

Misinterpretation of Women on Cinema Boards in Pakistani Culture

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Abstract

This study observes the representation of women on cinema boards in Pakistan. It is a significant investigation of a few cinema boards in Lahore; these boards are present in both painted and printed form. This research discovers the characters of women portrayal on cinema boards as a sex object that is meant to capture the attention of viewer. Using content analysis, as the portrayal of women on cinema boards is not reflective of real Pakistani women rather this depiction presents a depressing image of Pakistani women in the mind of viewers that can be ruled and over powered. These cinema boards do not address women's issues that are the subject of films nor do they present the real image of Pakistani women. So far as the findings demonstrate that the interpretation of women on these boards are just not free from male chauvinism and these boards do not depict the true communal and political role carried out by tangible Pakistani women. This investigation shows that the representation of women on cinema boards is based on the assumptions and prejudice of male Chauvinism and for the satisfaction of their sexual desire.

Keywords: Misinterpretations, Sex Objects, Male Chauvinism, Farce Impact, Lust.

Introduction

Cinema boards are a bizarre amusement medium and an outstanding storytelling entertainment. They are dominant, established and ideal composition of visual communication. Amalgamation of image with exaggerated expressions, poses and movements which impart charisma and attraction to cinema world. Cinema boards promote reality, consistency or unreality and total fabrication. It is been rightly said that the amalgamation of image with expression is perceptibly incredible and quite mysterious in its consequence on human beings; it is more or less magical. Film is the most admired medium of amusement. The films play a fundamental task in the edifice of a well thought-out society. This responsibility becomes more imperative in such a culture having low literacy rate. Thus the film in Pakistani culture is a well-liked and prevailing medium of entertainment. To advertise these films and capture the attention of viewers for cinema business, facades of cinemas are adorned with colossal boards with an amalgamation of semi nude female images from films. This amalgamation of images dominantly highlights the presence of women in various roles performed in the film that is engaged for amusement in the cinema.

These boards are not taken as imaginative source of significant thoughts rather they are taken as transitory break away from the agitations and troubles of life males suffer by representing discriminately woman as sex

fantasy. This act of such representation shows singled out status of female in a country that is based on specific religious nationalism.

Majority of the cinema going people that are attracted to the entertainment provided by these cinemas in Pakistan are uneducated and poor. They are highly affected by the ideology projected in the depictions of women on these boards. Images of women depicted on cinema boards are a significant and attractive field of study. One can find out that the image of women projected through the medium of cinema boards' aim at projecting a shameful and humiliating picture of women. The religious nationalism of Islamic Republic of Pakistan could not eliminate yet the undignified and humiliating images of women from these boards and the situation preserves the traditional male sexist approach and attitude towards women and such discriminated representations demand critical investigations into gender relation and society.

This paper intends to analyze and discover how the attraction of cinema boards is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of male fascination towards woman as sex object. The way cinema boards reflect and reveal and even play on directly in a social context, established analysis of sexual difference of patriarchal culture which controls imagery in erotic ways of gaze and expression. These visually discriminated images build social formations that have been moulded under the power of males. In this paper it will be preferred not to mention

the names of female artists depicted on these boards rather focus will be an analysis of images that project a specific theory about such representations. Where such representations work as weapon to dominate over woman demonstrating the way patriarchal society has planned these boards.

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How we comprehend world around us and our relation with it. It does not depend upon our individual creative intuitive; rather all our concepts about world are based upon the information that reaches to us through technologies, most powerfully media, which codify information. Media makes us hostage to receive ideas conveyed the way they are conveyed by a specific brain set.

In a male chauvinistic culture of Pakistan, images are fabricated by the manipulation of gender. Through Cultural production sources such as, media, television, radio, print, film, music, theater, cinema, internet these manipulations are reinforced as ideology of our state in a subtle way.

In Pakistan, state ideology has been constituted initially by following an Islamic framework which works at both private and public level. There is much exotic diversity in this country but Pakistan is unified by religion. Idea of a separate country derived from the need of a Muslim country. A country where the people could follow Muslim practices according to the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

Television dramas about Muslim history, personalities, national heroes like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, deliver a concept of such national identity which is patriotic and follower of particular religious nationalism. Now, if we look at the articulation of our cultural identity as it is expressed in visual form on Cinema Boards around us, the case is entirely different. Every depiction of female on these cinema boards represents a specific brain working behind it. Where, every image of woman represents her as a sexual object. This approach is entirely against Islamic ethics in such a country which was founded on religious nationalism.

The position of women in Pakistan is very complex. A woman was elected as prime minister in 1988 and 1993. Fatima Jinnah ran for presidency in 1965. Women have served as ministers in national and provincial governments. Women's movement campaign for women's rights was run by Pakistani females that were negatively affected by the Islamization that Zia ul Haq proposed. Pakistan was the first country to appoint women ambassadors.ⁱ A few decades back, Islamization in Pakistan during Zia ul Haq's Government brought a decline to cinemas. Religious followers not only attacked video shops but also cinemas and practiced throwing paint splashes on the displayed female figures on cinema boards. Though, in the remaining cinema boards' still female interpretation is same as a sex object.

These boards featuring emphasized curves of bold and voluptuous actresses in seductive outfits, for the promotion of movie and to draw attention of the viewers for a good business. This representation is entirely dissimilar to the real Pakistani women who are even more dressed conventionally since Zia's oppression when he forced Islamization in Pakistan under his martial law regime in the 70s.

Utterly conditions regarding female representation are very complex. In Pakistani culture at one hand role of the women is forcefully restricted to the house and on the other she is seen enjoying high statuses in various fields. The attitude towards forceful restriction in the houses is reflected in the very visible absence of women from public spaces in various regions where such places are considered male preserves and this leads to gender discrimination in rights as well. But on the other hand woman is the source of pleasure in every ethnicity, none of the TV commercial, advertisement hoarding looks complete without the presence of woman. Same attitude is dominant in advertising and cinema boards.

All kind of visual imagery around us addresses perplexity about the position, status and role of woman in Pakistani culture. We can talk about various forms of cultural projections but let's focus the imagery that reaches to all communities. From low class to high class all have access to this imagery around us is in form of Rickshaws, trucks, and cinema hoardings. These reflect a popular genre that gives an insight to the imagery which mirrors perfectly how a woman in Pakistani culture is perceived.

Over half a billion Muslim women live in immeasurably different lands, ethnicities, the general public and political systems. Iranian scholar Mahnaz Afkhami points out, cruel or unjust use of power or authorities over Muslim women are comparable due to gender-discrimination under Islamic *Sharia* laws and patriarchal dogmas that are implemented in the name of religion and culture.ⁱⁱ

Their state is the state of all women, born to be distinct by their bodily characteristic, born to give birth, or if born attractive, born fortunate; a state which makes it potential and acceptable, within bourgeois ethic, for girls to display, silent and smiling, to be reviewed on the merits of their figures and faces.ⁱⁱⁱ Similar is the complex situation in Pakistan to understand the status of woman in religious nationalistic Pakistani culture. A culture, which to a greater extent represent a specific religious nationalism. Where female is the symbol of honour and dignity, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife all statuses demand nobility, but cultural representation of female on cinema boards determines such a reality which is a entirely dissimilar to it.

Cinema hoardings that are a part of our metropolitan landscape depict image of a woman unashamedly as a sexual object. In every representation either a story of nation or romance she is depicted in discomfiting poses with voluptuous bodies. Idea underlie such

representations is male sexual fantasy and this move toward such representation determines all women and women bodies as objects. Through which male satisfy his fantasies of power, superiority, lust, abuse and antagonism. This male's sexual fantasy demands gigantic proportions of female bodies. Such images are set in the most prominent space of the entire composition of cinema board.

Satellite television arrived in 1990s and soon thereafter came cable television. Indian channels were very popular on cable especially in the cities. The government banned them in 2002, however, several independent Pakistani channels started broadcasting soon after.^{iv} Once crowds of people flock to the cinemas on weekends to watch movies, got personal cables installed in their houses which destroyed the cinema business.

Transition in technology did not only affect the business of cinemas, in addition, introduction of flex printing equally affected the life of artists working for the cinema boards. Initially these boards were painted with hands and the skillful hand of the cinema board painter masterly used to render the emotions and expressions with bold brush strokes and vibrant colours. In additions specific exaggerations in drawings of the female bodies was added, followed by specific rules set by the artists to bring attraction for the viewer of movies.

If we observe films of a few decades back we see subjectivity due to the subjective practices of the filmmakers and the members of the Censor Board (CBFC). In the early days of Pakistani cinema, the attitude to films was somewhat feminism in a society where males hold primary power. Early films promoted the norms of the civilized culture but since, the issuance of the Motion Picture Ordinance, 1979 gradually these movies by changing reproductions preferred an increasing reliance on cheap consumerism. The changes in the ethics of both censors and society are apparent. They also point to an adaptation in the Pakistani gaze and the underpinning of pre-existing prototype of male enthrallment with the female form.^v

Cinema boards emphasize the impression of woman as reflexive object of beauty wearing heavy jewelry, vibrant coloured costumes. For appealing touch women are represented with natural beauties such as long hair tied or set in a fashionable manner. Lustrous unveiled parts of bodies with smooth and clear skin and partly revealed bosoms these female are portrayed for the male fantasy of sex.

Pakistani films correspond to visual, aural, textual and contextual fundamentals and contents that jointly make a film strong and generate pleasure for viewer. The story aims at raising an urge by take advantage of technique and technology to create stories that are on no account inclusive without female characters. However, films utilize further techniques to trigger pleasure in watching these characters by centralizing the platform on socially privileged male's wishes.

Art of cinema board painting for require such a masterly skill that could play well with the elements of harmonious fusion, contrast, emotional charge by adding element of exaggeration. And the cinema board painter is skillfully doing this till today.

The compositional unity of a painting contributes fundamentally to the power of its image. It is fair and sensible to consider a painting's composition first. But composition is always written despite the fact that it were in itself the emotional charge of the painting. Terms like harmonious fusion, unforgettable dissimilarity, reaching a peak of extensiveness and strength transmit the sensation aggravated by the image from the plane of lived experience to that of able to see all sides for art appreciation.^{vi}

The expression and misrepresentation of female body, apart from being unpleasant and unnatural, is repulsively overstated to characterize dancing postures causes' emotional charge in males. These postures make it possible to provide very shameful angles of hips and buttocks to reveal every possible curve of female body. In the same way emphasis is also put on breasts that are revealed partly out of dress and look inviting to capture the attention of male viewers. Sexually inviting looks of females, gestures and postures and direct eye contact with viewer on these boards add to the tempting ambiance of the whole composition. And this is all what men of this culture want to see in a female. Laura Mulvey states about Woman who stands in social system or culture of male dominance as concept of signifier for the male. For her in this investigation for feminists there is an understandable significance. This attractiveness of female, in its precise depiction of the nuisance is accomplished under the categorization which is focused on or apprehensive with the phallus as a symbol of male dominance. It takes us closer to the extraction of our subjugation, it conveys an expression of the dilemma and it looks at us with the definitive confront that how to struggle the insensible prearranged idiom while still trapped within the idiom of the patriarchy.^{vii}

This can easily be realized by examining and conducting a careful analysis of these images that they are literally living in the world of man and do not resemble real women of Pakistani culture. Yet they don't deal fairly with the realities of women experience in this culture.

Depiction of woman as a sex symbol is a tool in the hands of certain people of society for their business interests. This kind of representation of women clearly communicates male's injustice, manly desires and immoral assumptions regarding women. This also satisfies masculine ideology about women which is merely based on sexual desires. In these representations there are various dimensions of female characters. Though, the main intension is to present her only from one characteristic, which is without a doubt in the perspective of customary views of male overriding culture.

Such discriminated representations demand critical investigations into gender relation and society. Evidently such portrayals are reflective of an unquestioned social system in which males holds principal power to subjugate women. Cinema boards aim at presenting a theory which is constructed on a predetermined conceptual perspective about woman. Woman is at one time strong, weak, prominent or hidden smart or subdued. She is represented in many forms such as mother, sister, daughter, and wife or of high caliber or status with intrinsic worth and virtues. But the impact that is delivered through these cinema boards is rarely affirmative.

Royal Park is the hub of cinemas and entertainment activities in Lahore. Where once were many cinemas out of which many have been closed due to decline in film industry. Cinema board painters were once worked here day and night to fulfill the display requirements of numerous cinemas in the town. But now this market is rushed with different kinds of printing machines. Where now for cinemas displays flex are printed. Very little painting works is been done and the painters are doing other job than cinema board painting to meet their survival.

Dancing girls or heroines of the movies are always depicted in such postures and gestures that arouse the sexual passion by obscene and vulgar poses. In the film advertising market we find a variety of cinema boards. Historical hand painted cinema boards are rarely displayed nowadays, however facades of cinemas are adorned attractively with flex hoarding. Flex printing presses producing huge displays for cinemas and the business of advertisement is flourishing with remarkable momentum.

Cinema board painting is completely declined after the arrival of offset printing machines and most modern technology of flex printers in the market has captured the whole business of cinema displays. This technology at one hand made advertisement fast and less expensive and on the other hand affected the life of artists who once manually painted these boards to earn their living. Now most of the cinemas are displaying flex hoardings with images treated on photo shop as per desire and demand of the display.

An artist once used to apply his manual skills of painting to depict inviting figures but same manipulation nowadays is done by using photo shop techniques. Four examples of cinema boards will be discussed here that have slight dissimilarities but intentions behind the composed image are somehow same. Let's analyze the images of film board 'Lāra Punjab Dā' which is comparatively less obscene but out of three females one is wearing an inviting dress to fulfill the intention of presenting female as sex object in this display. (Plate.1).

Composition of this board is pyramidal and showing three male and three female figures that show a visual balance in division. All three males holding advance weapons with a gaze that is filled with violence, revenge

and anger. Male figure on the top of pyramidal composition is larger in size to create an emphasis or importance seems hero of the movie, though the gaze is showing same anger and violence. Heroes of such movies are kind of immortal beings or super human and always survive even after gunshots of countless bullets.

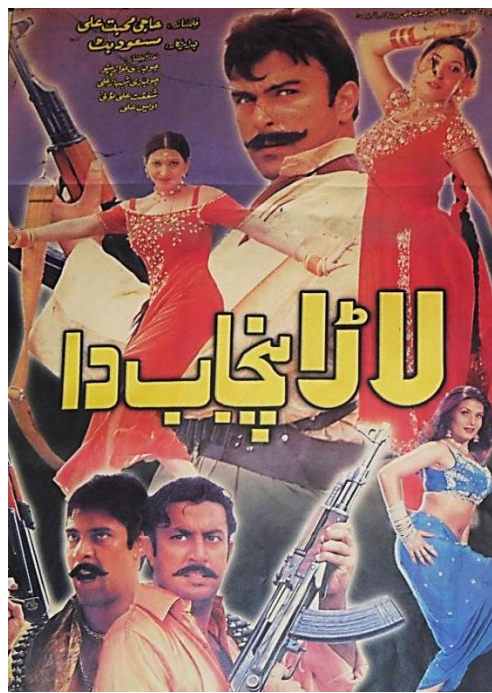


Plate.1 Lāra Punjab Dā.

Rests of two male figures are placed in foreground of the composition and smaller in size comparative to top figure. But their gaze displays same anger and revenge.

Depiction of female in Pakistani movies is controversial. Utmost contradictions lay in female character. She is altogether shown weak and strong, Shy and dishonorable and so on. If she is presented in the form of mother and sister, she is the most dignified and for her honour brother or son is ready to destroy the whole world. However on the other hand she is a dancer, a gangster, or a prostitute and the society is ruthless towards her. Another contradiction can be seen when same sister, daughter or wife is dancing for her loved one in the fields wearing shameful dresses. Now not only the character of prostitute is meant for public pleasure rather sisters, daughters and wives are also performing same role of providing sexual pleasure to male. Inside house these characters are chaste and in the field an object that provides pleasure to the man.

Female presentation in 'Lāra Punjab Dā', somehow or the other shows same idea through its selection of female poses and dresses. Three females are represented in a zigzag manner as divisions are made in the compositional space of board. All three females are attractively depicted with various poses and gestures. One figure on the upper right set beside the larger central figure of male (hero) is also comparatively bigger in size than other females. This

variation of size in depiction shows her on a specific status of importance in the film. She is attractively dressed in red lāchā and kamīz with long slits and half sleeves. Below the neck line kamīz is embellished in a way that ornamentation covers whole area of breast and makes it the focus or point of prominence. Rest of the body is covered with dress except arms that are adorned with bangles. Regardless of covered body image still concentrate on a specific attraction that is generated by its posture. It is formed in a way that the breasts and hips are pushed out and make waist line more prominent. Body postures in all such images are manipulated in a way that they enhance the attraction in female body and convert them in seductive objects rather human.

Another female figure in this board is set almost in the center on left side comparatively smaller in size than the figure set above. She is also wearing same vibrant red colour, but dress is designed in western cuts in form of a maxi which is embellishment with golden on red putting a prominence on breasts. Another appeal is added by an extremely low and wide neck line exposing body till shoulders which is held by two strips crossing over naked shoulder. Again the posture is maneuvering attraction by a slight twist of waist.

Third figure in the composition is set in the lower right section and is smaller than other two figures, wearing semi nude blue dress partly revealing her body. Her posture is very seductive and inviting as she is ready to fulfill male's sexual desires. Dress is designed in such a way which is not at all local rather cuts partly resemble Indian style. Blouse which is commonly known as *chauli* with a skin tight lāchā she is standing in a tempting pose. This posture with right leg bent and left raised is enhancing her body curves, and are arousing a deceptive mood which is alluring for the viewers. In these boards not only semi nude figures of female fulfill set objective nonetheless body postures equally play a pivotal role to generate a seductive mood and capture interest of viewers.

Nudity more dynamically depicted in the board of 'Kālā Gujjar'. (Plate.2) Weapons are equally dominating along with female figures in this work of art. Picture composition is comprised of two male and two females as focal points. These four figures are covering maximum area of the whole board. Below these figures a group of few policemen running speedily away from a blast are shown in very small size in bottom mid. On left bottom are three male portraits comparatively small but very all three in size. Out of which one is composed with weapon. Central male figure is covering largest part of the whole picture space still two female figures are eye capturing. Presence of semi nude females and weapons both show masculine ideology about women; these masculine notions are based on sexual desires and dominance over women by showing supremacy of male.

Vulgarity and obscenity are major elements of these boards that arouse the sexual passion. Women representation displays patriarchal discourse where male

superiority is the major intension behind such portrayals. Two figures show women of two statuses but both projecting nudity.

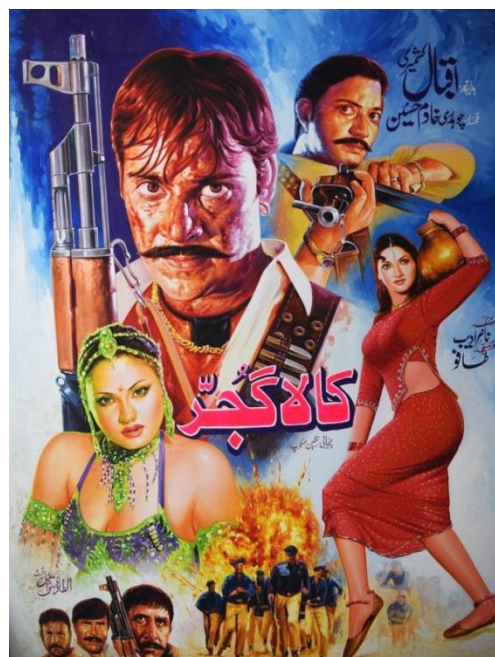


Plate.2 Kālā Gujjar

Standing figure on the right is semi nude wearing red mini top with slits till breast line showing undergarment through the cut of slits. Breast is been made up prominently by creating darks to attract the vision, and to providing the hint of under garment. This figure is standing in a vulgar pose while raising her left leg high showing hip line clearly.

The other female figure is shown in portrait, gazing right in the eyes of viewer. Area of the body till breasts is covered with blue sexy lingerie that is partly revealing her boobs. Breast line is made prominent out of this sexiest lingerie which is highly embellished with ornamentation in bright green. Head and neck are adorned richly with matching jewelry. In short this figure is the main attraction of this board along with a male figure with angry gaze and holding a gun. This representation is perfectly narrating gender prejudice which is observed in Pakistani culture where male is reverential in all regards even if he is a murderer, killer or deceiver. Both of the females in voluptuous representation are the main attraction on this board and the difference in dress also decides their varied status. Now neither the dresses nor the actions can be related to the real Pakistani female and real image of female do not have any match with the females represented in these films.

Manipulation and exploitation with female image is been done in many ways such as with obscene poses and dresses, exaggerated gestures, facial expressions and emotions. On the other hand new technology and advanced techniques are also applied for such manipulations such as image making on photoshop. Many

of the images that are made on photoshop are not real images rather a collage of various images in which face belongs to film artists and the body is attached which is not her own. Mostly these semi nude body parts are taken from English film magazines or internet.

Cinema board painters are deeply affected by the absorption in global visual culture, which has brought many possibilities to add more lustful images to capture the attention for a good business of cinemas. Image making on photoshop has given a way to unlimited exaggeration but the effects are applied in a careless way and most of the time one can easily identify additions that are made on it. A very interesting example is the film poster of 'Lady Killer'. (Plate.3) Such semi nude posters in a big number are displayed inside cinema to attract male viewers. Cinema poster of 'Lady Killer' is a diagonally set composition with seven female figures reducing in size from left to right. All seven females are standing in weird postures, bending their bodies in such a way that bulging out their breasts and showing the twists of their waists. Arms are raised in a posture which is exposing their armpits and nude waists. Some of the figures out of all are depicted with abnormal proportions that show the use of photoshop by adding ill proportioned bodies in comparison with heads.

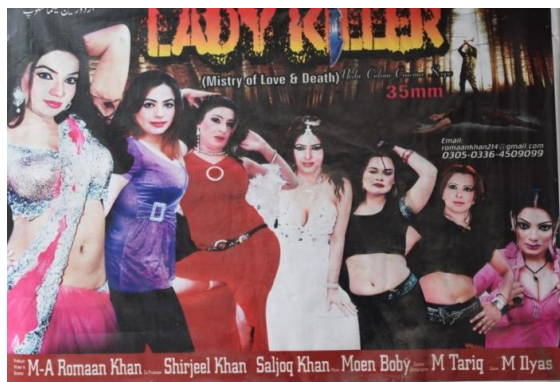


Plate.3 Lady Killer

The most awkward posture is of the figure set on extreme right in the composition. She is stretching neck line of her pink dress she is wearing to expose her breasts. This representation is address to same phenomena of showing female as sex object. Central figure dressed in white is depicted with such low necks that complete central breast line and half breast on both sides is naked. All the females are wearing strange fusion of Indian and Western dresses. Their costumes do not represent local Pakistani culture at all. Intentions behind such complex representation that has no match with the local culture are the economical interests of the investors.

Imagery of these cinema posters and boards is based on inherent form which is been followed generation to generation of artists. Content and structure of the composition is also followed by implementing exaggeration in various elements in many ways. The ultimate aim of such imagery is to satisfy sexual desires

towards females. And to achieve such goals applied method is based on exploitation of female image.

None of the conceptual perspective can be constructed while looking at these cinema boards except lust. Pictorial analysis of such boards conveys a set coding system which is entirely based on gestures and postures. Rest of the intentions is achieved by obscene and vulgar dresses that are not the real representation of Pakistani culture rather such dresses convey clearly the set intentions behind such representations.

Another attraction that is added by photoshop in film posters is adding contemporary Indian figures with images from old Pakistani movies. One example of this kind is the cinema poster of 'Nāg Manī'. (Plate.4) This is an offset print poster including two photographic images of heroin of the movie set with a modern image of female wearing Indian lingerie adorned with tassels. Her entire back and waist is naked and body is twisted in way that side of her breast and armpits are exposed. Now the film image is not obscene but the attraction for viewer is generated by adding a foreign figure showing her voluptuous body revealed through her Indian dress. Mostly such images are taken from internet and are added with Pakistani images that are selected from the movie.



Plate.4 Nāg Manī

Height of vulgarity and obscenity is rendered through the flex print cinema hoarding of 'Gunāhgār'. (Plate.5) Intention behind such emphatic composition with a huge semi nude female figure set in the center of board is so obvious and there is no other possible opinion about objectives of such imagery. First glance at the board makes the viewer see nothing except a huge female wearing wet yellow costume of see through fabric illuminating her body tone. Water on her face is making her more attractive and wet body beneath delicate see through fabric is enhancing every curve and twist of body. Voluptuous body and posture beneath delicate fabric is assertively stimulating for the sexual desire. Breasts are made prominent and noticeable with illuminated undergarment embellished with stars that was perceptible through delicate light yellow fabric. In the whole figure the emphatic order makes breasts and hips focal of the whole composition. Such delightful and

sensuously congenial body decodes the intentions. This central female figure is the most dominating feature of the board and covering roughly one third of the total area in the center. Around this central figure are various scenes from the film. Weapons in the hand of males depicted on both sides of central figure show the power and control of male in chauvinistic Pakistani culture.



Plate.5 Gunāhgār

Parallel to the knee point of the central figure is another female depiction in comparatively very small size wearing bright blue costume reclining on the table. The reclined angle of her body is facilitating her breasts to be clearly noticeable through very low neck. On upper right between these two female representations is another female, running on the road in mini skirt. Neck till the mid of breasts is been designed with delicate see through fabric of black from which the breasts can clearly been seen. Now on the lower bottom of the board on both sides of the central figure are other female depictions busy in activities in male's company.

Another very odd figure is set on the extreme left bottom wearing a blue very low neck sleeveless top with a tattoo of butterfly over left breast. Her dress is designed with circular motif in cut work on belly part revealing her tummy and belly button. Photoshop application is partly applied to enhance female body to make it lustfully striking.

Cinema boards and hoardings images of females portray romantic and sexual fabrication of imagination which is shown with her body postures and gestures in every role. They are mostly represented as emotionally deprived females and ready to give themselves to male partners. Significant intention to gain erotic pleasure through such images entirely negates the dignity, honour and respect which is obligatory for women in Islamic Culture.

Cinema boards of 'Arāin dā *Kharāk*' displayed on Capital Cinema, on Egerton Road, Lahore is showing another brain set of enforced strictness on obscene imagery.

Exposed areas of female bodies are filled with black paint on this flex hoarding. Though this black filling on semi nude areas of bodies is not covering those areas rather they are more striking with such dark colour. (Plate.6)



Plate.6 Arāin dā *Kharāk*

By all means intention remains the same, highlighting the body of women to capture the attention and entertain sexual pleasure through such representations.

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- ⁱSean Sheehan and Shahrezada Samiuddin, 2004, pp.61.
- ⁱⁱMahnaz Afkhami, 2001, pp.234.
- ⁱⁱⁱMulvey, 2009, pp.3.
- ^{iv}Sean Sheehan and Shahrezada Samiuddin, 2004, pp.111.
- ^vHaji Ashraf, Interviewed by Samina Zia Sheikh, Lahore, Pakistan, July 05, 2015.
- ^{vi}John Berger, 1972, pp. 13.
- ^{vii}Mulvey, 2009, pp.1.

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