

Artistry and Identity in South Asian Cinema: Courtesans and the Shaping of Pakistan's Film Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Courtesans have been an essential part of South Asian civilization at all times. All rulers and governments have patronized them, irrespective of religion, caste, race, language or culture. During the early decades of South Asian Cinema, female representation was made possible mostly by courtesans, though not totally. Such actresses were more successful and active in this field due to their artistic background. They not only contributed in acting but also dancing, singing, directing, film and the establishment of film companies.

Methodology: This is a qualitative study of the role of the courtesans in the development of cinema in South Asia. It employs the historical-comparative research method to study the contribution of courtesans in the film industry.

Findings: The courtesans of the upper class did not participate in the development of cinema, so they were whipped out from the pages of history by time. The courtesans of the middle and lower class contributed to the film industry and they got names and fame. In this line, they became immortal for their services and roles.

Conclusion: These pioneers opened the doors to women of all sections and religions of South Asian society for future participation in the film industry. They are the founding stones of modern actresses but also milestones of the film industry.

Keywords: Courtesans, Cinema, Film, India, Pakistan, South Asia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Courtesans have been an essential part of South Asian civilization at all times. All rulers and governments have patronized them, irrespective of religion, caste, race, language or culture. *It* was a living social phenomenon till the independence of South Asia from colonial clutches. Historically, this institution was very respectful and bore several females of social and political influence like Imtiaz Mahal, Qudsia Begum (Neville, 2009), Begum Sumroo (Sharma, 1985), Begum Zeenat (Khan, 2020), Mastani (Neville, 2009), Muddupalini (Neville, 2009) and others. Contrary to Western civilization, the *residences* of Courtesans were homes of fine arts and centers of learning music, dancing, painting, calligraphy, gymnastic training and exercises (Wamiq, 1942) as well as etiquette and manners for centuries. Sex work was also related to this profession but it was not its prime purpose. Starting from the Devdasi system of

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ancient times (Altekar, 2014), the system of *courtesans* passed through many stages of development in medieval and early modern India. During the 18th century, Dargah Quli Khan counted courtesans (being artists, dancers, singers and musicians) among the prestigious persons of that time like noblemen, Sufis or poets (Khan, 2020). The poets used courtesans for the publications of their poetry (Wamiq, 1942), the elite class to teach their children etiquette (Dadi, 2022.), the kings and landlords for their pleasures and the political persons (either rulers or attackers or defenders, whatsoever) for spying and information (Khan R. M., 1936). The female rulers were also fond of male dancers (Adeeb, 1935). Indian society divided courtesans into many fractions according to the class system prevailing there. They were called Deredarnis, Kanchanis, Chona Pazniyan, Nagarnian, Khangiyani, Kasbiyan, Pataryas and Takabiyan (Begum, 2004).

The British translated the term courtesan but the alternate word of the English language does not represent the original sense and meaning of courtesan term in India. Prostitute means just a female sex worker (Wamiq, 1942) while courtesan means a female that performs dance and singing (Jaikumar, 2006). This highly cultured and civilized section of the society was brutally oppressed by British Indian enactments of the colonial period. Western education also condemned courtesans and influenced Indian society in this matter (Dehlvi, 1988). The main reason was the participation of a large number of the courtesans in the War of 1857 against the British. Begum Hazrat Mahal, Azizen the dancer, courtesans of Meerut and Lucknow and many others showed their courage and abilities in the fields of war. They were the only section of society which was in collaboration with males without any hesitation as well as free in their own decisions (Ali., 1874.) Surpassing the War of 1857, the British encountered courtesans with the Cantonment Act of 1864 which passed sanctions on courtesans' activities. The reason stated by British authorities was that, in these years, more soldiers died of venereal disease than in combat in 1857. After that, the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 was passed to expand these restrictions beyond cantonments, to the cities. In such ways, the activities of the courtesans were restricted, reduced and tightened. The Westernized educated South Asians of the colonial era perceived courtesans as taboo for their civilization under the influences of the European system, education and Christian missionary movements. Since then, a negative thought appeared in society that courtesans are a treasure of diseases, immorality, health issues and corruption, which still prevails. The contribution of this group to the development of culture and civilization, especially in the fine arts, was ignored completely.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative research and comparative-historical approach has been adapted to conduct it. The document analysis is also applied to verify the contents of documents. The internal and external criticism of artifacts, documents and contents available in books is made. The information contained in data of one nature is compared and analyzed with the information available in data of other nature. In the same way, the visual art monographs are utilized for this purpose.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Courtesans, Arts and Learning

In the fine art realm, the courtesans of India had contributions since the very ancient times. During the early colonial period, many courtesans were reputed poetesses and their verses were published in journals, along with famous contemporary poets like Dagh Dehalvi and Mirza Ruswa (Ara, 2008). The authors of that era also included many courtesans in their works as great poetesses along with Ameer Minai, Ghalib and Zauq (Ranj, 1965). Many poets were attached to courtesans of their time like Ghalib with Chawdhwin Begum and Dagh Dehlvi with Munni Bai. Umrao Jaan Ada, a prominent courtesan of Lucknow was a good poetess as well as calligrapher whose calligraphic note is still preserved in the Rampur Raza Library (Siddiqui, 1998).

3.2 Courtesans and Performing Art

Performing art was the main realm of the Courtesans. Indian Drama started with the assistance and active role of Lucknow Courtesans with Wajid Ali Shah – King/Nawab of Lucknow. Darogha Abbas Ali, one of the early photographers of India, compiled a work titled “Beauties of Lucknow” in which he added photos of those Courtesans of Lucknow who ever participated in Inder Sabha of Amanat, the first stage drama in India (Dayal, 1987). It was published in 1874. It is stated that King Wajid Ali Shah also participated in it as Raja Inder. The Courtesans performed as Sabz Pari and Lal Pari etc. After that, theatre developed in India and the Courtesans of India performed an active part in the theatre industry. The famous stage actresses in dramas were Miss Zohra, Miss Gauhar (Adeeb, 1957), Bai Munni Bai, Miss Hassan Jahan, Miss Ranga, Miss Sanorba, and Miss Manna (Adeeb, 1957) Among them, Munni Bai got 30 music certificates from American institutes through correspondence, while Hassan Jahan was an expert artist in oil as well as a watercolor painter from Calcutta School of Arts. She also performed dances in European theatres. Following theatre, the Courtesans of India also participated in recording their songs with gramophone companies. Gauhar Jan was the first Courtesan who did so in 1902. Her mother Malika Jan was also a famous Courtesan of Benaras (Neville, 2009).

3.3 Courtesans’ Participation in the Film Industry

When films started in India, it was perceived as shameful for women of all sections of society to participate in them. Even the Courtesans felt so (Pandit, 1973). They did not join film companies at first. In the first silent film, Raja Harishchandra (1913), the role of the heroine was also played by a male, Anna Salunke. According to director, Dadasahib Phalke, he even approached many to act in the film but they refused (Mehta, 1957). The only female in this film was the director’s seven-year-old daughter Mandakani (Bala, History of Prostitution in India , 2016). However, he managed two women, Durgabai Kamat and her daughter Kamlabai, for his next film of the same year, Mohini Bhasmasur (1913). Why exactly did the Courtesans from the early cinematic era refuse to participate in films? It is uncertain. They were already performing in private and public meetings for centuries, so why did they reject cinema? The traditional answer is that performing in the film was equal to showing themselves before people of the whole world, so, it was a shameful act (Begum, 2004). But it is thought, this was not the main reason. The main reason was financial. At mujras, the actresses were highly paid every single time. In theatres, she would have had a fixed salary on a monthly or yearly basis. In films, they would have been paid once and would have had no right to claim further royalty or reward. The Courtesans felt it was against their status and financial standard to be paid once only. Naseeruddin Hashmi gives us the example of Gauhar Jaan who won too much wealth and honour by her mujras that even the Europeans served her. However, actresses could not earn such wealth from films (Jaikumar, 2006). The situation remained static for years. The early famous stars of South Asian cinema were Anglo-Indian females, Reese Smith, later called Seeta Devi, and Ruby Myers, called Sulochna (Dehlvi, 1988).

The first woman of Indian origin, who broke this taboo, was a Courtesan Fatima Begum, an actress-cum-director as well as owner of Victoria Fatima Film Company. Ten years after Raja Harishchandra, another director Ardshir Irani cast her as the heroine in his film ‘Verabhi Menu’ (1922). Fatima was lucky that her husband supported her as well as their three daughters as actresses. Her eldest daughter Zubaida was the heroine of the first talkies (talking) film ‘Alam Ara’. She got fame and name from this film and ruled the screen for about 10 years. The next woman was Devika Rani of Rabinder Nath Tagore’s family, who being a well-educated lady, joined the film industry. These women challenged the stereotypes prevailing in society regarding women’s appearance on screen. Now the door was open for women in the film industry.

Women from all sections of life participated in the film industry from the 1930s. However, a careful examination of the life history of early heroines shows that approximately half of them belonged to the Courtesan community (mostly Muslims) while the remaining were from other sections of society. The

social background of 235 prominent actresses of the early 50 years of South Asian cinema is collected. The estimation is graphed in the following tables (Anjum, 2017).

Table 1: *Distribution of Actresses according to Religion*

Muslims	Hindus	Sikhs	Christians	Jews	Others	Total
123	76	2	26	6	2	235

Table 2: *Table 2: Distribution of Actresses according to Profession*

	Courtesans	Working Women	House Women	Students	Others	Total
Muslim	94	4	18	7		123
Hindus	13	1	52	10		76
Christian	1	6	12	7		26
Jew	0	4	1	1		6
Others					2	2
Total	108	15	83	25	2	235
Grand Total					235	235

Table 3: *Distribution of Actresses according to Education*

Actresses Education	Courtesans	Others
High Education	0	28
Mid Education	6	37
Low Education	45	9
Oriental Learning (Prose & Poetry, Persian, Urdu/Hindi, Music, Dance, English)	70	NA
Total	51	74

Table 4: *Distribution of Courtesan Actresses according to Region*

Region	Total	Courtesans
Punjab (Lahore)	86 (50)	50 (40)
Khyber Pukhtunkha & Afghanistan	2	2
Delhi	12	3
UP & CP	37	15
Bihar	3	2
Bengal	34	8
Maharashtra & Bombay	44	20
Tamil & Telugu areas	3	2
Hyderabad Deccan	4	2
Kashmir	3	2
Others	7	2
Total	235	108

Table 5: *Courtesans' Data*

Courtesans	Findings
Total Courtesans Actresses	108
Highly Successful in Films	27 (versus 13 non-Courtesans actresses)
High Class Courtesans	1

Middle & Low Class Courtesans	107
Successful Singers	7 (versus 4 non-Courtesan actresses)
Literate Tawiafs	6
Multi-language Courtesans	12

Naseeruddin Hashmi has discussed actresses' problems in his work *Filmnuma* (Hashmi, 1940) in which he points out those Muslim actresses were hardly from educated and respected families. He emphasized that women from such Muslim families must also join film industry to compete with women of other religions especially with Hindu women. In *Filmnuma*, he encourages educated Muslim women to join the film industry to perform long kissing scenes as per requirement of the films. He criticized the then-current Muslim actresses being Courtesans and illiterate. He also gave suggestions to establish performing art schools in Lahore, Delhi and other places, and to establish a union of actresses to counter the sexual harassment from male hierarchy, like directors, producers, actors, cameramen and so on. This last suggestion however, unfortunately never followed through even today. His suggestions were very progressive for the 1930s, however, his analysis of Courtesans' contribution to film industry is very poor, at least to me.

An in-depth study states that Courtesans' contribution to early film industry seems very fertile. The 'film' is a phenomenon of emotions, sensations and modes. An actress is a woman who copies a reality and presents that copy as original. The most successful actresses of early fifty years of South Asia were originally courtesans. Although they got no formal training from European or British Indian art/performing art institutes – their social background brought up them. They were brought up in such an atmosphere where acting, singing, dancing, dealing in etiquettes, reading and writing vernacular languages and sense of poetry were essential parts of life. It is true that during the first half of twentieth century, European culture has influenced the high-class and middle-class societies of South Asia, but the viewers of these films were mostly from the lower class – constituting majority of South Asian population. From this class belonged those courtesans who contributed in early South Asian cinema. Centers of *Courtesan* – learning centers where the art of singing, dancing and *nazakat* (sensivity), *ashwah* (ogling), *gumzah* (blandishment), emotions and sensations were taught – still existed where the Courtesans were mentored since childhood.

The Courtesans of upper class, like Gauhar Jaan, did not join the film industry as they saw no financial charm there. Courtesans like her were patronized by the Rajas, Nawabs, industrialists, bankers and landlords of the time. They could earn more money as *Courtesan* than the film industry (Markel, 2011). The only exemption from this class was Jiddan Bai. Most of such upper class courtesans have been forgotten with time and today nothing is available about their lives on record. Only a few courtesans can be narrated in detail in old books like *Gulzar e Asafi*. The advent of new technology replaced old norms, values, traditions, cultures and eventually, Courtesans.

The courtesans of the middle and lower class from Punjab, UP, CP, Bengal and other areas of India joined the film industry. Those who belonged to northern India were well versed in Hindustani (Urdu and Hindi), so they were welcomed by filmmakers. Such courtesans were living quite hand to mouth during the first half of the 20th century due to political instability at national and international forums. The two world wars had shaken the super powers and the British government was facing its last days of raj in South Asia. In this situation, it was easy for middle-class and lower-class masses to spend a few *annas* on a film show instead of hundreds of rupees on a *mujra*. This situation made up the minds of the middle-class and low-class courtesans to come into the film industry for livelihoods. They deemed it fanciful for their earning and popularity all over India. For example, the prominent courtesan, Malika-e-Mausiqui Jiddan Bai was quite highlighted in film journals and advertisements (Sharma, 1985). It is also notable that many middle and low-class courtesans were residents of Punjab, especially Lahore as this center of *Courtesans* developed during the Sikh era. The centers of Delhi and Lukhnow had a long history of *Courtesan* patronized by kings and nawabs. But Lahore was unable to produce any notable Courtesan till the beginning of the Sikh rule. The reason was the continuous raids of Persian and Afghan invaders as well as

their clash with Mughal Punjabis and Sikhs during 18th century. This forced the Courtesans of Punjab to flee to Awadh and Deccan. Ranjeet Singh was the first ruler of Lahore who maintained law and order here and patronized *Courtesans*. He had a regiment of 150 courtesans in his army. Many famous courtesans achieved influence in his darbar. So, having short historical backgrounds, the courtesans of Lahore were mostly, though not all, from middle and low-class. This situation encouraged them to participate in theatre and cinema.

Historically, Punjab-based courtesans were prominent in all cultural centers of India. During the period of Nawab Shuja ud Daula, many courtesans of Punjab, termed as Kanchanis, migrated to and settled in Awadh. Most of the famous courtesans of Lucknow were Punjabi origin (Wamiq, 1942). Similarly, another prominent cultural center of South India, Hyderabad (Deccan), was inhabited by many courtesans from Punjab (Begum, 2004) who introduced Punjabi Anga there. The Punjabi songs along with Persian and Urdu ghazals, were sung by Hyderabad courtesans till 1947. Surprisingly, the Punjabi courtesans had the quality to be absorbed easily in the local culture and civilization of their newly settled areas. So, the contribution of Punjabi courtesans can never be ignored in the fine arts realm of India. Due to the same reason we find more courtesan actresses from Punjab than other parts of India in the film industry. On the other hand, the actors, directors, script writers, poets and distributors from Punjab – mostly well-educated contrary to their opposite sex – were shaping Lollywood (Adeeb, 1957). Among them Walsukh Pancholi, Agha Hashar, Master Ghulam Haider, Abdul Rasheed Kardar, M. Ismael, Hakeem Ahmad Shuja, Hakeem Ram Parsad, Barkat Ram Mehra, Alauddin and R. L. Shoori and Sons were major players of this ground (Dehlvi, 1988). Lahore not only made its own identity but also influenced the Bombay film industry. As Bombay was a major commercial city, so many artists, whether male or female, opted Bombay as their ground of action. Many personalities from the film industry shifted to Bombay long before partition, just for a better future and chance. Courtesans of Lahore also persuaded males of Punjab in this new born industry. The Courtesan actresses became more popular and successful than non-Courtesan actresses. They played prominent roles of heroines. The actresses of ordinary backgrounds often played side roles in films.

During 20s, the famous actresses from the courtesan category were Fatima Begum, Bibbo, Sharifa, Gauhar, Gulaab, Gulzar and Mushtari. From the 30s, Zubaida, Sultana, Shahzadi (all three daughters of Fatima Begum), Khursheed Begum, Mumtaz Shanti, Ragni, Malika-e-Tarannum Noor Jahan, Meena, Sharifa, Zohra Bai, Mumtaz Begum, Jiddan Bai, Ratan Bai, Akhtari Bai, Jahan Ara Kajjan, Chandrikasaroop Rani Nigar, Sardar Akhtar, Mehtab, Vena Kumari, Jeena Bai and Chanda Bai were all famous actresses having a *Courtesan* background.

During the 40s, Noor Jahan maintained her position and was followed by Roshan Ara, Geeta Nizami, Najma, Akhtari, Rehana, Zebunnisa, Anwari, Pari Chehra Naseem Begum, Kukko, Munawwar Sultana, and Mah Jabeen Naaz. All these were famous stars and from the courtesan category. From the 50s, Sabiha Begum, Sahira, Jamila Razzaq, Shamim Ara, Nargis (Dutt), Veena, Nimmi, Vijanti Mala, Mala Sinha, Paro and legendry Meena Kumari belonged to the courtesan category. These actresses became very successful heroines.

Among actresses who hold no courtesan background, the famous ones were: Renuka Devi, Rozz, Sulochna, Devika Rani of the Tagore family (from the 30s), Sobhna Samirith (mother of Nautan), Durga Khote, Pushpa, Kaushalya, Manurma, Nalini Jewant (from the 40s), Geeta Bali, Kuldeep Kaur, Shyama, Madhubala, Begum Para, Suran Lata and Musarrat Nazeer (from the 50s). These actresses were also successful heroines but they were less in number than the previous ones.

60s onward is beyond our research limitations, so the actresses of later eras were not discussed.

During the early stages of film industry, such an actress was deemed successful who possessed the qualities of bebaki/fearlessness in acting as well as in dealing with people, free decision-making (especially no pressure from family) and additional expertise in singing and dancing. Comparatively, many Courtesans had such qualities. We examine that when a female of a respectable or reputable family

joined the film line, her family or section of society protested against it. This was the case with Geeta Baali (Dehlvi, 1988), Renuka Devi (Adeeb, 1957) and Begum Hassan Jahan of a Syed family of Bhagalpur (Ruswa, 1899). However, none of the Courtesan families would protest as such thing was common for them. They were already used to singing, dancing, kissing and extra marital relationships. And they opened ways for their other family members to join this line as wellz like in the case of Zubaida, Ragni and many more.

This comparative study shows that Courtesan based actresses were more active and successful than non-Courtesan based actresses – in quality as well as in quantity. Courtesans not only participated in the acting department of the film industry but they also developed other departments too. The famous female playback singers of the early and golden era were mostly Courtesans like Malika e Tarannum Noor Jahan, Surayya, Khursheed Bano and Zohra. Mukhtar Begum also started a music college in Lahore after partition (Ajnalvi, 1959).

It is important to mention here that the first female founder of a film company in India was Fatima Begum of Gujrat, India (narrated above, mother of Zubaida) who established her famous film company – Victoria Fatima Film Company (Mirza, 1967). Later, many courtesan actresses founded film companies. Ishrat Sultana founded Rainbow Pictures, Lahore; Khursheed founded Modern Pictures, Bombay; Mumtaz Shanti founded Punjab Film Corporation, Bombay; Suran Lata established Anis Pictures, Lahore; Zeenat was the founder of Zeenat Films, Lahore; Ratan Bai also founded her own film company; Imperial Company was established by Mehtab's mother (Akhtari, 1952), and so on.

The same lady, Fatima Begum, was also the first ever female director of India (Ahmad, 2017) After establishing her own film company, she directed films by herself and in most of her films, she casted her daughters. She was followed by Jiddan Bai, another actress from the Courtesan category. Other founders of film companies also directed many of their films themselves.

But the role or impression of Courtesans in the Indian film industry was twofold. First, they were presented as the most cunning and notorious women of the society who wants to snatch a husband from his wife or to grab the wealth of an innocent person. She is portrayed as an unfaithful and greedy. This side was, and is still today, common in all films of early decades with a short role of a courtesan added in a film, just to entertain people by her mujra or dance. The second side is a character of a pious courtesan, who is forcefully deployed in this hell and wants to save her honour/izzat or her virginity from the clutches of the merciless society. Such a role was depicted in specific films on courtesans like Pakiza. Traditionally, Umrao Jaan Ada has been an ideal for all film makers in this matter.

3.4 Benefits for Film Makers from Courtesans' Participation in Film

The directors and film makers had more benefits in hiring a Courtesan in films than an educated lady. They had to work less hard to train a Courtesan as she was already trained since her childhood in expressing emotions, sensations and intimate scenes. Many of the early Courtesan actresses were trained in dancing and singing so they made it convenient for film makers to combine the requirements of a film within one lady i.e., acting, dancing and singing. Madam Noor Jehan, Khursheed Begum and Surayya are prime examples. The third benefit for film makers in hiring courtesans for films was that as the films were produced in vernacular languages, like Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu etc., the courtesans already experts in their mother tongue as well as other vernacular languages proved beneficial. Another benefit which film makers and others got from courtesans is very suspicious, but claimed by early research scholars like Hashmi and Adeeb, that is, relationship with the actresses. It was common for them to be friendly to film stakeholders than an ordinary educated lady. However, there are some exemptions like Bai Munni Bai, who Adeeb has referenced in his book.

3.5 Benefits for Courtesans in the Film Line

The early courtesans got many benefits from the film line. First their popularity jumped from a local level to the national level (Zubaida, Surayya, Nimmi, Meena Kumari etc.), and sometimes up to the

international level (Devika Rani, Noor Jehan etc.). Second, their social status was raised: from courtesan to actress. Now, they were from a respectable class of the society. Bureaucrats, officials and academics etc., paid respect to them and admitted their artistry. Next, the publicity of a film was automatically converted into the publicity of the actors and actresses involved. Moreover, being low-class courtesans, they earned more money from films than local mujras.

3.6 Difference between a Courtesan and Actress of the Early Film Era

Regarding the early stage of the film industry, we can study some sharp differences between an ordinary courtesan and a film actress (whether a courtesan or not in her past):

1. In art, the courtesan has no area for a mistake during her performance of art like dancing, singing or playing musical instrument. Such faults or risks could affect her artistic abilities. She could be blamed as anari (untrained), beginner or learner. On the other hand, an actress can repeat her role or performance before camera as many times as the director requires for a better shoot. When a film is released we see a refined version and travel into a dreamy world. But if we view the making process, the whole dream is interrupted by repeated 'cuts' and 'actions.'
2. For the performance of her art, a courtesan herself is the decision maker while the actress depends upon the directions of the film stakeholders.
3. Courtesans and actresses have the same difference which exists between a photograph and a painting. A Courtesan is a living phenomenon like a painting which bears the lines of action and expression of an artist. While an actress is like a digital photograph which is romanticized by the addition of colors. An example of the difference between 'calligraphy' and 'typing' is also relevant.
4. A Courtesan's art is socio-natural but an actress' art is acquired/*iktisabi*. Courtesan works hard since her childhood within her family's or group's atmosphere, while actresses without such a background, have to work hard after joining the film line.
5. A courtesan's art is cultural and civilizational, while an actress' art is based on training.
6. Courtesans are forerunners and predecessors while actresses are successors.

3.7 Effects of Partition on the Pakistani Film Industry

The partition of India adversely affected our film industry. The consequences of 1947 may be examined as under:

1. Large number of performing artists belonging to areas of Pakistan joined Bollywood and developed film industry there. Dilip Kumar, Kapoor Family, Dev Anand, Surayya, Pran and many others who were sons and daughters of this part of land joined Bollywood. Lollywood faced loss of great artists from this incident.
2. Indian government, both at federal and provincial levels, patronized the film industry and artists. Performing art institutes were set up at Pune, Bombay and other areas but in Pakistan, performing art was never patronized. No performing art institute was established here in 1947. The education of performing art was discouraged as such educational institutions were labelled as anti-Islam, anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan. The only centers of performing art training were red light areas like Heera Mandi, Lahore.
3. The waves of so-called Islamization, fundamentalism and terrorism which started during Zia's regime, highly affected the film industry. Intolerance and emotional black mailing prevailed in society. Films and dramas were unnecessarily censored. Hudood/Prohibitory FIRs were launched against artists at Heera Mandi. And the graph of this industry fell lower. Heera Mandi, the only traditional center of performing art also whipped out gradually.

4. Partition also deprived film makers from large civilizational tracts of South Asia. For example, the film makers of film 'Umrao Jaan Ada' in Pakistan were circumstantially forced into indoor shootings as there were no locations available here which were parallel to Lucknow or Faizabad. The only benefit which film makers gained in Pakistan was the availability of original traditional performing art at Heera Mandi Lahore. Even after independence, this locality produced film actors and actresses with traditional dance, music, singing and acting. That is why the films even after 60s are more genuine and closer to society as well as early film styles of 40s.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the courtesans of India, especially from Punjab, played a vital role in development of South Asian cinema. During the early decades of South Asian Cinema, female representation was made possible mostly by courtesans, though not totally. The *tawafiat* based actresses were more successful and active in this field due to their artistic background. They not only contributed in acting, but also in dancing, singing, directing and establishing film companies. The courtesans of upper class did not participate in the development of cinema so they were whipped out from the pages of history by time. The courtesans of middle and lower classes contributed in the film industry and got names and fame both. In this line, they became immortal for their services and roles. These pioneers opened doors to women of all sections and religions of South Asian society for future participation in film industry. They are the founding stones of modern actresses but also milestones of the film industry. Their role cannot be ignored, whether in Bollywood or Lollywood.

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