

# Is Islamicate a Genre? Looking at Popular Muslim Films through the Lens of Genre

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*Received February 25, 2017; Revised April 9, 2017; Accepted April 10, 2017; Published May 7, 2017.*

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## Abstract

This essay engages with genre as a theory and how it can be used as a framework to determine whether Islamicate or the Muslim films can be called a genre by themselves, simply by their engagement with and representation of the Muslim culture or practice. This has been done drawing upon the influence of Hollywood in genre theory and arguments surrounding the feasibility / possibility of categorizing Hindi cinema in similar terms. The essay engages with films representing Muslim culture, and how they feed into the audience's desires to be offered a window into another world (whether it is the past or the inner world behind the purdah). It will conclude by trying to ascertain whether the Islamicate films fall outside the categories of melodrama (which is the most prominent and an umbrella genre that is represented in Indian cinema) and forms a genre by itself or does the Islamicate form a sub-category within melodrama.

**Keywords:** genre, Muslim socials, socials, Islamicate films, Hindi cinema, melodrama.

## 1. Introduction

The close association between genre and popular culture (in this case cinema) ensured generic categories (structured by mass demands) to develop within cinema for its influence as a popular art. Films providing similar visual pleasures came to be grouped together under one genre. From its early days in Hollywood, popular cinema has been organized on the basis of genre. This would include particulars of film advertising to television broadcast schedules, and even distribution practice; from production to consumption, genre has defined every aspect of cinema, and even the desired effect upon the audience. However, the nature of segmentation<sup>1</sup> in Indian cinema (Vasudevan: 2015, 29) has rendered it problematic to strictly conform to western (American) genre division as an attempt at restructuring the generic division of Indian cinema would involve accommodating some of the specific concerns (socio-political events) of the region. Through an understanding of the complexities of genre and the dilemmas involved while defining it, this paper tries to capture and negotiate with the idea of a specific Islamicate<sup>2</sup> genre existing within the body of mainstream Bombay Hindi films.

Cinema as a visual narrative embraces the systemic categorization offered by genre, while accommodating new ideas and modes of representation. It constantly breaches boundaries set forth by its own tendency to conform.<sup>3</sup> As Barry Keith Grant argues, genre films relate to the culture that produced the film such that they became inevitable expressions of the defining spirit or mood of a moment in history – its dominant set of ideals and beliefs which motivated the

actions of the society. (Grant, 2003: 6) They gained wide popularity, and from being mere objects of fascination and enigma, cinema embodied a content that could immediately be associated with. These images survive through history, making the films an archive of time. Thus, genre's repetitiveness with formulaic representations is downplayed by the constant dilemma and difficulty experienced while defining it. It is an idea or a notion that theorists have been trying to come to terms with and accommodate within the production economy of art.

## 2. The genre debate

Genre criticism originates in literature as early as Aristotle's *Poetics* whose ideas find currency even today. They keep appearing in (cinematic) texts, branding them as part of a category. Pitted against Mathew Arnold's notion of 'good art' – that which is 'original, distinctive and complex' and 'the best that has been taught and said' – popular/genre art became unsophisticated and formulaic, lacking in originality and authenticity. This fed into the assumed differences between literature and popular writing, which graduated into a debate between true art as opposed to popular culture. Generic features like repetition, formulaic progression of narrative, common theme, etc., have been used to accuse genre of 'inculcating false consciousness' by being industrial products of capitalist economy despite their commercial success.

However, genre subverted creative art by breaking away from the high brow of exclusivity and helped popular and even folk art and culture gain currency and popularity within the mainstream. It helped folk art break away from a niche and move into the mainstream, their artistic expressions giving agency to individual cultures and their practices. It empowered fringe cultural groups to become sites of ideological struggle, giving representation and lending voice to the marginal, bringing it to the centre and challenging the predominance of "high art". Thus genre-specific cinema blurred the lines of dissociation, transcended the barriers of language through visual narratives, and become economically viable by catering to the tastes of masses<sup>4</sup>. It brought the masses under the common umbrella of the popular that functioned within the paradigm of the modern nation.

## 3. Elements of genre that define the visual narrative of cinema and the position of the Islamicate films

### i. Conventions, Iconography and Setting

A genre film is marked by visual and aural motifs embedded within a space, represented through set design, language, plot, and a common geo-political history. They are well-known symbols used to narrate a story, drawing upon the viewer's familiarity with a certain milieu and culture. They predetermine the audience's expectation, achieving an economy of expression and allowing a smooth progression of plot. These may involve frequently used styles/techniques or narrative devices typical of (but not necessarily unique to) a particular generic tradition. Aural conventions like dialogue, musical styles and sound effects, along with mise-en-scene create a pattern to form a corpus of deterministic features associated with a body of films. Thus graphic styles used in the opening credits of a film trigger an association for the audience with a specific genre.<sup>5</sup> It makes the audience immediately aware of the backdrop of the story. The opening credits in some Islamicate films would be portrayed against a background of a minaret or a dome-shaped structure or be accompanied by music that is largely associated with Islamic culture – like the call for *azaan*. Familiar names associated with such films become common in the opening credits,

actors like Ashok Kumar and Meena Kumari, lyricists Majrooh Sultanpuri, Javed Akhtar, Kaifi Azmi, prominent screenwriter and art director, Shama Zaidi, to name a few. They become evidence to the nature of the content and the narrative that is to be presented through the film.



Figure 1: Opening credits of *Garm Hawa*



Figure 2: Film poster of *Mughal-E-Azam* published in *Filmindia* magazine

Iconography is one of the defining criteria of genre. For the Bombay Muslim films they marked the text as evocative of an Islamic tradition, culture and history. Erwin Panofsky's "iconography" (wherein themes or concepts are represented or expressed through symbolically charged object and events) when applied to cinema, could be what comprises Edward Buscombe's distinction between a film's inner and outer forms.<sup>6</sup> Mukul Kesavan explains how, as audiences, we associate certain icons and symbols as registers of a religio-cultural tradition.<sup>7</sup> Steve Neale pointed out how the "generic image" is also promoted through photos, stills, publicity materials and reviews, thus

shaping audience's expectations prior to watching the film. Indeed, the industry learnt quite early how to thrive on feeding the audience with bits and pieces of information about the personal lives of prominent people associated with the industry.<sup>8</sup>

Setting is the physical time and space within which a film's story/plot unfolds. The plots of the Islamicate films draw upon the iconic settings, establishing the backdrop and context against which the story unravels. *Mughal-e-Azam* begins with a replica of the undivided Indian subcontinent ('Hindustan') towering over a distinctly Islamic skyline, immediately establishing the story in Mughal history.



Figure 3: Opening shot of *Mughal-E-Azam*



Figure 4: Opening shot of *Garm Hawa*

The film is about Akbar, the Mughal king who propounded the *Din-i-ilahi* and an oblique reference to the notion of justice and tolerance. This was depicted through the *insaaf ka tarazu*

(the scales of blind justice are extremely relevant in modern independent India) which the audience related to the idea of justice and equality – two fundamental rights laid down in the Indian Constitution. Through it the film manages to transcend between Mughal history and a more recent political history within the span of a single shot. Cinema opens up windows to a world, to the audience's nostalgic gaze. By using specific settings like the Islamic architectures in the opening frame in *Garam Hawa*<sup>9</sup> they trigger an immediate association.

*Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* releases in 1989, but the audience's immediate memory is no more captured by the history of communal fracas. Therefore, the film is set in the urban underbelly of Mumbai where distinctive pointers and motifs mark the characters' social and religious identities. They are primarily Muslims surviving in an urban India that was desperately coming to terms with the blitz of a liberalized economy that opened the doors of plenitude to one section while sucking dry the means of survival of another. Their space is defined by a battle for survival, and it was twice as hard for Muslims who were struggling to survive amidst a sudden Hindutva mobilization that swept Bombay during the 1980s. Their skull cap, practices and places of worship, in other words, the private became the public that determined their identity and position in society. The success of both *Garam Hawa* and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* depended heavily on the audience's prior knowledge of the setting that each of the plots were unfolding in.

## ii. Stories and themes

Genre films follow the classical narrative style focusing on the hero's struggle to overcome various obstacles and achieve his goal. A crisis is introduced at some point, and the story progresses to resolve it. Within this primary dramatic arc exists the secondary narrative that focuses on the heterosexual romance; and engages with social issues and debates within the generic framework of formulaic narratives. While Thomas Schatz argues that film genres concern themselves with elements that threaten normative social order in different ways, some genre theorists argue that the over-riding theme is a version of the individual in conflict with the society; a tension that represents the ongoing negotiation. For Schatz, the extent to which a genre film achieves closure is important for reading its political implications. Thus, there is a conflict, which might take place within the realm of the determinate or the indeterminate space. The determinate involves the attainment of a closure, that is, happy ending. It is therefore artificial, since life, unlike such stories, continues beyond the happy ending. It is the lack of such closures that make the plot closer to reality like we see in *Garam Hawa* or *Umrao Jaan*. The indeterminate space on the other hand is concerned with the social order, thereby coding the conflicts within the paradigms of a heterosexual society. The indeterminate space does not make it a less genre film nor does the determinate space make it less real, for in both cases the film has managed to invoke the universal truths and impulses within the audiences.

A closer look at the stories and themes of the Islamicate films shows a definite progression as they build their narratives around contemporary social issues and concerns. This was seen as early as *Najma*, which was produced in 1943 and became almost a blueprint for the Muslim social films.<sup>10</sup> It upheld the institution of marriage and showed that a woman's place is behind the purdah, while successfully capturing the anxiety of a generation witnessing the breaking down of old and familiar traditions due to the social changes brought about by modern education. The film emphasizes the importance of education within the Muslim community, while stressing on the value of family honour and tradition. It harps on the traditional *tehzeeb* (etiquette) of Lucknow and its influence on society, and this structure becomes a prototype for representing the

traditional Muslim community that recognized the need for education while balancing it within the traditional ethos. The courtroom scene in *Elan*<sup>11</sup> (1947) is symbolic of the Muslim community embracing the tenets of the modern state. Both *Najma* and *Elan* resonates some of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's thought about the future of Muslims in a Hindu dominated India. *Pukar*<sup>12</sup> (1939) is a typical Sohrab Modi film, with long dialogues in Urdu, delivered in a dramatic manner. It deals with Jehangir's profound meditation on the nature of justice, governance and law in the light of clan allegiances, religious difference, class and caste divisions. By celebrating the idea of polity and governance, *Pukar* speaks in radical terms the history of an indigenously conceived just polity that was hopelessly compromised by imperialism. (Bhaskar and Allen, 122)



Figure 5: The courtroom scene at the end of *Elan*.



Figure 6: Pakeezah dancing on broken shards of glass.

*Tawaif* comes in 1985, bridging the wide chasm between a world of courtesans shrouded in the civility and etiquette of a culture long gone and the social reality they were living. Located in Bombay, the film could be said to be the result of the influence of New Wave aesthetic on the Islamicate films. However, it re-echoes Pakeezah's appeal for the right of a courtesan to be courted and be married to someone of her choice. For the first time in this film, the middle class

woman sacrifices her love for the redemption of the courtesan. There are some scenes in *Tawaif*, which bear striking similarity with *Pakeezah*, most prominent among which is the courtesan dancing on white floor with bloodied feet, almost proving her purity in blood before eventually losing her love to someone else. Also, in the final scene, the space of the 'kotha' is transformed into the place of a wedding. The two renditions of *Umrao Jaan*, based on Mirza Muhammed Hadi Ruswa's biography, were attempts to portray the life and story of Lucknow's most famous courtesan<sup>3</sup>, and became a blueprint for courtesan films in Indian cinema.

*Garam Hawa* and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*<sup>4</sup> are realistic portrayals of two generations – one coming to terms with the loss of homeland and another taking up violence in a society that differentiated people on religious basis. There is a change observed in the themes and concerns in the films and they are reflective of a progression witnessed in the manner in which social concerns were addressed in Islamicate films. They captured social reality and became archives of moments in history. This progression can be observed as early as the 1940s, a crucial period both politically as well as culturally for institutionalizing the relation between so-called Hindu majority and Muslims, who were the most substantial minority group, in the run-up to the decolonization and Partition of the subcontinent. These films broke the commonsensical notion about socials being films about the Hindu society, popularized by film journals like *Filmindia*. Hence, the Islamicate metamorphosed into a sub-genre that contested the primacy of what is often not called the "Hindu socials". (Vasudevan)

### iii. Character actors and stars; viewers and audiences

Barry Keith Grant said, "Character actors contribute to the look of particular genres, populating the worlds of genre movies and becoming a part of their iconography." They appear alongside the hero, and play an important role in the narrative. In Indian cinema they have primarily contributed to the comic element or a realistic commentary on society or merely for parody.<sup>15</sup> Actors playing the main characters also become signifiers of certain codes and values, like Ashok Kumar who was often seen playing the roles of the Muslim hero, whether it is Shahbuddin of *Pakeezah* or Yusuf in *Najma* or Nawab Buland Akhtar in *Mere Mehboob*. Actors sometime become associated with a particular role or type of roles; they become icons, their faces and bodies immediately recognizable within that culture. Ashok Kumar became the centre-point to the "distinct spaces of modernity" (Vasudevan) – the doctor in the hospital or the lawyer in the courtroom. He was the embodiment of the unmarked modern hero, who publicly embraced the modern ideals while quietly retaining traditional values of family, etiquette and marriage in private.

Just as stars reinforce a genre, audiences sustain them and give them meaning. They enter into an implicit contract by becoming familiar with the tropes and features constituting a genre. These repetitive codes are consciously developed through extra-filmic elements and audio-visual narrative; a process of signification, developed over time that serves well for bringing about conciseness in narrative. This is defined by indexicality or the relationship between the object to be photographed and the resultant image of it, developed by the presence of the camera and the man behind it who is suitably aware of the mise-en-scene to be captured, and what they are going to convey to the audience.<sup>16</sup> As Lawrence Alloway states, the familiar symbols in works of art have cultural meaning which may extend beyond the context of the individual work in which they appear. According to him, icons are second order symbols bearing meaning which may not

necessarily have any connection established within the individual text, but is already symbolic because of their use across a number of similar previous texts.

#### **iv. The generic dilemma: the problem of defining genre**

It has always been problematic to define genre within strict paradigms. Wellek and Warren captures the crux of the problem:

The dilemma of genre history is the dilemma of all history, that is, in order to discover the scheme of reference we must study the history; but we cannot study history without having in mind some scheme of selection.

As a very practical way out of this dilemma is to draw up a list of elements which are found in a to-be-defined genre, in this case, the Islamicate films, and to say that any film which includes one or more of these elements could be considered as one. According to various theorists, the fundamental requirement for defining a genre is to determine the corpus of films that constitute its history. Each method of genre definition<sup>17</sup> has its own limitations. The empiricist method is the most common in which, by a circular logic, films selected have already been chosen as representing the genre by some prior knowledge. Andrew Tudor identified the “empiricist dilemma” in such a method wherein it is necessary to isolate the body of films. His only plausible solution is to rely on a common cultural consensus where almost everyone agrees that a set of films belong to a particular genre. He rests his proposition on the argument that ‘genre is what we collectively believe it to be.’<sup>18</sup> (Tudor, 1973: 139)

Despite everything, genre still remains defined by very unstable categories.<sup>19</sup> Hindi cinema has seen the coming and going of various genres over the years, but the “social” and the melodrama have been robust and dominant ones that have survived over time. Rachel Dwyer speculates that it could be because of the fuzzy nature of their boundaries; and given the nature of Hindi films which are most of the time a mish-mash of all genres, most films come to be associated with this. In fact, the formula-based approach of the Bombay film industry, where a successful film must have a smattering of romance, song, action and melodrama, makes it difficult to strictly adhere to the confines of genre specificity without the formulaic elements crawling their way into the narrative.

#### **v. Religion to define a genre**

The Islamicate films are not religious films and must not be confused with the Muslim devotional films. However, questions have been raised over the naming of a genre by a specific religion, thereby marking its conformity by the cultural practices of its followers. The not naming of the non-Muslim Social as the “Hindu Social” is obvious of the fact that ‘Hinduism is the invisible norm, the standard default position.’ (Dwyer, 2010: 136) The socials in Bombay cinema addressed the masses, thus contributing in the nation-building project. A major force of reckoning at this juncture of Indian political history is the thrust on an Indian version of secularism by which instead of keeping religion separate from the state, it promoted a spirit of tolerance emphasizing on the inclusiveness of all religion. In other words, it was keen to accommodate a multi-religious, and therefore multicultural, Indian society. (Nandy, 1995: 37) This gave Muslim socials a certain peculiarity that included a range of films addressing the concerns of the Muslim community, but from a completely non-religious point of view. In other words, they isolated religion from the



modern approach to life that the film promoted while catering to an audience otherwise rooted to a strong religious worldview. The Muslim socials dealt with Muslims and their changing position in post-independence Indian society. The early films like *Elan* bore the ideological influences of Syed Ahmed Khan whose pre-independence speeches invoked a modern future for the Muslims in the subcontinent.<sup>20</sup> The Muslim socials drew upon Ahmed Khan's idea of educating the Muslim population, making them fit for a post-colonial India that was dreaming to build a future on its own. These films showed an uncanny mix of Syed Ahmed Khan's belief and a secularism specific to India. The Islamicate films reflect a certain cultural Islam which defines their mores of living and everyday practice, including language. Thus, to categorize a set of films simply based on their religio-cultural representation makes it too easy to fall within the many limitations of genre definition. Indeed Ravi Vasudevan observed that as the political demands for the representation of community interests accelerated in the late 1930s, along with the secularized disposition of critics like K.A. Abbas, there emerged a more homogenised set of demands on how communities should be represented on screen, that is, through a prism of social reform. This possibly led to the emergence of the Muslim socials of the 1940s as products of this recalibration.

There is no denying the general influence of Islamic culture in Bombay cinema and the contribution of the community towards its popularity. The Islamicate films are a testament to that – the iconographic, performative and narrative idioms, shaped by the requirements of popular cinema. They have been distilled into our conscience by the Muslim historicals, the courtesan films and the Muslim socials.<sup>21</sup> Thus the Islamicate films uphold one of the primary characteristics of genre – representing the spirit of the time; as well as accommodating its evolution and the role that it plays in the context of the changing contemporary. This is evident in the way the historical films, salient in the early years of Indian independence, were invoked by filmmakers much later in the first decade of the twentieth century in response to the communal tension of the time as in seen in the case of *Jodha Akbar*. Similarly, the earlier Muslim socials located the Islamicate idioms within the elite Muslim cultures, in most cases, of Lucknow. This was completely turned on its head with films like *Fiza* and *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro* when the focus shifted to the working and middle class. It is this very volatile nature of the genre that rendered it capable of representing the evolving nature of the Islamic culture and idiom of the subcontinent for the last seventy years.

Thus it seems that this specific aspect of genre theory acts as the peg around which the Islamicate films explore their culture and community. Genre provides them a contained environment to delve in and take a closer look within. They throw light upon the problems and dilemmas of a community trying to move along with the waves of social and political change and yet holding on to the last straws of individuality. A panoramic view of such films over the course of five to six decades, gives an idea of the changes and negotiations that the community has undergone. The closing scene of *Garam Hawa* seems to capture this dilemma and efforts at negotiating one's politics and identity with the changing courses of time and history. Like Salim Mirza there were those who refused to acknowledge the transformation of the old social equation they once enjoyed. He could be the last of the elite Muslims to make way for the working/middle class. His joining the protest rally, demanding the rights of those who refused to abandon India as their motherland and their country of origin, under the obvious banner of the leftist movement is a clear indication of the path that the Muslim Socials were going to take. They reflect the fall of the Urdu speaking Muslim elite who enjoyed positions of political and administrative importance; the Hindustani Musalmans of northern India, especially the areas surround Delhi and Uttar Pradesh as well as Hyderabad in the south, who were also called the Urdu speakers. They possessed a

sense of group identity based on cultural and historical facts like Islamic religion, Persian cultural tradition and its Indian offspring, the Urdu language.

## Conclusion

Thus, the Islamicate films constitute a repository of works that engage with the Islamic culture, using the elements (conventions, iconography, setting, narrative, characters and portrayal of contemporary society) that constitute genre. Genre is conformative, to the extent of thwarting creative expressions, and yet it is flexible. The Islamicate films, through their non-conformity to any generic formula, have upheld the true nature of genre. Yet, Madhava Prasad's argument that the social as a generic form not only subordinated other generic tendencies, but also, through an internal subordination, included within itself several fragments of genres, holds true. The popularity of the Islamicate films proves their commercial success as a genre. It promoted a consumption of these films as modes of entertainment, featuring songs, comic bits, and massively popular stars. Like the Bombay socials which were driven by a star system along with a smattering of song sequences, the Muslim socials too captured commercial success by subsuming to the requirements of a formulaic masala film (which combined comedy, drama, romance and action along with song and dance). The Islamicate films have been broadly looked upon from the perspective of the socials (a category that loosely refers to any film in a contemporary setting not otherwise classified ranging from heavy melodrama to light-hearted comedy, from films of social purpose to love stories, from tales of family and domestic conflict to urban crime thrillers). And yet at the same time, the Islamicate films have proven to be a corpus of values and social codes as well as an archive of their changes down history. Islamicate films (apart from the historicals) have metamorphosed over the years to capture the changing notions of society, and have been evidence of how genre provides the authorial figure of the director or the filmmaker or the producer, a framework within which they can animate the elements of the genre to their own purpose. The Muslim/Islamicate social along with the New Wave socials are a confirmation of that as we see the filmmakers pushing the limits of the genre while at the same time using its framework to give the audience a space in which they can associate as well as negotiate the changes that the director invokes.

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<sup>1</sup> By segmentation Ravi Vasudevan was referring to the segmentation of films by audience and genre, with the implication that different genres appealed to different audiences whose tastes were influenced by distinct social, cultural and intellectual orientations.

<sup>2</sup> Mukul Kesavan's essay, "Urdu, Awadh and the Tawaif: the Islamicate roots of Hindi cinema" and later Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen's book *The Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* have given currency to the terminology "islamicate" in contemporary discussions on films with a certain specific narrative, theme and subject matter – namely the Muslim films. However, the term has had its share of debates surrounding and there is a need to pause and reflect on that a little

<sup>3</sup> As Steve Neale pointed out 'genres are not systems: they are processes of systematization' and cannot be defined as fixed forms. David Buckingham argues that 'genre is a constant procedure of negotiation and change.' (Buckingham, 1993, 137)

<sup>4</sup> While literary critics, claiming that there could be ‘no community, no genial middle ground’ (Brooks, 1970: 18), continued their battle against the blitz of the popular upon high art, they were also acutely aware of the rising influence of formula-driven motion pictures that were gathering large and faithful communities of spectators.

<sup>5</sup> It must be mentioned here that it has been a convention in Hindi cinema to roll out their credits in three languages – Urdu, Hindi and English (irrespective of whether it is an Islamicate film or not). This could be because all three languages were equally popular and important in post-independent India – English as the language of modern governance, Hindi as the language spoken and understood by maximum number of people, and Urdu as a language that captured which has had a major influence in modern day popular Hindi as well as captures the erstwhile glory of a secular and tolerant society. All this made it necessary for filmmakers to accommodate all three, for after all, they were engaging with a medium that could reach out to the masses. These were also evidences of the heavy influence of Urdu writers in the industry, which has continued to remain so even today.

<sup>6</sup> The inner forms consist of the film’s themes while the outer form refers to the various objects that are repetitively found in a film, or in other words, iconography.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the scalloped arches or onion domes as representative of the “Islamic” culture and architecture, the language, art, ways of living, customs and practices, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Thus, an oblique reference to a certain long forgotten star in a particular narrative might stoke the audience’s interest, just like Khalid Mohamed’s association with the film *Zubeidaa*. The film’s plot was loosely woven around the story of an erstwhile film actress belonging to the Bohra Muslim community, whose first marriage falls through due to Partition. She then falls in love with a Rajput prince and marries him to become his second wife, and who accepts her along with her son from her previous marriage. However, they both die in a tragic accident when their plane crashed.

<sup>9</sup> It is set in Agra, established through repeated shots of the Taj Mahal along with the panoramic view of the swathing green fields from the minarets of Fatehpur Sikri. Its story of a Muslim family affected by Partition becomes representative of a generation of Muslim population who suddenly found themselves alien in a land they had called home.

<sup>10</sup> It is the story of two Muslim families and reflect upon how they engage with concerns of class and economy. The hero, Yusuf, is played by Ashok Kumar looking dapper in western clothes in the opening scene which was shot in a studio with a painted skyline dotted with silhouettes of mosques and minarets. Yusuf falls in love with Najma but their romance is interrupted when his father announces his betrothal to his cousin, Raziya. Najma convinces Yusuf to marry Raziya in order to respect his family honour while she herself marries a wealthy merchant, Mukkaram Nawab. Yusuf sinks into depression and Raziya soon finds out about Yusuf’s hidden love and becomes jealous. In the mean time Mukkaram overhears Raziya berating Najma over her love for Yusuf and in a fit of anger decides to kill him. He meets with an accident on his way and it was Yusuf who saves Mukkaram’s life. He assures both Raziya and Mukkaram that he and Najma are going to give up each other, and with this they part forever.

<sup>11</sup> Produced by Mehboob Khan the film is set in Hyderabad and is the story of Javed and Sajjad, who were cousins. Sajjad was an uneducated but spoilt son of rich parents, who squandered his money on gambling and courtesans. Javed was the son of Sajjad’s mother’s older sister. When he lost his father, his mother was left without any means to support herself and her son, and thus ended up taking shelter in a small portion of his sister’s palatial house. She befriends a well-mannered and educated young girl, Naaz Parwar, who initiated teaching lessons for her. When Javed returns from Aligarh having earned a degree in law, he comes across Naaz and the two falls in love. However, when Javed’s mother proposes a marriage alliance to Naaz’s father, she is refused; instead, her father decides to get Naaz married to Sajjad. The marriage soon revealed the darker side of Sajjad, and his mother realizes her mistake in spoiling her son, which was responsible for his unruly behaviour. One day, in a fit of rage when Sajjad tries to kill his own son, he is killed by his own mother. Naaz takes the blame and Javed as a lawyer come to her rescue, and proves her innocence. The film

takes a natural recourse as Javed offers to marry Naaz, but he was refused by her. Instead she donates her palatial house for running a school for the poor and the orphans.

<sup>12</sup> It was an Urdu film about the Mughal emperor, Jehangir's sense of justice and how he offers himself to be killed when the empress is accused by a washerwoman of killing husband during a hunt. This was a test for the emperor who claimed that the law knew no class distinction. However, the washerwoman magnanimously forgives him when he offers to kill himself.

<sup>13</sup> They were highly cultured and sophisticated women trained in the various forms of art and culture, and young princes spent their time to become familiar with the sophistications expected of a person of zamindari household. However, like all courtesan stories Umrao Jaan's life unfolds no differently. She falls in love and wishes for a social acceptance that would give her a place within familial codes of society. Pakeezah gets such a closure but not Umrao Jaan. They are realistically left outside the realms of societal norms.

<sup>14</sup> Set against the Hindutva mobilization the film revolves around Salim Pasha, a small-time thief who lives with his parents and sister in a shady neighbourhood where crime and illegal activities are the order of the day. Salim is aware from the beginning that given the circumstances his identity as a Muslim will never let him earn a decent living and live respectfully. He will never be trusted and therefore will never get a job. However, with time he decides to change his life and live honestly, and we are to assume that everything falls into place. He is killed on the day of his sister's anniversary by a member of a rival gang. No matter how hard he tries to run away from it, his past eventually catches up with him.

<sup>15</sup> Yakub as Bedil in *Najma*, almost sketches a character type that will become much popular in later films and become a staple of this genre. He will be the comic friend of the lovelorn hero, the perfect foil, who in his comments and actions, replays or ironizes the romance of the hero. This was a role which came to be closely associated with Johnny Walker who played such roles with great aplomb in *Chaudhvin ka Chand* and *Mere Mehboob*.

<sup>16</sup> In the case of the Islamicate films, this development of a relationship started as early as the oriental films.

<sup>17</sup> Here I refer to Janet Staiger's suggestion of four ways of defining genre – the idealist; the empiricist; the a priori; and the social convention.

<sup>18</sup> Grant agrees that Tudor's solution offers a pragmatic approach taken up by many critics.

<sup>19</sup> For example, crime and science fiction film as well as the westerns are defined by their setting and narrative content. While horror or comedy films are conceived around the emotional effects that these films intend to trigger.

<sup>20</sup> He fervently spoke of a modern educated Muslim population that marched shoulder to shoulder along with their Hindu counterparts and took equal responsibility in running the country. However, Syed Ahmed Khan's dream of a modern future for the Muslims in the subcontinent was set in a colonized India.

<sup>21</sup> Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen points out that these sub-genres gradually evolved by filmmakers at different historical moments according to the pressures and concerns of the time.

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