a collection of information for every released Pakistani film. The data is collected from his collection of weekly Pakistani cinema magazines, which were popular till the 1970s. The paper trail left behind the invisible Pakistani film forms this searchable database. Iqbal also uploaded over 3000 films from the pre-partition era film industry, giving an excellent example of the crossovers and multi-ethnic and linguistic filmmaking practices in British India. Despite being a database for Pakistani films, the identification of Indian films in the database shows the cultural intersections between film hub industry cities Bombay and Lahore.

2.6. Inventory

The inventory created by the GEM is adapted from the BFI's preliminary list. However, the GEM inventory differentiates Hindi language films from Urdu/Panjabi. Moreover, after researching each film's production provenance, the films are assigned country of origin, production houses, and preservation notes. The preservation notes entail

¹⁴ Mushtāq Gazdar, *Pakistan Cinema, 1947-1997*

[Lahore made films](#) | [Punjabi films](#) | [Other films](#) | [Silent films](#) | [Hindi / Urdu films](#) | [Urdu artists](#)

[Filmmaking](#) | [Songography](#)

109 Lahore made prePartition films

(15 Silent, 65 Hindi / Urdu and 29 Punjabi films from 1925-47)

15 Silent films from Lahore



1. **1925** : **The Light of Asia**(Silent)
2. **1927** : **Daughters of Today**(Silent)
3. **1930** : **Anar Kall**(Silent)
4. **1930** : **Awara Raqqasa**(Silent)
5. **1930** : **Gadria Sultan**(Silent)
6. **1930** : **Husn Ka Daku**(Silent)
7. **1930** : **Sarfaroash**(Silent)
8. **1930** : **Sunehri Khanjar**(Silent)
9. **1931** : **Abla as Yateem Larki**(Silent)
10. **1931** : **Khyber Falcon**(Silent)
11. **1931** : **Mushkilat Akelay Nahin Aatir**(Silent)
12. **1931** : **Mysterious Bandit**(Silent)
13. **1931** : **Qatli Katar**(Silent)
14. **1931** : **Safdar Jung**(Silent)
15. **1933** : **Qismat Kay HeirPheir**(Silent)

29 Punjabi films from Lahore



19 Hit films from Lahore

(7 Silent, 2 Hindi / Urdu and 10 Punjabi films)



1. **1925** : **The Light of Asia**(Silent)
2. **1927** : **Daughters of Today**(Silent)
3. **1930** : **Awara Raqqasa**(Silent)
4. **1930** : **Gadria Sultan**(Silent)
5. **1930** : **Sarfaroash**(Silent)
6. **1931** : **Mysterious Bandit**(Silent)
7. **1931** : **Safdar Jung**(Silent)
8. **1937** : **Gul Bakavli**(Punjabi)
9. **1938** : **Sassi Punnu**(Punjabi)
10. **1940** : **Yemia Jatt**(Punjabi)

acquiring descriptive and administrative metadata for the collection that should be done through the Pakistani diaspora community in New York. The community will be able to identify films and actors and memorialize the films in the collection for accurate physical appraisal. Pakmag.net offers essential information for aggregating information such as dates, names, and language. However, further research may be required to separate the Pakistan Film Collection into different languages and create accurate descriptions of each item. An example I've seen is the use of the word Panjabi spelt "Punjabi" throughout the preliminary inventory. Panjabi, meaning "Land of Five Rivers" originates from the Persian words *panj* (five) and *ab* (river). The misspelling here of "Punjab" is the British spelling used during the colonial era. Small changes like the language used to describe the collection and disseminate the group infer an understanding of the residual effects of British colonialism on the Panjabi community.¹⁵



Figure 2. Pakistan Film Magazine sourced on PakMag.net

¹⁵ Daljit Singh, "It's Panjab... not Punjab (Opinion)," *SikhNet* (blog), June 10, 2010, sikhnet.com/news/its-Panjab-not-Punjab-opinion

2.7. Rights Status

The GEM has taken a custodial role in preserving these films; the collection is a permanent collection at the museum. The rights status of the films remains unknown because the production companies that produced the films closed. Moreover, if a film from 1950 in the collection retains copyright, that copyright would have ended in 2000 unless it was renewed. This is as per the US copyright office that declares that copyright is renewable after 28 years.¹⁶ The lack of state-funded archival infrastructure in Pakistan has led to copyright infringement (piracy) of almost every Pakistani film and recorded music. Ethnologist Timothy Cooper calls the pirated market of Pakistan's cinema industry "The Black-Market Archive", constituting an active cinephile that retracts to bootleg copies as modes of communication and distribution.¹⁷

The YouTube variations of popular films within this collection have helped identify the films and provided evidence of the migratory nature of film distribution to the UK South Asian diaspora. The accessibility to films of the 1960s-1980s became available through pirated prints on tape, magnetic media, torrent websites, streaming platforms, and file sharing websites. The copyright of these films is not an issue for most bootleg owners, who usually print their names across recordings of the films to show the online users who uploaded the film.¹⁸ There has been little done to claim copyright for films made in Pakistan from the 1950s-1980s, resulting in a loss of culture and neglect of the cinema during this time.

¹⁶ United States Copyright Office, *Duration of Copyright*, January 2022, <https://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ15a.pdf>

¹⁷ Timothy P.A. Cooper, "The Black-Market Archive: The Velocity, Intensity, and Spread of Pakistani Film Piracy," *Archival Dissonance: Contemporary Visual Culture and Knowledge Production in the Middle East*, Anthony Downey ed (2015): 401. I.B Tauris.

¹⁸ Timothy P.A. Cooper, "The Circulatory Dynamics of Pakistani Film: Approaches to the Circulation of Film Media Across Formats," in *Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2020), 222.

The GEM is seeking copyright permission; part of copyright clearance is conducting due diligence. However, the GEM is a not-for-profit institute that can claim the works in its collection as works preserved for the nature of fair use. There are exceptions for libraries, museums, and archives under the fair use doctrine of the US copyright law. §108 allows copies to be made for preservation efforts and copies to be distributed for educational purposes.¹⁹

3. Literature Review

In this literature review, I expand on the significance of Pakistani films in the GEM. The literature review is not limited to Pakistani scholars, of which there are few. Still, it expands the discourse of Pakistani cinema within the confines of Bollywood-centric mediascapes in the Indian Subcontinent. I trace the migratory history of Pakistani cinema by exploring the diaspora and their connections to this cinema. I attempt to locate why a lack of film appreciation exists in Pakistan and how to address this from a practical archivist viewpoint. From private collections to state-funded archives, the policy of preserving Pakistani films has a fraught history of repressing film culture. I explore how post-colonial critique informs a justification for the lack of film archives and a lack of inclusivity between various tribes and ethnicities within Pakistan. Lastly, I begin to form a dialogue with the diaspora community in New York in search of a method of community archiving. I am informing the reader of previous pan-South Asian diaspora connections outside the Indian Subcontinent and how these can shed light on intergenerational film spectatorships.

3.1. The Cultural Significance of the “Pakistan Film Collection”

¹⁹ United States Copyright Office, “Revising Section 108: Copyright Exceptions for Libraries and Archives,” September 2017, www.copyright.gov/policy/section108/#:~:text=Congress%20enacted%20section%20108%20of,preservation%2C%20replacement%2C%20and%20research.

This section discusses the cultural hybridity of Pakistan's cinema. I use available resources on the history of Pakistan's cinema to complement and assess the holdings of Pakistani films at the GEM. The collection at the GEM has Pakistani cinema from the 1940s-1980s. Even though most films in the collection are made from the 1950s to the 1970s, I will concentrate on the broader period. Furthermore, I historicize Pakistani cinema and pan-South Asian spectatorship by addressing the collection's contents. Pakistani cinema of the period is imbued with migratory forces. Historically, these decades constituted the aftermath of the end of the British Empire and the Partition of India and Pakistan. After the partition, the Bombay vernacular cinema culture dispersed, as artists from across film hubs in India began migrating to Pakistan to seek cultural, religious, and ethnic roots in response to the bifurcation of nationalist ideology.²⁰ Pakistani cinema from the 1940s to the 1980s, therefore, is linked inextricably to the mass migration from the Partition leading, in turn, to amnesic shared cultural realities of film production between Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Gul-e-Bakawali [The Magical Flower] (1939), directed by Barkat Mehra, is the oldest film in the Pakistan Film Collection. It is a film made in the time of British-ruled India. *Gul-e-Bakawali* was produced and distributed by Dalsukh M. Pancholi. Pancholi studied screenwriting and cinematography in NY and eventually became the largest distributor of American motion pictures in North and West India before starting Pancholi Art Pictures in Lahore, Pakistan. Pancholi worked alongside Roshan Lal Shorey, a famous distributor in Bombay at the time. The 1939 film is based on a Persian legend from *Arabian Nights*. The Persianate influence on myths and folklore, such as the story *Gul-e-Bakawali*, took form in the early nineteenth century. The theatricality of the stories has literary genealogical movements across Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Cinematic translations of these legends

²⁰ Partha S. Ghosh, *Migrants, Refugees and Stateless in South Asia*, (New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications, 2016), 263.

are arguably the “Orientalist fantasies based on Arabian Nights and similar legends, and historical films that imaginatively interpreted Mughal, Rajput, and Maratha historical narratives.”²¹ Nonetheless, pre-partition *Gul-e-Bakawali* remains a remnant of shared multicultural and multi-ethnic realities in cinema production between India and Pakistan.

Unbeknownst to the author, Salma Siddique addresses the film in her publication *Vernacular Cinema and Partition Temporality in Lahore* in 2017, just as the shipment of this film was arriving at the GEM from the BFI. So, her comment reflects this assumption: “Starring the ‘singing-sensation’ Noor Jahan, little survives of the film (*Gul-e-Bakawali*) except a fragment of publicity material.”²² As the GEM collection has emerged, *Gul-e-Bakawali* is no longer a “fragment” or distant memory. The film can now be restored, preserved, and used for scholarly publications and select screenings, which was not possible before. This demonstrates the fundamental positive intervention and contribution of processing and managing existing copies of Pakistani films in today's GEM collection.

Following her successful career as a child star in Calcutta, Jahan migrated to Lahore in 1938 and continued working on films in the Calcutta, Bombay, and Lahore film industries after Partition.²³ Jahan is significant to what, by now has become a regional international memory of the shared film industry between India and Pakistan. Jahan is admired across global South Asian diaspora cultures, and her legacy continues as a cultural mediator.

The aftermath of the violence of Partition gives us clues into the lost print of *Gul-e-Bakawali*. “In July 1947, riots broke out in Lahore, and many cinemas and film studios were

²¹ Iftikhar Dadi, “Lineages of Pakistan’s ‘Urdu’ Cinema: Mode, Mood, and Genre in *Zehr-e-Ishq (Poison of Love, 1958)*” in *Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2020), 27

²² Salma Siddique, “Rustic Releases” *Third Text*, 31:2-3, (2017): 482.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1385930>

²³ The Indian Cinema Heritage Foundation website provides an in-depth history of Noor Jahan’s life and other cinema personalities of the time that were popular across the nations: www.cinemaazi.com/people/noorjehan

attacked and burned to the ground by violent mobs. This most notably included Shorey Studios and Pancholi Studios.”²⁴ It is not surprising that the films that the GEM acquired from the BFI are exhibition prints, as many originals were likely burned down during the riots of 1947.

After the Shorey Studio burned down in Lahore, the studio was renamed Shahnoor Studios. *Shahnoor* is a mixture of the names of Jahan and her husband of the time, Shaukat Husain Rizvi.²⁵ Jahan and her husband Rizvi co-directed the Panjabi film *Chanway* (1951). Rizvi didn’t understand the Panjabi vernacular, so Jahan did most of the directing.²⁶ Addressing this multilingual code of production before Urdu was adopted as the formal language of the country, as Uswah e Fatima notes, “While Bombay and Lahore produced films in many languages, the films produced in Hindi/Urdu (and to a certain extent Panjabi) served as a major point of connection between India and Pakistan.”²⁷

Panjabi films *Gul-e-Bakawali* and *Chanway* are points of connection for the Indian and Pakistani diaspora in the UK, who memorialized the story of *Gul-e-Bakawali* in the language shared before Urdu was adopted as the national language of Pakistan. The Panjab province (northwest India) was severely impacted during Partition due to Panjab's shortage of food and water sources.²⁸ By 1950, “refugees made up almost half of the population of Lahore, almost a third of the population of Delhi.”²⁹ In 1950, only 13 films were made in the

²⁴ Fatima e Uswah, “A Shared Past and An Ambivalent Future: The Dynamics Between the Pakistani and Indian Film Industries,” *Reel Pakistan* no. 3, (2021): 4, https://reelpakistan.lums.edu.pk/sites/default/files/user376/reel_pakistan_vol_3_2021-8_ahmad.pdf

²⁵ Siddique, “Rustic Releases,” 485

²⁶ Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 38

²⁷ Uswah, “A Shared Past and An Ambivalent Future,” 10

²⁸ Yasmin Khan, “Divided Families,” in *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, (Yale University Press, 2017), 186, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1bzf93.19>.

²⁹ Yasmin Khan, “Divided Families,” 186

newly formed state of Pakistan.³⁰ Amid the chaos, extreme poverty and violence afflicted the community, while a struggle for social equality was also underway among refugees being persecuted for their religious and cultural values.

Jahan's films were admired across Pakistani and Indian borders out of the small number of films made in the newly formed nation of Pakistan. *Dupatta* (1952), another Jahan film in the GEM's collection, is an Urdu film about a woman (Jahan) whose husband goes missing in action and is presumed dead during World War II. *Dupatta* was released in Calcutta, India, in 1952, and had a large Indian audience. Performances by Noor Jahan in *Dupatta* and *Chanway*, with the musical direction of Feroz Nizami, solidified Jahan's commercial and artistic talent.³¹

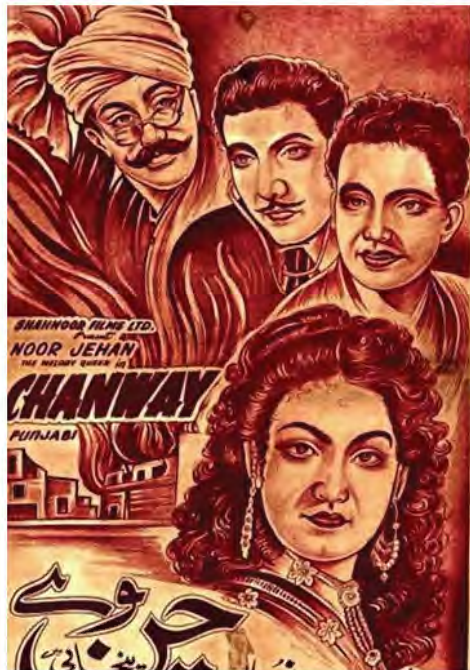


Figure 3. *Chanway* (1951) (Poster from IMBD, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0212051/>)

Do-Ansoo [Two Tears] (1950) was a Silver Jubilee Urdu film from Pakistan. “The term “silver jubilee” indicated that a film had completed a 25-week run in the cinemas.³² The

³⁰ Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 240

³¹ Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 27

³² Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 32

meaning of silver jubilee also demonstrates that the film's popularity was shared with Indian and Pakistani audiences.³³ Many directors, screenplay writers, musical score writers, actors, and actresses who migrated to the Lollywood film industry in the 1950s after Partition are featured in this collection. *Do-Ansoo* features transnational stars like Shamim, Shahnawaz and Himlawala (all of whom came from India), while Anwar Kamal Pasha, the director of *Do-Ansoo*, is indigenous to Pakistan.³⁴ These examples demonstrate a broader pattern of the relationship between Bombay-Calcutta-Lahore-Karachi-and Dhaka is culturally intertwined in the films physically appraised by the GEM.

Addressing this regional phenomenon from an Indian perspective, Ali Nobil Ahmad writes that “Pakistani cinephile might thus hold the key to a more inclusive global history of Indian film – one in which South Asian labor diasporas form the material and technological basis of cinematic diffusion rather than this or that nation-state, ethnic group or religion.”³⁵ In this respect, Indian cinema discourse expands on similarities between Urdu language films and of films being produced in India. For example, the Pakistani filmmaker Masood Parvez’s film *Intezar* [Waiting] (1956) involved the Pakistani screenplay writer and musical composer Khawaja Khurshid Anwar, who was heavily influenced by the Bombay filmmaking community. Anwar composed twenty-eight Pakistani movies from the 1940s-1980s.³⁶ Another film produced by Anwar, *Zehr-e-Ishq* [Poison of Love] (1958), is also in the GEM collection. Anwar’s musical scores are mostly adapted from the poetic *ghazal* form, and they reflect a time in Pakistan's cinema history where “Pakistani society was emphatically not

³³ Uswah, “A Shared Past and An Ambivalent Future,” 8

³⁴ Mushtāq. *Pakistan cinema, 1947-1997*, 247

³⁵ Ali Nobil Ahmad. “Introduction: What is (Pakistani) Cinema?” in *Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan, (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press), 15

³⁶ Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 50-52

based on high Urdu" and films like *Zehr-e-Ishq* serve as an allegory of the psychic costs of Pakistani nationalism a decade after Partition."³⁷

Into the 1960s-1970s more Urdu language films featuring talent from Bangladesh (formally known as East Pakistan) were specifically made in the film hub city of Dhaka. Lotte Hoek discusses the multilingual audience and market for Urdu films in Bangladesh. As she points out, the 1960s Pakistani film magazines do not address the political inequalities between Urdu, Bengali, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.³⁸ More importantly, in the years coming up to the War of Liberation, there is a demise of Urdu because speaking Urdu or Bengali became "a clear [divisive] indicator of what side you are on, in a way religion was not able to do."³⁹

The films in the GEM collection also include titles that were once popular, despite being out shadowed by the aftermath of the war between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Before the war of liberation in 1971 between Pakistan and Bangladesh, Urdu language in film was enforced in the film industry in Dhaka. Notable works with Bangladeshi Pakistanis in this collection include *Dosti* [Friendship] (1971), *Darshan* (1967), and *Zeenat* (1975). Shabnam (Jharna Basak), the star of this film, migrated to Pakistan. He came from the Bangladesh region. Similarly, *Diya Aur Toofan* (1969) and *Shama* (1974) starred Nadeem Baig who was one of the most popular actors in both Bangladesh and Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁰

These films are a continuation of the popular genre of social drama. Stories about love and society, family tensions, usually middle to upper-middle class problems. By the late 1970s, in Lahore and Karachi, creative communities began revolting against middle class

³⁷ Dadi, "Lineages of Pakistan's 'Urdu' Cinema," 34

³⁸ Lotte Hoek, "Cross-wing Filmmaking: East Pakistani Urdu Films and their Traces in the Bangladesh Film Archive," in *Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan, (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press), 65.

³⁹ Lotte Hoek, "Cross-wing Filmmaking," 55

⁴⁰ Mushtāq, *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*, 110-112

ideals of what Pakistani cinema should constitute. Panjabi cinema “displaced Urdu as the dominant language of film.”⁴¹ Working-class creative communities began revolting in some ways to reflect on middle and upper-class struggle in film. *Maula Jatt* (1979) is an action film, in which Maula, the main character's disdain for the police and structural caste-system, shows “a gendered fantasy” in which there is a “celebration of masculine honor”.⁴² The framework of Pakistani cinema has largely been adopted for the middle and upper-middle classes and the archiving of cinema has been impacted because of class differences. *Maula Jatt* represents creativity in the rural Panjab area of Pakistan alongside deeply rooted patriarchal values in Panjabi society. The popularity of the film throughout the years has resulted in a re-make of the plot in 2022, called *The Legend of Maula Jatt*. Prior to *Maula Jatt* cameras and filmmaking was a novelty for the upper class.⁴³ *Maula Jatt* positioned itself as a film revolting against the military regime before General Zia-ul-Haq and positioned a new framework for the Pakistani action film genre. This film shows how Pakistani cinema is also a large body of Panjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi language films that don't fit into the class and capitalist elitism associated with Urdu.⁴⁴ Classism and nationalism in parts of Pakistani society decreased the interest of films. The practices of Zia-ul-Haq’s restrictive material law dictatorship adopted a type of restrictive interpretation of Islam as seen in Saudi-Arabia (where cinemas only became legal in 2020). However, rather than the claim that Islam causes the violence against all film production within Pakistan, Salma Siddique suggests considering “the instance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where a commitment to doctrines of modesty

⁴¹ Ali Nobil Ahmad, “Introduction: What is (Pakistani) Cinema?” 8

⁴² Ali Nobil Ahmad. “Introduction: What is (Pakistani) Cinema?” 8

⁴³ British Era Camera in Film and Cinephilia

⁴⁴ Iftikhar Dadi, “Modernity and its Vernacular Reminders in Pakistani Cinema,” *Cinema and Society: Film and Social Change in Pakistan*, ed. Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad, 77-100. (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press), 85

led to a new form of post-revolutionary cinema.”⁴⁵ Islamization may, in fact, have been a factor to lessen the number of films being produced and to decrease political freedom and expression. However, the nationalist agenda in Pakistan did not stop filmmaking in Pashtun, Panjabi, Sindhi provinces within Pakistan, as throughout Zia-ul-Haq’s reign the market and popularity for the films increased. However, in *Maula Jatt* “Panjabi action cinema’s nostalgic yearning for a bucolic pastoral past has troubling implications.”⁴⁶ The fabric of Pakistani rural society is not as Iran’s, therefore attests to its own cinematic movement, arguably, troubled, and violent towards the insecurities of Pakistani late-1970s governance tactics.

Lastly, there is an important documentary film in the collection. *Musafir [Beyond the Last Mountain]* (1976) is an English language documentary film. Directed by Senator Javed Jabbar, the film traces the history of the Indus Valley Civilization. Sen. Jabbar was introduced to me by Professor Dan Streible. Another print of this documentary film was found at the Lincoln Center in New York City by MIAP students. Sen. Jabbar is eager to preserve this film and because this second print has been located, there will be a decision made to determine which copy of the film is more suited for preservation.

In this section I've expanded on films currently in the GEM Pakistan Film Collection that have cultural significance for the shared colonial and post-colonial film industries in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The next section will address colonial fragmentation in these years after partition, specifically addressing root causes of Pakistan’s missing archival infrastructures.

⁴⁵ Salma Siddique, “Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 39, 1 (May 2019): 197.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-7493898>

⁴⁶ Ali Nobil Ahmad, “Introduction: What is (Pakistani) Cinema?” 8-9

3.2. Archival Infrastructures in the Indian Subcontinent

This section will expand on existing literature that discusses why film has rarely been recognized as a historical and cultural artifact in Pakistan's history. Moreover, I will examine the formal state-funded film archives that exist in the bordering countries of Pakistan (India and Bangladesh). My discussion of the lack of a formal moving image archival infrastructure in Pakistan also includes the archiving practices of bordering countries. I investigate factors that contributed to the emergence of India as the homogenous producer and care-taker of films made in the Indian Subcontinent, a place of multiple ethnic groups, languages, religious beliefs, and social, cultural hierarchies as well as ideologies.

The Partition of India and Pakistan (1947) plays a part in a shift of power in post-colonial India, creating not only divided nations, but also a divided archival infrastructure. Within comparative studies of the missing archival infrastructure in Pakistan, Salma Siddique makes the point that, formally, there is no government-funded National Film Archive in Pakistan while post-colonial India and Bangladesh “have national film archives (National Film Archive of India [NFAI] and Bangladesh Film Archive [BFA]) and hold membership at the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF).”⁴⁷ The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) was founded in the 1930s by the BFI.⁴⁸ The National Film Archive of India (NFAI) officially established itself in 1964, and as a member of FIAF. “In the mid-1960s, the British Film Institute (BFI) repatriated colonial Indian films entirely to India.”⁴⁹ Siddique examines that collectively “South Asia mobilizes Partition as a sociocultural experience,” and

⁴⁷ Siddique, “Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion,” 197

⁴⁸ Caroline Frick, “International Discourse and Global Film Heritage: Defending the National,” in *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press: 2011), 120

⁴⁹ Siddique, “Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion,” 196

further that Partition is “a condition that produces a set of relationships with cinema.”⁵⁰ Siddique addresses the relationships of inter-cultural, multi-ethnic cinema produced in South Asia as evidence of a shared social and cultural practice that is reflected through the language of film and performativity.⁵¹ Accordingly, the newly formed nation of Pakistan was only just building itself and not focused on building archival infrastructure for film. The nation's sense of self was pre-determined to partition from India and then in 1971 from Bangladesh, causing cultural divisions in where India and Bangladesh established own national identity, and arguably Pakistani society struggled to. It is important to note here that Siddique is not discussing “major film industries of the subcontinent Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, and Telugu...”. Even though they constitute South Asian film, the affected languages that were spoken across South Asia were “films produced in the languages Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, and Sindhi. Furthermore, the centers of production include Bombay, Calcutta, Dhaka, Karachi, and Lahore”.⁵²

To further iterate on Siddique’s point previously, on the part of the BFI, repatriation of colonial Indian films to only India proves a lack of historical and political insight. The repatriation also means a lack of access for institutions and individuals that were once part of colonial British India. I think the lack of access given to film as a historical artifact within Pakistan is a direct result of the post-colonial mishandling of archival records and repatriation attempts on the part of FIAF and the BFI. The lack of accessibility and preservation of Pakistani Films from the 1950s-1980s lies one way or other in the ways India has held the homogenous authorship over pan-South Asian cinema. Being part of an international consortium such as FIAF, and having ties with governing bodies like UNESCO, creates a

⁵⁰ Siddique, Salma. *Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion*. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Duke University Press May 2019

⁵¹ Siddique, “Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion,” 209

⁵² Siddique, “Archive Filmaria: Cinema, Curation, and Contagion,” 209

power dynamic that excludes and exalts an invisibility of not only Pakistani cinema, but other under-represented cinemas of the region. However, it is not the nations of India or Bangladesh that are responsible for the welfare of Pakistani cultural heritage. The occupation and destruction of cinema halls from rioters, theater spaces where films were projected in Pakistan, is symbolic of the ongoing cinephobia within Pakistani society. As early as the 1920s, it's reported that Muslims had "clear concern to the British governing authorities, which in the wide-ranging Indian Cinematograph Committee report mourned that Muslims appeared particularly unmoved by filmgoing."⁵³

Feudalism in and among Pakistani society is responsible for the lack of representation for cinema culture as well as any archiving of cinema made in Lahore. Ahmad questions, "Perhaps, then, middle- and upper-class identity in Pakistan has been more haunted by its inadequacies and lack of legitimacy than it has in India?"⁵⁴ Ahmad suggests that in both India and Bangladesh filmmakers managed to create a sense of nation-building through the technology of film, but in Pakistan that notion was too insecure as the Pakistan was "Founded on the flimsy basis of political expediency and the Muslim League's original sin of collaborating with the British for the right to speak on behalf of an Indian Muslim Population"⁵⁵ Ahmad makes the point that elites in Pakistan have always and especially in recent years felt nostalgic for the "golden years" but reject the very idea that Pakistani cinema forms a larger ideological link with India and Bangladesh and that Pakistani cinemas "decline" which is also seen as predisposed to "vulgarity" because it is not the elite norm (Pashto and Panjabi cinema). The record of decisions made on what has been preserved and

⁵³ Timothy P.A. Cooper, "Cinema *Itself*: Cinephobia, Filmic Anxieties, and Ontologies of the Moving Image in Pakistan," *Visual Anthropology* 31 (3): 253–67.

doi:10.1080/08949468.2018.1445394

⁵⁴ Ali Nobil Ahmad, "Explorations into Pakistani Cinema: Introduction" *Screen*, 57:4 (2016): 473

⁵⁵ Ahmad, "Explorations into Pakistani Cinema," 473

what's not in South Asian film archives prioritizes religious, political, and class hegemony in the preservation process. Pakistan, riddled with social, cultural hierarchies' and ideologies, faces a gentrification of "privatized multiplex"⁵⁶ and the death of the "traditional cinema halls"⁵⁷. The national ideology of Pakistan's state and government has a "dual geopolitical role as an outpost of American imperialism and supporter of religious militancy in Afghanistan."⁵⁸ The result of Islamic resurgence is argued by Ahmad as a complex history and reality of fascism in Pakistan. The result is extraordinary gentrification of the modern day unaffordable "cineplex" and the burning and accusation that traditional cinema halls are somehow un-Islamic.⁵⁹

The BFI's collection policy is a policy that only preserves British film and British film production. The collection policy of the BFI, to preserve only British film, carries with it a historical colonial weight, a national political agenda. Caroline Frick, in *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* traces a history of nationalism in BFI's beginnings. To strategize its colonial empire, in the 1930s, the BFI and the National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA) commissioned a report that would "fervently believed the creation of a U.K. film institute to be an "urgent national necessity" for both its domestic citizenry and for the education of "backward races within the Empire."⁶⁰ Frick uses this statement to address the way the British ideology was attempting to use preservation of films as a tool to power the emerging interest of Hollywood in the British Empire colonies. Frick explores the

⁵⁶ Ahmad, "Explorations into Pakistani Cinema," 476

⁵⁷ Ali Nobil Ahmad, "Fascism and Real Estate: An Inquiry into the Strange Death of Traditional Cinema Halls in Pakistan," in *Cinema and Society: Film and Social Change in Pakistan*, ed. Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad, (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press).

⁵⁸ Ahmad, "Fascism and Real Estate," 314

⁵⁹ Ahmad, "Fascism and Real Estate," 318

⁶⁰ The British Institute of Adult Education, Commission on Educational and Adult Films. *The Film in National Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), 140, quoted in Frick, "International Discourse and Global Film Heritage" 105

nationalistic roots of the BFI's National Film Archive (spearheaded by Ernst Lindgren) which "advocated the establishment of a British film institute with which to combat other nations' propaganda."⁶¹ Importantly, the establishment of the film archives in America are influenced by European initiatives that justified film preservation as a document of the sacrifices of war.⁶² Frick discusses the use of the film archive as an institution that has its roots in nation-state politics, rather than the film archive as a repository of art and culture. Film archiving in European nations and America (western notions of archives) began in wanting to preserve war-time film. This, in turn, traces the relationship to and creation of national film preservation policies. Rooted in racism and the grandeur of British culture as the most civilized culture, it was thought that the establishment of educational film for former British colonies would be a tool goes on to outline the way in which the nationalistic roots of the BFI's National Film Archive (spearheaded by Ernst Lindgren) continually inflated the National Film Libraries status. This history also demonstrates the imperial paternalism according to which the BFI and NFTVA sought to teach British Empire colonies and "the proposed film institute would respond, in kind, by supplying films for the colonies that would better educate residents there as to the British national culture and value system."⁶³ The training films were used to propagandize a British cultural value over the colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. More importantly, this policy of film distribution and of necessitating what needs to be saved is rooted in racist and imperial thought. To assess why there is a displacement of Pakistani cinema, I argue here that it is because institutions like the BFI, UNESCO, and FIAF have stood dominance over film distribution and production and

⁶¹ Frick, "International Discourse and Global Film Heritage" 106

⁶² Caroline Frick, "The Plurality of Preservation," in *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press: 2011), 187

⁶³ Frick, "International Discourse and Global Film Heritage" 106

are the leading powers in film preservation. As Frick states, “During the post-war period in which newly created nations assumed a central role in a proliferating number of international organizations, FIAF members worked closely with UNESCO, and representatives of the UN’s cultural agency regularly attended FIAF congresses. Moreover, influential FIAF members, such as the BFI/NFTVA’s staff, worked directly with UNESCO projects.”⁶⁴ The institutions here saw the benefits of film and film production as a tool to propagandize Western notions of archival practice.

The BFI has amassed a large British India Film collection, as I noticed while researching the displacement of Pakistani films. This collection now demands a critical eye. The collection spans from 1899-1947 and comprises mainly amateur films, travelogues, short documentaries, and British newsreels.⁶⁵ This collection of pre-partition (British ruled India films) questions what the end of the empire meant for cultural heritage institutions like the BFI. The BFI invited artist Sandhya Suri to repurpose the archival footage for the film *Around India with a Movie Camera*. The BFI validated Suri to visually historicize British-made films in India as a diasporic woman. This puts the diasporic woman in a position of authorship over British films. Grazia Ingravalle states that Suri’s repurposing of the collection in the documentary *Around India with a Movie Camera* is “signifiers of a colonial visual culture that inextricably ties together colonizer and colonized in a mutually dependent construction.”⁶⁶ Whereas in past press releases, the BFI have framed these films as Indian films but were “shot by British officers, directors, and amateur filmmakers in colonial

⁶⁴ Frick, “International Discourse and Global Film Heritage” 125

⁶⁵ The collection of available films from British colonial rule is on the BFI iPlayer streaming platform. See: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/collection/india-on-film-1899-1947>

⁶⁶ Grazia Ingravalle, “Indian or British Film Heritage? The Material Life of Britain’s Colonial Film Archive,” *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, Volume 61, Issue 2, (2022): 66, Michigan Publishing, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2022.0016>

India”.⁶⁷ Ingravalle proposes that as Indian, the films are actually “part of Britain’s colonial legacy”⁶⁸ and “a more critical approach to archival film curatorship—one that interrogates audiovisual heritage more radically and engages more courageously with the colonial legacy of much of Western film archives’ collections.”⁶⁹ Curatorially this suggests that the diasporic woman reclaims the dissemination of these films. However, why is this a “burden of transnationality”⁷⁰, as Spivak suggests, validated by the diaspora when these are films made by British officers, directors, and amateur filmmakers. I am in no way discrediting *Around India with a Movie Camera*, which is critical of the British Raj. However, I am concerned with how the BFI approaches archival technicalities if the informed archival curation is not addressed by white British artists or by the BFIs as its institute is part of a colonial legacy.

With ties to international film archival institutions, the evolution of the National Film Archive of India in Pune informs bureaucracies in postcolonial archival infrastructure. The history of Pakistani cinema collides with an internationally recognized standard of the Indian “Bollywood” cinema or South Asian Cinema. There also seems to be a post-colonial decay within the National Film Archive of India, where the lack of resources suggests further inaccessibility to collections collecting dust. In her book *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City*, Debashree Mukherjee explores the archiving of colonial Bombay film production (the 1930s-1950s) and states that “...less than 5 percent of the Bombay film industry’s output from two decades is available to us for research and scholarship. Film prints have been lost in accidental studio fires, through industry neglect and deterioration, or by deliberate recycling to extract silver from the nitrate base.”⁷¹ Additionally, Ramesh Kumar, in

⁶⁷ Ingravalle, “Indian or British Film Heritage?” 66

⁶⁸ Ingravalle, “Indian or British Film Heritage?” 67

⁶⁹ Ingravalle, “Indian or British Film Heritage?” 66

⁷⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” *Textual Practice*, 10:2, (1996): 252, Routledge.

⁷¹ Debashree Mukherjee, “Introduction: Mapping a Cine-Ecology,” in

his dissertation, reflects on the NFAI, in which he felt “the scattered nature of state records and the red tape involved in dealing with the Indian bureaucratic machinery...”⁷² This is not at the fault of the archivist but more that the archive is a governing institution that is controlled by the dominant ideology of a nation-state’s political and social agenda.

India post-independence is revered as a vital stakeholder in film production. After independence from British rule, in India, “in March 1950, a UNESCO press release announced that India had purchased over \$10,000 worth of film coupons to apply toward raw stock, negatives, and prints. Subsequently, UNESCO and the BFI strove to communicate that the program would not hinder or impede commercial film distribution, a strategy that seemed to work.”⁷³ The residual effects of colonialism meant that the hand that fed film production in India in 1950 was the hand that under-represented other film production centres of British India, like in the Province of Punjab, the city of Lahore in Pakistan.

Alongside the National Film Archive of India, the Bangladesh Film Archive is also part of the international archival consortium FIAF. Bangladesh’s independence from Pakistan in 1971 created an even greater nation-state agenda, the decline of the Urdu language in Bangladesh was an act of defiance against Pakistan’s war, genocide, and assimilation tactics against the people of Bangladesh. An example of the cultural hybridity of Pakistan’s and Bangladesh’s cinema is seen in Lotte Hoek’s ethnographic research and writing on the discovery of cross-cultural films in the Bangladesh Film Archives. Her research traces the lineage of Urdu language films in the Bangladesh Film Archives, those being good for the economy because it meant that West Pakistan would consume the films. Hoek addresses

Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). ProQuest eBook Central, 34

⁷² Ramesh Kumar, *National Film Archives: Policies, Practices, and Histories: A Study of the National Film Archive of India, EYE Film Institute Netherlands, and the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia*. September. PhD diss., 2016, 64

⁷³ Frick, “International Discourse and Global Film Heritage” 114

critical film distribution networks and actors that migrated back and forth between the two states. Yet when interviewing the director of *Son of Pakistan* (1966), Hoek states it was “Mildly surprising, sometimes confusing, mostly forgotten, these films have left little trace in contemporary understandings of Bangladeshi cinema. The very possibility of Urdu films cannot be clearly recalled.”⁷⁴ In 1971, West Pakistan was essentially assimilating Bengalis into speaking Urdu. The case of Pakistani cinema is somehow fueled by contestation with the former colonies. As is the case with the amnesia of shared networks of cinema production and distribution between India and Pakistan, the same occurs with Pakistan and Bangladesh. After the War of Liberation, Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) gained its independence from West Pakistan in 1971. This resulted from Pakistan’s post-colonial state’s nationalism which arguably “modelled their political imagination on the modern European state” and led to “new rounds of the national building by ethnic cleansing.”⁷⁵

Arguably, Pakistan never regained momentum and never acknowledged Panjabi language cinema as its national cinema because it’s too closely tied to cultural interlinks with India. I argue that the displacement of Pakistani cinema is a result of post-colonial anxieties and resolutions of national identity across South Asia. Within Pakistan, the body of films in the GEM collection has limited space because the film is not yet seen as a cultural heritage object. Displaced Pakistani cinema may also collect dust in the state film archives in India and Bangladesh; this can only be known if the countries communicate and share their cultural similarities. Politically, this may prove to be complicated. The trauma of another war, genocide and mass migration in Bangladesh created its nationalistic cinema linguistic identity away from the Urdu language. The atrocities of war between Pakistan and Bangladesh don’t

⁷⁴ Lotte Hoek, “Cross-wing Filmmaking,”

⁷⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020). 15

reflect that Pakistanis still see Bangladeshi people as their neighbors. Pakistan was the oppressor in this historical war; therefore, the national ideologies of Bangladeshi films regained momentum with their indigenous movements at the forefront of the creative practice.

The authority and history of Western film archival practice in post-colonial South Asia is institutional and requires a decolonizing approach for reconstruction. The migration of the Pakistani prints from the BFI to the GEM infers historical amnesia for the prints before. The responsibility of the BFI and the GEM as partners in authority archival institutions holds advantages for museum work in the UK and US, given the history of imperial tactics to assert Western cultural value systems in South Asia. This literature review is done to provide a critical inquiry into the historical legacies of film archives and to suggest that there must be more dialogue around decolonizing the film archive given these historical facts.

By examining the existing films in the GEM collection through the literature on Pakistani film production pre- and post-independence, I explore Pakistani cinema through its parallel histories of early Indian and Bangladeshi cinema, as the current cinematic landscape in Pakistan contests Bollywood but is also influenced by Bollywood production schemas. Pakistan's film industry is somewhat parallel to the discourse of South Asian cinema, which is still primarily dominated by the Bollywood film industry.

To conclude, South Asian postcolonial political agendas directly impacted the displacement and migration of Pakistani cinema. Without a formal state-funded film archive, the preservation and provenance of Pakistani cinema are displaced and scattered worldwide and within South Asia. However, borders, nationalism, and the archive representing National cinema reject the shared cultural traditions of film production in the South Asian region. Transnational filmmaking practices across South Asia after the Partition of 1947 co-opted

anti-colonial regiment to create the nation-states that formally exist. Countries such as Afghanistan, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh all have formal state-funded film archives that are members of FIAF or are at least recognized by international cultural heritage consortiums such as UNESCO. Once these nations defined their borders, their individual nation-state agendas formed collection policies for government-funded National Archives.

3.3. Invisible Archives in Pakistan

The lack of a film archive in Pakistan has meant private collectors have to create their informal collections. This is not unique to countries without formal film archives. However, it results in the neglect of collective memories and cultural histories surrounding Pakistan's film industry. In this section, I will review collections and archival infrastructures in Pakistan that serve the purpose of recording Pakistan's film history. This way, it can be understood that there isn't a need for a new archive. Still, that existing infrastructure can serve as the foundation for creating a new archival strategy, specifically for film conservation and preservation.

The Guddu Khan's film memorabilia collection contains photographs of him with people in Pakistan's film industry, cassettes, VHS tapes, vinyl, magazines, and traditional posters.⁷⁶ Interviews with Guddu and his archive are on YouTube, which is the collection's

⁷⁶ Siddique, "Archive Filmaria" 199; Vazira Zamindar, "Ek Haseen Archive: Notes on Love & Longing in a Film Archive," in *Love, War, and Other Longings: Essays on Cinema in Pakistan*, ed. Vazira Zamindar and Asad Ali, (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2020) 132-159; Timothy P.A. Cooper, "Raddi Infrastructure: Collecting Film Memorabilia in Pakistan: An Interview with Guddu Khan of Guddu's Film Archive." *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 7, no. 2 (December 2016): 151–71. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974927616668004>; This list is contested by photographs in the published interview in *Ek Haseen Archive* (A Beautiful Archive).



Figure 4: YouTube Video evidencing the culture of watermarking over poorly digitized VHS tapes. (Screenshot from *Melody is Always Queen- RAJA*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGaOkmnWgPk>)

primary depository and outreach method.⁷⁷ Parts of the collection were featured in a week-long exhibition in Karachi in 2015.⁷⁸ Guddu Khan’s archive is a personal collection that evokes nostalgia for Pakistan’s cinema history. In published interviews, Guddu talks about his time in the film industry and his goals for reproducing the archive through social media outlets such as Facebook and YouTube.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Siddique, “Archive Filmaria,” 199

⁷⁸ *Filmistan: Jaane Kahan Gaye Voh Dinn* (Film Nation: Wonder Where Those Days Went) was exhibited by the Alliance Française de Karachi. See: Siddique, “Archive Filmaria” 199

⁷⁹ Guddu Film Archive on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Guddu-Film-Archive-207312132674880/; on YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UC5sw2Ygw4Y2Kf1BN0h5oaUw. Guddu Film Archive blog: guddufilmarchive.blogspot.com.

However, there are concerns about conserving and preserving the film ephemera that publications on Guddu's archive have not addressed. Here's the fear that photographs from decades ago may start fading or already have. In these instances, I conclude that there needs to be a serious formation of the visual and cinematic cultural history of Pakistan's Cinema. Even in my visits to Lahore to art studios and private collections of film posters, paintings, posters, tapes, and other ephemera were kept in humid rooms with little knowledge of the objects' expiry. As the personal archive of Guddu seems to remain some of the only elements of love and nostalgia of cinema within the country, it is imperative to initiate some archival conservation and preservation system for accurate record keeping of these artifacts.

Dadi states that “the absence of an official archive and the terrible quality of the limited material on VCD and DVD...the analysis offered here is not meant to be definitive.”⁸⁰ Dadi points out the lack of quality of the film being researched. In all the publications, academics have watched the copies of films on YouTube and other bootleg formats like DVD or file-sharing Websites, or the film is lost and memorialized by paper ephemera. Accessibility for copies of these films for exhibition, curation, and digital streaming is transient. My research has not found one archive with a fine print of Pakistani cinema for preservation purposes. The absence of a film archive in Pakistan makes it difficult for researchers, filmmakers, and historians to accurately describe the films they are discussing.

The lack of state-funded archival infrastructure also led to a counter-cultural distribution movement from VCD/VHS to digital to YouTube. The 1970s saw a rise in VHS bootlegging, which is still prevalent when searching for online Pakistani cinema from the 1940s to the 1980s. These illegal forms of exchange increased because many Pakistani immigrants relocated to the Middle East, North America, and Europe.

⁸⁰ Dadi, “Lineages of Pakistan's ‘Urdu’ Cinema,” 27

Cooper's ethnographic research has found migratory paths in pirated versions of Pakistani films sold in South Asian communities in London. Piracy is so prevalent that shops watermark their pictures onto the DVDs, and many watermarks are removed or written over to show there is a new distributor.⁸¹ Piracy and informal film distribution networks have been a significant reason why Pakistani films can be watched online, although of very poor quality. These distribution networks, such as Cooper coins, are illegal but arrived with VCR technology in the 1970s and the advent of media migration. Therefore, that is why, as Cooper states, "the film holdings of the National Archive of Pakistan appear to be almost entirely composed of low-resolution VCDs transferred from the last generation of legitimate VHS transfers."⁸² The digital and audio files stored on a VCD are MPEG-1, frequently used for distribution on the internet. If the VCD is transferred from VHS, there is a risk of lossy compression (grainy images).

Moreover, the materiality of VCDs is fragile if not stored properly. According to the Preservation Self-Assessment Program, optical media like VCDs should be "stored in cool, dry, and dark conditions," and "recordable and rewritable CDs contain a dye layer that can cause numerous problems like signal loss and failure due to several factors."⁸³ This is why optical media are not considered archival formats or the last stage of preservation.

Similarly, the Lok Virsa Museum (National Museum for Folk and Traditional Heritage) in Islamabad collects; books on cultural heritage and audio and videocassettes of folk, classical vocal, and instrumental music. The museum's Media Center distributes VCDs,

⁸¹ Cooper, "The Circulatory Dynamics of Pakistani Film," 219

⁸² Timothy P.A. Cooper, "The Circulatory Dynamics of Pirate Cinema," *Rhizome* (blog), March 2016, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/mar/17/the-circulatory-dynamics-of-cinema/>

⁸³ Preservation Self-Assessment Program. "Optical Media," <https://psap.library.illinois.edu/collection-id-guide/opticalmedia#cd>.

CDs, and DVDs. These audio-visual materials are available for sale and distributed at Lok Virsa but aren't part of any ongoing preservation goal or collection status. The museum's Research and Publications section seeks to record ethnographic research on traditional folk culture throughout Pakistan's nomadic tribal areas.⁸⁴ The lack of an archival infrastructure in Pakistan has not limited research within museums and universities in Pakistan but limits scholars in their research pursuits. For example, the Lahore School of Management Sciences (LUMS) has a Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies program. The program's students participate in *Reel Pakistan: A Screen Studies Forum*. The forum was created for students to submit working papers about film culture, industry, and history in Pakistan. The reports show an interest in cross-cultural South Asian cinema cultures. For a university program such as this one, accessibility to copies of films would open a new field of discovery for historical research.

Unlike the National Archives of Pakistan, which collects government documents, newspapers, and news bulletins from radio and TV stations, the Lok Virsa Museum collects cultural heritage, such as oral histories and research work. This makes the Lok Virsa Museum an organizational structure best suited for film and media collections. Film is a cultural heritage object watched by various language-speaking populations in Pakistan. In 2020, the newly appointed Director General for the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), Dr Fouzia Saeed, began planning to acquire and preserve 35mm prints of Pakistani films since 1948. It is unknown where these films are being acquired; however, the PNCA and Pakistan Film Producers Association are pushing for more focus on film in Pakistan.

⁸⁴ Lok Virsa Museum, "Research and Publications," <https://lokvirsa.org.pk/programs/research-and-publications/>

They also prepared a national film archive and introduced a one-year film course.⁸⁵ In more recent years, the establishment of the Pakistan International Film Festival (PIFF) has prompted the ongoing circulation of new films being made across the country. Founded by the Karachi Film Society (KFS), the festival is beginning to form its base as an educational platform, promoting workshops and panel discussions on all the aspects of creating films. In terms of providing educational and participatory workshops on filmmaking, these workshops should be obligated to teach film archiving to enforce personal archiving tools for future generations. There has already been a loss of a generation's films. Pakistan does need a film archive as much as it needs schools and universities to participate in the collection and dissemination of film, music, and dance.

Invisible archives are points of contention in Lahore, where ghosts of the past film technologies linger in the Punjabi creative communities, “Excluded from access to digital technologies, filmmakers in Evernew Studios continue to use cameras that are decades old and are filming feature films for a national market on 35mm technology.”⁸⁶ Gwendolyn S. Kirk records her time at Evernew Studios, where the assistant cameraman announces that they still use cameras (the 35mm Arriflex camera) from the British colonial rule period. Unfortunately, this studio has an archival infrastructure that is degrading because of the hegemony of the Urdu language. Panjabi-speaking filmmakers at Evernew Studios face difficulties creating films without funding from Urdu language films.⁸⁷ Using technologies

⁸⁵ Jamal Shahid, “PNCA to Set Up Film Archive,” *Dawn News*, December 4, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593823>

⁸⁶ Gwendolyn S. Kirk, “‘A Camera from the Time of the British’: Film Technologies and Aesthetic Exclusion in Pakistani Cinema,” in *Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death*, ed. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2020), 184.

⁸⁷ Kirk, “‘A Camera from the Time of the British’” 185

from decades before to make films is impressive but highly time-consuming and requires more people to develop.

Notably, there are filmmakers and creative Panjabi-speaking communities with experience and expertise in the technicalities of analog film. This community holds knowledge from the participation of hundreds of production assistants from the 1970s.⁸⁸ Their experience as directors, writers, and production assistants is left behind because of ethnicity, language, and class structures. How can the fabric of Pakistani society evolve to create an inclusive industry? It will need to focus on contextualizing Pakistan's cinema with broader Indian and Bangladeshi filmmaking practices. Secondly, documenting the immense work by production assistants, who moved away from studio houses for better income, must become a part of the archival infrastructure because of their technical knowledge and film expertise from the 1960s onwards. Finally, there needs to be a solid establishment for archives in the West to participate with home countries to provide access to materials for education.

3.4. Community Building and Spectatorship in the South Asian Diaspora

In this section, I review literature that corroborates that the South Asian diaspora has initiated transnational viewership, which is transcendent religious, ethnic, and language differences. I focus mainly on diaspora cultures in North America and the UK. This is intended to highlight where South Asian populations have relocated, and literary evidence provides an analysis of the history of South Asian diaspora spectatorship. South Asians have a vast account of transnational migration. This is an extensive network of people identifying with similar cultural movements.

The term Desi is the well-known word for describing yourself as having South Asian heritage and originating from the Sanskrit word *deśa*, meaning country/land. The term Desi is

⁸⁸ Kirk, “A Camera from the Time of the British” 185

usually used to identify oneself as being ethnically South Asian and insinuates a shared commonality between other Desi people. According to an April 2019 report, based on a 2010 and 2017 US census, nearly 5.4 million South Asians live in the United States. This includes the number of South Asians on green cards, student visas, and undocumented immigrants in the US. The report also contains immigrants that ethnically came from South Asia and settled in the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East.⁸⁹

A generation of these networks can be seen through social media apps (TikTok, for example) that record Bollywood songs from the 1990s being reclaimed across the diaspora.⁹⁰ Presently, social media is creating a movement of South Asians that breaks stereotypes, reclaims their cultural heritage, and forms intercultural discourse. For the generation of pre-social media, the formation of intercultural communities was explored by Uzma Quraishi. Quraishi explores the inter-ethnic formations of film spectatorship amongst Pakistani and Indian university students in the US. “Paying a dollar admission, Indians and Pakistanis gathered to watch Hindi films on occasional Saturday evenings. By 1970, attendance at the movie screening ranged from 250 to 300 people, including students and members of the broader Indo-Pak community.”⁹¹ The mobilization of community screenings of Bollywood films at the University of Houston, as stated by Quraishi, formed intercultural screenings among members of pan-South Asian university students.

Furthermore, it is addressed that “English immediately emerged as a bridge among various language speakers.”⁹² English still creates a commonality between the different

⁸⁹ SAALT, Demographic Snapshot of South Asians in The United States. April 2019. <https://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SAALT-Demographic-Snapshot-2019.pdf>

⁹⁰ Natasha Roy writes on Brown Tik Tok: www.thejuggernaut.com/brown-tiktok

⁹¹ Uzma Quraishi, “The Formation of Interethnic Community, 1960s–1970s,” in *Redefining the Immigrant South: Indian and Pakistani Immigration to Houston during the Cold War*, (North Carolina Scholarship Online: May 2021),

DOI:10.5149/northcarolina/9781469655192.003.0005

⁹² Quraishi, “The Formation of Interethnic Community, 1960s–1970s”

ethnicities and religions of South Asians, as can be seen by TikTok users using English subtitling to translate famous Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi songs. Quraishi records the spectatorship of Indian films in universities and cities across the US because of interviews Quraishi led with university students from South Asia coming to universities in the US during the Cold War Era. The events held at university campuses across the US formalized a bond between Desi people; as Quraishi states, “Frequently, Desis befriended Desis, no matter the religious affiliation, underscoring for them the importance of shared ethnicity at least as much as shared religion.”⁹³ University campuses have been recorded as spaces for activism between South Asian cultural groups by Anu Gupta, who wrote case studies of South Asian-run student movements and organizations at four universities: Brown, Harvard, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania.⁹⁴ The broader Asian-American social organizations began with activist movements in the 1960s advocating against the Vietnam War at the 1960s at University of California at Berkeley. By the 1980s, critical student organizations across the four universities, Gupta studies formed strong ties between East Asians and South Asians but also developed South Asian identities through co-existing relationships.

Importantly, Quraishi and Gupta’s analysis and interviews with Desi people forming communities in universities are records of a shared cultural reality rather than a difference because of religion, politics, or class in the diaspora. A formal and mutual understanding between different South Asian cultures co-exists outside of South Asia, making it extremely important to utilize. Arguably, the political landscapes of South Asia are often feudalistic societies, often surmounting intergenerational trauma caused by mass migration in the aftermath of the Partition from British-ruled India. Relationships between pan-South Asian

⁹³ Quraishi, “The Formation of Interethnic Community, 1960s–1970s.”

⁹⁴ Anu Gupta, “At the Crossroads: College Activism and its Impact on Asian American identity Formation,” in *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, (Philadelphia Temple University Press, 1998), 131

cultures outside of South Asia show that nation-state agendas are usually politically motivated and not individualistic.

Manan Desai's article published by the South Asian American Digital Archive records the viewership of Hindi Cinema in California in the 1960s, following old newspaper clippings advertising viewings of Hindi Cinema.⁹⁵ Outside the inner cities of California, Illinois, and New York, South Asian film viewership is not very common. However, the GEM acquired a large sum of Indian films from an abandoned Bollywood theater in Texas, as I noted in Chapter 2. Bollywood has held dominance over the transnational markets. With the advent of streamable media through file-sharing Websites, many cinemas showing South Asian films have closed in North America and the UK. Cinemas in the US, for example, that screen the latest Bollywood films don't have much of a market. A 2009 article in the NY times records how Bollywood's film industry is transnational, affecting millions of spectators looking for legal ways to watch movies. A popular cinema in Jackson Heights, Queens, called The Eagle, closed in 2009 because of a seven-week-long strike from Indian Bollywood Producers. The owner of the Eagle, a Pakistani-American, showed Bollywood films because of the high demand for the industry across the US. Subsequently, a video and music store next door to the theater also closed because fewer people were coming to the theater.⁹⁶ Evidently, literary research supports that Bollywood films dominate the fabric of North American diaspora spectatorship.

The UK diaspora is arguably more urbanized and identifies with more intercultural nuances between other minority cultures in the UK. Since the 1980s, the British South Asian

⁹⁵ Manan Desai, "The Dancing Raneer: Bollywood in Sixties California," *South Asian American Digital Archive*, July 22, 2014, <https://www.saada.org/tides/article/the-dancing-raneer>

⁹⁶ Kirk Semple, "Dispute Half a World Away Darkens a Movie House in Queen" *New York Times*, May 26, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/27/nyregion/27bollywood.html>

diaspora has amassed a countercultural film scene alongside Black British filmmaking collectives. The 1980s-1990s saw a shift in the perspective of South Asians on screen in the UK and began questioning multifaceted identities, British and South Asian. British Asians started producing shows and films marketed at local television stations, funded by the BFI.⁹⁷ I think these films gained more popularity as cult films because of the hegemony of Hollywood and Bollywood cinema, these being global cinema platforms with the most significant and dominant markets. I've argued that the migration of 35mm exhibition prints to the UK and then donated to the BFI indicates that there was a solid establishment of spectatorship of Pakistani films. However, the evidence of such events is not historicized through literature, and this is a point that I closely assess in section 2.5. However, it is essential to note that, like the closure of cinemas in New York, South Asian cinemas in the UK were hailed as extremely favorable until piracy boomed in the 1970s. Districts in London with large South Asian populations, such as Tooting and Southall, have served as historic spaces for the distribution of cinema from Bollywood and minor film factions of South Asian film. These include the Granada Cinema in Tooting and the Himalaya Palace in Southall. Cooper writes about buying Pashto-language films produced and distributed in Pakistan at the Himalaya Palace. The films are grainy and distorted in color because of the lossy digital transfer from VHS to VCD to DVD. The migration of each media transfer results in the lossy image, ironically reflecting the migratory loss of Pakistani cinema itself.

3.5. Proposal for Community Appraisal and Archiving

In an encounter at a local business in Queens, New York City, I began to think more about community-archive relationships. In January 2022, I picked up a copy of *Journey Through Lens: Pakistani Cinema* by Aijaz Gul and Jamal Sohail from Columbia University

⁹⁷ Jigna Desai, "Between Hollywood and Bollywood," in *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 53

Libraries. The coffee table book has vibrant photographs printed across the cover of the book of famous Pakistani actors and actresses. It is one of the few titles I found that chronicles the rise and decline of Pakistani film and film spectatorship and Pakistan's traditional cinema halls. I stopped at my local store on my way back from the library. A store owner pointed out the photos on the cover of the book. She told me about all her favorite actresses, Saima, Zeba, Shabnam, and Rani. I asked her where she was from; she told me she was from Nepal and watched these films at home with her family in Nepal!

This encounter made me question the South Asian diaspora's collective memory and how Pakistani cinema can re-emerge through community archiving inference and archiving. Bollywood classics have reached international levels of distribution and spectatorship. With avant-garde film distribution networks, Bangladeshi cinema, specifically the cinema of Satyajit Ray, has pioneered a global and pan-South Asian audience. For the most part, Pakistani cinema has remained invisible on the international level. I became excited to learn about her memories of watching Pakistani films on television in Nepal. So, although invisible, Pakistani cinema may remain in memories of home for diaspora communities in New York.

In an interview with the GEM's curator Peter Bagrov, we discussed the importance of the 35mm Pakistani film prints because of the scarcity of Pakistani film from 1950-1980 in archives in South Asia. We discussed how the trickiest objective for this collection now is determining what should be preserved first. Should the highly decayed films that won't last another year be scanned first, or should the most culturally and historically significant films be preserved first? The goal of the GEM is to be able to gather funding and preserve all the films in their South Asian Collection. Many archival institutions face the challenges of preservation, which include extraneous amounts of money, labor, and technical experience to produce fine preservation prints and digital remasters of films. For this reason, my research

suggests that the South Asian diaspora and community are the critical benefactors to the films in the collection. Their knowledge and spectatorship of Pakistani cinema is equal to the institutional decisions because of the history of their presence with the films in the collection.

I've included a collection assessment (chapter 2) because the role of the collection assessment is an essential factor for the preservation history of a collection. The collection assessment is due to change as the preservation of the collection progresses. However, without the input of communities who have watched the films, there may be no way to determine the priority items for preservation, provide accurate metadata for the museum's collection, and ethically approach the curation and dissemination of the collection. The GEM Pakistan Film Collection is made by and should be targeted at the South Asian diaspora. The diaspora created the collection and should hold stewardship of its dissemination.

At this research stage, I began working on bringing together academics and South Asian diaspora community members to acquire contextual analysis of the films in the collection. Community inference provides a value for the group to be accurately preserved, distributed, and curated. I propose two types of community archiving workshops—the first aimed at scholars and academics published on Pakistani cinema and cross-cultural cinema production in South Asia. The second workshop was designed for focus groups, specifically South Asian diaspora focus groups on the United States. These workshops explore how this collection, even in its very early stages, has a collective social history remembered by diaspora audiences—further enforcing the importance of community archiving workshops and the potential of the contents of this collection to be a living memory of a cinema history lost in-between religion and politics.

An archival appraisal is a process that collects institutions (museums, libraries, and archives) use to determine the uniqueness and value that object holds for the given institution. In the case of the GEM museum, the appraisal of the Pakistan Film Collection is essential

because of the lack of a record of any archive containing Pakistani cinema from the 1950s-1980s. Michelle Caswell, the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), informed me that “community appraisal” is potentially the best route for Pakistan Film Collection. Caswell has conducted multiple focus groups with South Asian communities in the US. The research shows the correlation between past and present circumstances that communities of color in the US endure. Focus groups, for Caswell, are ways that participants can become representatives of their history and culture in the archive.⁹⁸ Creating community-based focus groups in predominantly South Asian New York neighborhoods would allow individual experiences to be recorded. Not only would focus groups provide information about film screenings, but they could also provide more understanding of Pakistani film screenings. Abandoned or closed theaters in these neighborhoods would be the first point of exploration for beginning a community-based project. For example, SAADA conducted focus group questionnaires to examine what South Asian community members want from community archives. The questions included “What stories from your parents’ or grandparents’ lives do you wish you knew more about?” and “What stories from your generation would you like your grandchildren to know more about?”

I expressed my interest in creating focus groups for SAADA. However, these films were not viewed by South Asians in the US. They were considered British Asians. This experience makes evident the transnationality of many South Asians, with some still having roots in Britain and Pakistani cinema's popularity and influence over Indian cinema. The complexities of the South Asian diaspora's viewership, which I addressed in section 2.4, attest to the effect that UK-based South Asians share much of the same multi-cultural schools of thought as US-based diasporas.

⁹⁸ Michelle Caswell, “Community Archives Interrupting Time,” in *Urgent Archives Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, (New York: Routledge, 2021)

For future research, I intend to use community crowdsourcing to contextualize titles in the films that may be the only existing 35mm exhibition prints that have not been preserved anywhere. Moreover, I will be carrying out interviews with my immediate family members in Lahore and with the community social clubs in dominantly South Asian diaspora neighborhoods in New York, e.g., Jackson Heights and Astoria. I also want to extend the research toward UK British Asians since the Pakistan Film Collection was formed in the UK. The interviews will be able to serve community members speaking languages, Urdu, Panjabi, and Hindi. Although, this may not be needed because English is usually a way that different South Asian countries can share mutual connections. Exploring translating the films in the Pakistan Film Collection into other languages at a later stage will evoke a more extensive crowd because of pan-South Asian spectatorship of Urdu and Punjabi cinema.

Participation from the diaspora is an important activity that promotes the role of community inference in the archival process as imperative for this collection's preservation and future uses. This curatorial methodology is to gain insight into films that the public watched in the 1950s-1980s. Crowd-sourcing information mainly gathers information on the titles donated to George Eastman Museum. On the part of the GEM, there is an ethical duty to listen to the voices of South Asian diasporas to understand better what has been donated. Transparency with the museum and organizations that promote community archiving workshops, such as SAADA, is critically important to begin decolonizing Western archival systems.

So, as part of the research for this paper, I got in touch with members of academic communities internationally who have written on Pakistani films. The purpose of this was to examine ways in which film scholarship on Pakistani film is conducted. I began this community outreach in January 2022 in the hopes of holding an online workshop that would

gather academics in the field of Pakistani and pan-South Asian cinema. The initial proposal of the workshop is attached to this paper in Appendix A.

My event did not occur due to time restraints and time differences between academics in the US, UK, and Pakistan. However, the researchers are aware of the collection at the GEM. To reiterate the importance of community archiving, Caswell states, "Community archives must aim for more than representation, leveraging the minoritized histories they have painstakingly recuperated for liberatory ends."⁹⁹ Inferring that the community archiving strategy will not just represent the community but also shift perspectives and allow for joint resolutions of South Asia's collective conflicts.

4. Conclusion

This research has expanded on what it means for Pakistani films to be archived in New York at the GEM. I have explored the history, migration, and status of Pakistani films at the GEM. This exploration is intended for the GEM to utilize and for the GEM to initiate conversation between pan-South Asian diasporas as part of the preservation process. This paper reiterates the importance of preserving Pakistani films because Pakistan has lost almost all its physical films. Furthermore, I have discussed how community archiving is a tool to contextualize films in the collection accurately.

In this research paper, I have negotiated the identity of Pakistani cinema by assessing the history of archival infrastructure in South Asia. The history and establishment of film archives in the West, shipped to South Asia during colonialism, shows how the archive stands as a symbol of nation-state political agenda. Rather than addressing cinema with shared intercultural ideologies and linkages. I argue in this thesis that Indian and pan-South Asian archives share film production histories with Pakistan. I also address the issues in

⁹⁹ Michelle Caswell, "From Representation to Activation," in *Urgent Archives Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, (New York: Routledge, 2021)

Pakistan that led to the neglect of film as a cultural heritage object. I hope to continue supporting the efforts of the GEM by initiating community archiving workshops to gather memories of spectatorship of these popular films from the 1950s to the 1980s.

This thesis has examined the need to establish a Pakistan Film Archive. Through the collaboration of academics, community members and archives staff, it has been possible to historicize the state of Pakistani film of this period. Through community archiving, it is possible to bring participatory activities that can attest to film as a cultural heritage object for Pakistani culture. Currently, there is minimal discussion on ways the preservation of films can be attained in Pakistan. Therefore, I discuss ways diaspora communities can serve as personal and collective memories of the viewership of Pakistani cinema.

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