CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ab/uses of Brechtian techniques in South Asian commercial films

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Abstract: The South Asian film industries have always found a niche in formula films that would cater to its audiences a free mix of action and comedy, preferably with a rich amount of romance in a well-‘melo’-ed drama (Ganti, 2004). Most of the commercially successful formula films in this region often house powerful film techniques which are Brechtian in nature. This paper locates them in select South Asian cult films. Brechtian techniques are quintessential to the Third cinema, which shuns the establishment and "commerce" altogether. Therefore, the paper takes an interest to comment on whether it is possible for these South Asian commercial films to do justice to Brechtian techniques or not. To do so, the paper has adopted the theoretical approaches of the Screen theorists who heavily align their thoughts with political and third cinema filmmakers. Espousing Screen theory, this paper analyzes the contents, i.e. select South Asian films [which are Beder Meye Josna (1989), Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995), Punjab Nahi Jaungi (2017), and Chhakka Panja (2016)], and identifies employed Brechtian techniques in them such as freeze frame, direct audience addressing, use of songs and dance sequences to disrupt the linear storytelling as well as recognizable crossdressing in order to evaluate the uses or abuses of the techniques to gain commercial success in the market.

Subjects: Theatre & Performance Studies; Film Studies; Cinema Studies & Popular Cinema; Film & TV Communication

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

German playwright Bertolt Brecht developed a number of theatre techniques that helped to shape the Epic theatre in the first half of 20th century. The purpose was to make the audience politically aware and to see the world as it is. With a similar vision, a group of filmmakers in the late 1960s borrowed a number of Brechtian techniques in films and developed Third cinema that decries the money-making tendency of films. Many a popular South Asian commercial films employ these techniques to appeal to their audiences. This paper locates these techniques and evaluate the use in four extremely successful films from the major national film industries of South Asian region. The findings suggests that if the South Asian films can make appropriate use of the Brechtian techniques, they will be successful both commercially and critically.
Keywords: Screen theory; epic theatre; Bertolt Brecht; South Asian commercial film

1. Introduction
Films in South Asia have always been a powerful mode of communication, entertainment, and a well-fitted site for struggle. The film industries that produce them in this part of the world have often adopted nicknames inspired largely from Hollywood; like the film industry based on Mumbai of India (previously known as Bombay) is called Bollywood, which is right now the largest film-producing industry in the world (Dastidar & Elliott, 2020). Similarly, Dhallywood is the Dhaka-based film industry from Bangladesh, while Lahore-based film industry of Pakistan is known to be Lollywood and Kathmandu based Nepali film industry oscillates between the “nicknames” Kaliwood and Kollywood (often confused with the Tamil film industry of South India, which is a portmanteau of the words Kodambakkam, i.e., a residential neighbourhood of Chennai and Hollywood; Sri Lankan film industry which is heavily inspired as well as influenced by the South-Indian film industries is often called Helawood (Prasad, 2003). All these industries are (in)-famous for producing masala films filled with songs and melodrama which often act as Brechtian techniques and Epic theatre traits. The primary goal of this paper is to locate such traits in commercially successful films hailing from these industries.

As almost all of those industries tend to borrow half of their names from Hollywood, it was commonly thought that the films these industries were producing were merely failed copycats of the western popular genres and forms. Lately, a few scholars’ works provide a completely new view; like Madhava Prasad’s “Surviving Bollywood” talks about this nomenclature and implies that even this name-game had some “colonial” meaning which tries to keep the global supremacy of Hollywood intact (Prasad, 2008). But, then again, have we done anything to tackle that? Yes, we did and that is also in manifold layers. For instance, Bollywood film industry has already established itself as a defiant competitor to Hollywood; first, by outnumbering the annual production rate and second, by upholding a different identity which is in a nutshell way more melodramatic and musical than the realist representation the latter has been vouching for since the era of Edison and Griffith. Bollywood started the trend of being Frederik Jameson-ion “kitsch” way before it became a “thing” in the age of late capitalism. Pieces of art that appeal to popular or uncultivated taste because of being overly sentimental or garish are referred to as Kitsch by Jameson (Jameson, 1991). Even before the inception of Kitsch as a post-modern term, it had been around in South Asian cinemas in forms of groggy dance steps of antagonists and wailing mothers of valiant sons, often worth a whistle or two. Kitsch, thus, had already housed sub-continental hues in it. Similarly, the Brechtian techniques that are seen to be employed, do not always arrive from a theoretical or political understanding that are academically associated with.

Altogether, this flashy pop-culture-ish elements in films, protagonists running around trees in fifty shades of fuchsia and fluorescent coloured costumes alongside both loud expressions and songs brought a bewildering criss-cross of film techniques at one spot to jolt the audience up for something beyond real, in a very un-Interstellar way. This is something Bertolt Brecht wanted to achieve. To jolt the audiences so that they get aware of the fact that whatever they are watching on the stage/screen is not real and is all part of an act. Later on, political filmmakers ranging from Glauber Rocha, Bernardo Bertolucci to maestros like Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Kumar Ghatak heavily employed them in their films. But, the way these filmmakers used Brechtian techniques were deliberate, calculated and excelled. They adhered to the formal manifesto of Third Cinema titled “Toward a third cinema” and heftily borrowed techniques from Brecht’s Epic Theatre. The key idea was to estrange the audience from the illusion of the screen. And, to achieve that goal third cinema makers left almost no stones unturned. (Van Wert, 1979; Murphy, 2002; Chowdhury, 2020)

While the way the mainstream South Asian commercial films employ them seems to be used either out of whim or as something that has arrived at their doorsteps in a very organic way.
2. Literature review

The second half of the 20th century is a proud witness that had seen the Alternative Films taking South Asian films (to be specific Indian Bengali films) to a new height. Still, for decades, the South Asian film industries had been primarily deemed as industries that could only produce masolacized formula-films which must have songs at every thirty minutes of a three-hour-long predictable storyline. And, unlike the recent decades, local film scholars intensively focused, worked and harked on either the aforementioned alternative film movement or the experimental ones. Collectively, scholars around the world kept considering the pouring commercial films South Asia produced as “unworthy of serious academic attention” (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 202). The “patchy sort of narration”, “total lack of realism”, “typical songs and dance sequences” that are rightfully held responsible for “interrupting the narrative flow”, with immensely predictable plots, rarely reflective dialogues and songs that would break “every code of continuity in space and time” started becoming “study material” during the late 1980s (Cioffi, 2012, p. 387). Because jolting the audience and breaking the fourth wall are glaring signs of revolutionary films. Now, whether it is possible to do so through songs that break out without any prior warning with 50 scarves waving women on the screen is the question this paper seeks to answer. To elaborate, Stephen Heath (1974) stated in his essay “Lessons from Brecht” that it is necessary to dismantle the idea for the audience that the film screen is imperturbable (Heath, 1974). And, films that seek to turn their audiences into thinking beings, must not let them slip into the uninterrupted authorized version of reality that traditional films produced. Now, is it possible that when in a commercial film exposes the filmmaking processes or a character shares his comic byte directly staring at the camera, can partially achieve the goal Heath and others have set? The alternative film movement and the third cinema directors were all for creating critical audience (for example, often by interrupting the narrative flow through non-linear editing) and chided films that failed to do so. Now, interestingly, many a commercial film element from South Asian industries were aligning with those film techniques unbeknownst. Thus, even though prolific industry figures like Chidananda Dasgupta would go on labelling the local audience for popular cinema as “gullible” units of an “undifferentiated, monolithic group”, the film scholar fraternity still managed to start to pay attention to this usage of “epic theatre” techniques. These techniques are famously borrowed from the German maestro Bertolt Brecht’s innovative theatre techniques (Dissanayake, 2004).

Gradually, the South Asian popular films are shining as a revisionist reservoir of film studies. Extensive works of theorists and film scholars like Ashis Nandy, Geeta Kapur, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Ravi Vasudevan, Sumita Chakravarti, Sara Dickey, M. S. S. Pandian, K. Moti Gokulsing, Vijay Mishra, Malini Sahai, Lalitha Gopalan, Vivek Dhareswar, Tejaswini Niranjana, Ranjani Mazumdar, Jigna Desai and “like-minded” scholars and critics inundated libraries worldwide which altogether came up with a new understanding of the popular films in the subcontinent (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 212). Dissanayake delineates that even though “they do not adopt a uniform approach to cinema” (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 213), they still managed to play a “crucial role in opening up a fruitful line of inquiry into questions of tradition and modernity, narrative discourse, regimes of visuality and, commodification of art and spectatorial pleasure in relation to popular cinema” (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 212).

Some of these esteemed theorists and scholars have focused on indigenous elements in such films that help them stand out in a postcolonial way like Kapur, Rajadhyaksha and Vasudevan (Kapur, 1987; Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Vasudevan, 2000). While doing so, they have also explored how filmmakers of South Asia have very often appropriated and abrogated the axiomatic norms of Hollywood films by frequently infusing local and indigenous elements for its own cultural-specific purposes. Many more have simply denied considering the relationship between South Asian popular films and the Western films as the simple influence of the latter over the former including Rajadhyaksha and Dissanayake. These issues, on one hand, have extended the discursiveness of Hollywood films, and on the other, have subverted them greatly. These subversions are most notably seen in South Asian melodramas and masala films, as they deny the projection of “realism”. To be specific, the particular kind of “realism” that Hollywood films vouch for and largely
try to project “realistic and psychologically convincing narrative” (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 209). A number of film theorists like Collin MacCabe have indicated that denying “realism” in films is a necessity as concealing the film-making process through that “realistic and psychologically convincing narrative” creates psychologically passive audience as a part of an un/intentional scheme of the dominant authority to make a conforming group of people (Baudry, 1985; Metz, 1975). Most of these theorists are known for their contribution to the Screen theory. No wonder texts that are dedicated to epic theatre, Brechtian techniques and commercial Indian cinema separately are found in abundance. For example, in the aforementioned book chapter, Dissanayake has attempted to find the core of the songs into the indigenous culture rooted in Sanskrit scriptures and local art forms, but somehow eschewed giving an account of the songs’ role as an Epic theatre element.

Then, Geeta Kapur (1987) in her “Mythic Material in Indian Cinema”, oscillated between the “styles of representation” and inclusion of indigenous performances in Indian Cinema (Kapur, 1987, pp. 79–107). While doing so Kapur chose not to shed much light on the effects of such elements on creating critical audience either. Most of the local mythic material invokes musical narration and Kapur played on finding a route to the root and remained heavily occupied with such mythical inclusions to Indian Cinema (Kapur, 1987, pp. 81, 86). Even though Kapur’s work has since been considered a path-breaking one, it has seemingly missed out to take the impacts of these elements into account. This paper argues that a lot of such inclusions house great potentials of impacting its audiences in a way a Brechtian technique would do. And, to do so, this paper uses the perspective of Screen theory in its approach to define the roles of an array of songs that are largely used to complement as well as intensify the textbook romance that blossoms between an over-righteous hero and a damsel-in-distress often hailing from opposite economic backgrounds in South Asian films. It would also take into account the overtly physical and slapstick comedy in family dramas to liquefy the ever brewing conflict between the righteous one that suffers and the eternally evil one which proceeds toward a family-Armageddon at the end; the self-reflexive scenes that showcase unbelievable revival of lost memories and reunions between siblings lost in local village fairs are also our concern in this paper.

We also have critiques like Vinay Lal and Ashish Nandy who viewed South Asian commercial cinema as a “flawed art” form and scathingly called it “a curious intrusion into the world of modern art forms” and believed that these films limit themselves to “carnivalesque atmosphere, the larger-than-life characters, the centrifugal story line” (Lal & Nandy, 2008, xiii). Since many other scholars like Nirmalya Biswas (2014), Akaitab Mukherjee (2014) walked the same roads Lal and Nandy did, the scenario looked pretty sardonic. But, Prasad (2003) in his “This Thing Called Bollywood” definitely instils a different route to assess the popular commercial films, one that this paper adheres to (Prasad, 2003, 17–20). Prasad stated that Indian cinema has always tried to “capture a mood or style’ rather than designate a piece of reality” to its audience which eventually is expected to end up creating a thinking audience (Prasad, 2003, para. 4). We also get a similar vibe from Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Sara Dickey, who have emphasized on local commercial films’ scopes in creating “active spectatorship” and “the purposeful participation of the audiences in negotiating meaning” (Dissanayake, 2004, p. 212). Thus, a gamut of works dedicated to specific commercial films hailing from Bollywood. Even though a number of works address South Asian commercial films, they mostly focus on Bollywood films. The present paper, therefore, chose to provide not only a fresh reading of Brechtian techniques gone rogue in commercial films but also to push the boundary of the term South Asian films beyond Bollywood. It started with the all-time highest-grossing Bangladeshi film Beder Meye Josna (1989), a folklore that exhibits not only local folk elements but also uses ample amount of Epic Theatre techniques. The second pick is Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995), the longest-running film in the history of Indian Cinema, while the third being Punjab Nahi Jaungi (2017), the first-ever Pakistani film to cross the 500 million PKR threshold. The last but not the least Chhakka Panja (2016) is the first instalment of the in-house highest grossing franchise of all time in Nepal’s Bollywood (“Nepal’s film industry going”, 2020). The paper garners on the ways Prasad (2003) provides a close reading of a number of films, Geeta
Kapur (1987) draws on local mythic-folklore, Ravi Vasudevan “makes meaning of Indian Cinema” (2000). To add, this paper is heavily invested on the statement that “films represent the prime vehicle for the transmission of popular culture and values” and that is why finds it really important to assess how these industries are mal-handling techniques (i.e. Brechtian techniques) that are capable of shaping the whole world (Rajadhyaksha, 2003, p. 30).

3. Methodology
The aim of this paper is to explore and examine commercially significant South Asian films in the light of Screen theory and analyze them to ascertain whether the Brechtian techniques that have been employed in these films, consciously or unconsciously, are legitimated or not. With a view to determining whether commercially successful South Asian films resonate with the effectiveness of the applied Brechtian techniques, this paper samples one commercially successful film from each of these four South Asian countries—Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. The four commercially successful films that have been taken under consideration are Beder Meye Josna from Bangladesh, Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge from India, Punjab Nahin Jaungi from Pakistan and Chakka Panja from Nepal. While Beder Meye Josna is the highest-grossing Bangladeshi film of all time (Mazhar, 2008), Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge has been the longest-running film of all time in India (Shah, 2015) and Punjab Nahin Jaungi is the first Pakistani film to cross the 500 million thresholds (Ahmed, 2017). Though Nepali film industry is still to be nourished comparing its neighbouring countries’ ones, the Nepali selection Chakka Panja is the first part of the three sequels that gave a tough fight to foreign films and became the highest-grossing domestic franchise of all time (Raut, 2016).

Even though there are a plethora of studies by remarkable theorists and scholars available that explores, analyzes and explains the role of Brechtian techniques in the third cinema or political films (Solanas & Getino, 1970; Comolli and Narboni, 1971; MacCabe, 1974; Heath, 1974; Baudry and Williams, 1974; Metz, 1975) there is a serious scarcity of scholarships in analyzing the role of Brechtian techniques in the South Asian formula films. In order to shed light onto the legitimacy of Brechtian techniques in these South Asian films, this paper employs qualitative content analysis that “involves the empirical study and subsequent theoretical analysis of a body of film texts in order to generate knowledge” (Brylla, 2018, p. 151). Thus, leveraging on content analysis, this paper identifies the Brechtian techniques—freeze-frame, direct audience addressing, use of songs and dance sequences to disrupt the linear storytelling, and recognizable crossdressing—in this film that seizes any suspension of disbelief in the audience. In the light of Screen theories, the paper then critically examines the sequences and their achieved effects through these techniques upon their audience to evaluate the justification of their application. And, finally, will add concluding remarks on whether Brechtian techniques could fit in these commercial cults with huge reach or not.

4. Theoretical framework: Screen theory
The British film journal Screen laid a few of the central tenets in the field of film studies. Primarily, the scholars who wrote predominantly in Screen wanted to theorize a politics of freedom through cinema which emphasized diversity over unity. Screen first came into being in 1958. Initially, it was run by the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT). Young scholars like Colin MacCabe and Stephen Heath joined the editorial board of Screen in 1973. The most outrageous, energetic, controversial and optimistic write-ups by Screen scholars were published between 1974 and 1976. Scholars and theorists ranging from Laura Mulvey, Raymond Bellour to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson contributed heftily to this film magazine, while the editorials and translations of Ben Brewster led the way (Kuhn, 2009, pp. 1–12). Though the Screen theory concentrates a lot on analyzing films mainly from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and Marxism, the most enticing influence on Screen theory was of the German poet, playwright Bertolt Brecht. Brecht’s major contribution to such thoughts is his theory of Epic theatre. Epic theatre is an idea of the theatrical drama that wished to nullify the traditional idea of the “invisible fourth wall.” Brecht considered this traditional notion of looking into the imagined world in which a story unfolds by separating oneself from the stage is equivalent to
encouraging an uncritical, emotional response in the audience. Screen theorist had little or no trouble transferring Brecht’s designations for theatre to the theories for cinema. Like the Cahiers du Cinéma critics, the Screen theorists also thought that “traditional films provided escapist fodder for uncritical audiences” and, therefore, tried to theorize modes of cinema that could foster critical audiences (MacCabe, 1974 in Rushton and Bettinson, 2010, p. 53).

Colin MacCabe, in his “Realism in the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses” put forward a critique of realism or rather certain aspects of Hollywood cinema for being a realist (MacCabe, 1974, pp. 7–27). It might be stated that this critique was basically targeting André Bazin, the founder of the journal Cahiers du cinéma whose basis of realist argument says that the most important aim for cinema is to represent reality as accurately as possible. But, denying this, MacCabe began from a position that reality cannot be represented in films as reality is “made of stuff that is not representable” and therefore, realism is an inadequate way of articulating the true nature of the world and social relations contained therein (MacCabe, 1974 in Rushton and Bettinson, 2010, p. 54). While clarifying his stand regarding realism, MacCabe defined four types of films; they are “classic realist films, progressive realist films, subversive realist films and revolutionary films” (MacCabe, 1974 in Rushton and Bettinson, 2010, p. 54). He, like Jean-Louis Baudry, advocates the revelation of the production process to nullify the cinematographic ideology at work as he believed that realism is a trick which lures and compels one to believe the objectivity of its statements when clearly, those statements exhibit someone else’s point of view that he gained and appropriated from somewhere whatever it is. And he finished the essay with a “solution” to realism and that is by “placing the spectator within the realm of production” instead of concealing the processes (MacCabe in Rushton and Bettinson, 2010, p. 66).

To have a revolutionary film that MacCabe talks about is a film that Stephen Heath (1974) also advocated in his essay, “Lessons from Brecht” which also elaborated an argument that provides a distinction between separation and distanciation (Heath, 1974, pp. 103–128). For Heath, the traditional structure of film encourages the audience to adopt a position of separation from the cinema screen, whereas a revolutionary cinema would encourage a position of distanciation in the audience. This separation refers to the process of separating the spectator from a film’s processes of production and the distanciation refers to the way through which the separation or distance between the stage/screen and the spectator can be overcome (Rushton and Bettinson, 2010, p. 60).

So, the elements in the film which are advocated by the Screen theorists above could be listed like the following: dream sequences, cross-cutting, flashbacks (as they interrupt the continuity of the narrative), tableau effect created by freeze frames, jump cuts connoting spatial dislocation, direct addressing to the audience to destroy the fourth wall and doubling up of belief, non-linear story-telling, revealing film techniques like camera, projector, shooting, clap-sticks, etc., conflicting shots like a long-shot followed by a big close-up, using inserts, gestus, self-reflexivity, creating jolts, contrapuntal sound, unusual camera angles, use of negatives, voice-over, mise-en-scene, etc. Interestingly, melodramatic films in South Asia have housed and celebrated such techniques in abundance as they help to create the “mode of excess” portraying emotional fits-sufferings-suspense-romance-evil-morality-justice versus revenge-innocence versus corruptions with stock characters with strong facial expressions and large movements which the west has always noted but never recognized; and even more interestingly, South Asian commercial films mostly employed them without the MOTIVE to create an active audience and the employment of such powerful devices was random, wishful and harmless (Kelleter et al., 2007). Therefore, it is a debatable question that should we call it the use or the abuse of Brechtian elements in these masala-melodramas. Moreover, whenever these films are using songs featuring locations unreal to the current situation to the protagonists, they are actually using a Brechtian element. Songs, be it shot in yellow mustard fields amidst groups of extras dancing alongside the protagonists in most colourful matching dupattas or stoles or be it only the two protagonists amidst foggy tulip lines of red and yellow, each of them severs the linear realist narration,
therefore, jolts the audiences just like a disturbing dream sequence or a direct audience address.

5. Discussion

5.1. In Beder Meye Josna
Beder Meye Josna is scripted and directed by Tojammel Haque Bakul and was released on 1989. This cult film is the highest-grossing film of all time, in Bangladesh (“They Met After 23 Years”, Mazhar, 2008). Though it includes a lot of folk and indigenous elements, it does not project the verbatim story-line from the oral literature which it claims (Bagchi, 2011, p. 82). Rather, it produced a mixture of all the notions regarding the notions of snake-charmers’ living styles and myths by using melodrama as a key essence. This film revolves around the protagonist Josna, who as a kid was bitten by a snake. As no snake charmer of the locality could cure her, she was put on a raft with a letter requesting to whomever the raft may reach, to give her back to her parent if cured. This launching of rafts in water bodies with snake-bitten people on it is an indigenous ritual. Bangladesh is a land, netted with rivers and the death rate caused by snake-bites was ever-spiking. There are communities of snake-charmers who lead a nomadic lifestyle as they roam around in boats. The snake-bit child was eventually adopted by the snake charmer who cured her. She grows up to be a beautiful woman and falls in love with the prince of the state who, actually, is a cousin to her. But, her present identity of belonging to the snake charmers’ clan upsets the king even though Josna pawns her life to save the prince. Eventually, through a series of twists and revelation, Josna meets her biological father and unites with her prince. The film is full of melodrama, with its stock characters as we see in the following stills, Damsel in distress, her honour is saved by the most illustrious hero who leaves all his wealth and the kingdom for the damsel he saves and loves. And he punished the villain (another stock character) brutally in noisy action sequences as we can see in Figures 1 and 2.

The villain, like most other traditional villains of Dhallywood films, is accompanied by a slapstick “sidekick” who is busy in physical comedy-making stunts, with loud gestures (Figures 3 and 4).

Figures 1 and 2. Damsel in distress Josna sobbing in torn blouse; Josna’s honour is saved in a most noisy and melodramatic fight sequence. Stills from Beder Meye Josna (Anondomela Cholochitro, 1989).

Figures 3 and 4. Slapstick sidekick; the sidekick’s direct audience address. Stills from Beder Meye Josna (Anondomela Cholochitro, 1989).
Figures 5 and 6. Classic examples of the Brechtian tool—direct audience addressing in Meghe Dhaka Tara and Interview. Still from Meghe Dhaka Tara (Chitrakalpa, 1960) and still from Interview (Mrinal Sen Productions, 1973).

Figures 7 and 8. The stark contrast between the freeze frames used in Beder Meye Josna and 400 Blows. Stills from Beder Meye Josna (Anondomela Cholochitro, 1989) and 400 Blows (Les Fimsl du Carrose, 1959).

Figure 9. The classic freeze frame from Ray’s Pratidwandi. Still from Pratidwandi (Priya Films, 1970).

Figure 3 captures the typical “slapstick” gesture of renowned comedy actor Dilder, while in Figure 4, we find him directly addressing to the audience to inform about his recent job-status of a village barber in disguise and reveals how he is going to try his skills on a goat. Here, this direct addressing not only represents a melodramatic act but also is a very powerful “Brechtian” device which is seen in a number of notable films like Ritwik Ghatak’s Meghe Dhaka Tara (Figure 5), Mrinal Sen’s Interview (Figure 6) etc. In such latter kind of direct audience addressing, politically charged exchanges provoke the audience to negate the anomalies of the then society and successfully opens up sites for struggles. But, in Beder Meye Josna, the employment of such a device can only be tagged as an “abuse” of such a powerful device. This cult film might be given credits for an array of features. For example, this film single-handedly has re-introduced the Bengali people to its rich folklore and opened up a trend that eventually revived the Dhallywood from its dormant state, made the urban dance to the tunes of wandering minstrels. But, unfortunately, mastering Brechtian techniques like direct audience-addressing is not at all its cup of tea (Ghatak & Ghatak, 1960).

To rub salt into the wound, let’s focus on the freeze-frame that Bakul used in here (Figure 7) to end the film, this freeze frame is also a “Brechtian” device and a similar frame is seen in the last shots in Francois Truffaut’s seminal film 400 Blows and Satyajit Ray’s Pratidwandi. Truffaut’s one produced powerful “tableau effect” (Figure 8) (Truffaut, 1959). In plays, in few cases, the actors freeze for a moment or two immediately before the curtain falls, which create a powerful image to be remembered; and the effect it creates is known as tableau effect. Truffaut froze the frame and the frame was accompanied by the sound of the sea where a teenager, Antoine Doinel meets freedom for the first time in his life but is also about to lose it very soon. And in Pratidwandi, the
protagonist Siddhartha finally meets his long-lost and long-sought bird-call, a symbolic return to innocence, a cigarette between finger yet to be lit symbolizing some unfinished tale yet to be told. (Figure 9) In comparison to such classic examples, the one from Beder Meye Josna egregiously fails where the slapstick repents his mistakes, sitcom flavour laughter of an unknown audience is heard at the background, and the frame freezes for no good reason (Dutta et al., 1970).

Next, the loud make-up/expression and the large body/organ movements are capable of reminding the audience that whatever they are watching is a piece of performance, the idea of which can subvert the “illusion” of realism; therefore, they may nullify the basic cinematic apparatus (Baudry, 1985) and disturb the “doubling up of belief” (Metz, 1975) which to a great extent it does, for example, in Figure 10, when Josna comes out of the pond after bathing in loud make-up, it clearly denotes that it has no intention of maintaining realism. And, in Figure 11 the lady is in the disguise of a man with fake moustache and chip, but the red lip-colour, the thick amount of eye-makeup do not earn the credibility. Thus, they create enough scope for making a thinking audience, but it makes us wonder whether these employments were deliberate or just innocuous tendencies on the part of the maker to follow the codes of melodrama and masala films. After a careful scrutiny, we learn that Josna coming out of the pond with unwashed make-up was deliberate in a sense that the “heroin” has to look beautiful and always with make-up, she is never seen without heavy lip colour put on a powdered face, while the latter is also a deliberate one as no other male character are seen with such gaudiness and the maker wanted the audience to keep a cue that who she actually is. This shows how the director viewed the audience as a collection of non-thinking being who required listening to loud cries to understand the grief and anger of the characters (Figures 12 and 13) all of which end up in sequences highly dramatized with the poor deployment of melodrama as a Brechtian technique.

Aforementioned indigenous elements made the film stand out anyway. The “Baul” i.e. a local singer who sings with a device with one or two strings only, the melancholic tunes that are arcane to non-Bengali ears dragged the audience back to the cinema. The appealing snake dance (Figure 14), the pitcher dance (Figure 15), ancient jallad (executioner at the jail), the honour-killing, local justice courts, the tale of a lost princess to be found again, the flashy costumes are to name a few more.

While giving attention to these postcolonial-ish elements, Bakul weaves subtle Brechtian techniques here and there like the swish pans (fast camera movements from right to left and left to right) he used in the Baul song in (Figure 16) with which the film starts. It indicates that Bakul was
Figures 14 and 15. The snake dance and pitcher dance. Stills from *Beder Meye Josna* (Anondomela Cholochitro, 1989).

Figures 16 and 17. The baul song: a swish pan to the raft carrying young Josna bitten by a snake. Stills from *Beder Meye Josna* (Anondomela Cholochitro, 1989).

probably seasoning his audience for a nuanced political conviction. With a very rudimentary hint in the very title, Bakul established that this film is a non-conformist film that would challenge the then urban-centric Dhallywood mainstream productions. Josna (IPA /dʒɔtːnaː/) is a “menial” version of Jyotsna (IPA /dʒɔtsnaː/). To pronounce the latter, one requires to have an “educated and urban tongue”. Thus, Bakul made it clear by adopting the layman version that he believed it was high time Dhallywood should stop ignoring the rural audiences and working people. Et voilà! He made history. Therefore, his experimentations with a little bit of Brechtian elements in places might not garner much praise from third cinema scholars, but definitely provides a hefty banquet for critiques (Mazhar, 2008).

In a nutshell, *Beder Meye Josna* is a princess’ tale like Cinderella, Snow-white or Sleeping Beauty. But, the melodramatic representation appropriates and abrogates the western genre of fairy-tales in such a way that it could be hardly recognized. Like all the fairy tale princesses, Josna first suffers a lot being an adorable epitome of innocence and simplicity and later wins a happy life with the prince. *Beder Meye Josna*, then again subverts the Sleeping Beauty tale in a most interesting way. In The Sleeping Beauty, the princess in an eternal sleep was brought back to senses by a prince with a magical kiss, while in *Beder Meye Josna* has a sleeping prince, being bitten by a most poisonous snake whom Josna brings back risking her life by playing the snake flute. Thus, *Beder Meye Josna* can be considered as a postcolonial text instilled with some misused Brechtian techniques, altogether the appropriations and abrogations which Bakul introduced are worth shedding lights on (Shikder et al., 1989).

5.2. In Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge

Aditya Chopra’s *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* is the longest-running film in the history of Bollywood and is commonly known as *DDLJ* (Shah, 2015). This acronym is so famous that if one googles “DDLJ”, it directly prescribes pages and links of this film. As of March 2020, Maratha Mandir theatre was on its 24th year of screening this film ([Great Big Story], 2020). This romantic comedy broke the previous record of the curry western Sholay (1975) and remained the highest-grossing film till 21st century crawled in. Simran (Kajol) is the eldest of the two daughters of a conservative NRI (non-resident Indian) Baldev Singh (Amrish Puri) who has never been to India during his twenty years of stay at London. Yet he manages to keep “Hindustan” i.e. India alive and instilled both in his heart and values (which are mostly patriarchal in nature). Simran convinces this conservative father to let her go for a one-month long Europe tour before she was going to get married to Singh’s friend’s
son in India whom she has never met. In this tour, Simran meets Raj (Shahrukh Khan) and eventually, they fall in love with each other. But Simran is forced to leave for India as soon as Singh learns about her feelings for Raj. On the other hand, Raj, being the diliwale (i.e. lover) comes all the way to India to win his dulhania (i.e. bride). A little later Raj’s father (Anupam Kher) also joins the quest only to make the plot more intricate. Fathoming the obstinacy of Singh, a number of characters including Simran prescribe that they should elope. Raj outrightly rejects the idea as he is determined to win her hand and her father’s consent in a most “chivalric” manner. And, in the very last scene, after a full-throttled climax, Singh asks Simran to go with her diliwale as he then has learnt that nobody can love Simran the way Raj does (Chopra & Chopra, 1995).

This fairy tale ending followed by a collage with shots from different songs of the film ends with a freeze-frame (similar to the “FIN” scene from 400 Blows and Pratidwandi, but unfortunately without any powerful impact) from their mustard-field sequence (Figure 18) which seemed a poor use of the tableau effect (which is “Brechtian” in nature) like the earlier instance that this paper has talked about from Beder Meye Josna. We can also note that the employment of local dance moves with the usual melodrama is totally “Brechtian” in nature; even though whether it is effective or not is the question this paper explores.

The stock characters in the film put up quite a successful melodrama, first of which is the protagonist (Khan), the most dynamic person in the whole story, who can go to any extent to win his bride but is too chivalric to elope. He does not resist at all when the anti-hero with his gang beats him to the pulp, but as soon as his father gets hurt he gets into an adrenaline rush. Then, the female protagonist (Kajol) is a typical damsel-in-distress, who is only capable of listening to a tune played by Raj from miles away (probably through telepathy) and rush there. The other stock characters are, the obstinate father of Simran, the ever-silent mourner mother, the unmarried aunt, the dying granny whose last wish is to attend her granddaughter’s marriage like most other grandparents featured in Indian cinema, slapstick father of Raj, the worthless anti-hero Kuljit and a number of sidekicks. Similar to the curry western cult film Sholay (1975), the wind plays an important role in DDLJ as well. A sudden gust of wind brings a photograph to Singh that reveals Raj and Simran's relationship. Then, the loud expressions accompanied with typical sound effects, trembling dialogues and large body movements, the “bloody” fight of the hero against the twenty give an aura of performance that this “mode of excess”. This film had set a trend for films with NRI heroes and its effects were seen in films ranging from Pardes (1997) (with the same key stars, Khan and Puri) to the very recent Humpty Sharma ki Dulhania (2014). Thus, it is not an overstatement at all when Namrata Joshi states that, DDLJ’s impact is so huge on Bollywood that we can divide it “into two eras—before DDLJ and after DDLJ” (Joshi, 2012, p. 235). It also set the trend of shooting amidst the greenery and busy streets in Europe, especially Switzerland. Thus, melodrama in this film largely failed to nullify the “doubling up of disbelief” that “Brechtian” techniques in films target. In a 2008 film from Bollywood, Bachna Ay Hasina makes a comment on the effects of the film, it showed how a girl from Punjab went to a tour in Europe in search of her Raj (the hero from DDLJ) and accidentally meets and falls in love with one; and this incident almost ruins her life which is due to her failure to differentiate the reality and the screen fiction (Figure 19). Thus, even

Figure 18. The freeze frame at the very end of the DDLJ. Still from Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (Yash Raj Films, 1995).
though DDLJ houses a number of Brechtian tools (like melodrama, loud gesture, loud make-up, slapstick comedy, etc.), its immense popularity has outshined their impact so badly that they could barely unravel the screen to turn its audiences into critical thinking ones. (Chopra & Anand, 2008)

5.3. In Punjab Nahi Jaungi
It was a difficult growth for Pakistan’s Lahore based film industry, Lollywood to compete, negate and follow Bollywood. There are several reasons that make it easier for Hindi Bollywood films to win over a Pakistani Urdu-speaking audience, the key being the mutual intelligibility the two languages. Hindi and Urdu happen to “share a grammar and a basic vocabulary” (Prasad & Virk, 2012, p. 1). To add, shared culture and mannerism and a bit of pre-partition (1947) nostalgia actually made Bollywood’s penetration seem easier. Thus, Lollywood is highly inspired by Bollywood and often copy them blindly. Moreover, until the late 2010s arrived, Lollywood filmmakers could not have thought that their films could compete with any Bollywood films at all. They first experienced a neck-to-neck battle when Nadeem Baig’s 2017 romantic-comedy film Punjab Nahi Jaungi became the first-ever Lollywood production to cross the threshold of 50 crores (i.e. 500 million) rupees and win over Bollywood multi starrer blockbusters like Baadshaho in the UK and other international box offices (Ahmed, 2017). Thus, in many ways, Punjab Nahi Jaungi receives the status of a Lollywoody warcry to the regional cultural dominance of Bollywood, especially in its domestic market. However, this paper would solely like to focus on the couple of Brechtian techniques this film employs (Iqbal & Baig, 2017).

Punjab Nahi Jaungi revolves around a love triangle between the key protagonists Fawad Khagga (played by Humayun Saeed), Amal Dastoor (played by Mehwish Hayat) and Durdana Butt (played...
by Urwa Hocane). Fawad Khagga hails from a super-rich spendthrift family from Punjab, Pakistan. He has recently completed his MA in Political Science after several attempts. But as none before him from the family had crossed the bar of higher education, his bringing home a diploma tied in red ribbon became a most joyous occasion for the entire village. In Figures 20 and 21, we see the Fawad’s father, grandfather and a number of family members are dancing “bhangra” (a local form of dance) as they go ecstatic about Fawad’s graduation. Later on, her mother even crowns him with a tiara, entirely made of gold. The entire occasion was videotaped and was shown on “a screen within a screen” which is a very powerful Brechtian device. When a filmmaker reveals the process of filmmaking by revealing how a particular scene is/was shot, he eventually destroys the fourth wall between the audience and the screen/stage. Baig does the same in here. But, neither it was necessary for this part of the film nor was it able to create any impression.

Fawad dodges his cousin Durdana’s feelings for him as he feels Sufism or marfati has made him fall for his other cousin who is careerist, stylish, smart and way more educated than Durdana is. He convinces her to marry him through a lot of melodramatic schemes and strategies. But, being a headstrong spoiled kid of a rich Punjabi family could barely survive beside a strong woman like Amal and eventually ends up in the arms of cousin Durdana. The rest of the film is about how Fawad saves his marriage with Amal and brings her back to Punjab, who said she would never go to Punjab again. While doing so, Baig employed a series of Brechtian elements like songs, freeze frames and slapstick comedy shots full of melodrama, etc. But nothing seems appropriate. (Figure 22 and 23)

5.4. In Chhakka Panja
Deepa Shree Niraula’s Chhakka Panja has changed the whole scenario of the Nepali Film Industry. Nepal’s Kollywood is heavily influenced by Indian Cinema. Even, till date, the highest-grossing film in Nepal is Bahubali 2: The Conclusion (2017). With having an entire audience whose taste is seasoned with Indianess, it must have been very difficult for Niraula to catch the pulse of his audience in one and to make it as Nepali as possible. Moreover, all the three films of this franchise are dark comedies that are very critical about social anomalies. Their tone is also very anti-establishment in nature. With an ensemble cast of Deepak Raj Giri, Shuvahari Poudel, Kedar Ghimire, Buddh Tamang and many others. The first one to hit the screen revolves around the lives of the villagers who often tend to go for foreign jobs as menial workers to support their families back in the village. The entire film is about how hankering after these monetarily lucrative jobs affects their personal relationships. One of the central characters, Ateet (played by Poudel) loves a girl in his village but was only given her hand once he wins a US Diversity Visa. He leaves his young wife at home to earn a fortune. When he comes back, he learns that, in his absence, his wife hopped into an extra-marital relationship with his best friend Raja. Learning from Ateet’s case, another protagonist Buddh Tamang, makes all the young men wear rakhi out of his wife’s hand before he leaves for work abroad. Because, men who wear rakhi that are tied to their wrists by a woman become her brothers as per a local ritual. Another key character, Kedar Ghimire, leaves the village to go abroad but ends up being a mafia boss in Kathmandu after failing to go abroad. Thus, he could send all the money he wants to his mother, but could barely come back to the village he grew up in. Another family is seen in front of a funeral pyre that has just lost the youngest kid of the family who had flown to Australia but died in an accident. The family is now
unable to pay up all the debts they had made to send him abroad. This beautifully woven film had explored a good number of Brechtian elements as well. For example, in Figures 24 and 25, director Niraula used two freeze frames to create a tableau effect. Both these moments are epiphanic in nature. In the first one, Ateet is sitting in a bike between his newly wedded wife and his best friend Raja, the freeze-frame intensifies the foreshadowing that as soon as Ateet leaves these two will be riding the bike together. And the latter shows the transformation of Raja from a Casanova, who played his best friend’s wife in his absence had turned into a hermit (Niraula, 2019). Even though it has fallen really far from Truffaut’s 400 Blows, it is not as bad as Dlider’s freeze-frame from Beder Meye Josna.

Secondly, being a dark comedy itself the film had ample scopes of incorporating slapstick comedy to do loud and unreal onscreen acting, which is highly melodramatic in nature. The jolts the audiences of this film experience eventually compel them to think critically—a target that Brechtian techniques aim at. To add, realizing that what they are watching on the screen is just a piece of film and not a slice of reality that they are fed are crucial too. For example, Figures 26 and 27 definitely shake the string of willing suspension of disbelief to a great extent.

Then, in Figures 28 and 29, we experience direct audience addressing. In this scene, we see Buddhi’s wife is applying vermilion and flower petals on our forehead which is considered as a good omen as per local culture. And, Buddhi is closely inspecting the work by directly looking into the camera or rather at us. This scene created certain uneasiness which may not be as unsettling as scenes from Inglourious Basterds (2009), but quite unnerving. Similarly, in Figures 30 and 31 we see Ateet and his wife Brinda flies off to different directions as cardboard dummies; from their nuptial bed to a busy market in broad daylight, also hinting the failure of this marriage in a comical way through a very effective editing.

Thus, this film ran great miles to create a cult film which is not entirely commercial but also political. Such a happy blend was made possible because of its great employment of Brechtian elements partly.

6. Conclusion
A lion’s share of the enormous number of films that are hitting the screens across the South-Asian sub-continent each year is mostly brainless formulaic successes. Though there are creative films with innovative use of Brechtian techniques, it is also evident that mostly the film-makers are ab/ mis-using these powerful devices in all the four major national industries of this region, be it
Bollywood or Dhallywood; be it Kollywood or Lollywood. The way third cinema uses such techniques in coordinated deliberations, calculation and with excellence might find the films we examined outrageously. But, these are the films that have gained cult statuses in their respective industries, some even transgressed boundaries and became international phenomena. These films house qualities that have won over billions at the drop of a hat. Using that popularity as a vehicle, if one or two revolutionary and anomaly-cleansing techniques reach its huge audience, then that should be welcomed. Out of the four films we discussed, two of them Beder Meye Josna and Chhakka Panja actually employed the techniques quite effectively. So, the success rate is almost 50 percent. These two films hail from the smaller industries and compelled their respective industries to almost take a U-turn with their appeal to indigenousness and innovation. Both address social issues like class-conflict, migrant workers, mental health and provide severe criticism of money-centric societal norms. The latter carried on to become a franchise and is giving Nepali cinema a new look altogether. To add, all the three non-Bollywood films actually started a trend that defies not only the regional dominance of Bollywood but also proudly exhibits how unique they culturally could be.

Alternately, as Bollywood is rooting for a global dominance, since quite a long time, is primarily focusing on how to make money and mostly investing on films that could bring back home a hefty profit, a trend that DDLJ started has turned into a “vicious”-looking thing. Even though a number of original and exceptionally told stories are topping the charts of highest-grossing films. Still, the heavy dependence on a “formula” of success is still pervasive. The formula has undergone several revisions though. Previously, it was a stark semi-rom-com between damsel-in-distress and a heroic protagonist full of hubris, hailing from extremely different socio-economic difference which breaks loose family drama, bloodshed and law-enforcement arriving at the last scene to serve justice. Presently, it has become way more convoluted and capitalist in nature. A successful recipe must have big names, and the story grows to base on what wonders can those stars bring to the screen (Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff starrer War (2019) became the highest grossing film with only dance moves and action sequences). If not that, then they would go for the tried and the tested, biopics or remakes of films that have done great business in regional markets. In the present age, the sole thing all these filmmakers want is to “make an offer” in a Godfather-ly (1972) way that the audience can’t refuse. Therefore, this paper would like to conclude on an optimistic note. It believes the present age will be marked by its weird, happy and Kafkaesque amalgamation of different genres and strands. It is no wonder that commercial filmmakers are taking keen interest infusing third cinema elements like Brechtian techniques, and often miserably failing like Punjab Nahi Jaungi or DDLJ. But, a few might succeed and stand out like Chhakka Panja. It would not be an overstatement if this paper states that the scathing criticism that this film provides had potentials of making social impacts of a scale that Ousman Sembene’s Xala had made. Finally, amid all the rat races to bring investments back to the bank, if some filmmakers want to make a political sub-text and use Brechtian techniques, we should welcome it. But, unnecessary and miserable use of such powerful tools in brainless films is excruciatingly painful to watch as well. At the end, it is all about how bridging the “necessary” reality to the films’ audiences can help making a better place as envisaged by Ousmane Sembène who...
viewed films as “people’s night school” (Caesar, 2015). And, as aptly Bertolt Brecht said, “[r]enity changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change” (Brecht, 1974, p. 51).

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