

Moral Symbolism and Social Struggle in Pakistani Animation: An Iconographic Analysis of *3 Bahadur*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the non-technical elements of “3 Bahadur”, Pakistan’s first 3D (three dimensional) animated movie. Using Panofsky’s (1972) three-pronged approach, the film is analyzed iconographically. The analysis of the movie is conducted through Panofsky’s three step method: pre-iconographical description, Iconographic analysis, and Iconographical interpretation. The Ichnographic analysis of different characters, objects, and scenes is done using this approach. This study examines the sociocultural ideologies in Pakistani society through the context presented in “3 Bahadur”. Three children (heroic trio) named as Amna, Saadi and Kamil embody youth empowerment to solve the social issues by societal uplifting a major theme of the movie. Through the characters of heroic trio, Deenu Chacha, Baba Balaam and Mangu, this analysis navigates the tensions between moral binaries between good vs evil. Themes of youth empowerment, culturally accepted women empowerment, heroism, patriotism, social responsibility, and

morality have emerged from the analysis. The study affirms that social uplifting is an enterprise and endeavor to the collective outcome by the collaboration by the members of a particular society. Hence the systematic inequalities are reduced and positive change emerges for the betterment of the disadvantaged community.

Keywords: 3D animation, Iconography, Heroism, Women empowerment, Patriotism

Introduction

Animation as the representation of written and oral media, emerging as a dynamic form of cultural expression. Significance of Animation is increasing in contemporary cultural production, gaining more scholarly interest (Bendazzi & Halas, 2017; Wells, 2009, as cited in Khalid & Baig, 2021). Berger (1992) highlights the importance of animation as like fish, in the sea of images, we “swim” and these pictures help us shaping the perspectives of the world and of ourselves. According to Kress (2003), "the power of images projected on screen should not be perceived as dormant or containers of partially obscure meanings; rather, they reflect emotional meanings in the context of culture, evoking both pain and pleasure." The twenty-first century has witnessed an enormous rise in media, which uses visual exchange to fully immerse an ordinary individual in the global arena (Khalid & Iqbal, 2024).

Many tribes and civilizations from 3500 to 2900 BC, used visual communication in the form of glyphs and pictorial drawings. In human history, visual communication was primarily used for practical purposes (Mitchell, 1986). In response to the needs of the era, different styles developed. The subfield of communication art is animation. Wells (1998) claims that animation has been largely ignored by discourses and cinema academics in both English and non-English languages, despite the fact that studies in animation have gained popularity and become a crucial domain of theoretical and historical research in recent decades, there remains a lack of scholarly work on Pakistani animated movies.

Bendazzi (1994) argues that because animation is linguistically, technically, and aesthetically independent, it must be treated differently from other cultural products in order to comprehend the roles of gender, shaping one's identity and beliefs that inherent in animated content. Zipes (2011) highlights the role of animation in today's media-driven society as children's perceptions of the world, their place in it, their values, and their sense of self can all be influenced by animated storytelling.

The purpose of this study is to examine the non-technological elements of animated movie "3 Bahadur", Pakistan's first full-length 3D animated movie, directed by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's (an Oscar winner), focusing on its cultural, social and potential democratic messages, such as justice, equality, and collective action. It is notable for being the first full-length animated feature film produced in Pakistan, presented by Waadi Production in 2015, a collaboration between SOC Films and ARY Films, co-produced the film. Although many different studies on this film are there, but these lack the lens of Iconography. This gap provides an opportunity to explore the visuals of this animated movie through Panofsky's (1972) iconographic framework in the context of Pakistani culture.

Research Objectives

1. To conduct an iconographic analysis of selected characters and major scenes of Pakistani animated movie *3 Bahadur (2015)*, using Panofsky's (1972) framework
2. To examine how the film represents themes of youth empowerment, heroism, religious deceit and the conflict of good vs. evil through visual storytelling, set within the context of Pakistani socio-cultural values"

Research Questions

1. How does the Pakistani animated film *3 Bahadur (2015)* visually represent selected characters and key scenes according to Panofsky's (1972) iconographic framework?

2. In what ways does *3 Bahadur* (2015) portray themes of youth empowerment, heroism, religious deceit, and the conflict between good and evil through visual storytelling, within the context of Pakistani socio-cultural values?

Literature Review

Lamarre (2009) defines animation as a material and technical phenomenon that functions through its technological essence and interactions with the world, rather than being solely a textual or sociological object. Rather than offering a list or catalog of formal elements of animation or anime, he examines animations in terms of how they work and how they interact with the world. He prioritizes function over form. In the twenty-first century, the most creative medium is animation (Wells, 2002). Animation as an art form, method, and practical tool influences numerous aspects of visual culture, from prime-time sitcoms to blockbuster films, and from TV shows to cartoons on social media. In summary, animation is present all around us.

Animation and Ideology

The notion of Ideology has undergone numerous changes and has been widely theorized. The concept of Ideology is defined by Graeme Turner in *Film as a Social Practice*, as in every culture it is ingrained, that gives motivation to us about the dichotomous sense of good and evil, right and wrong, us and them as a theory of reality, among many other concepts (Turner, 1999, p. 133). He argues that although it lacks a concrete form but its effects are visible in all political and social structures including class systems, gender relations and our definition of what makes a person unique.

This concept is also defined by Mitchell (1986) as Marxist view of ideology. It describes a collection of beliefs and behaviors that are maintained by organizations that duplicate and validate the ideological status quo in social norms and cultural contexts as a false consciousness, a symbolic representation of the historical position of class power. In younger generations, dualism, uncertainty, misinterpretation and cultural alienation are frequently experienced in Pakistan.

According to John Dewey, the terms "artistic" and "aesthetic" cannot be described in a single word; rather "artistic" relates to production while "aesthetic" refers to the act of appreciating, recognizing, and enjoying the product. In an artwork, both characteristics must be present. The artist's job is to make the experience visually appealing.

Iconography

The term iconography in genre films refers to specific objects, iconic characters and even specific actors. Iconography can also relate to a genre's overall mise-en-scene, such as the melodramatic visual excess or the horror movie's low-key lighting and Gothic design. Similar to conventions, iconography gives genres a visual shorthand for effectively communicating meaning and information. Of course, there is no set interpretation or value associated with the genre film symbols, even though their meanings may be culturally created (Grant, 2007:12).

According to Grant (2007), iconography in cinema is based on Panofsky's art historical study and consists of culturally charged symbols that convey meaning across related texts. Iconographic Analysis (three levels of meaning) is a theory developed by art historian Erwin Panofsky that librarians and information scientists use to organize and index photos. (Choi et al., 2005). Understanding how Panofsky's levels of meaning have aided in our thinking about the relationship between art and culture in a hierarchy of representation and interpretation has been beneficial (D. Bartmanski, 2012).

Advanced digital media devices exhibit and facilitate the transition from mono-modal to multi-modal texts, which contain text, sound, animation, and visual language (Jowitt, 2006; Kress, 2003). As a result, interpreting texts requires a multimodal view of text as a coherent unit of meaning in communication, rather than treating the written word as a synonym for text. These modalities consist of a number of socially and culturally influenced tools (Bezemer & Kress, 2008).

Using Panofsky's iconographic approach, the study by Khalid & Baig (2021) examines the non-technological elements of the 3D animated series *Burka*

Avenger. It concludes that, although tackling issues like the class divide, women's empowerment, and the feudal-clergy relationship, the series perpetuates social stereotypes. The study emphasizes how Pakistani media can both reflect and reinforce cultural views.

Khalid and Iqbal (2021) use Panofsky's iconographic method to analyze non-technological aspects of a Pakistani 3D animated film *Allahyar* and the *Legend of Markhor*. It highlights recurrent themes that represent social injustices in Pakistan, such as patriarchy, classism, elitism, nationalism, and media bias. The results attribute these depictions to a lack of institutional support, financial constraints, and Eurocentrism-influenced creative limitations. The purpose of this study is to examine the non-technological aspects of Pakistan's first animated film, *3 Bahadur* (2015), using Panofsky's (1972) Iconographic framework.

Iconographic Analysis

Iconographic analysis is a method for reevaluating the conditions and prevailing infrastructure that gave rise to these cultural contexts. In order to observe cultural activities, the researcher will consider social and cultural factors. This study has chosen Panofsky's (1972) approach of Iconography to analyze Pakistani animated film because of its widespread popularity and visuals.

Panofsky (1972) elaborated three layers (three-pronged approach) while reading images. The first step often known as primary or natural level deals with the perception of context. This degree encompasses both factual descriptions of what we observe and expressive meanings derived from the images. We quickly add significance to the work by linking it to our own live-in experiences. The second level (sometimes known as "secondary" or "conventional") requires a more complete and in-depth study of the activities or behavior stated in the first level. When we have a basic understanding of concepts and context, the creative and constructive themes derived from the image and visual codes interact more effectively, allowing us to better perceive the actions taking place in the image. The third level, often known as the intrinsic level, transmits information that the creator of the picture does not

know. This level uses our knowledge and perception about the world and connects the artifacts or codes in the work to disclose the underlying "basic mindset of a nation, a period, a class, are religious or philosophical inclination-subconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work" (p.7). According to Panofsky, this is the ultimate purpose of iconography (Panofsky, 1972 as cited in Khalid & Baig, 2021).

OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION	ACT OF INTERPRETATION
I – Primary or natural subject matter - (A) factual, (B) expressional - constituting the world of artistic motifs.	Pre-iconographical description (and pseudo-formal analysis.)
II – Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of images, stories and allegories.	Iconographical analysis in the narrower sense of the word
III – Intrinsic meaning or content, constituting the world of 'symbolical' values.	Iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense (Iconographical synthesis.)

Erwin Panofsky's Three Stages of Iconographic/Iconological Analysis

This framework is used by Müller (2011), to understand art and he used it to examine Renaissance art. He emphasized Panofsky's framework in "Iconography and Iconology," and multiple forms of meanings to analyze art using this framework and since then this framework has gained popularity among social scientists who study images to look for differences in meanings. He claims that iconography, which was first devised in the sixteenth century for the study of art, was later expanded and systematized by Erwin Panofsky into a three-level approach for visual analysis (Müller, 2011).

This study conducted three steps to analyze the iconography of 3 Bahadur (Müller, 2011):

Level I: Pre-iconographical description (expressional meanings derived from the visual as well as factual descriptions of what we see)

Level 2: Iconographic analysis (examines the ways in which ideas and certain themes are portrayed visually)

Level 3: Iconographical interpretation (determining the inherent significance of how a picture reflects historical and societal developments)

Film analysis

The animated adventure movie of 2015 '3 Bahadur' is directed and produced by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. In the 3 Bahadur series, it is the first installment. Waadi Animations, a joint venture of SOC Films and ARY Films, co-produced this film. 3 Bahadur is Pakistan's first full-length animated film in Pakistan. ARY Films released 3 Bahadur in theatres across the country on May 22, 2015. After 50 days of a successful run, the movie earned Rs. 6.65 crore (US\$230,000), making it the seventh highest-grossing animated film in Pakistan and breaking the previous record of Rio 2. The duration of the movie is 90 mins. This movie is a social comic and targets both children and youth.

The plot of the movie is on three friends, Amna, Saadi, and Kamil, all eleven years old. They are remarkable kids who come from the most unlikely backgrounds to protect their town 'Roshan Basti' from the evils that plague it (*BBC News*, 2015). The film is set in a fictional town named *Roshan Basti* (Town of light). Equipped with courage and special powers, they battle against the odds and stand up to injustice to regain peace and serenity in their once prosperous village and live a very happy life. The film starts with the festival in the town of Roshan Nagar (Roshan Nagar Mela), people were enjoying, meanwhile a little girl is kidnaped by thug named Mangu. A person named Ahmad, runs after Mangu, knocks him and rescues the girl and then he was chased towards a cave where he encounters evil and demonic creature Baba Bolaam, who gives him evil powers and instructs him to guard the key of evil. One evening, Mangu declares himself king over the residents of Roshan Nagar after emerging from the tower clock. The man who saved the girl Saadi's father, Ahmed, tells everyone not to pay attention to his showmanship. As a result, Mangu kills Ahmed by strangling him while

carrying him up the tower using his abilities. Mangu's goons quickly instilled fear across the town, which came to be known as Andher Basti.

Even though Saadi's mother tells him not to pay attention to it, his three companions Kamil, Amna, and Saadi are eager to learn about the tower and overcome the thugs. Unknown creatures give the three powers to these three children when they enter the tower. Saadi is given intelligence and the capacity for comprehending things cleverly, Kamil is given super hearing, and Amna is given super speed. The following evening, as Mangu confronts them, they re-enter the tower and defeat his thugs. After being saved and protected by the unidentified beings, they are taken to an unknown location.

They learn there that Deenu Chacha, their local security guard, is the custodian of the key that keeps all the positive powers intact. More powers are given to the three children. Saadi has the ability to generate black holes, Amna can make shields, and Kamil can fly and jump at great heights. Saadi becomes enraged when Mangu tells him about his father's passing and remembers that Ahmed, Saadi's father, attempted to stop him ten years ago.

By throwing Mangu and the evil key into a strong black hole that Saadi generates with all of his power, they employ all of their abilities to defeat him. Mangu's influence diminishes as the key is shattered, and the three Bahadur are able to bring peace back to their homeland.

Results and discussion

Analysis of different characters, scenes and places is carried out using the three-pronged methodology described in the method section.

Aerial scene of Roshan Nagar, a living place of 3 Bahadurs

This image is taken from opening scene of 3 Bahadur animated movie, shows an aerial view of Roshan Nagar

Level I: Roshan Nagar is a living place in 3 Bahadur with a tall, red-brick clock tower at its center which dominates the image. It is surrounded by tightly packed, greyish houses in a populated urban setting. Under a blue sky,

a vast barren desert stretches in the background. The ARY Digital logo in the top left corner highlights that this movie is broadcasted on this channel.

Level II: Roshan Basti means bright or illuminating town often associated with hope, positivity, a place of wisdom. The clock tower symbolizes the cultural and historical landmark of the colonial past, is reminiscent of real South Asian sites like Ghanta Ghar (Clock Tower) of different cities and closely resembles with the clock tower of Faisalabad. Clock tower serves as the central authority, or governance of town, a point of civic pride or a symbolic guardian of Roshan Basti. The condensed houses show the modernity, civilization and place of cultural hub.

Level III: The name of town Roshan Nagar evokes the sense of enlightenment not in physical sense but in spiritual, moral and ethical where all the problems and issues are resolved. This highlights the society with no issues as a utopian society lack of poverty, and other social issues. This scene depicts the Pakistani culture, a symbol of unity and pride, and clock tower also symbolizes the true depiction of Pakistani society as in different cities of Pakistan, there are clock towers in the center of cities. The densely populated urban environment is representative of the dense, energetic, and culturally diverse daily reality of many Pakistani cities, where communal life thrives in spite of physical constraints.



Figure I. Aerial view of Roshan Nagar, the home of three Bahadurs

Festival in Town

The movie starts with festival, people are celebrating, dancing and enjoying their lives.

Level I: A south Asian building in the center embellished with buntings and balloons give the vibes of a festive celebration. Four drummers in the foreground are playing large traditional drums (dhol), wearing yellow and red cloth with turbans, an attire for folk performers. In the background, other performers also in traditional clothes, wearing coordinated outfits in white and purple with tambourines (daf). The things shown in picture like multicolored flags, balloons, amusement rides indicate a festive celebration. The sky is blue and clear indicating the event is taking place in daytime.

Level II: The drum and tambourine (dhol and daf) players represent Pakistani cultural celebration often associated with the harvest of wheat. The decorated building presenting a community hub, a place central for all gatherings like in Pakistani culture. The use of traditional music and colors invokes joy, unity and national or regional pride among inhabitants of town. The lively audience and environment depict group involvement, reaffirming concepts of solidarity, celebration, and common identity.

Level III: The deeper meanings reflect the sociocultural and historical values of a Pakistani society or South Asian Culture. The director and writer portrayed the elements of Pakistani cultural identity, incorporating the folk players, traditional art and community engagement play an important role in moral and cultural awareness in children through animation. A pedagogical approach is demonstrated by the incorporation of traditional aspects into an animated format, which uses amusement to teach a younger audience about heritage, values, and goals. By incorporating traditional aspects into an animated format, a pedagogical approach is used to teach younger audience about culture, heritage, values and goals of Pakistani society. This festive atmosphere with its joyful depiction counters narratives of unity, harmony and prosperous life town's people.



Figure 2. Festival in Town

Mangu

Level I: In this animated close-up, two characters are visible. The man in the foreground has heavy eyebrows, a prominent jawline, long black hair, and a severe, almost menacing, expression on his face. He appears to be holding a child tightly, a girl in red cloth with a pony, suggesting a physical power dynamic or exploit action. The child face is turned away, on the shoulder of man indicating the unconsciousness. The image is given a dramatic effect by the warmly colored urban buildings in the distance, which may be around sunset.

Level II: It indicates that Mangu is a negative character. The visual communicates conflict, strength, and intensity. The man's piercing eyes, clinched jaw, and furrowed brows convey dominance, power, or rage. The threatening face of man indicates a malicious intent as kidnapping. By kidnapping the child, his stance and the manner he holds the child imply control and possibly force. As the child is not resisting in the man's arms suggests dependency or weakness. The child's passive behavior contrast with the violent action of man evokes the themes of weakness, dependency, fear, power disparity, or danger. Through the portray of urban housing

background, it is depicted that in working or middle-class, such crimes are frequent.

Level III: This scene highlights the one of major issue of society that is kidnaping. The abduction serves as a metaphor for larger moral and social collapses in urban life, specifically problems such as: child exploitation and safety, the impact of crime on communities, disregard for justice or law enforcement. This character may be seen as a representation of evil or social corruption that poses a threat to children, who are the most defenseless members of society. The wicked characteristics of dark hair, irate features, and physical domination are reinforced by his visual style.

The conduct is even more morally repugnant because the child stands for innocence and the future. These sequences in 3 Bahadur emphasize the risks the main characters must take in order to fight injustice and save the weak. The abduction serves as more than simply a plot device; it also serves as a visual representation of the difficulties Pakistani adolescents encounter, ranging from crime to social neglect, and it serves as a rallying cry for resistance and the restoration of justice.



Figure 3. Mangu, a malicious villain

Baba Balaam

Level I: This scene is dark and intense, with a male character who is known as "Baba Balaam" (according to the subtitle). He stands against a backdrop of fire or red flames, holding a luminous staff that resembles a twisted branch. His eyes shine, his face is shadowed, and he has a gloomy, threatening expression. He has messy, spiky hair and a beaded necklace. The ominous atmosphere is heightened by the lighting, which is primarily red and black.

Level II: It is evident from the visual elements of image that Baba Balaam is a villainous, negative supernatural character. The staff he holds refers to dark spiritual power. Danger, hell, malevolent forces and negativity is shown by the fierce color of red and fire. His face and bright eyes convey evil or magic and evokes fear. The beads indicate that the character holds a perverted spiritual or mystical identity. He presents himself as "I am Baba Balaam!", indicates the authority figure or a leader of evil spirits. His figure refers to a corrupted personality and distorted spiritual leader.

Level III: In Pakistan's sociocultural background, Baba Balaam is the symbol of corrupt leadership and spiritual deceit of practitioners. In South Asian society, the character of Baba Balaam represents the crooked spiritual healers, practitioners of black magic, and shady religious and political figures. This character poses a threat for innocent people who believe such corrupt and deceit people easily. The film criticizes the misuse of religion and spirituality for personal gain, as well as the threat posed by invisible, evil forces in society that prey on innocent people, through this portrayal. Baba Balaam also represents the ways in which corrupt leaders may conceal their evil intentions by claiming divine power. In 3 Bahadur animated movie, his character warns not to accept people blindly in the authoritative positions by their outer looks. His hidden narrative evokes the young heroes to eliminate the evil forces in their town through bravery, integrity, and solidarity.



Figure 4. Baba Balaam (Guardian of evil forces)

Evil key

Level I: This object looks like mystical, intricate, and having symmetrical metallic patterns that looks like a staff or key. In the center, red and orange light glows intensely. The middle part of object has claw-like extensions pointing downward and looks like a demonic and monstrous face with a fiery aura. The darkness behind this object makes it look more fierce, powerful, and evil.

Level II: The colors like red and orange are mostly used in visual storytelling to symbolize evil forces, danger and power. The intricate and elaborate design of the key making it more significant as not just a tool but a vessel of dark magic and source of corruption. Its central glowing core might be a source of bad energy and trapped evil power. Therefore, the picture does more than simply shows that a magical object exists; it visually depicts the fundamental conflict between light and dark as well as the danger or temptation that comes with power in the wrong hands.

Level III: 3 Bahadur animated movie is the fight between evil and good using fantastical allegory to defeat the evil forces and resolve issues prevailing in the society caused by the evil people and negative intentions to destroy the

harmony and peace of society. The evil key represents the issues in Pakistani society such as dishonesty, injustice, corruption, stealing, kidnapping, fear of evil people, evoking the good powers fight against. Both South Asian mystical symbolism, such as taweez (amulets) or cursed relics in mythology, and Western fantasy tropes, such as Sauron's eye and magical staffs, are included into the key's design, which visually echoes mythological and fantasy weaponry. This evil object encourages children to not step back in face of evil but to confront and fight against all the societal issues in the society in order to eliminate them.



Figure 5. Evil key (the source of evil forces)

Mangu using evil powers to possess this tower as his kingdom

Level I: A clock tower with luminous light indicating a time of night. A hooded figure with lifted eyebrows is standing before the clock tower, stern and staring up with a grim and ominous expression. This image shows a tense atmosphere using blue and black colors to reflect dark sky and whirling clouds.

Level II: It shows the control or possession over town by evil means. Using nighttime, and dark, whirling clouds, the sense of danger, chaos, and distortion is visible. The rise of evil by possessing the clock tower as the

kingdom of Mangu is reflecting. His stance and location show that he is declaring the town as his kingdom and transforming the town into his kingdom of darkness.

Level III: In Pakistani socio-cultural society, it reflects the corrupt authority figures who grab power and position through dishonest means. The black figure may represent negative forces of criminal control, corruption and bribe, commonly found in our society. The possession and control over kingdom using evil forces reflects the system of our society in which justice, control, and time is out of balance reflecting that control is in the hands of people having bad intentions leads to the destruction of the society.



Figure 6. Control of Mangu on Tower using evil powers

Community in Crisis: A Collective Encounter with Evil

Level I: A group of people standing together looking alarmed and worried. Their facial expressions show concern, fear, or shock. The background reflects the night time as it is dimly lit. people are wearing clothes of different colors. Men are in Shalwar Kameez, Pent-Shirt and women in Hijab of Pink color and wearing a Shalwar Kameez.

Level II: These are common people that belongs to middle class. Men in traditional clothing suggest a South Asian and Middle Eastern culture. Women in hijab suggesting a Muslim society. The presence of community

members displaying serious emotions suggests that they are confronting a crisis or injustice as a group. This could symbolically stand for a community's awakening or solidarity in the face of danger.

Level III: In Pakistani society, people gathered whenever there is a problem or crisis, and the struggle against evil or oppression. The inclusion of various characters, especially the girl wearing a hijab in a major role, emphasizes themes of social duty, bravery, and inclusivity suggesting the key role of women in Muslim society and culture along with males. It raises awareness not to set back but confront the challenges.



Figure 7. Community in crisis

Roshan Nagar under the control of evil leader

Level I: This image shows a town Roshan Nagar that is turned into darkness. A full moon and luminous clock on tower are visible. Dark, swirling clouds are covering the sky. Above the gate, Arabic script is written.

Level II: The clock tower, which was once a representation of order, civilization, and authority, is now a source of fear. That something strong and strange and evil has taken over is symbolized by the stormy clouds and luminous clock face. A twisting of cultural or religious authority for destructive ends is indicated by the black energy that has overshadowed the

Arabic inscription. It presents a contrast between town's name and surrounding darkness.

Level III: This image represents the corruption of authority in the sociocultural framework of Pakistan, as evil forces seize control of the clock tower, which stands for the institutions of law and order. The glowing clock's depiction of time distortion may be an example of how governance and justice are distorted, resulting in social unrest and anxiety.



Figure 8. Town of Darkness

Deenu Chacha the guardian of Sacred key

Level I: An elderly male figure with curled moustache, pointed chin and raised eyebrows and hand, in blue uniform and a cap sitting on the chair. The background is green some kind of forest and a magical staff like key with glowing blue light in the center is placed near the character.

Level II: Deenu is the nickname may be derived from Deen meaning faith or religion. This name suggests that the character is righteous, the moral or spiritual guide. Deenu Chacha is positive, mysterious character as his clean face and uniform in blue, cap and confident gesture convey wisdom and authority. Deenu Chacha is positioned as a guardian of righteous or sacred energy because of the staff's aura and the magical forest background, which suggest a link to spiritual or mystical abilities. He is the school's guard and the custodian of the key, which contains all good powers. The staff with

glowing blue center represents the symbol of power, protection and responsibility from evil.

Level III: In our society, Deenu Chacha is the person with strong faith and who guides others from wrong and right, evil and good and guides people morally. These figures are prominent in our society as they are the guardian of good values, protecting knowledge, preserving moral values and supporting youth. Deenu Chacha's presence emphasizes the importance of faith, tradition, and moral strength in overcoming contemporary issues with wisdom and spiritual leadership for social harmony and justice. The sacred key stands for goodness, truth, and responsibility.



Figure 9. Deenu Chacha, the guardian of sacred key

Minions of Mangu

Level I: Five men in distinct attire, facial expressions and posture are standing before someone in dark setting. The first man with crossed arms and stern facial expression, wearing sky shirt and blue jeans. The second man with whiskers and moustache wearing clothes like a local goon with hands folded back. The central man is bald and hunched, holding a stick, is shorter with more intense look. Fourth man with tilted cap and kurta looks a calm person

in all these. Fifth character with wide eyes open, hands together bowing before someone.

Level II: These are negative characters in different attires are symbolizing the local goons in Roshan Nagar that works for someone. Under Mangu's direction, their formation and diverse personas paint a picture of a well-organized and disciplined gang, with each member carrying out a distinct role and working together to spread fear and violence in Roshan Nagar.

Level III: In real-societies, these persons or goons are working under the command of dominant figure like Mangu who has the power. Their presence, which is set in the made-up town of Roshan Nagar, emphasizes how oppression is institutionalized and maintained by a network of devoted violators who represent larger sociocultural problems like exploitation, corruption, and remaining silent in the face of injustice, rather than just by one villian.



Figure I0. Minions of Mangu

3 Bahadurs (Amna, Kamil and Saadi)

Level I: Three ordinary children in various positions surrounding blue light as they are using some kind of supernatural powers. The bright figures are the

main focus, and the black background suggests night as they are fighting against evil. The girl is wearing a purple shirt and blue trouser, a little dupatta, shoes and a band on her short hair. The boy next to her is in orange shirt and blue jeans, wearing glasses and shoes. The third boy in green shirt, blue jeans and blue cap, is wearing a chappal (sandles).

Level II: The children's surrounding energy, strength, or spiritual force is represented by the glowing blue aura. Their different positions may signify various phases of development, adversity, or readiness and empowerment. The blue glow may be a sign of latent power, purity, or protection. A conflict between light and darkness, or innocence and misfortune, is implied by the contrast between their lit figures and the surrounding gloom.

Level III: In sociological context, youth is empowered to challenge any issue in society and to fight for it. It is represented by the blue light, that encapsulates spiritual enlightenment, protection, and moral strength, elements that inspire young people to face social problems. There is nothing like superpowers in reality but your morals, keenness, hard work, struggle and the capacity are the real superpowers that children inhabit. They just need a little push. The blue light is awakening the inner strengths of these characters to fight against evil.



Figure II. 3 Bahadurs (Amna, Kamil and Saadi) using their super powers

Themes

From the iconographic analysis of the 3 Bahadur animated movie, different themes arose from the descriptions and quirks of icons in this animated movie.

Table I Themes in 3 Bahadur (2015) animated movie

Place/Character/Object	Description and Idiosyncrasies of Icons	Connotations	Themes
Roshan Nagar	Fig 1: Aerial scene of Roshan Nagar with a colonial-style red-brick clock tower at the center, surrounded by greyish houses, set against a desert horizon	The clock tower reflects residual colonial governance and the illusion of time-based order; "Roshan" (lit. enlightened) contrasts the fading moral clarity under dark influence	Utopian society
Festival Scene	Fig 2: Streets decorated with colorful balloons, and buntings, dhol players with vibrant clothing, celebratory	Visual reinforcement of collective identity, cultural heritage, and pre-chaos harmony	Cultural identity

Moral Symbolism and Social Struggle in Pakistani Animation: An Iconographic...

	crowd under a bright sky		
Mangu (Kidnapping Scene)	Fig 3: A muscular male antagonist with spiky hair and angular jaw holds a limp child under dim urban lighting	Represents brute force, moral decay, and abuse of masculinity; the child symbolizes innocence under siege	Moral collapse
Baba Balaam	Fig 4: Mystical elder with glowing eyes, fire-lit backdrop, ornate staff, draped in red robes and prayer beads	A visual echo of the corrupted spiritual mentor, bearing resemblance to local Sufi or pir figures turned dark	Religious Deceit
Evil Key	Fig 5: A symmetrical metallic object with glowing red core, demonic embellishments	Serves as an emblem of forbidden knowledge and the temptation of unearned power	Moral Conflict
Mangu at Clock Tower	Fig 6: Dark silhouette atop the luminous	Mangu's position implies	Governance by evil means

	clock tower under storm clouds	seizure of state power; the illuminated clock suggests corrupted moral authority	
Community in Crisis	Fig 7: Men and women, in ethnic attire, some wearing hijabs, all gathered in confusion during a power outage	Depicts gender-inclusive social unity and a collective moral awakening during crisis	Community resistance
Roshan Nagar in Darkness	Fig 8: Townscape engulfed in dark clouds, moonlit clock tower, Arabic signs fading into shadows	Symbolizes societal deterioration; spiritual and linguistic erosion reflects deeper identity loss	Fall from Idealism, Cultural Erosion
Deenu Chacha, the Guardian of Sacred Key	Fig 9: An elderly man with curled moustache, raised hand, blue uniform, cap, sitting on a	The name "Deenu" connotes "faith" (Deen). His confident pose, blue	Moral Guidance and Spiritual Guardianship

	<p>chair in front of a magical glowing blue key placed in a forest-like background.</p>	<p>uniform, and glowing staff symbolize wisdom, moral strength, and sacred guardianship. The staff glows with blue light, representing spiritual power.</p>	
<p>Minions of Mangu</p>	<p>Fig 10: A gang of five men with distinctive postures and expressions: crossed arms, hunched back, tilted cap, folded hands, each wearing rough or goon-like clothing in a dark setting.</p>	<p>These figures represent a structured group of negative forces. Their attire and alignment suggest they are local enforcers of oppression under Mangu's rule. Their different looks indicate diverse roles within a</p>	<p>Institutionalized Oppression</p>

		system of organized corruption.	
3 Bahadurs (Amna, Kamil, and Saadi)	Fig II: Three children surrounded by glowing blue light in a dark background in different confident posture, symbolic costumes and female leadership. Amna in purple and blue with dupatta; Kamil in orange shirt, glasses; Saadi in green shirt, blue cap, and chappal.	The blue aura denotes spiritual energy, protection, and awakening of inner strength. Their ordinary clothing highlights realism. Their poses depict readiness and determination against unseen evil.	Youth Empowerment, heroism, and women empowerment Amna Breaking stereotypes of gender roles

This analysis reveals that animated movies use blue light to represent positive energy while black, red and orange is used to represent evilness and negative energy.

Culturally accepted Women empowerment

Women empowerment includes listening their point of views, providing education, knowledge, training and elevating their status in society. This

empowerment allows them to make life-changing decisions in the midst of challenges and social difficulties (Bayeh, 2016 as cited in Khalid & Iqbal 2021). They have more freedom to accomplish their goals since they can change gender roles or other similar responsibilities (Kabeer, 2005). Amna is the hero who breaks typical gender stereotypes in Pakistan by fighting against evil and expresses the themes of women empowerment in Pakistani society.

Moral conflict and religious deceit

A society has both good and evil characters like Deenu Chacha and Baba Balaam, the ultimate need is to uphold the moral values and ethics for the growth and nourishment of the society. Religious deceits misinterpret the religion to people and they follow them.

Heroism and youth empowerment

This movie expresses the true and innocent nature of children as heroes as youth is empowered to fight against all the tensions that became the predator for the decay of society. This movie is the perfect blend of values prevailing in society or the mirror of Pakistani society. It depicts Pakistani social beliefs, which dictate that young people must decide between remaining silent and advocating for justice. This idea is consistent with more general cultural precepts that view moral need to choose good over evil, even when doing so puts one at risk. The children's change serves as a metaphor for a broader social appeal for moral bravery.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that 3 Bahadur both dispels and reinforces a variety of widely held ideological and stereotypes. The film illustrates a well-known contrast between good and evil, courage and oppression, and moral deterioration and spiritual enlightenment. These components form the foundation of a larger narrative about youth resistance, communal collaboration, and ethical enlightenment. However, 3 Bahadur challenges Pakistani media's established notions of subservient femininity by elevating Amna to a main hero, departing from conventional gendered representations. Despite this progressive move, the film nevertheless heavily relies on visual

clichés that could simplify complex socio-political realities, such as the idealized depiction of heroic children, mystical elders, and the hyper-masculine antagonist.

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