

## **The Broken Walls of Cinema: An Exploratory study of Cinema Halls in Quetta**

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### **Abstract**

*Cinema is one of the important social institutions in the society along with family, religion and education. Cinema depicts human emotions on the screen which is a source of education, learning and entertainment. Before the emergence of the cinemas human societies had folktales and poetry followed by theater. After the Industrial revolution and the invention of the pinhole camera; cinema was established which would produce pictures on screen. This Study aimed at finding the origin and later developments of cinema in Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan. It further aimed at exploring the present status of the cinemas in Quetta. For this purpose, Qualitative and interpretive approach was selected and data was collected through in-depth interviews and Participant observation in the cinema halls. The results shows that the origin of the cinemas dates back to the pre 1947 era in Quetta. The first cinema in Quetta was built during the British rule. Later, after the partition of India- Pakistan and establishment of Lollywood many more cinemas were established in Balochistan and especially in Quetta. The culture of cinema-going in Quetta was at its peak from 1960-2000. Many cinemas were established during this time period. Later, the culture of cinema has declined and is facing existential threats, as many of the cinemas are closed now. These Cinema halls have turned into shopping malls and garages and currently there are only two functional cinema halls in Quetta.*

**Key words:** *Cinema, Quetta, Films, Lollywood, society, culture,*

### **Introduction**

In modern era Cinema is arguably one of the most powerful mediums of communication and films, being an influential tool, highly impacts the minds of individuals and leaves imprints within the larger society (Prot, S., Anderson 2015). Ingmar Bergman, the legendary filmmaker has very aptly

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described the power and influence of cinema in these words; Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.” (Bergman, I. 2007).

Along with the literature, cultural exchanges, exhibitions and music, films play a far greater role in portraying the culture of a particular society and therefore, act as a cultural ambassador too. Presently, when the world has become a global village, the significance of films and cinema has increased manifold. Presenting a society’s culture, language and norms, films also act a medium of exhibiting the indigenous knowledge, thought processes and subtleties of a given society. Not only do they play a significant role in bringing people together but also act as a powerful medium through which real issues and problems of a society could be highlighted.

Cinema is a place where people are shown a movie (Athique, A. (2011). There are other terms also used for the place such as Movie Theater and cinema halls. Cinema generally consists of an auditorium; a large hall with sitting area where movies are projected for the audience. Cinema is one the major recreational place for the public where they go for entertainment and spending their spare time.

Cinema is one the significant social institutions in the society. It plays many imperative social functions either manifest in the nature of the institution or latently as a logical consequence. With the development in the film making the functions of cinema has also changed. The audience started getting involved in the movies as the talkies were started being projected in the cinema halls. A movie was no more a series of moving pictures for the audience. It is there that the films and cinema together starts shaping and reshaping the behavior and attitude of the audience. From then on cinemas have been place of utmost importance in the society.

Lollywood, the Pakistani film industry, despite facing numerous setbacks and ups and downs, has a rich history. The political landscape of the country played a very important role in shaping the fortunes of the industry. Before its partition from India in 1947, it was mainly based in Lahore as a number of artistes, film producers, film directors and writers. The post partition industry, however, met with a number of problems that arose mainly as a result of lack of technical staff, film making equipment and experienced personnel. Although the reconstruction of this industry was an uphill task, yet it managed to survive and in the coming years, produced a number of blockbuster films as well. Right after the partition, Lollywood released its

first post partition film, *Teri Yaad*, in 1948, which turned out to be a successful movie (Khan, A. Ahmad, 2010).

Although the first film of the Lollywood was released in 1948 that does not mean there were no cinema halls prior to that period. Cinema had existed before partition in certain regions like Lahore, Karachi and some other cities. In Balochistan cinema hall existed and were functional in Quetta and Pishin even before the partition. After partition the number of cinema halls in Balochistan increased. Many cinemas were established in Quetta city. Along with the development in the cinema hall culture in Quetta, cinemas halls were built in other regions like Zhob, Loralai, Gawadar, Turbat and Lasbella.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Although Balochistan couldn't develop its own film industry but there have been cinemas in the province a long ago. Cinemas were established in regions like Quetta, Pishin, Lorelai, Turbat and other areas where people would come and watch Urdu, Pashto and English movies. With the passage of time, cinema culture met a down fall and its exact reasons are still unknown.

This study explores the history of cinema halls in Quetta city and the later developments till present day which is unknown to many. Very less has been unearthed so far about the culture of cinema in Balochistan in particular. Cinema which is ignored by the people to go there and watch movies, is similarly ignored by the researchers and academicians. This study would give many other researchers an opening to investigate further and explore this particular area in Balochistan which could be very useful in the revival of the cinema culture in the region.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study was conducted to meet the following objectives.

- To explore the historical origin of cinemas in Quetta
- To investigate the later development and current status of cinema halls in Quetta.

### **Literature review**

Cinema is arguably one indispensable medium of communication and socialization in the modern world (Prot, S., and Anderson 2015). Beside other elements of socialization like family, education and peer group cinema stand tall in this list. According to Oseroff, "we are liable to socialization forms from the time that we initially go to the world. Socialization messages

guide us, how to carry on, and how to decrease vulnerability identified with a circumstance or setting (Oseroff-Varnell, 1998).

There are number of scholars and researchers who have investigated and has executed in-depth research on history and culture of Pakistani Film Industry, which is Lollywood. They have focused on the evolution of cinema in Pakistan and the aftermath the rise and decline of cinema in the country, among them a prominent researcher is Mushatq Gazdar who extensively covers the fifty years history of film making in Pakistan in his work *Pakistan Cinema (1947-97)*. Another figure Almagir Kabir (1969) has written a book about the first efforts to establishing a film industry and has tried to manifest the importance of this field of cinema industry.

The film industry of Pakistan known as Lollywood like that of Bollywood of India (named after Bombay) and Hollywood of the USA (Aslam, E. H. (2015). Lollywood is the center of film production in the country in which films are produced in Urdu language and also in other regional languages like Punjabi and Pashto. Historically the film industry of Pakistan had three production centers: Lahore, Karachi and Dhaka but after the fall partition of Bangladesh Lollywood lost its one of the production center in 1971.

The culture of cinema in Pakistan is highly related to the film production in the country. The film production of Pakistan is known as Lollywood (Athique, A. 2011). With the rise and fall of film production industry, the culture of cinema the culture of going to cinema has also risen and fall. The number of cine goers in the golden era was significantly more than the number of people would go in the decadent era of Lollywood (Gazdar, M. 1997). The number of cinema halls built in Pakistan immensely increased in the golden era of Lollywood (Gazdar, M. (1997).

The decade of 1960's is known as the golden era of Lollywood as during these years, a number of successful films were made and these films were admired and praised for their quality of script and storyline, impressive direction, and strong acting (Aslam, E. H. (2015). The language of majority of the Pakistani films is Urdu, however, films in Punjabi and Pashto are also made in a great number depicting the cultural diversity of the Pakistani society. Although the industry continued to thrive during the 50s and 60s, however, it could not manage to continue with its legacy of quality work and suffered downfall during the 70s. Among the various reasons that paved the way of Lollywood's downfall, the fall of Decca is the major one. Coming as a destructive jolt to the Pakistani film industry, this fateful incident along with the dictatorial rule of Zia ul Haq and his bans on TV and media caused great damage to the cinema (PARveen, U., Tariq, T., & Siddiqui, M. T.

(2015). Under his Martial Law, Urdu classic films, just like the other genres of arts, especially those based on the themes of love were banned and gradually started to vanish from the scene.

Classics were replaced by a new genre of films commonly known as “*Gandasa Culture*”. Cinema-going became a transgression during this era and ironically Pashto and Punjabi cinema overcame and replaced the Urdu cinema significantly during the decade of 1980s due to the cultural repression (Danish, 2014). According to Tariq Rahman in his work on cinema shows that the two languages that somehow replaced predominantly Urdu “came with their own internal codes of solidarity and intimacy”.

According to a survey of Federal Bureau of Statistics, the country once boasted of large number of cinemas and movie theatre operating in the country. From 1,100 in 1985, these numbers have come down to 120 in these days, and the number of films produced locally have shrunk reasonably. Studios that would at times explained defined the cinematic origin and roots are now in a dilapidated state. They are either being closed down, one after the other or seized by the property dealers and influential groups turning them in residential or commercial areas. (Faruqi, 2013).

The traditional cinema of Pakistan is known for masala films: a genre, similar to popular Bombay cinema, now called Bollywood in its recent form. This kind of filmmaking is marked by mixing up cinematic elements; melodramatic themes, raunchy, innuendo based romance, humor, songs and dance numbers, to provide its audiences with a particular experience of entertainment.

People in Pakistani enumerate multiple reasons of this steady demise including the VCR, cable television, DVD piracy and most significantly the Islamization of the Pakistani society. Undoubtedly, the role of the state machinery in one major factor in the downfall of cinema in the country. Similarly, on one hand, people who owned cinemas wanted the state to put a ban on the piracy of Digital Versatile Disc, while on the other, the filmmakers insist that government must provide them support and financial assistance to buy and install newer equipment for the production of movies.

### **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature in which data was collected through in-depth interviews from the respondents. The universe of the research is Quetta. The research is carried out on all the closed and still open cinema

halls of the city. For data collection questionnaire guide was used and interviews were conducted from people mainly the owners of the cinema halls, the managers in the cinema halls and people who has worked in the industry through purposive sampling. Sample is a Subset of a larger population. We make conclusions on a population by studying or investigating a sample In order to get access to these respondents snow ball technique was implied. The nature of the data is qualitative which was collected through in-depth interviews. Data was analyzed using thematic and factual analysis which could give most convenient results.

## **Results**

### **Origin of cinema in Quetta**

The findings of the study shows that the origin of the cinema halls in Quetta dates back to pre-partition period of the British rule in the region. The British came to the subcontinent in the seventeenth century as east India Company and later ruled the subcontinent for almost a century after the war of independence of 1857. The colonials introduced many aspects of their culture in the subcontinent. They brought technology and introduced their system of infrastructure and education in the subcontinent. Besides these they introduced the sports played in the England like Hockey, cricket and football. Similarly they introduced the cinema for the first time in the subcontinent.

Balochistan was a relatively less populated area in the subcontinent during the British Rule. The only true urban town was Quetta city where cinema house was first established during 1930's. One of the respondents states that

*“Cinema halls in Balochistan started establishing during 1930's and before that the people of the region would only have the opportunity to watch a movie when the English men would arrange a magic lantern show or a bioscope for the people in different villages and towns. Similarly those people who would work with crown would have the opportunity to watch a movie whence the English men would watch one”.*

### **Earliest Cinema Halls in Quetta**

As per the information provided by the respondents there are two categories of cinema halls in Quetta city based on their establishment.

1. Those established before Partition of the subcontinent (1947)
2. And those established after the partition

Complete list of the cinema as per their establishment year has been given below

	Cinemas established Before Partition (1947)	Cinemas established after Partition (1947)
1	Nishat cinema (1930)	Asmat cinema (1950s)
2	Delight Cinema (1936)	Paradise cinema (1960s)
3		Ghazi cinema (1960s)
4		Regal cinema (1960s)
5		Imdad Cinema (1965s)
6		Rahat cinema (1970)
7		Weplex (2016)

**Table 1**

**1: Nishat Cinema, Quetta**

Nishat cinema was the first cinema established in Balochistan. it was located in the current capital city of Balochistan i.e Quetta. Nishat cinema was built in early 1930's and it was the time when subcontinent was ruled under the British Rule. The cinema was owned by a Hindu merchant and the whole construction of the cinema was of crystal. A respondent said

*“Before the partition of the subcontinent, most of the shops and business were owned by the Hindu community in the town. The hindu community was in great strength in the area before the partition. They owned business, shops and the first cinema was also established by the hindus in Quetta”.*

The cinema became a popular place for the people of the town and neighboring places. People in large numbers would come and watch movies in this cinema. Since the Lollywood hadn't been established during that time so the majority of movies projected here would be English movies or silent movies of the Bollywood. English silent movies were also projected in here. It was the time when movie were produced and projected in black and white. The cinema was functional almost for a decade. The cinema was closed in early 1994s when the owner of the cinema left Quetta.

**2: Delight cinema**

Delight cinema was the second built cinema hall in Balochistan. It was built in Quetta at Toghi road in 1936. Delight cinema which later became popular for the projection of the Pashto movies; initially projected English and Urdu movies. Delight cinema was the first of the series of the cinema halls built by its owners. The owners of the cinema later built more cinema halls in Balochitan and Sindh in the coming years. The owner of the cinema hall stated that

*“The cinema was built by my father before the partition. We later built more cinema halls in Balochistan like Asmat in Quetta and others in different parts of Balochistan and Sindh”.*

Delight cinema initially projected English, Hindi and Urdu movie but with the rise of Pashto film industry it became the cinema hall where only Pashto film and at times Punjabi movies would be projected.

The period from 1970 to 1995 was the golden era of the delight cinema. It was the time when quality Pashto films were produced and projected in the cinema. The decline came in the late 1990s and early 2000 when people started losing interest in Pashto and Punjabi movies because of the quality of the movie. The owner further says that

*“there was a time when people would get tickets in black for watching a Pashto film in the delight cinema but later it became very difficult even to find a hundred people in the cinema watching a movie”.*

Delight cinema couldn't survive a last decade of low viewership and eventually it was closed in 2012-13. Its building was collapsed by the owners and a new shopping plaza is being constructed in its place.

### **3: Asmat Cinema Hall**

Asmat Cinema hall was built in the early 1950s by the owners of the delight cinema. The owner of the cinema; saith Asmat, had established a series of cinema halls across Balochistan and Sindh. The cinema was also built in the center of the Quetta city at prince road. Asmat Cinema had an area of 12000 Sq feet and had the capacity to manage 450 to 500 viewers at the same time. There were separate lodges for the female visitors and for the families. It was one of the popular places for the lovers of Urdu movies in Balochistan. The owner of the cinema states

*“This cinema was known for and specific for the projection of Urdu films. Urdu films were very popular among the masses and family would often come in numbers. The content of the Urdu films of that times was very much liked by the people and majority of the people of the city would prefer watching Urdu films”.*

As in many cases, the fate of Asmat Cinema was linked with the rise and fall of the Urdu film industry. When the Urdu film industry was in its zenith, the cinema would be its peak as many and many people would visit them. The era of late 1960s till 1977 was the peak time for the Urdu film industry. With the decline of the Urdu film industry in the late 1970s the Asmat Cinema too declined. One of the respondent and cine goer of the times states that

*“There was a time when a movie would continue and run for years. I remember movies like, dulhan aik raat ki and aena they were in Asmat Cinema for more than two years”.*

Asmat cinema projected movies almost for five decades and finally it was closed in early 2000 and like many other cinema halls in Quetta it was replaced by a shopping mall.

#### **4: Imdad cinema**

Imdad cinema was built in 1965 in Quetta city, the current capital city of the province. The total area of the cinema is 10 to 15 thousand square feet. Imdad cinema is located in the center of the Quetta city near Imdad Square.

On the ground floor it has the capacity to accommodate 350 people and in the galleries as many as 140 people can sit and watch films. The galleries are built for the different strata of the viewers and has more ticket price as compared to the ground floor. There is a special gallery for the families and women.

Like all other cinema halls in the province, initially, black and white movies were projected in the Imdad cinema and later with the production of the color print films, films of such quality would be projected in the Imdad cinema. Imdad cinema initially projected English films only and it was mostly visited by the educated masses who could comprehend the films. The manager of the cinema thinks that

*“Imdad cinema reflected the social dynamics of the society. It was considered to be elites’ cinema where the high class and the educated classes of the area would come to watch movies. But it was not always the case, people from different classes would come and watch movies in the Imdad cinema even those who could not understand the English language”.*

Imdad Cinema has been closed this year and has become another cinema hall whose walls have been broken.

#### **5: Regal cinema**

Regal cinema was also established in 1960s and it was located in the Quetta city. Regal cinema was popular for projecting only English movie as it never projected a movie other than in English language. The size and sitting capacity of the regal cinema less than the other cinemas.

Like Imdad cinema, regal cinema hall also reflected one the many social dynamics. People of a specific community i.e Hazara community would mostly visit regal cinema.

*“Since only English movies were projected here in which there would be fights and judo karaty (martial arts) scene, so such films would attract the Hazara community more than the other communities as Hazara*

*community has a special liking for the martial arts, says one of the respondent”.*

Like many other cinema halls, the regal cinema was eventually closed in early 2000 and is now known as regal plaza a popular commercial place in the Quetta city now.

### **6: Paradise Cinema hall**

Paradise Cinema was established in 1970 and is one of those cinema halls in Balochistan which is still open for the cinema goers. Paradise Cinema is located at Circular road, Quetta Balochistan and has an area of 9000 sq feet. It has the capacity to accommodate more than 350 people at one time. It has a gallery at top and a sitting area on the ground floor. Paradise Cinema is historically popular for the projection of Pashto films as it has only projected Pashto films only.

During the 1970s Pashto films were produced and the other cinemas in Quetta like Delight cinema, Imdad Cinema, Asamat Cinema and Regal Cinema would only project English and Urdu films and some would project Hindi films too. Thus that gave room to the Paradise Cinema to establish its root in the area. From the early years it gained popularity in the area and it enjoyed its golden time during 1970/80s.

With the decline of the Lollywood in general and Pashto film industry in particular in 1990s the decline of the Paradise Cinema also started. But it was not closed because the other cinema like Ghazi and Rahat cinemas which also projected Pashto films were closed earlier giving the owner of the paradise cinema a breathing space. As a result it remained the only cinema hall where Pashto films are being projected.

But the owners and managers of the cinema don't think the cinema to survive more days of empty room shows.

*“You hardly see people coming here now. People can watch Pashto films in their cell phones now which is more economical for them. Secondly the part of the city where our cinema is located is now not a place where one would want spend the good part of his day, there are car garages all around”.*

### **7 Ghazi Cinema**

Ghazi cinema was also established in Quetta city and it was open and functional from 1980 to early 2000. Ghazi cinema was popular for the projection of the Pashto and Punjabi films. Quetta is a mutli-cultural city where people of different ethinc background reside. People from a Punjabi origin live in thousand in the city and thus had a significant viewership for the Punjabi films..

The Punjabi films produced in 1970s and 80s had a huge fan base. The era of Sultan Rahi was the golden time period as far as the Punjabi movies are concerned. It was not only the Punjabi community but also the communities too in which there were many fans of these particular films.

Along with Punjabi films, Pashto films were also shown to the public and a Urdu film on special occasions like eids. But like other cinemas Ghazi Cinema couldn't gain that popularity and eventually it was closed and no signs of it are left in the city.

### **8: Rahat Cinema Hall**

Rahat Cinema was a small cinema hall located at Prince Road. It was established in 1970s and was eventually burnt by public mob after the bomb blasts in the Imam Bargah (a religious place for Shias) next to the cinema.

*“When the blasts took place in 2004, people demonstrated against it and showed their anger by burning many of the public places like bus stops, buildings and cinema halls. The set fire to Imdad Cinema and Rahat Cinema too, said one of the eye witness”.*

Rahat Cinema was never to be re-constructed and eventually it was converted to a flowers' nursery called Rahat Nursery now.

9: Pak Force Weplex Cinema:

### **Present status of cinema halls in Quetta**

Currently there are only two cinema halls in the city where pictures are projected. These cinema halls are the Paradise Cinema Hall where Pashto films are projected for the people and the Weplex Cinema which is located in the cantonment area.

### **Conclusion**

Quetta which was at times known for its many cinemas has become a city with only two cinemas. Most of the cinemas have been collapsed and have turned into shopping malls and garages. The broken walls of the cinemas in Quetta city show the decline of cinema culture in the region. From the research it is clear that the origin of the cinema in Quetta dates back to the colonial rule in the subcontinent. The first cinema in Quetta was built in early 1930 and a second one was built in 1936. Later more cinemas were established in the city after the partition. These cinema halls were popular places for the public. Not only people of Quetta would visit these cinema halls but people from the surrounding areas would too visit these cinema halls. Cinema decline started with the decline of the Lollywood in early 1990s as currently there are only two cinemas which are open for the people of Quetta.

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