

## GLOBALIZATION IN PAKISTANI CINEMA: TRANSFORMATION FROM TRADITIONAL TO FANTASY WORLD

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Cinematic transformation, thematic development, global viewer, digital art, Pakistani cinema, cultural globalization, Hybridity, visual aesthetics, thematic evolution.

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## Abstract

This study examines the stylistic, visual and thematic development of Pakistani film through the cultural globalization effect, following the pattern of localized traditional storytelling to globally aligned cinematic productions. This study explores how the local film narrative has been adapted to accommodate international standards in four classic Pakistani films *Heer Ranjha* (1970), *Maula Jut* (1979), *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022), and *Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning* (2024). The study explores the changing patterns in the four basic dimensions of analysis visual aesthetics, costume design, delivery of dialogue, and thematic content. The results suggest that even though the films made in Pakistan were strongly oriented to cultural realism, native aesthetics, and regional dialects, the modern cinema is characterized by a deep cinematographic change comprising of sophisticated CGI, digital art, and fantasy environments with a stylized appearance. Moreover, the traditional narrative tropes based on regional pride and social responsibility have also become hybridized, multiverse-based fantasy structures. This new strategic direction has enabled modern film producers to create a narrative that will attract a global audience and the international diaspora without totally eliminating the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples. Finally, the study indicates that globalization did not destroy the local traditions in Pakistani cinema but, on the contrary, it has created a hybrid cinematic culture that neither kills nor eliminates local traditions but instead offers them as the hybrid cinematic culture that balances the local heritage with the demands of the transnational market.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The film industry in Pakistan has experienced an incredible transformation, shifting its focus from localized filmmaking to a more globally oriented approach over the last few decades. This trend is an indicator of the strong presence of cultural globalization, which transforms national media in terms of blending global technologies with local stories (Appadurai, 1996). The Pakistani cinema, often called Lollywood, during its formative years was firmly rooted in classical realism and ethnicity

in its aesthetics. The films created in the late 20th century were first designed to appeal to the local audience relying heavily on the regional folklore, rural life and localized socio-cultural norms (Gazdar, 1997). The visual decisions, costume choices, and language dialects used in these films were direct representations of regionality as an authentic representation of local heritage as opposed to technical spectacle. But with the advent of the 21st century and the explosion of digital media, a radical change of the industry has

occurred. With the world slowly coming to a unified standard in cinematic productions, Pakistani filmmakers had the difficult task of not only keeping cultural roots intact, but also adapting to the demands of a highly connected, modern society (Kraidy, 2002).

This kind of pressure has been responsible for what is referred to as 'glocal' film-making, which entails a reconstruction of familiar plots employing modern technology, innovative cinematography, and fresh narrative strategies. The landmark films of today exemplify the rebirth of Pakistani cinema through an application of modern digital artistic style to break out of national boundaries and win a place with audiences worldwide, even those living abroad. The study looks at the evolution of Pakistani storytelling and how it has changed over time as demonstrated by the following four famous films from Pakistan: Heer Ranjha (1970), Maula Jutt (1979), The Legend of Maula Jutt (2022), and Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024). The purpose of the study is to show how storytelling in Pakistan has evolved over time from cultural realism to fantasy storytelling. The analysis considers how far local cultural identities have been preserved, transformed or merged with global cinematic tropes to reach a broader international audience through the theoretical framework of cultural globalization and hybridity.

### 1.1 Research Objectives:

- To explore how Pakistani cinema has evolved out of the traditional storytelling to the contemporary and fantasy-based storytelling using selected films.
- To analyze how cinematography, visual style, dialogue, themes, and costume design play a role in this transformation.
- To investigate how current techniques in filmmaking and strategies in plotting help to extend the audience interaction across the national borders.

### 1.2 Research Questions:

- How Pakistani cinema has evolved from traditional storytelling to contemporary and fantasy-based narratives?

- How do cinematography, visual aesthetics, dialogue, and costume design show this transformation?
- How do modern cinematic techniques and fantasy elements enhance the appeal of Pakistani films to wider and international audiences?

## 2. Literature Review

Pakistani cinema has evolved from its emergence shortly after independence in 1947 until today. The earliest films were highly inspired by the regional culture, folklore and stories. The tradition genre included poems in dialogue, indigenous clothing and setting, rural life, and themes about honor and sacrifice. The importance of this genre lies in the fact that this genre has been important in documenting stories and values in popular culture (Gazdar, 1997). Moreover, another period in which films have been important in documenting the cultural heritage of Pakistan includes the golden period of the Pakistani film industry where films like Maula Jutt have documented the lives and honor of the rural population in rich Punjabi dialogue (Zhou & Iftikhar, 2024). In the linguistic aspect, the application of Urdu language and regional language like Punjabi was important to retain authenticity and cultural continuity. Dialogues were also frequently poetic and symbolical and were based on the socio-cultural context of the era and reinforced the attachment of the audience to local customs. Due to globalization, there has been a transformation of the structure of the stories told in Pakistani movies, along with the methods used for cinematography and film making. The change in the Pakistani films can be considered a gradual shift wherein traditional storytelling was complemented with the methods adopted in global movies. Globalization has impacted the local film industry with the advent of technology and mass production.

Due to globalization, the process of making films has been enhanced through the usage of innovative technology such as CGI, digital editing, and diversification in genres, thereby making the Pakistani film industry more popular (Bushra et al., 2025). These advancements have seen

Pakistani movies both increase their scope as well as compete in the global film markets. Moreover, the contribution of Shams and Shahid is of critical importance to the understanding of the cultural shifts in Pakistani cinema. In their work, they note the influence of the modern cinema on the change of the culturally closed narratives to the open ones that have global impact, and in this regard, they observe the development of the hybrid forms of cinema where the local traditions are intertwined with the international ones (Shams & Shahid, 2025). This metamorphosis is an example of cultural hybridity in which the conventions of world cinema are localized, leading to the emergence of so-called glocalised discourses, which are attractive to local and international viewers. Other scholars, on the same note hold that globalization has played a great role concerning cultural identity and representation in Pakistani films. The internationalization of film elements like fantasy, action, and science fiction proves that filmmakers are more and more experimenting with new forms of narrating, but still keeping some traces of local culture (Khan et al., 2025). Such a combination of international and national aspects can be seen as a constant negotiation between the traditional and modern, as the Pakistani cinema is able to develop without losing its cultural hold. The influence of globalization can also be found in the language that is used in Pakistani cinema. The previous movies were mainly based on poetic Urdu and regional dialects, supporting the conservative identity and emotionality. Conversely, modern cinema has been increasingly using English code-mixing, technical jargon, and contemporary language varieties, as a result of urbanization and cultural openness to the world (Zhou & Iftikhar, 2024). Socio-linguistically, this transition means modifying the signs of identity, in which language has been made an instrument of articulating modernity, education, and cosmopolitan identity.

### 2.1 Research Gap

Although, there is an increasing amount of literature on Pakistani cinema, there are still gaps. The majority of the current literature is dedicated to historical development or modern change with

little comparison made between the early and modern movies. Moreover, no combined studies that analyze simultaneously visual aesthetics, development of themes and sociolinguistic characteristics in one analytical framework can be found. The contribution of the advanced technologies like CGI, and the influence of hybrid language practices on the development of cinematic narratives are under researched. Thus, this study fills these gaps through the comparative analysis between Heer Ranjha (1970), Maula Jut (1979), The Legend of Maula Jatt (2022) and Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024). Using Cultural Globalization Theory and Sociolinguistic approaches the study presents a thorough insight into the role of globalization in the structures of narrative, visual representation, and linguistic identity in Pakistani cinema along with the perpetual debate between cultural continuation and globalization.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design, which focuses on comparative film analysis to systematically study the structural transformation of Pakistani cinema. The study examines how the industry has moved into high-concept, globalized fantasy narratives, via a series of evaluations of the strategic changes in visual aesthetics, costume design, dialogues and thematic content across the various eras of history. The qualitative method enables an in-depth, interpretative study of the cinematic texts that help to unravel the underlying cultural meanings and socio-linguistic changes within the narrative structures.

### 3.2 Data Selection

Data selection of this study is based on four purposely chosen Pakistani films, which represent three different evolutionary stages of the film industry in Pakistan. The first is the Classical Era that is expressed through Heer Ranjha (1970) and Maula Jut (1979), which reflect the origins of the traditional realism, the local folklore and the localized narration. The second era is the Transitional Era, which is represented by The Legend of Maula Jatt (2022) that shows how

traditional narratives were modernized through the global cinematic standards. This movie shows how modernization is used within the traditional plot through global cinematic standards. Lastly, there is the Transnational Fantasy Era, which includes *Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning* (2024).

### 3.3 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The theoretical basis of this study is based on Cultural Globalization and Hybridity Theory, as well as, the principles of Sociolinguistic analysis. The Cultural Globalization Theory, originally driven by the works of Arjun Appadurai (1996) is the theory that is used to explain how the localized cinema embraces the transnational visual and narrative practices without fully discarding the indigenous culture. To supplement this, the notion of cultural hybridity, related to Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Marwan M. Kraidy (2002) is used to examine how local and global forces interact within cinematic texts to create hybrid cultural forms. Moreover, a sociolinguistic approach, based on John J. Gumperz (1982), is used to analyze dialogue and language use in the chosen films with a particular focus on a shift of traditional poetic and regional dialects towards contemporary Urdu-English hybrids.

#### 4.1.1 Traditional Realism and Indigenous Aesthetic



Figure 1: Heer Ranja

Source: "Heer Ranjha (1970) movie poster (accessed via Google Drive)."

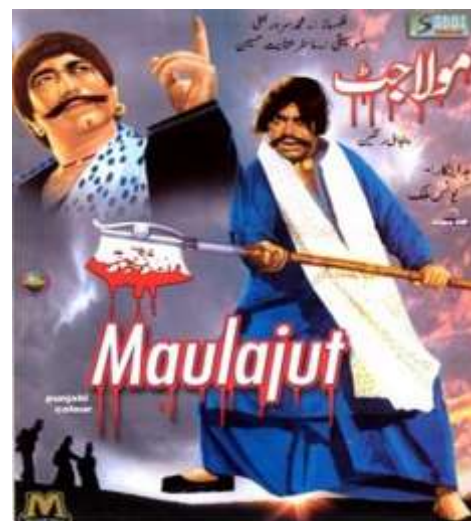


Figure 2: Maula Jut

Source: "Maula Jut (1979) movie poster (accessed via Google Drive)."

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis process entails a comparative analysis of the textual data in a step wise manner in three stages. During the material selection phase, the films were carefully watched in order to identify the critical scenes, the specific visual frames, the choice of costumes, and the main dialogues, which reveal the tension between the local tradition and the global influence. After this, the data obtained was divided into four analytical aspects such as the visual aesthetics, costume designs, thematic development, and delivery of dialogue. In the final analysis phase, the categorized elements were cross-examined over the three selected periods, to trace the exact trajectory of change, so that the study could determine how globalization has influenced the artistic and linguistic identity of contemporary Pakistani cinema.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Visual analysis

There have been notable changes in the visual style in Pakistani films. This is evidenced in the visual style present in the following films; *Heer Ranjha*, *Maula Jut*, *The Legend of Maula Jatt* and *Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning*.

The traditional films such as Heer Ranjha and Maula Jut (1979), reflect rural life and culture. The approach is realistic, naturalistic and plain. Design elements in Heer Ranjha are village backdrops, dark colors, and cultural elements. It is more about feelings and culture, than technique. Just like the same way, Maula Jut (1979) is a realistic representation of the rural areas in Punjab. The use of natural background settings, still camera, and straightforward frame composition is done

through traditional filmic techniques. The picture highlights masculine power and ethnic pride, typically with weapons and significant body language. The traditional images are the visual expression of the cinema of narrative and culture. This stage is known as the period of traditional realism in Pakistani cinema, during which cinematography focused on indigenous aesthetic principles and realistic locations rather than technological sophistication.

#### 4.1.2 Cinematographic Transition and Visual Styling



Figure 3: The legend of Maula Jatt

**Source:** The legend of Maula Jatt (2022) movie poster (accessed via Google drive)

The transition is made with The Legend of Maula Jatt (2022), which is a large shift in presentation. This is a globally rich film. It features a very stylized look in terms of lighting, color and design. There are special effects and cinematographic techniques involved in this movie. The heroes in this movie are much bolder than those in previous movies. This can be attributed to the effects of globalization where local tales are produced in a

global fashion. Nevertheless, the setting of this movie is still quite realistic because the film belongs to the category of traditional Pakistani movies. Thus, it can be said that cinematography underwent a certain transition, which involved reinterpretation of the folklore using stylistic elements and high quality to create a kind of "glocal" effect appealing to local and international audiences.

#### 4.1.2 Digital Artistry and Fantasy for Global Audience



Figure 4: Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024)

**Source:** Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024) movie poster (accessed via Google drive)

The second level of the visual revolution is Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024). It's a fantasy and globalized movie. The visuals are advanced and magical, using CGI, fantasy and action. The characters are stylized and almost magical as in international fantasy films. This is not just a narrative, but also a visual treat. The fantasy and digital effects reflect the influence of global cinema and expectations of the audience. The development towards fantasy art and digital effects is considered to be an important step for making movies for the entire world. Therefore, this transition indicates that Pakistani films began to meet the requirements of international cinematography and even started to follow some trends of fantasy movies. The study of these films reveals the evolution in Pakistani film. The films of the beginning focus on realism, culture and simplicity, while the later films embrace stylized designs, technology and global cinematic techniques. Theoretically, this development can be explained by Cultural Globalization Theory, which outlines how local cinema progresses through blending global and local elements. The evolution from Heer Ranjha to Umro Ayyar shows this shift from traditional narrative-driven cinema to more visually centered, globalized cinema.

#### 4.2 Dialogues Analysis

The dialogues that can be found in Pakistani movies have undergone a unique shift due to the effects of globalization and culture towards the development of hybrid and fantastical global dialogues. In the movie, Heer Ranjha (1970), the dialogues in the film are rooted in the traditional rural culture of Punjab; hence, they speak about social relations, gender role and devotion. For instance, the dialogues like "Tu vela mustanda ja ke kaam kar" and "Ty sada kaar ey tu menu roti nhi paka ke daini ty na dy" indicate social norms and roles of men and women in a rural setting. The dialogue by Ranjha which states "Main tere waste aaya Heere" indicates a sense of spirituality and romance in him which was considered sacred in a society where love was seen as a religious value. This stage highlights the era of cultural realism, where the dialogues purely targeted the local audience and relied on authentic regional idioms without any external global influence.

In Maula Jut (1979), dialogues adopt a more assertive and dominant language style, expressing rural masculinity, honour and retribution-based social norms. Dialogues like "Maidan gallan naal nahi, gandasiyan naal ladde jande ne" and "Nawa aya ae sohnia?" reflect assertiveness, courage and

defiance. Punjabi dialect and metaphors such as "gandasa" turn language into a symbol of power and dominance. The period of filmmaking highlights the local cultural identity of cinema and in which conversations function as a tool of power instead of being an expression of emotion. The linguistic approach here remains strictly local, reinforcing cultural archetypes to maximize engagement with the domestic viewers. Conversely, *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) marks a new beginning for film dialogue in which dialogues are restructured to form the cinematic language. Dialogues such as "Maidan jeet sar jhuka ke maafi mangan wale di nahi..." and "Kaash mere hath ch maafi di lakeer hondi" reveal the inner psyche of the character. In contrast to traditional cinema, this era mixes traditional language with global cinematic language to create a hybrid narrative structure that combines traditional themes with contemporary cinematic language. Therefore, this indicates the nature of the cinematic evolution in Pakistan whereby traditional idioms are translated through modern narrative to reach local youth and the international diaspora as well.

Finally, *Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning* (2024) exhibits a totally globalized and fantastical language structure with code-mixing and science-fiction language in the dialogues. Phrases like "Multiverse main anginat dimensions hoti hain..." and "It doesn't matter we weren't followed hum log risk nahi le sakte" exemplify English-Urdu code-switching and global scientific ideas such as the multiverse theory. This language mix reflects transnational narrative strategies of local language and global fantasy and technological discourse. The blending of languages represents narrative approaches that mix up the language with global fantasy and technological languages. It creates a conscious approach for the purpose of appealing to an international audience with respect to the linguistic style within the cinematic production. Generally, there is the evolution from *Heer Ranjha* to *Umro Ayyar*, showing how Pakistani cinema dialogue evolves from a local idiom to fantasy-hybrid narrations.

#### 4.3 Thematic Analysis

Theme changes in Pakistani movies have moved from the traditional cultural themes to the modern influence of globalization on fantasy themes due to cultural globalization. Themes in *Heer Ranjha* (1970) include love, relationships, gender, and rural culture. The dialogue, "Main tere waste aaya Heere," is in line with the theme of spirituality and passionate love where relationship boundaries are marked culturally and spiritually. Similarly, male domination and accountability represent the rigid structure of the Punjab rural culture where personal desires are based on societal expectations. This movie presents a conventional theme in film, which is about love and obligation. Some themes that feature in *Maula Jut* (1979) are that of honor, vengeance, gender, and masculinity as punishment. For example, a quote such as "Maidan gallan naal nahi, gandasian naal ladde jande ne" shows the culture that revolves around honor and power. Gender relations and revenge of community become very important in such movies because the theme supports patriarchy. In these earlier films, there is an indication of regional realism in thematic issues that relate to the local values to enhance attraction within local audiences.

*The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) displays these changes by incorporating topics related to emotion, dilemma, and individual problems. This is seen through the quote "Kaash mere hath ch maafi di lakeer hondi". It shows an internal dilemma or conflict involving emotions. As seen from here, the thematic composition is a composite one that includes both these aspects. There is a major thematic change here since themes of honor and revenge are portrayed with deeper psychology in terms of global narration structures.

*Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning* (2024) addresses themes such as fantasy, science fiction, adventure, and technology. The theme of "Multiverse main anginat dimensions hoti hain..." has been used for uncertainty, whereas adventure has been used for risk. This shows that the themes used have globalization in them, since the movie has not been filmed on reality but on fiction and globalization. From realistic to fantasy films and

the idea of multiverse, Pakistan cinema has become global and this indicates how legends and folklore can be turned into a universal tale.

4.4 Costume Analysis

4.4.1 Traditional and Ethnic Attire



Figure 1: Heer Ranjha (1970)



Figure 2: Maula Jut (1979)

Source: “Heer Ranjha (1970) movie (accessed via Google Drive).”

Source: “Maula Jut (1979) movie (accessed via Google Drive).”

Costumes used in the first Pakistani movies were relatively simple and traditional. The costume worn by the hero in the movie “Heer Ranjha” is basic as well as the ornaments used. Colorful costumes, ornaments, and headwear represent reverence for culture in the rural parts of Punjab province. Furthermore, the hero in the movie wore kurta and a turban on his head. Similarly, the costume used in the movie Maula Jatt also signifies the rural village stereotype. In this movie, the lead

wears a loosely fitting kurta along with a lower garment resembling the 'dhoti'. Moreover, a 'shawl' can also be seen being carried around the neck of the character. These are not overly stylized costumes but are basic and authentic. There is no particular styling in this image; thus, the costumes look simple and authentic. Such clothes represent a period of cultural realism, during which indigenous people wore rural clothes.

4.4.2 Aesthetic Transformation and Heroic Styling



Figure 3: The legend of Maula Jatt (2022)

Source: The legend of Maula Jatt (2022) movie costume (accessed via Google drive)

Costumes in The Legend of Maula Jatt have been enhanced more. In the selected image, the characters are wearing bulky and dark costumes. These costumes have luxurious texture as compared to other movies. The characters are dressed in stylish attires with textures, leathers and accessories. Traditional elements like turbans and body shapes are still present, but are shown in a

stylish manner. This demonstrates a move from realism to stylized versions inspired by foreign cinema. In this phase, the costumes are considerably different from what has been observed above. However, the main point about them is their style because of a tendency to create the hero look for the main character.

4.4.3 Fantasy and Globalized Costume



Figure 4: Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024)

Source: Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024) movie costume (accessed via Google drive)

In Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning, fantasy is reflected in the costume design. In this picture,

characters wear costumes that are highly stylized with unique clothes with jackets, armor, and other

elements. Contemporary styles, black tones and intricate hair design give the costumes a modern look. These costumes are meant not only to be realistic but also create a fantasy. This is influenced by international cinema where the costume design is used to create spectacle and persona. These costumes are included in a deliberate attempt to come up with something that can be enjoyed by a global audience. The costumes adhere to international standards regarding superheroes, thus enabling foreign audiences to enjoy their local mythology. The difference between these images reveals the way the design process was developed over time. Films made earlier have simple and realistic costumes, but films made today have enhanced costumes. This transformation is due to globalization, in which Pakistani films move from a cultural realism to cinematic styling and fantasy representation, while retaining some local aspects.

### 5. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the effects of globalization on Pakistani movies have caused great alteration in these movies. When observing Heer Ranjha, Maula Jut, The Legend of Maula Jatt, and Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning, it becomes evident that there has been a departure in the film genre, of realistic movies, to more globalized and fantasy-based movies. Speaking of the traditional movies, their visuals are simple and rural in nature, whereas the theme is associated with love, honor and values. Conversely, recent films have experienced a tremendous improvement in images due to the advent of new technology, stylized filming and enormous budgets. The second phase is the The Legend of Maula Jatt that is represented by the narration of ancient tales in the modern cinematic way. In addition, the element of fantasy in Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning is also a sign of shifting towards global tendencies. The application of CGI and convoluted plots, as well as, expensive costumes are evidence of how the Pakistani film industry is adhering to world standards without losing its cultural values.

From the perspectives of Sociolinguistics, code-mixed and modern expressions are forms of

cultural change as they involved a shift in conventional expressions to new expressions. Finally, the results indicate that culture has not been replaced by globalization but has turned into an amalgamation culture of films. The results of this study show that the visual, linguistic and thematic alterations in the Pakistani cinema as a result of globalization have been very drastic. Looking at Heer Ranjha (1970), Maula Jut (1979), The Legend of Maula Jatt (2022) and Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning (2024), one must admit that there has been a distinct change of traditional cultural realism to globalized fantasy-based narratives. The early film was also marked by its naive, rural looks and the plot of the film about localized idea of love, honor and traditional social values. Contrary to this, modern movies show a distinct change in the field of cinematography, fueled by advanced technology, direction, and budgeting. The Legend of Maula Jatt can be regarded as a turning point that reinterprets the folklore legends using cinematic language that is captivating to both domestic youth and their foreign counterparts. In addition to this, the employment of fantasy elements and modern CGI in the movie, "Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning," clearly shows that the film has been directed at fulfilling the needs of its international audience base. In terms of sociolinguistics, the cultural transformation is portrayed through the evolution of regional dialects of regional Punjabi into English-Urdu code-switching. Finally, the findings indicate that globalization has not eliminated the local identity; on the contrary, globalization has made Pakistani cinema to be a hybrid cinematic culture that balances the local roots with global market demands.

### 6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study shows that globalization has fundamentally altered the landscape of Pakistani cinema, by leading its evolution out of localized, traditional narrative storytelling to highly stylized, globalized storytelling in the form of cinema. In a comparative analysis of the films Heer Ranjha, Maula Jut, The Legend of Maula Jatt and Umro Ayyar: A New Beginning this study demonstrates that the transformation of Pakistani

cinema has not been an abrupt change, but a progressive change shaped by the forces of cultural globalization. First, concerning the visual aesthetics and cinematography, the industry has shifted to the sophistication of cultural realism and rural authenticity to the high-end digital art technology, advanced CGI, and immersible fantasy worlds. Secondly, this visual change is reflected in the costume design, where the emphasis has shifted to highly stylized, heroic and fantasy-based costumes and designs that are to appeal to international audiences. Third, language and theme forms of the two films have transformed the local languages and regional ideas of honor to the hybrid language and the global narrative of the films including the multiverse. The findings suggest that modern Pakistani films have had the potential to adopt universal filmmaking techniques to appeal to a larger and more global audience while maintaining their basic cultural essence. Rather than undermining the indigenous culture, globalization has facilitated the fusion of the film narratives created by Pakistani filmmakers into a globally competitive product.

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