



## **The Visual Identity of Lollywood: Poster Art, Borrowed Aesthetics, and Cultural Rebirth**

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### **Abstract**

Every region has its film industry, which is promoting and showcasing the local culture, language, customs, and values of the area for a local and foreign audience. To promote the movies and to attract the audience, movie posters play an important role. In past decades, movie posters were hand-painted and had the originality of the work. But with time new mediums evolved, and the demand of the market has changed. The art of movie poster making went into shadows, and new digital mediums like photography and digital art took place. However, this research article will discuss how this medium promotes plagiarism in the movie posters and what impact they left on the audience. This research paper will discuss how after experiencing all the experiments, the art of movie posters came to light once again but with the upgrade of medium and technology.

**Key Words:** *Pakistani Movie, Movie Poster, Visual Plagiarism, Lollywood, Lollywood Poster*

### **Introduction**

Every country has its film industry, which portrays the cultural values and social issues of a certain area or society in a visual format and represents it in front of the masses. Pakistani film industry named *Lollywood*. In the start, the majority of Lollywood movies were made in the local language, like Urdu; later, many movies were made in other languages, like English, *Pashto*, *Punjabi*, *Sindhi*, and *Balochi*.<sup>1</sup> All these languages reflect the diversity of Pakistani culture. Mostly, the Pakistani movies were made for local audiences, and authorities made very little effort to portray these movies in international festivals; that is the reason very little knowledge is out there about Lollywood and very few know about it.

The cinema journey in Pakistan began in 1947, right after the partition of the subcontinent. And Lahore became the hub of the cinema industry in Pakistan. At that time Pakistani industry has very few resources and equipment; with all the hardship, the very first Pakistani feature film '*Teri Yaad*,' was released in Lahore and in 1950 '*Do Ansoo*' was released, which achieved its silver jubilee status. The 1960s-1970s is the period known as the golden era of Lollywood, and the major success of this era was that two movies, named '*Jago Hua Sawera*' and '*Ghonghat*,' were nominated for the Oscar in the category of

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<sup>1</sup> Zubair Shafiq, Sajjad Ahmad Parscha, and M. Shahzad, "The Bilingual Cinema of Pakistan," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 56, no. 2 (2019), 507-512.



Foreign Language.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the Pakistani film industry faced a decline from 1977 to 2000 because of the interference of the political parties and the implementation of *Islamization* by General *Zia-ul-Haq*.<sup>3</sup> Urdu language movies faced financial problems because of the heavy tax, and in the same era, *Pashto* and *Punjabi* movies gained popularity and gained a different set of audiences. Later in early 2000, producers made some effort to revive the Pakistani cinemas by making some quality movies and catering to the middle, educated people again. In the period of the liberal dictatorship of General Pervaiz Musharaf, the government decreased the taxes on entertainment, which encouraged the producers and investors and shook a new wave in the Pakistani film industry.

Despite all this, political interference movie businesses were running in the market and kept attracting people. Movie posters are the bait that lures you into the theater.<sup>4</sup> Before the invention of the internet and portable TVs, film posters used to serve a great purpose: getting the attention of an audience and forcing them to see the film. The first movie poster was created in 1890 by French painter and lithographer Jules Cheret.<sup>5</sup> At that time, film posters were painted with hands by using the brush to pick up paint and apply it on canvas. Such posters consist of vibrant colors and more than huge, from life-size illustrations of figures. The art of making film posters came to Pakistan in 1948 when the first Pakistani film, *'Teri Yaad'* (Fig. No. 1) directed by *'Daud Chand,'* was produced. However, from 1977 to 2000, the film industry faced Islamization, and many film poster artists were in search of other jobs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shahjehan Saleem, "How 7 Decades of Pakistani Films Defined Cinema Through The Years," *Diva*, last modified on 24 September, 2020, <https://www.divaonline.com.pk/how-7-decades-of-pakistani-films-defined-cinema-through-the-years/> (accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Naeem Khan Niazi and Javid Syed, "Downfall of Pakistani Film Industry," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, <https://www.app.com.pk/articles/downfall-of-pakistani-film-industry/> (accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Rayan Errington, "The History of Film Posters," *The Artifice* last modified on 10 November 2015, <https://the-artifice.com/the-history-of-film-posters/> (accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2025).

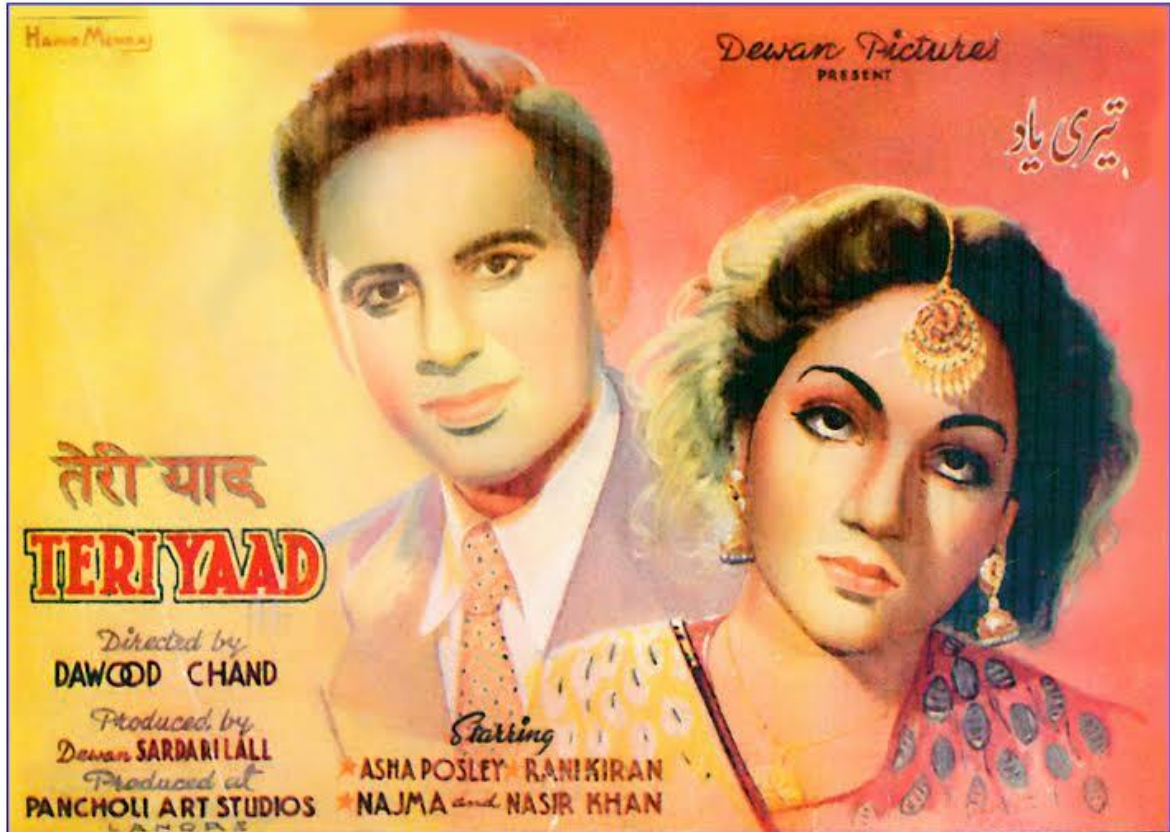
<sup>5</sup> Matthew McCarthy, "The History of Movie Posters," *Film Art Gallery* last modified on 9 March 2024, [https://filmartgallery.com/blogs/news/the-history-of-movie-posters?srsId=AfmBOoo6zkotuc73Le9ez\\_KSDyMLnSdlrKugd53Dusbn3tCuXlGhVwHk](https://filmartgallery.com/blogs/news/the-history-of-movie-posters?srsId=AfmBOoo6zkotuc73Le9ez_KSDyMLnSdlrKugd53Dusbn3tCuXlGhVwHk) (accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Haya Faruqi, "From Hand-Made to Digital: A Study of the Aesthetic Evolution of Lollywood Posters in CAP Archive," *British Online Archives* last modified on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2024, <https://britishonlinearchives.com/posts/category/articles/766/from-hand-made-to-digital-a-study-of-the-aesthetic-evolution-of-lollywood-posters-in-the-cap-archive> (accessed on 5 August 2025).



**Fig No. 1:** Teri Yaad: Source: "Photo Archive: 'Teri Yaad' - Pakistan's First Feature Film Released (1948) By Pakistan Chronicle". 2018. *Thefridaytimes.Com*.

<http://www.thefridaytimes.com/beta2/tft/article.php?issue=20110715&page=30>.



Over time, as Pakistan started making headway, with the hard work of Shoaib Mansoor (Pakistani film director and writer), the Pakistani film industry revived in 2007.<sup>7</sup> This revival brought technology, digital arts, and graphics with it and allowed digital film poster artists and photographers to show their real talent to the world. Availing the opportunity, young digital artists came up with creative compositions and unique color palettes, as all work was done with machines using different digital software. However, this revival abandoned old film poster artists who used to paint with hands. It is said that the art of hand-painted film posters is dying, and artists are facing a big loss.

### Hand-Painted Film Posters

In the 1940s, when film poster artists were busy showing their talent to the world by painting film posters day and night, Pakistan was going through a real crisis, such as the partition, male-dominant society, gandasa culture, illiteracy, weak family bonding, etc. All these issues were being discussed in films and shown

<sup>7</sup> Noshina Saleem, Hanan Ahamad Mian, Nasim Ishaq, and Masroor Ahmed, "Migration Letters Feminist Trilogy in Lollywood: Exploring Female Transcendence In Blockbuster Pakistani Movies," *In the Journal of Migration Letters* 21, no. 7 (2024), 111-124.



visually in posters. Keeping all these issues in mind, poster artists used vibrant colors and huge figures with a limited amount of text so that uneducated audiences could also understand the genre of film.

### **Interview with Ustad Jahangir (commercial poster artist)**

Ustad Jahangir's art thrived in the golden era of the Pakistan film industry. He was the student of *Allah Bakhsh*, who taught him watercolors. He worked under the supervision of *Mustafa Chughtai*, a pioneer of film poster painting in Pakistan. According to Jahangir, painting a single film poster took a month, but he used to do it in one week. He is very concerned about the art of hand-painted film posters. He says, "All poster artists are spending a life of hopelessness."<sup>8</sup> He says this art is dying and has switched to painting wrestlers of Punjab. He is happy that he is still serving his culture and country.

### **Interview with Sarfaraz Iqbal (Lahore's Last 'Lollywood' Poster Artist)**

Safaraz Iqbal is known as S. Iqbal; he has been working as a film poster painter since 1962.<sup>9</sup> He says that many students of local universities came to me to learn, but he is disappointed that local universities don't avail their students of such talents. It is the biggest reason the art of hand-painted film posters is dying because we don't pass it on to the young generation. He says, "My biggest regret is that I never kept a record of my posters."<sup>10</sup> Further, explaining the art of painting film posters by hand, he said,

"There's a lot of creativity in manual work. Out of a few thousand images, I end up selecting three or four pictures that tell you about the movie—if it's a cultural film, an action film, a romantic film, or a family film. I need to know about the outline of the movie. Then, according to that, I work. I've always been working according to the subject of the film. For instance, if the film is something related to family, the poster should represent that. If the film's called *Love's Promise*, then the poster should represent that."<sup>11</sup>

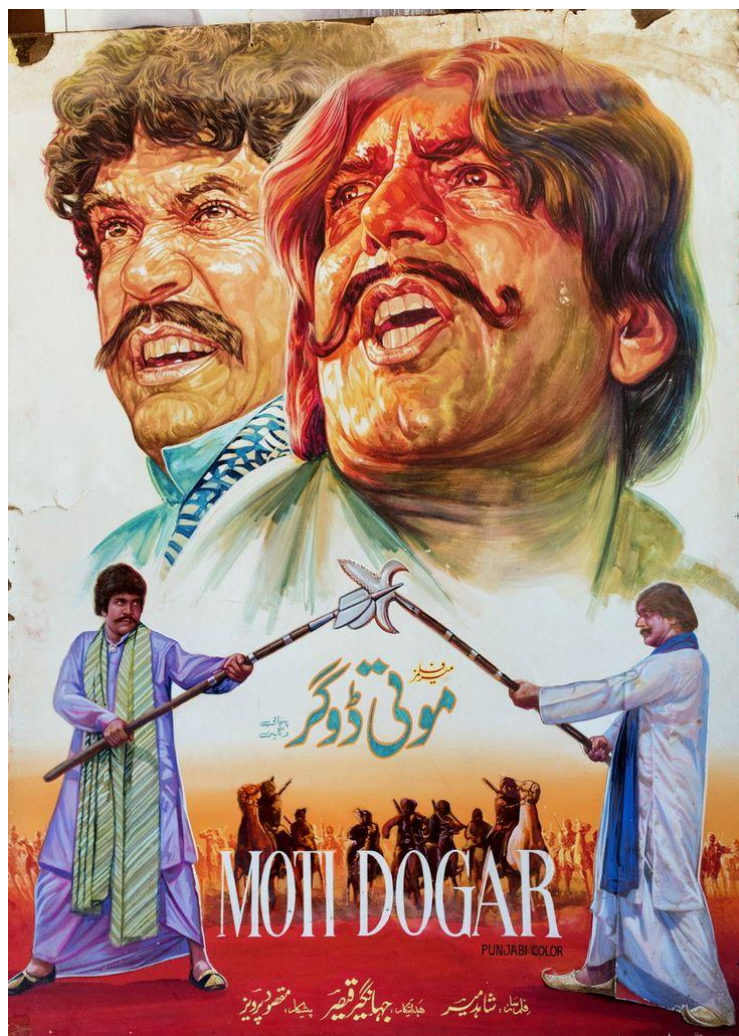
No doubt the art of hand-painted film posters has vanished. Gone are the days when film posters used to possess creativity and artistry that could do justice to the film. If we take a look at the poster of the film '*Moti Dogar*' (Fig. No. 2) made by S. Iqbal, the marvelous illustrations with colorful bold strokes take the breath away. Recently S. Iqbal has manually painted the main poster of the film '*Zinda Bhag*,' and he painted it vividly, and the audience appreciated his efforts, which means the audience is willing to see more hand-painted artworks.

<sup>8</sup> Rabia Mehmood, "Out by Royal Park, the 'soul' of film lays dying," *The Express Tribune* last modified on 10 May, 2012, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/377170/out-by-royal-park-the-'soul'-of-film-lays-dying> (accessed on 4th August 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Sarfaraz Iqbal, "Almost Famous: Painting big screen moments on canvas," *The Express Tribune* last modified on 03 November, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/626617/almost-famous-painting-big-screen-moments-on-canvas> (accessed on 5th August, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Sarfaraz Iqbal, "Almost Famous: Painting big screen moments on canvas," *The Express Tribune* last modified on 03 November, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/626617/almost-famous-painting-big-screen-moments-on-canvas> (accessed on 5th August, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> John Howard Lawson, *The Creative Process: The Search for an Audio-Visual Language and Structure* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 36.



**Fig No. 2:** Photo: Saad Sarfraz Sheikh "Lahore's Last 'Lollywood' Poster Artist Looks Back On A 50-Year-Career". 2018. *Sonyarehman.Wordpress.Com*. <https://sonyarehman.wordpress.com/2014/09/16/lahores-last-lollywood-poster-artist-looks-back-on-a-50-year-career/>.

## **Advantages**

Hand-painted film posters are the real work of art; bold strokes and odd visuals develop interest and curiosity. They illustrate the genre of film through illustrations, and chances of plagiarism are zero.

## **Disadvantages**

Hand-painted film posters take a lot of time and effort. They can't be produced in bulk and are quite sensitive to atmospheric changes.

Now let's have a look at the contemporary digital posters, which are machine-made and are mostly photography driven.

## **Contemporary Film Posters**

In the 1980s production of digital posters started, and it is still used today. Huge photographs, text, heavy backgrounds, typography, and more balanced composition as compared to hand-painted film posters. This style has been used for so many years, but only some posters stand out because of their creativity and



uniqueness.

## Advantages

Digital film posters require less time and effort and can be produced in bulk. They are flexible and can be manipulated at any time before the final printing. Thousands of variations can be produced according to the need of advertisement; for example, an outdoor film poster has a different layout than the indoor poster.

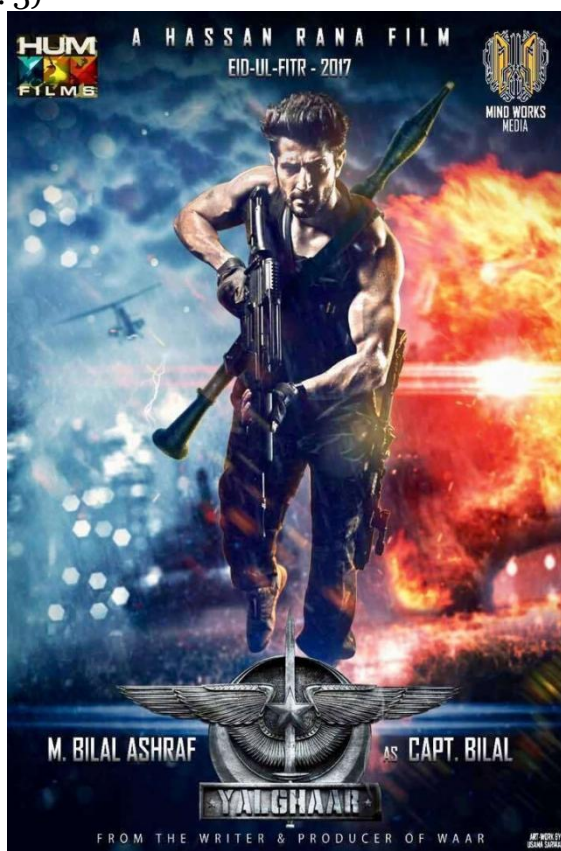
## Disadvantages

- Digital tools have made designers lazy.
- Highly sensitive to atmospheric changes
- Mostly follow the same design trends.

But digital posters have gotten so bad that it looks like their templates and color palettes are pre-made, depending on the style of the film.

## Teal and Orange

The use of teal and orange is very common because they complement each other, so it's quite safe to use them together. As it's a common theme now, all posters look the same. (Fig. No. 3)

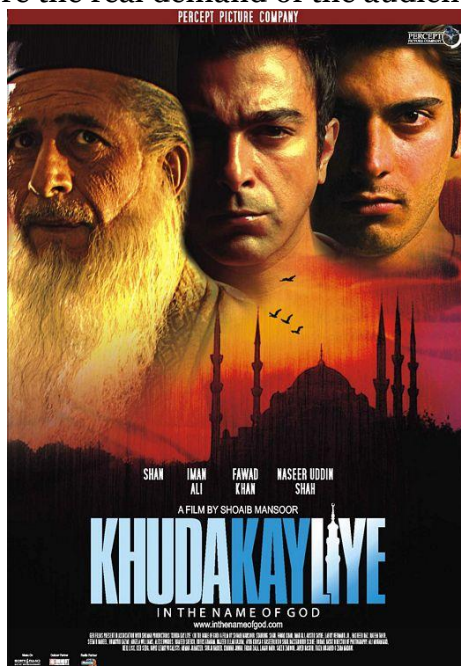


**Fig No. 3:** Poster of film 'Yalghar', Digital image. *IMP awards*. Accessed December 11, 2017. [http://www.impawards.com/intl/pakistan/2007/khuda\\_kay\\_liye\\_xlg.html](http://www.impawards.com/intl/pakistan/2007/khuda_kay_liye_xlg.html)



## Huge Floating Head Posters

Secondly, the most common theme used is huge floating head posters. No doubt it gives power to the image and makes the cast prominent, but it's quite lazy not to use your creativity and just follow what others are doing. Sometimes to follow ongoing trends, we ignore the real demand of the audience. (Fig. No. 4 & 5)



**Fig No. 4: Poster of film 'Khuda Kay Liye'.**



**Fig No. 5: Poster of film 'Mah e MIR'**

## Romantic Films

If it's a romantic drama film, then mostly we have two floating heads standing close to each other in a romantic way with a romantic background. (Fig. No. 6)



**Fig No. 6: Poster of film 'Mehrunisa v lub u'**

### **Action Films**

Posters of action movies usually contain a combination of orange and white or teal and orange. To make it different, there is mostly a hero standing in the center of the poster with his back towards the audience and usually carrying a weapon. (Fig. No. 7)



**Fig No. 7: Poster of film 'O21'**

### Horror Films

Mostly have a close-up of an eye. (Fig. No. 8)



**Fig No. 8: poster of film 'aksbandh'**

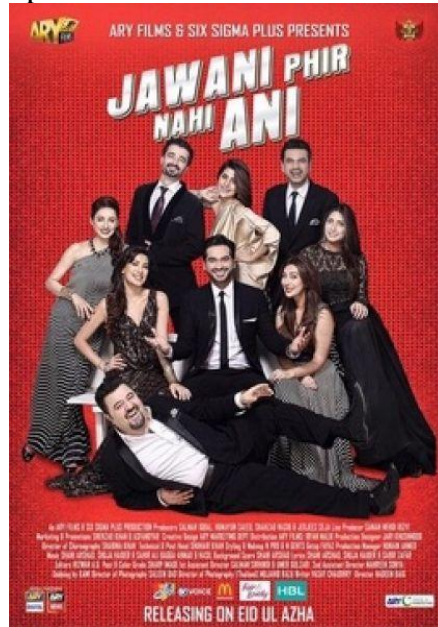
### Plagiarism

'Plagiarism' means copying or imitating the idea or work of another person, while 'inspiration' means taking another person's work as a reference. There is a long list of Pakistani film posters that are being imitated from Hollywood and Bollywood film posters.

### Jawani Phir Nahi Ani

Comparing Fig. No. 9, Fig. No. 10, and Fig. No. 11. All of them consist of a complete red background, actors dressed in black and white (some standing and a few sitting) in the center, and text in white. Comparing Fig. No. 9 and Fig. No.

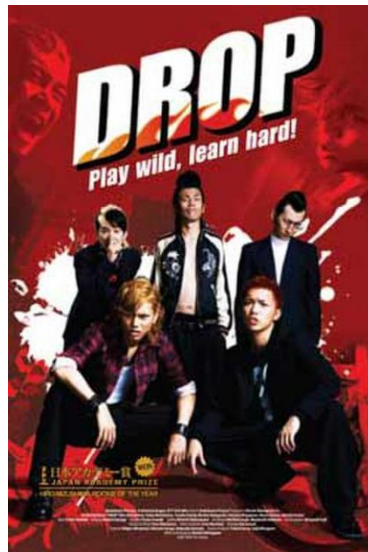
10. A few of them are sitting on the white seat, others are standing around, and one male actor is lying on the floor in a triangle composition. The hand position of the leading characters is the same on both posters. Comparing Fig. No. 9 and Fig. No. 11: the color and composition of the film title are almost the same.



**Fig No. 9: poster of film 'Jawani Phir Nai Ani'**



**Fig No. 10: poster of film 'The Wedding Ringer'**



**Fig No.11: poster of 'The Drop'**

It seems like the designer of this poster has used both posters as a reference. But the composition, color, photography style, and poses are the same as in Fig. No. 9 and Fig. No. 10. So, we can say that the poster of the film 'Jawani Phir Nahi Ani' is copied from the poster of 'The Wedding Ringer' because 'Jawani Phir Nahi Ani' was released on 19 September 2015,<sup>12</sup> after the release of the film 'The Wedding Ringer,' which was released on 14 January 2015.

**Balu Mahi:** (Fig. No. 12)

In this movie poster, the color palette is almost the same, with center-aligned text at the bottom. In the mid-ground, we can see a mid-shot of a couple standing in the same pose with an arch in the background. Overall, we get a romantic feel for both artworks. A viewer can not see the major differences except that the female actor is standing on the right side in the background of the poster of 'Bajirao Mastani.' Accordingly, we can say that the poster of the film 'Balu Mahi,' released in 2017, was copied from the poster of the film 'Bajirao Mastani,' which was released in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

“Most movie posters these days merely communicate the cast of a motion picture. The true "art of the one-sheet," as it existed very strongly in the 50s-80s, is now rarely seen. Film posters are used to motivate a viewer to see a film—to create intrigue and give the feeling of what to expect from the movie.”<sup>14</sup>

In this age in which we can easily watch trailers and behind-the-scenes videos at one touch of our thumb, a poster has lost the real worth they used to have. But they still have an impact on the audience. Time has changed; now the most

<sup>12</sup> Farwa B Naqvi, “Jawani Phir Nahi Ani-review,” *Wordpress* last modified on 3 October 2015, <https://farwarants.wordpress.com/2015/10/03/jawani-phir-nahi-aani-review/> (accessed on 14 August 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Ainy Jaffri and Osman Khalid Butt, “First look of ‘Balu Mahi,’ *The Express Tribune* last modified on 14 November 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1230981/first-look-balu-mahi-revealed> (accessed on 14th August 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Sneha Pooranalingam, “Film Poster Design: Understanding Film Posters Designs and the Compositinal Similarities Within Specific Genres,” in the journal of *Spectrum* 12, (2024), 1-19.

important thing is to entertain the audience and generate money. Everyone wants popularity and fame. Now poster designing is not in the hands of designers only; they have to listen to producers, actors, and important parties involved. So, a poster has to climb a few hurdles to finally reach the market.



**Fig. No. 12: poster of film 'Balu Mahi' and Bajirao Mastani**

### Rebirth

Due to the invention of the internet and technology, people are quite aware of genuine art. Recently, leaning towards hand-painted film posters has been observed. Real film poster aesthetics is freshly making a comeback.

Kayle Lambert, a US-based visual artist and illustrator, said:

"I think illustrated poster art will continue to be used for movies whenever it feels like an appropriate way to communicate the story. Sometimes that will be in service of nostalgia, and other times it will be to add quality to the advertising that is unique and can't quite be captured by still photography."<sup>15</sup>

This new style first came to attention, not from a film poster but from an official poster of the horror TV series "Stranger Things" (Fig. No. 13). Kyle was commissioned to create modern artwork that followed the trend of hand-painted movie art. He says, "When companies are looking for an illustrator to produce a

<sup>15</sup> Ella Kemp, "One-Sheet Wonders: the art, psychology and people behind film posters," *Letter Boxed* last modified on 23 November, 2022, <https://letterboxed.com/journal/one-sheet-wonders-poster-art/> (accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025).



poster for their film, they want a unique style that is far away from what they can achieve from photography. Sometimes they want the painterly effect and sometimes graphical; actually, they want the kind of work that could evoke the feelings that match the film, and that can only be done by hand painting” (Mairiam 2017).



**Fig. No. 13: The Stranger Things poster by Kyle Lambert**

## Conclusion

The art of handmade illustrated posters is not dying. It just vanished for some time because people started taking interest in photography. But now it's uniquely making a comeback. This new trend is the rebirth of hand-painted film posters. Now, painting is done by using digital tools like drawing tablets and digital art applications like Adobe Photoshop and Autodesk Sketchbook. The creativity and hard work of artists remain the same. It can be described as a style with the benefits of both hand-painted and digital arts. We paint by hand and produce in bulk with an unlimited number of variations.

However, It has to face some difficulties to revive, as people think drawing with digital pieces of equipment is very easy. They assume that artwork is automatically made by the machines, but the fact is drawing a line on paper is similar to drawing a line in Photoshop with a stylus pen. Although the result is created in a different format, it doesn't change anything. So, now the responsibility is on the artists; they have to upgrade their tools and skills and have to learn digital methods of painting to stand out and produce some original and unique work. Moreover, this is the demand of the current time.

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