Title Design in Hindi and Bengali Film Posters

Mohammad Shahid, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, m.shahid@iitg.ernet.in

Dr. D. Udaya Kumar, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, d.udaya@iitg.ernet.in

Abstract: Indian cinema comprises films produced across India in different cultures and languages. *Bollywood* is defined by Hindi cinema industry based in Mumbai whereas *Tollywood* is Kolkata based film industry. Both these industries show a very diverse pattern in terms of visual culture. In film industries, film posters have been used as a medium for advertising. Both in Hindi and Bengali, film posters feature images and text to create first hand visual experience to its viewer. The textual content generally includes film title, tagline, credit block, and leading character's name. Because of cultural changes, advancement in technology and upgradation in design education, the titling in the film posters has gone through gradual changes in terms of form, style, colour, texture, composition, and typeface design. This kind of exploration can be traced in the use of expressive typography, combination of images and lettering in title design.

This paper aims to do a comparative study of the title design in both type of film posters and analyze the adaptation and evolution in the context of two cultural backgrounds.

Key words: *Bollywood, Film Poster, Titling, Tollywood, Typography, Visual Culture*

1.0 Introduction

Indian cinema is a big industry which produces thousands of films in different languages throughout the year. It is an industry which shows a diverse pattern in terms of visual culture because of its multilingual and multicultural nature. Bollywood (Bombay based Hindi cinema industry) and Tollywood (Kolkata based Bengali cinema industry) are two centers in India which has significant contributions in Indian cinema. From the beginning of Indian cinema, different tools have been utilized by these industries to advertise and publicize. During the early period, print media dominated the mode of publicity and because of this, booklets of film songs, stories, handbills and posters flourished during studio era where posters becomes the most significant and dominating form (Mazumdar 2003). According to Ranjani Mazumdar, posters are composition of frozen images whose forms are derived from different traditions of popular, traditional and modernist art cultures.

Films can be categorized in different genre based on the nature of the story. There are some identifiable characters in each genre which helps to categories films in different groups. The similarity can be found in terms of narrative structure, plots and similar

stories. Genre also depends on the way how producer, audience, distributors and critics create, organize and interpret a system of visual signs (ibid 2003). When we look on Indian films especially Hindi, most of the films are of melodramatic nature full of action, romance, social, fiction and family plot. This provides a multi genre perspective, making it difficult to place it in single category. For a poster artist, making a film poster showing all dimensions of the film is a difficult task. These multi genre films provide a lot of challenges in title design as well. In other hand most of the famous film in Bengali culture falls under parallel cinema, which is defined by its serious content of realism and naturalism.

1.1 Effect of Globalization on Film Posters

Globalization has major effect on cultural transformation in India. Economic upgradation, social and political changes are the major force behind this. The exchanges of ideas between the people of different cultures are evident since long time. These cultural interchange were very limited in the earlier time but globalization has increased its pace to maximum. This opportunity have created a room for global culture but simultaneously acting as a threatening force for the very existence of local culture (Mathur 2005). The influence of this global culture can be seen in both film industry.

As a dominant medium of film publicity, poster has seen a radical transformation by the influence from new technology and the proliferation of visual culture in 20th century (Mazumdar 2003). Similar effect can be seen in title design. This new technological advancement and upgradation of design education provide an opportunity to designer to explore title design in terms of form, style, texture, colour, composition, perspective, and typeface, experimental and expressive typography.

In the beginning posters were hand painted and made in original size. It was very difficult to do the changes once it was done but the arrival of computer technology provide an opportunity for greater digital manipulation in terms of composition, colour correction and overall look of the poster. But this technological upgradation restricts the exploration in terms of creative title design, which we will see in further discussion.

1.2 Hindi Cinema

Hindi cinema is defined by the films produced in Bollywood. This is one of the biggest film production centres in the world. It started from the film *Raja Harishchandra (1913)* by Dadasaheb Phalke, the first silent film. Looking at the mode of film publicity, poster has

been one of the foremost and main medium. It has gone through significant changes over time by the influence of western culture and technology. Stephen Haggard has points out that though Hindi film posters vary, it is only in terms of content and organization but not the style (Haggards 1988).

In term of Hindi cinema, cultural and social diversity throughout the country gives an idea to the distributor to divide the audience in three segments based on their liking preferences. First segment include the audience from big metro cities like Bombay, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and other big cities whereas second segment include smaller towns and interiors. The third segment represents the people from the places which features low budget semi-porn films (Mazumdar 2003). This leads to designing of different poster for each sector keeping in mind their taste and desire which ultimately leads a designer to play with the design element of the poster. For this a designer should have ability to read the people of different segment correctly.

1.3 Bengali Cinema

The history of film production in West Bengal goes back to 1919, when first film *Billwamangal* was produced under the banner of Mother Theater just six year after the first Hindi film *Raja Harishchandra (1913)*. Marked by famous directors like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Bimal Roy and Ritwik Ghatak, title design in early period of Bengali cinema was considered as one of the important feature of the film poster. Very artistic and expressive letterforms in calligraphic strokes were popular. It is interesting to see that the title designs in most of Satyajit Ray film posters were done by him only. This shows the sensitivity and importance of title design in film poster.

In case of Bengali film poster, designer has to deal with people of one segment providing an ease for poster design. Kolkata is famous for its unconventional street art. Till today, when lot of restriction has been made regarding the billboard and sign board placement in the public area, street culture is following the same conventional format but showing influence of new technology in advertisement sector (Figure. 1). Film foster has to compete with all form of advertisements from hand painted billboard to digitally created posters. This encourages designers to design a distinct style so that it could be more effective in streetscape of the city.
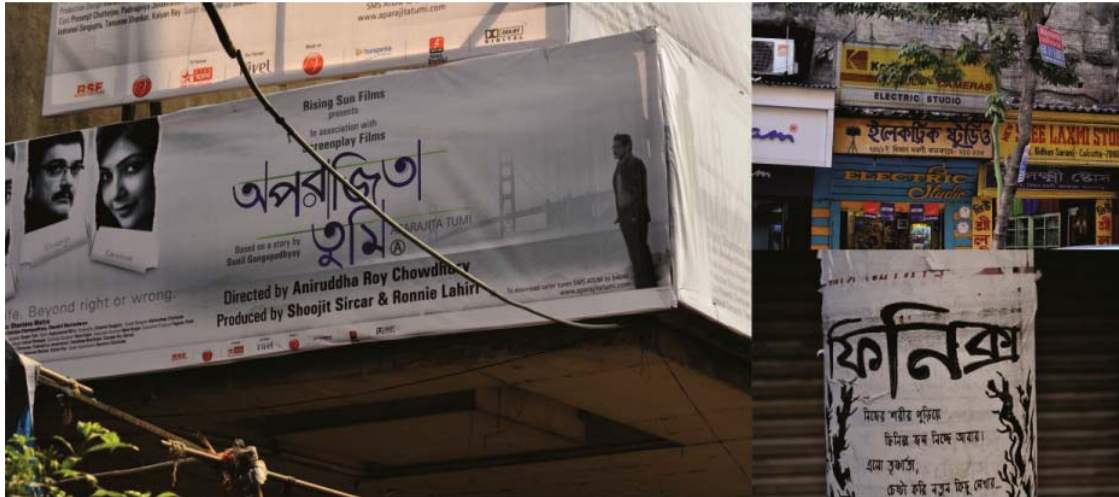
Figure. 1 Streetscape of Kolkata

Around 1940s this industry was rolling on shoulders of young designers mainly from British-owned advertising agencies. Some of the famous names are Annada Munshi, Makhan Dutta, Oroon Coomar Ganguly and Satyajit Ray. These young designers were responsible for giving new direction to Bengali film poster design by incorporating Bengali taste, culture and art (Shubho 2010). The reflection of this transformation can be seen in title designs of the film *Biraj Bou (1946)* and *Hanabari (1952).*

Figure. 2

During 1950s, the desire of getting Bengali look and feel leads towards the transformation of Bengali letters in advertisements, hoarding and cover art. Later down the time this was started reflecting in film title art (Shubho 2010).

This paper aims to analyze these adaptation and evolution of title design in both the film poster considering the cultural background. Mainly two parameters have been discussed. One is the structural variation of letterform and other the expressiveness of typography.

A semiotic approach has been adapted including Barthian visual semiotics and syntactic principles.

2.0 Methodology

For analyzing the title design in both Bollywood and Tollywood film poster, Barthian visual semiotics approach has been adopted. The key idea behind his visual semiotics is layering of meaning. The first layer is the layer of *denotation,* which deal with who and what is being represented? Whereas the second layer is the layer of *connotation* which enquire about the value and idea expressed through what is represented and through the way in which it is represented (Leeuwen 2001). This approach has been utilized to know the layer of meanings given by the letterforms in film poster titling. For viewers who know the language, it is very easy to read the title and know the meaning but what else has been tried to express by the producer of the design is something which requires more efforts to decode the meaning hidden inside.

It will be significant to discuss the Saussurean dyadic model of sign (Figure. 3), which states that sign, is a whole which result from the association of signifier and signified. The relationship between these two is known as signification and the value of any sign depend on its relationship with other sign within the system (Chandler 2002).
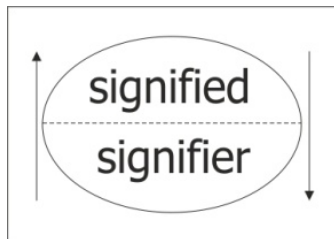

Figure. 3 Saussurian dyadic model of sign.

The meaning making and persuasion of title design in film poster depends on these value and relationship generated by different components of the film posters. Though we are covering only title design part in this paper but we cannot neglect its relationship with other design elements in the poster.

 For a designer it is necessary to have second-order understanding to provide appropriate sign so that viewer would be able to decipher the meaning behind what is represented (Krippendorff 2006). In the same way a viewer would also need a second order understanding to decipher the symbolic meaning behind what is represented. Here second order understanding is used in the sense that, when a viewer will look at the film poster

precisely on the title of the poster along with the literal meaning of the title, he should be able to decode the message given by the designer. Most of the time designer would present the title with some clue to understand those hidden meaning. For example in the title of Raj Kapoor's film *Barasaat (1949),* rain strokes have been used to give the symbolic meaning of the title making it more effective or in Bengali film *Devi(1960),* fonts reflects the feature of goddess.

This above approach of meaning making has been used throughout the study to analyze the title design and interpret the result.

3.0 Letterform structure and meaning making

Individual letters act as building blocks of title design where its form and dimension plays an important role in communication of film theme. Looking from the Barthes visual semiotics point of view, the denotation of individual letters is an unproblematic issue. Knowing the written language ensures each viewer to read and understand the literal meaning of the title. But the constructive meaning of the title gets generated through the understanding of the message which is hidden somewhere in the style and structure of the font.

This does not mean that denotation is entirely up to the beholder. This also depends upon the context (Leeuwen 2001). This could be further understood by taking examples of two Hindi films, a historical *Razia Sultan* (1983) and a family drama *Hum Saath Saath Hain (1999)*. For *Hum Saath Saath Hain* readers are encouraged to understand the phrase and relate it with the family structure in the Indian society whereas in *Razia Sultan*, along with the name, a symbolic meaning has been presented to the viewer based on the context of time, popularity and strength of the main character of the film (Figure. 4). Here individual letterform has been designed and arranged in such a way that it looks like entrance of a fort and present a feel of a *sultan*.

Figure. 4

3.1 Title design in Hindi film posters and letterforms

As already discussed earlier, Bollywood film posters shows *Pan Indian* culture. Before designing the Bollywood poster, designers would look at two parameters. First, are posters made for different cultural segment catering different group of people across the country and second, are most of the Bollywood film belongs to multi genre. This can be further understood from an interview of Simrat Brar, a well known poster designer by Ranjani Mazumdar in 2002. According to her most of film have four to five different posters to reflect different generic elements in the film. She created three posters for the film *Lagaan (2001)* based on the different thematic elements of the film (Mazumdar 2003). Giving the above example, we want to bring the attention towards the title design of the poster. It is interesting to see that all the three posters have same title design with same font without any alteration. This shows that instead of different thematic approach, a designer does little manipulation across the posters of the same film. From here we can interpret two possible reasons behind this approach. One is that, poster is going to be distributed all over the India irrespective of the regional language (it should be noted that sometime on limited level posters are designed in local languages to promote the film) and other is because of limitation of technology and fading of vernacular approach of poster design.

When we analyze individual letters in title design of Hindi films posters across the timeline (Figure. 5), we can see that there are very least variations in letterform. The variations are mainly in term of orientation, perspective and thickness of the font.

Movie Title 1930-1959	Letter 'A'	Movie Title 1960-1979	Letter 'A'	Movie Title 1980-2010	Letter 'A'
KING OF AYODHYA	A	DHARMPUTRA	A	Angoor	A
DEVDAS	A	WOH KAUN THI?	A	DISCO DANCER	A
WOMAN	A	RAM AUR SHYAM	A	Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!	A
BARSAAT	A	Anand	A	RANGEELA	A
DAAG	A	DEEWAAR	A	OM SHANTI OM	A
AWARA	A	SHOLAY	A	GHAJINI	A

Figure. 5 Variations of latter 'A" across the timeline in Hindi film posters.

One can notice variation in individual fonts in a title in terms of stroke thickness, size, and counter spaces in the poster up to 1970s (Figure. 6). There might be one strong reason behind this variation is that all posters till 1970s were hand painted and artist designed the title manually and in most of cases without using grid. Though they have tried to maintain the harmony across the letter but fail to do that with great accuracy in most of the cases.

Figure. 6

When we enquire about the title design in Hindi cinema, it gives an interesting trend. Between 1930 to1950, very minimal exploration has been done in term of shape, texture

and colour. Most of the alphabets are plain and monocolour, basically bright colours like yellow, green and red has been used for the body and darker tone has been used for outline and shadowing purpose. Most of the cases letters are decorated with shadow or outline to give more emphasis. Shadows have been used to give three dimensional perspective look.

The three dimensional lettering dominates the title designs during mid 1950s to 1980s. Some of the examples are *Aan (1954), Mughal-e-Azam (1960), Dharamputra (1961), Sholay (1975), Mukaddar Ka Sikandar (1979), Razia Sultan (1983)* and *Ghulami (1985).*This transformation of 2D title to 3D title design reflects the philosophy of EL Lissitzky, a Russian avant garde artist who defined this transition as a station where one changes from painting to architecture and coined the term *Proun* for this. Characteristics are multiple perspectives, shifting axis, 2D plain to 3D (Staber 1993). Interestingly same transition can be noticed in title design in Hindi film posters around 1960s. The letterform interestingly transformed from 2D to 3D style with multiple perspective. But it was occasionally adapted in Bengali film posters.

In Hindi cinema from beginning till 80s, posters were made by using hand painting, cut paste technique or combination of both. During early decades because of the limitation of technology artists used to make a master copy in original size and then it was mass produced through lithography. This gave freedom to explore with the form and style of letters. Titling was mostly in English, Hindi and Urdu. Three dimensional and artistic titling are some of the most explored area during these decades. Individual artistic strokes can be seen in most of the posters during this period. Around 1990s, industry was highly influenced by digital revolution. Computers replaced the manual technique of poster making. Availability of limited fonts affects the titling at most.

3.2 Title design in Bengali film posters and letterforms

In contrast to Bollywood cinema, where posters were designed to cater different cultural segment of the country, Tollywood film posters are centered to one specific culture. This would probably provide huge opportunity for experimentation and exploration with Bengali letters. From the beginning one can notice wide range of exploration from artistic sophisticated design to modern and contemporary form and even abstract letterform in title design. As Bengal is rich in art and painting, one can easily notice the great academic centers *Santiniketan's* influence in the title designs of early period. Because of the *Santiniketan*, Bengali film industry was flourished with lot of designers who are skilled in

art and aesthetics. This upgradation of cultural, traditional and design knowledge had certainly reflected in the Bengali letterform and overall title design. Looking at certain letterforms across the timeline confirms this supposition (Figure. 7).

Movie Name	Letter 'Ka'(ক)	Movie name	Letter 'Na'(ণ)	Movie name	Letter 'Ba'(ব)
বখেনো রেই	ক	বেনোরী	ণ	হানাবাড়ি	ব
শুক সারী	ক	আর্জ	ম	বেনোরী	◀
কয়াহানো পাঙ্কি	◀	থনি মেয়ে	ণ	স্থিরচিত্রের	⊿
আবিলের সন্ধানে	◬	নগর দর্পণ	ণ	দুই পৃথিবী	◀
তাহাদের কথা	ঢ	অনুসন্ধান	ন	নবরাগ	ৰ
কালবেলা	ক	অ২৮...	ণ	কালবেলা	ব

Figure. 7 Bengali letterform variations across timeline.

Most of the innovative and diverse explorations were done during 1970s. During this decade Bengali letterform shows influence from western typographic trends. Classical typography, French poster lettering, Art-Nouveau, constructivism, pop art, psychedelic arts are amongst the most influential driving force (Shubho 2010). Combination of local trend and western style results in new typographic trend. Film like *Amanush (1974), Nagor Darpone (1975), Paroshuram (1977)* and *Dadar Kirti (1980)* are classic examples of this transition.

The digital revolution and computerization of industry resulted in similar effect as in Hindi film poster. In the search of new look, this medium has great influence on degradation artistic skill and creativity. Individuality has been replaced with mass culture.

Till today Bengali writing is more calligraphic and has lot of influences from painting. Most of the title designs are in brush strokes giving an artistic look. But we cannot neglect the influence of digital technology in the font structure in later period. Along with generating the possibilities and giving more room for mass production, technology also leads towards the degradation of creativity in the title design of Bengali film poster.

4. Type and image/expressive typography in title design

During the beginning of Hindi cinema, in most of the cases the letterforms do not go with the meaning of the title. The letter has been designed randomly with individual artistic skills. The less availability of fonts and limited technology could be the reason behind this random exploration.

Till 1960s the Hindi film poster witnesses very little exploration in terms of use of external typographic elements. Throughout this period the title designs are plain and explored in terms of orientation, texture, forms, and couture of the letters and in some cases with 3D perspective style. By the end of 1960s, and early 1970s, the poster artist started using some external typo elements or 'image as a type' for title design. Nasir husain's *Teesari Manzil (1966)*, (Figure. 8) is one example which shows use of heart shape on the top of letter "i" instead of point. This style comes randomly in many posters throughout the timeline. Images were interestingly used as a type in many movie like *Do Jasoos*, *Fauladi Mukka*, *Mera Naam Zoker*, *Khiladi*, *Door*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *LOC*, *Iqbal*, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*, *Parinita*, *Azuba*, *Raja Hindustani*, *Zanjeer*, *Ghulami*, *Metro*, *No Smoking*, *Do Dooni Chaar* and many more. This introduction of image as a type playas an important role in making posters interesting and more powerful in terms of conveying message behind the film. By the end of 1990s, more professionals and design studio took over the poster designing in Hindi film industry. Designers effectively used semiotic approach in term of texture, colour and letterform structure to convey the theme.
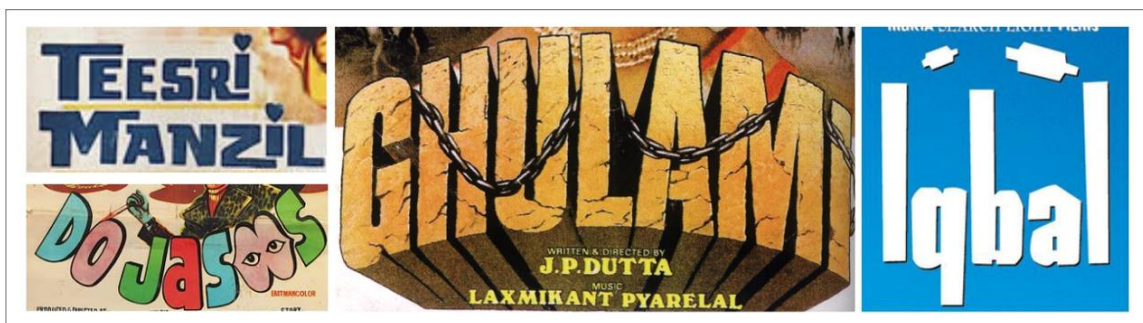

Figure. 8 Expressive typography in Hindi film posters.

In contrast to the Hindi film poster, uses of expressive typography in title design of Bengali film posters are prominent from the beginning of the industry. Probably the involvement of skilled designer and sinuous script are the reason behind this culture. In lot of cases it acts as a symbolic representation of film's theme. Famous Bengali film director Satyajit ray's posters are typical example of this category (figure. 9). Some of the examples are *Devi(*1960*)*, *Mahanagar (*1963*)*, *Joi Baba Felunath (*1978*)*, *Ghare Baire (*1984*)* and *Kapurush O Mahapurush (*1965*)*.

Figure. 9 Expressive typography in Satyajit Ray film posters.

These Trends of using expressive typography in title design can be consistently seen throughout the history of Bengali cinema. Figures shows some of the film from recent time featuring the expressive typography.

Figure. 10 Recent Bengali film posters with expressive typography.

Irrespective of the cultural significance, this kind of exploration in both types of films has been significant across the decade. Designers have used different approaches to make the

title more effective and significant. In case of Bengali film posters, this trend is more dominating. This is because Bengali posters are intended to the viewers belonging to the single language and cultural background and designers have more freedom for exploration in title design.

5. Conclusion

The overall analysis and study of posters from two film industry reveals that title design has significant role in film poster. In the beginning the variations are minimal but by the advancement in technology and upgradation of design knowledge enhance the possibility of exploration. Reflecting the national culture, variation in the letterform of Hindi film posters is very minimal whereas influence of local culture can be seen in Bengali film posters. The local language, rich cultural background has significant effect on title design in Bengali film posters. Expressive typography is playing an important role in conveying the theme of the film. In Hindi film poster the trend of using expressive typography is more popular after 1970s whereas in the case of Bengali film posters, it is from the beginning. Satyajit Ray's posters are ideal example in terms of expressive typography. Technology has played a huge role in mass production of the posters and opens up the opportunity of more exploration in form of colour and texture. But it has limited the skills of creativity.

6.0 Limitations

Overall this study set the platform for discussion about significance of cultural differences and importance of local context in film title design. The posters from both the film industries have been selected based on their availability and relevance with the research topic. It is not possible to include all the posters and hence it restricts the idea behind the generalization of the finding, his is just a part of an ongoing research. It will be interesting to see these patterns by considering more number of posters from each decade.

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