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Transcending Boundaries in a Globalized World: "Gandasa" from Local Folklore to Global Cinematic Narrative

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This study examines the transformation of "Gandasa" a traditional Punjabi folklore, into its global cinematic adaptation, The Legend of Maula Jatt. *Utilizing Blommaert's sociolinguistic frameworks of scales and indexicality, the article examines how this local narrative is recontextualized within the global cinematic context, addressing the complexities of cultural preservation amidst globalization. The results reveal a nuanced balance between maintaining cultural authenticity and adapting to global audience expectations. Further, the findings highlight the dynamic interplay between local cultural characteristics and global cinematic influences, contributing significantly to the discourse on media's role in shaping and negotiating cultural identities in a globalized world.*

Keywords: scales & indexicality, globalization, folklore, cinematic adaptation, Pakistan

Introduction

Globalization, conceptualized as an expansive interconnection among societies, profoundly influences folklore by extending its audience and transforming its narrative contexts (Storey, 2009). This process propels folklore, traditionally anchored in local cultures and histories (Hafez, 2007), onto a global stage while necessitating a nuanced synthesis of local traditions with international cinematic influences. Thus, folklore transitions from a localized expression to a dynamic component of the global cultural landscape, continuously shaped by and contributing to a complex, interconnected world (Fimi, 2011; Karaduman, 2023). The narrative of "Gandasa," emblematic of Punjabi culture in Pakistan, illustrates this transformation. Originally penned by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (1962), "Gandasa" (a large axe) has evolved significantly from its textual origins to become a cornerstone of Pakistani cinema by challenging the dominance of Urdu films, demonstrating the commercial viability and cultural appeal of Punjabi cinema (Rabe, 2019), and reshaping industry dynamics towards greater linguistic and narrative diversity and generating unprecedented revenue.

The evolution from *Wehshi Jatt*, the unofficial prequel of 1975, to *Maula Jatt* in 1979, and further to the 2022 adaptation *The Legend of Maula Jatt*, encapsulates the character's deepening imprint on the national consciousness, demonstrating a sustained and evolving cinematic legacy. The transformation of "Gandasa" from a local narrative to a globally recognized story is driven by global cultural flows — transnational movements of ideas, aesthetics, narratives, and production practices that have significantly influenced its evolution. These influences include Hollywood action genres, advanced filmmaking techniques, and the imperative to cater to an international audience (Jin, 2019; Ogone, 2021), collectively transforming "Gandasa" into a narrative that resonates globally. The 2022 adaptation, therefore, integrates the global cinematic elements, fostering a synthesis that respects cultural origins while embracing global narrative strategies.

Given this context, using Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistic concepts of scales and indexicality, this study aims to explore the broader sociolinguistic and cultural transformations that occur when local Punjabi folklore is adapted into a global cinematic narrative. The primary examination is on how the narrative and cinematic elements of "Gandasa" have been upscaled and recontextualized to resonate on a global stage. The research question — *How does the cinematic adaptation "The Legend of Maula Jatt" upscale and recontextualize traditional Punjabi "Gandasa" folklore to resonate globally, and how does the global film industry impact this adaptation?* — guides this inquiry. Significantly, the strategic selection of *The Legend of Maula Jatt* (2022) (hereafter: *TLoMJ*) for this study highlights its role in reshaping traditional narratives through contemporary global influences within modern cinematic frameworks, a dynamic that was markedly understated in both the 1979 adaptation *Maula Jatt* and its 1975 precursor *Wehshi Jatt*. This approach aims to highlight the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation, highlighting the role of folklore as an active, living tradition that engages with and mirrors societal transformations (See Bronner 2016; Dorson 2011). This study thus examines the interplay between local cultural narratives and global cinematic trends through *TLoMJ*, revealing the transformative impacts of globalization on cultural preservation and

adaptation. It advances our understanding of how global cultural flows reshape regional storytelling, providing significant insights into the evolution of cultural identities within the global media landscape.

"Gandasa" vs. *TLoMJ*

In Qasmi's 1962 story "Gandasa," set in rural Gujranwala, the narrative explores Maula's life, a figure from Punjabi folklore known for his wrestling prowess. During a local wrestling festival, Maula learns of his father's murder, prompting his quest for vengeance against Ranga and his clan. This journey is marked by intense confrontations and communal tensions, highlighting themes of honor and revenge. Maula's relentless pursuit of justice, symbolized by the Gandasa, intertwines with his struggles against betrayal, societal expectations, and complex relationships. The climax centers on retribution and redemption, emphasizing honor, loyalty, familial duty, and the communal impact of Maula's actions, transforming him from a celebrated wrestler to a lone avenger.

In *The Legend of Maula Jatt*, set in medieval Punjab, Maula Jatt, a fierce fighter with a troubled past, seeks vengeance against Noori Natt, his arch-nemesis. After escaping a massacre by the Natt clan as a child, Maula grows up unaware of his royal lineage and becomes an unbeatable wrestler. Haunted by his past, Maula finds solace in alcohol and meets his love interest, Mukkho. As Noori Natt, imprisoned to find a worthy challenger, kills indiscriminately, Maula's foster father reveals his true heritage and gives him his father's Gandasa. Maula avenges his family's murder by killing Noori's brother, leading to Noori killing Maula's foster brother. The story culminates in a fierce duel where Maula kills Noori, ending the cycle of vengeance and uniting the Natt and Jatt clans under his leadership.

Globalizing Folk Narratives: From Hearth to Silver Screen

The exploration of folklore adaptation in cinema, while rich in cultural insights, often privileges Western perspectives, limiting its broader applicability. For instance, Peterson's (2007) study of jinn in Arab and Hollywood films and Blackford's (2007) and Diawara's (2012) work on science fiction and African American folklore predominantly interpret these themes through a Western lens. However, such frameworks are invaluable for analyzing non-Western narratives like "Gandasa," where supernatural elements and marginalized voices echo broader themes of ethical and cultural conflict inherent in Punjabi folklore. Furthermore, research on Japanese wartime cinema (Davis, 2019) and Soviet animation (Klots, 2017) reveals how folklore serves as a tool for state propaganda, offering insights into how Punjabi cinema might similarly employ folklore to critique societal norms, reflecting a global trend where folklore mediates societal and political discourse. Moreover, Karaduman (2023) and Hammonds (2021) on British folklore and the globalization of superheroes respectively demonstrate how regional narratives are tailored for global audiences while preserving cultural authenticity.

This dynamic is evident in "Gandasa," which integrates Punjabi cultural motifs into a narrative framework that appeals globally, mirroring Bollywood's hybridization

strategies (Pauwels, 2007; Mehta & Pandharipande, 2011). Additionally, the concepts of 'negative nostalgia' in Gothic folklore (Hart, 2020) and critiques of cultural appropriation in Disney adaptations (O'Daly, 2013) enrich the discourse around "Gandasa." These discussions provide a framework for examining how "Gandasa" navigates the complexities of cultural representation in contemporary cinema. Finally, the influence of globalization on Indian cinema, as discussed by Bénéï (2008) and Rai (2009), parallels the challenges faced by "Gandasa" in balancing the preservation of Punjabi diversity against the pressures of a globalized audience. This study is crucial for understanding "Gandasa"'s' dual role in the global cinematic landscape, both participating in and critiquing it while grappling with notions of authenticity and cultural integrity.

Pakistani folklore studies currently face a significant gap in research concerning the cinematic adaptation of traditional narratives, particularly under the pressures of globalization. The existing literature, including notable works by Qureshi (2021) and Salman and Mazhar (2021), primarily focuses on themes of commodification and cultural preservation but largely neglects the cinematic recontextualization of folklore narratives amidst socio-political and global changes. For instance, analyses by Levesque and Bui (2014) on *Umar Marvi* and Siddique (2017) on vernacular cinema provide insights into linguistic and cultural preservation yet stop short of discussing cinema's role in adapting these narratives to contemporary global contexts. Similarly, while studies like Aslam's (2020) on linguistic revival and Sharma and Drora's (2018) on *Midnight's Children* delve into specific cinematic and linguistic aspects, they do not comprehensively address how global dynamics reshape these narratives and their reception. This oversight highlights a void in understanding the intersection of local folklore with global cinematic trends.

This study bridges this gap by examining the global adaptation of local narratives like "Gandasa", analyzing how these stories negotiate the challenges of cultural authenticity against global cinematic influences. It extends the discourse beyond typical focuses on Hollywood and Bollywood, introducing a nuanced perspective on how Pakistani folklore adapts and resonates on a global stage. Specifically, this review situates "Gandasa" within the global discourse on folklore adaptations, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive analytical perspective that extends beyond Western paradigms. By doing so, it highlights how non-Western adaptations like "Gandasa" contribute to global cinematic narratives, advocating for a nuanced understanding of their impact on cultural dynamics. By exploring these dynamics, this research enriches cultural and media studies'sunderstandings of the interaction between folklore and cinema enhancing our comprehension of globalization's impact on cultural heritage and narrative forms.

Data

The study's analysis engages with two seminal works: Qasmi's "Gandasa" and its 2022 cinematic adaptation, *TLoMJ*. In this study, Qasmi's "Gandasa," penned in 1962, is recognized as the "original" not due to its chronological primacy but because of its profound influence on cinematic adaptations of the narrative. This version is particularly significant for its detailed portrayal of the rural ethos of Gujranwala (where

the story takes place), Punjab, Pakistan, capturing the cultural significance of the era
(Kapadia, 2015). Qasmi wrote "Gandasa" as a commentary on vengeance and
masculinity during a time when Indo-Pak wars were transforming male role models into
militaristic heroes, with soldiers glorified in schoolbooks and martyrs celebrated on
billboards. This period saw the media extolling the virtues of masculine bravery and
sacrificial motherhood. Through "Gandasa," Qasmi challenges these narratives by
presenting Maula, whose name means "lord," as a figure who must protect and defend
while also avenging, reasserting dominance through a deadly response (Kapadia, 2020).

Conversely, the 2022 film *TLoMJ* was selected for its reflection of globalization's
impact on traditional folklore, interpreting "Gandasa" within contemporary global and
socio-cultural shifts in Pakistan. This contemporary adaptation significantly departs
from its 1975 and 1979 predecessors in narrative complexity, production quality, and
alignment with global cinematic standards. Examining *TLoMJ* offers a comprehensive
understanding of how traditional narratives are transformed in response to
globalization, illuminating the interplay between local cultural preservation and global
cinematic influences. This focus enables the study to explore the broader sociolinguistic
and cultural impacts of adapting local folklore for a global audience, a dynamic less
evident in the earlier adaptations.

Analytical Framework

This study's analytical framework draws on Jan Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistic
approach to globalization, which integrates insights from sociolinguistics, cultural
studies, and anthropology to examine the interplay between language, social practices,
and global processes. Contrary to views of globalization as a homogenizing force,
Blommaert (2010, 2007) conceptualizes it as a constellation of multi-layered processes
that operate across local and global scales. Central to this framework are the concepts
of "scales" and "indexicality," which illuminate the nuanced roles language plays
within social hierarchies and cultural contexts. "Scales" refer to the varying levels at
which language functions, highlighting the differential value and interpretation of
linguistic elements across social strata, shaped by power dynamics and cultural nuances
(Blommaert, 2007). For instance, the use of a particular dialect may signify a higher
social status in one context but not in another, illustrating how language is valorized
differently across scales. "Indexicality" relates to the ability of language to convey
implicit social and cultural meanings, such as identity and status (Blommaert, 2007;
Collins, 2011). An example of indexicality is how specific linguistic choices can signal
group membership or social positioning without being explicitly stated.

Applying Blommaert's concepts to the cinematic adaptation of "Gandasa" in *TLoMJ*,
this study extends the analysis of scales and indexicality to the depiction of cultural and
social interactions within the film. The application of scales is examined for instance,
through the narrative and cinematic development, notably in the symbolic
transformation of the Gandasa (a large axe). This transition from an agricultural tool to
a resistance emblem embodies Blommaert's (2010) notion of the dynamic nature of
cultural symbols, illustrating a deliberate narrative scaling that transcends local
specificities to engage with a global audience. Simultaneously, the film's adept
portrayal of Maula Jatt elucidates the application of scales, where the protagonist's

embodiment of Punjabi ethos such as honor, revenge, family duty and heroism, juxtaposed with universal valor and resilience, showcases the interplay of cultural narratives within multifaceted contexts. In parallel, the study employs indexicality to examine the film's visual storytelling, where elements such as the chosen color palette and traditional Punjabi motifs extend beyond their aesthetic functionality. Such visual and narrative strategies signify the Punjabi socio-cultural context, elucidating the characters' actions and motivations within a globalized narrative framework.

Furthermore, this study examines how *TLoMJ* manages to maintain cultural authenticity while engaging a global audience. Cultural authenticity in this context means the film's effectiveness in preserving the core cultural values and traditions (Hereniko, 2019; Standing & Standing, 2019) of the original "Gandasa" folklore as it adapts to global cinema. It requires a nuanced balance to ensure that, despite aligning with universal cinematic standards, the film retains its distinct Punjabi cultural characteristics. This balance is crucial (Hereniko, 2019); it safeguards the narrative's local relevance while broadening its global appeal, positioning *TLoMJ* as a vibrant embodiment of Punjabi cultural heritage within the international media landscape. Consequently, this framework is crucial for deciphering the intricate dynamics involved in transforming folklore like "Gandasa" into cinema. The extension of scales and indexicality to the cinematic adaptation of "Gandasa" enhances the sociolinguistics of globalization by incorporating cinema's ability to express cultural narratives visually and symbolically.

For the analysis, data was organized into two primary yet interconnected analytical domains, emphasizing the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the cinematic narrative. These categories were carefully delineated to facilitate clarity and precision in the analysis, yet they frequently intersect and overlap, demonstrating the dynamic and intertwined nature of cinematic elements. The categorization process, therefore, was not about segregating data into isolated units but about understanding how different elements of the film interplay and resonate on various sociolinguistic levels. The primary categories utilized for coding included:

1. Narrative Structure in "Gandasa" and *TLoMJ*

2. Cinematographic techniques

The first category focuses primarily on *narrative structure* and secondary to *character evolution*. The analysis of scales shows how culturally specific themes and characters with local identities are expanded to resonate among global audiences. Analyzing indexicality reveals how narrative elements signify deeper cultural meanings and identities through their transformation across the narrative, and how characters' transformations, marked by sociolinguistic cues of culturally specific traits and values are adapted to resonate globally.

The second category contains analysis of *settings* and *cinematographic techniques,* such as camera angles, lighting, and color usage. It demonstrates, how cinematographic technics function to scale the narrative emphasizing culturally specific aspects that are universally relatable. It also illustrates their instrumentality in enhancing the narrative's reach and criticality in indexing cultural and thematic messages (Conlen et al., 2023;

Becker, 2006). The analysis of settings shows how locations within the film act as narrative devices that bridge local and global cinematic context (scales) yet anchoring the story within its Punjabi context (indexicality). Such an application of Blommaert's sociolinguistics concepts enables us to demonstrate the film's role as a cultural bridge, effectively illustrating the interplay of local and global dynamics in contemporary cinema.

1. Narrative Structure in "Gandasa" and *TLoMJ*

The narrative of "Gandasa" exemplifies local scales and indexicality. Blommaert's (2010) framework considers scales as varying layers of social interaction, which are distinctly shaped by the dynamics of power and culture. For instance, in "Gandasa," the narrative's *linear trajectory* and *straightforward chronology* embody the storytelling techniques traditionally employed by local Punjabi orators and writers (Sargana, 2022; Matringe & Fletcher, 1998). This method, which traces the life events of Maula from a locally significant wrestling festival to his dramatic quest for vengeance, exemplifies the cause-and-effect storytelling prevalent in rural Punjabi communities (Luhar, 2023). Such a narrative style is not merely a plot device but mirrors Blommaert's (2007) concept of the "local scale" by embedding the story within the specific cultural frameworks of its setting and within the local storytelling traditions. This approach effectively anchors the folklore in the sociolinguistic realities of rural Punjab, where storytelling serves as a medium for imparting moral lessons and reinforcing community norms (Nova et al., 2019; Jhaj, 2020), thus ensuring the narrative's authenticity and cultural resonance with its local audience.

The scales in "Gandasa," are portrayed through the depiction of a rural Punjabi village, encapsulating its customs, communal interactions, and linguistic nuances. For example, the depiction of the traditional "Pehalwani/Kushti" festival (Figure 9) vividly illustrates the local scale. This event showcases local athletes adorned with oil and colorful loincloths, competing amidst the rhythmic sounds of the Dhol (a traditional drum) (Bandyopadhyay, 2009; Shekhar & Jatinder, 2019). By situating the narrative within this specific cultural context, the authors effectively capture the essence of traditional sports and community interactions. This portrayal is indicative of the local community-centric life in rural Punjab, where such gatherings are pivotal in reinforcing social bonds and communal norms.

Indexicality, which pertains to the capability of language and cultural symbols to convey broader social meanings, is adeptly employed in "Gandasa." It uses specific local linguistic terms like "charpai" (a traditional bed), "laacha" (a traditional form of clothing that wraps around the legs), "roti" (traditional bread), "Hakeem" (a local herbal healer), "Chopal" (a communal space) and "Gandasa" (a large axe), enhancing the narrative's authenticity and connecting it deeply with the regional ethos of Punjab. Expressions such as "Ya Ali," (a common invocation particularly among Shia Muslims), and the depiction of communal gatherings around "Hooka" (smoking pipes) anchor the narrative deeply in the rural Punjabi setting. Thus, these elements of language and setting are effectively utilized to reflect local norms and the specific sociolinguistic space of rural Punjab, demonstrating indexicality by signalling local cultural identity and values. This careful depiction of local norms and cultural identity

through language and communal settings highlights the narrative's capability to navigate between local specificity and broader cultural engagement, showcasing how it leverages linguistic and cultural elements to signify deeper local social values.

"Gandasa" remains tethered to a local scale through its thematic exploration of toxic masculinity, violence, and revenge, concepts deeply ingrained in the sociocultural fabric of rural Pakistan (Salam, 2021; Usman, 2011). Maula Jatt embodies the consequences of adhering to these localized norms, his struggles and ultimate fate resonating primarily with audiences familiar with such cultural specificities. The story's indexicality, as defined by Blommaert (2010), lies in its thematic focus on issues that are deeply intertwined with the local cultural context. The depiction of toxic masculinity, for instance, is a critique of its specific manifestations within rural Punjabi (and by extension Pakistani) society (Salam, 2021). Similarly, the glorification of violence and the culture of revenge are presented as deeply rooted in the local cultural context (Nasir, 2022; Asghar & Rehmani, 2019), making their portrayal more relevant and impactful to audiences familiar with this specific cultural milieu. Thus, the story's limited scope and focus on local cultural nuances contribute to its status as a local-scale narrative.

Conversely, *TLoMJ* exemplifies a significant departure from local storytelling traditions emblematic of the original "Gandasa" narrative, embracing a more complex, non-linear approach that aligns with global cinematic trends (Kim at al., 2018; Guha et al., 2015; Smith, 2000). This narrative deviation manifest in several key aspects of the film's structure and thematic content and as argued by Phillipson (2012), it consequently broadens the sociolinguistic scales from a localized engagement to a broader sociocultural vista, effectively transitioning the narrative framework towards a global scale. For example, the film's narrative complexity is enhanced through the use of non-linear storytelling elements such as *time shifts, flashbacks*, and *parallel plotlines* (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2023; Zhe, 2021). For instance, the juxtaposition of Maula's traumatic childhood experiences with unrelated contemporary scenes disrupts the traditional linear narrative flow. This technique deepens character development and introduces a temporal complexity typical of Hollywood cinema, which often employs such devices to develop a multi-layered narrative (Zhe, 2021). These flashbacks are crucial not just for character backstories but serve as a narrative device to connect personal histories with current motivations, a storytelling approach that resonates with a global audience familiar with complex cinematic techniques.

Furthermore, the *creation of new characters* like *Daaro*, *Mukkho*, and *Maakha*, absent in both the original story of "Gandasa" and its subsequent 1979 make, serves as a deliberate and strategic move to propel *TLoMJ* beyond the confines of local Pakistani narratives and onto the global cinematic stage. This creative decision to introduce new characters is not merely an additive measure but a transformative one. It fundamentally alters the narrative landscape, expanding its scope and complexity to resonate with a wider, global audience. In line with Blommaert's (2007 & 2010) concept of indexicality, these characters serve as signifiers of broader sociocultural realities. Noori Natt, for instance, with his ruthless ambition and thirst for power, embodies a universal archetype of the antagonist (Mishra, 2022; Sim, 2018). His character transcends the specificity of the Pakistani context, resonating with audiences worldwide who are

familiar with such power-hungry figures in their own cultural narratives. Similarly, Mukkho and Maakha represent archetypal figures of the loyal companions found in numerous global narratives (Ryan, 2019). Their characters, while rooted in the cultural context of rural Pakistan, are presented in a manner that allows for universal identification and understanding. By creating these characters and their complex relationships, *TLoMJ* moves beyond the localized narrative of the original story "Gandasa." These narrative and aesthetic choices collectively demonstrate a deliberate manipulation of scales and indexicality, moving the story from a local to a global dimension (Plencner et al., 2014; Hogan, 2008; Indick, 2008).

More importantly, *TLoMJ* strategically departs from the thematic focus of the original story "Gandasa," shifting the narrative from a local to a global scale. While retaining the core characters and setting, *TLoMJ* eschews the source material's critique of toxic masculinity and the glorification of violence, opting instead to celebrate Maula Jatt's hypermasculinity and heroic feats. This starkly contrasts with "Gandasa's" poignant and tragic ending, which serves as a cautionary tale about the futility of violence and the cyclical nature of revenge. This thematic shift is reflected in *TLoMJ*'s indexicality (Blommaert, 2007). While "Gandasa" is deeply rooted in the specific cultural context of rural Pakistan, *TLoMJ* deliberately elevates itself from these localized concerns. The themes of honour, revenge, and justice, while present in both narratives, are reinterpreted in *TLoMJ* to resonate with a broader audience.

For instance, Maula Jatt's violence, which in "Gandasa" is a consequence of societal pressures and toxic masculinity, culminating in a tragic demise, is reframed in *TLoMJ* as a heroic response to injustice, leading to a triumphant victory. This shift in thematic focus, coupled with a satisfying resolution, aligns the film with the archetypal hero's journey prevalent in Hollywood cinema (Valverde at al., 2022; Park, 2005), thereby broadening its appeal beyond the local context. Thus, *TLoMJ*'s thematic and narrative departure from "Gandasa" is a deliberate strategy to expand the narrative's reach and appeal. By shifting the focus from a critique of local cultural norms to a celebration of universal themes of heroism and justice, and by providing a triumphant resolution in contrast to the original story's tragic ending, the film transcends its local scale and indexicality, positioning itself as a global cinematic offering.

Despite its narrative and thematic expansions to a global audience, *TLoMJ* retains a deep linguistic fidelity to its cultural roots. The film maintains the use of culturally specific language and terminology from the original "Gandasa," embedding the adaptation firmly within the sociolinguistic context of rural Pakistan. This retention acts as a nod to its origins and as a strategic tool to balance global cinematic appeal with local authenticity. The film's linguistic choices serve to anchor its expansive themes within a distinctly local framework, ensuring that while the narrative scope broadens, the core cultural elements remains intact. This approach does not dilute the film's international appeal; instead, it enhances the narrative's richness and authenticity, offering both local and global audiences a more textured and culturally resonant viewing experience. Thus, while *TLoMJ* ventures into global cinematic territory with its thematic and narrative innovations, it simultaneously celebrates its cultural heritage through a deliberate preservation of its original linguistic landscape. This dual strategy highlights the film's complex engagement with both local traditions and global

cinematic trends, exemplifying interplay between local indexicality and global scales. Thus, this analysis highlights the adaptation's innovative shift away from "Gandasa's" linear, localized narrative towards a multi-layered, globally resonant story, exemplifying the power of Blommaert's (2007) sociolinguistic scales and narrative complexity.

2. Cinematographic techniques

In terms of cinematography, *TLoMJ* has been significantly upscaled (compared to its contemporary Pakistani films), employing advanced cinematic techniques that align with global standards. This upscaling is indexed through the use of high-contrast lighting, dynamic camera angles, settings, and carefully choreographed action sequences. The film's visual style, characterized by its dramatic color palettes and shot compositions, transforms the narrative from a local folk tale into a visually captivating epic. These cinematographic choices enhance the film's aesthetic appeal while positioning it within the global cinematic landscape, thereby broadening its international resonance and appeal.

Figure 1 (Fortress).   *Figure 2 (Fields).*   *Figure 3 (Village).*

For instance, *TLoMJ* upscales its **setting** to resonate with global cinematic standards, particularly those established by Hollywood, thereby achieving a significant indexical shift. The expansive aerial shots of grand fortresses (see figure 1) and vast verdant fields (see figure 2) are reminiscent of the epic vistas commonly found in Hollywood's historical and fantasy genres, such as *Game of Thrones* (2011) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002 & 2003). These panoramic views provide a sense of grandeur while serving as semiotic markers, indicating the film's elevated narrative scope. The detailed depiction of these landscapes creates an immersive experience that aligns with the global audience's expectations for visual splendour and historical authenticity (Ye, 2018). Moreover, the intricate set designs, including the carefully recreated village scenes (see figure 3) and imposing architectural structures, enhance the film's narrative by grounding it in a palpable reality.

The village, with its earthy tones and traditional structures, provides a nostalgic yet universally relatable setting that appeals to both local and international audiences. The fortress, on the other hand, serves as a symbol of power and conflict (Liddiard, 2012), elements that are central to the film's storyline and resonate with global cinematic tropes of heroism and epic battles. The market and festival scenes further demonstrate

the film's attention to detail and local cultural richness. These settings are alive with vibrant colors, bustling activities, and culturally specific elements such as traditional garments and local crafts. This vivid portrayal enriches the narrative while functioning as an indexical sign, connecting the film's local cultural context with a broader, global audience. The authenticity of these settings serves to bridge the cultural gap, making the narrative accessible and engaging to viewers worldwide. Thus, the settings in the film are not merely static backdrops; they function as dynamic indexicals, intricately embedding socio-cultural meanings that are both locally grounded and visually aligned with global cinematic standards.

Figure 4 (Traditional Kushti/Pehlwani).   *Figure 5 (Gladiator like arena).*

Figure 6 (Maula Jatt fight scene).

Perhaps the most significant setting are the ***intense combat scenes*** in an arena that notably visually contribute to the narrative and thematic depth of *TLoMJ*. These scenes, which showcase a form of traditional wrestling known as Kushti/Pehlwani (see figure 4), are upscaled through cinematographic techniques and visual aesthetics, aligning with global cinematic standards, particularly those reminiscent of Hollywood's gladiatorial depictions. For instance, in one of the fight sequences of Maula Jatt (see figure 5 & 6), the cinematographic choice to situate the conflict within a circumscribed spatial setting evokes the quintessential amphitheaters of gladiatorial combat as traditionally portrayed in Western cinematic productions such as Gladiator (2000). In cinematic terms, scenes that resemble gladiator arenas are typically constructed to emphasize conflict, competition, and spectacle (Bright, 2020).

On a macro scale, arena scenes symbolically represent the societal and cultural structures that sanction and celebrate violent confrontation as entertainment or justice. These scenes index a society's collective values and power dynamics, linking individual struggles to broader societal themes (Britt, 2018). On a micro scale, arenas provide an intimate stage for individual narratives, showcasing personal valour, skill, and the psychological drama of combatants. The close quarters of the arena compel a proximate view of the characters' emotions and actions, indexing their personal narratives and emotional journeys within the overarching narrative structure. In terms of indexicality, arenas are culturally loaded spaces (Britt, 2018; Wyke, 2013). They index historical notions of honour, struggle, and fate, resonating with the viewer's understanding of these archetypes deeply embedded in human storytelling. The imagery of an arena can invoke collective memories of historical gladiatorial combat, symbolizing life-and-death struggles and the capriciousness of fate, where individuals are at the mercy of larger forces (Bright, 2020).

In the context of a film that draws upon Hollywood imagery, the incorporation of gladiator-like arenas indexes the themes within the narrative while creating a dialogue between cinematic cultures. This deliberate scaling maneuver gives local narratives global resonance through the adoption of universally recognized cinematic motifs (Morris, 2015). It serves to upscale the local narrative to a global stage, inviting viewers from different cultures to engage with the story. These scenes also index the globalization of cinematic language, where local filmmakers employ globally recognized symbols to communicate themes that transcend cultural boundaries (Isomaa, 2016; Lim, 2019). Thus, the director in *TLoMJ* employs grand, sweeping shots of the arena, capturing the energy and anticipation of the crowd, the raw physicality of the wrestlers, and the overall grandeur of the setting. This visual approach heightens the dramatic tension while indexing broader cultural connotations of ancient gladiatorial combats, creating a bridge between local and global cinematic traditions.

Figure 7 (Maakha: low camera shot).

In *TLoMJ*, the strategic use of *camera angles* significantly contributes to the film's visual storytelling, aligning it closely with Hollywood traditions. The use of high-angle (see figures 2, 3 & 5) and low-angle shots (see figure 7), is particularly reflective of Hollywood's cinematic techniques. High-angle shots are often employed to convey a sense of dominance or vulnerability. For instance, shots looking down on characters in critical moments of confrontation index their precarious positions within the narrative's power dynamics. These angles provide a comprehensive view of the scene,

encapsulating not just the physical struggle but also the socio-cultural stakes at play. By contrast, low-angle shots are used to elevate the stature of characters such as Maakha, enhancing their imposing presence and indexing their larger-than-life roles within the story. These angles make the characters appear more formidable (Conlen et al, 2023), aligning with the archetypal depiction of heroes and villains in Hollywood cinema.

Figure 8 (Close-up shot of Noori Natt & Maula Jatt).

Figure 9 (Mukkho in wide camera shot).

Similarly, close-up shots are another Hollywood-inspired technique utilized extensively in the film. These shots (see figure 8) focus on the characters' faces during moments of intense emotion or critical dialogue, indexing their inner turmoil and emotional depth. Close-ups facilitate a direct connection between the characters and the audience, enhancing the narrative's emotional resonance. By capturing the subtleties of facial expressions, these shots index the psychological complexity of the characters, transforming local storytelling into a universally relatable human drama (Conlen et al., 2023; Becker, 2006). Moreover, wide shots (see figure 9) in *TLoMJ* are used to establish the grandeur of the settings and the epic scale of the narrative. Such shots are reflective of Hollywood's penchant for creating visually spectacular environments that immerse the audience in the film's world. For instance, the expansive shots (see figures 1, 2 & 3) of the rural landscapes and the intricately designed arena settings index the film's cultural roots while simultaneously showcasing the director's ambition to place the narrative within a global cinematic context (Becker, 2006).

These shots provide a sense of scale that elevates the local narrative, making it resonate with global audiences familiar with Hollywood's visual language. By employing these camera angles, the film indexes the immediate narrative elements while also highlighting broader socio-cultural themes. The high-angle and low-angle shots index power dynamics and character significance, the close-ups index emotional and psychological depth, and the wide shots index the grandeur and epic scale of the narrative. This strategic use of cinematography serves as a scaling maneuver, transforming a local cultural story into a globally recognizable cinematic experience. It exemplifies how *TLoMJ* participates in a global cinematic conversation, using Hollywood's visual motifs to enhance the storytelling and broaden its appeal (Morris, 2015; Isomaa, 2016; Lim, 2019.)

Similarly, **lighting and color** in the filmic adaptation transcend mere aesthetics, serving as indexical markers that embody the film's complex cultural narrative. Drawing upon Hollywood's established visual language (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018; Giessner et al., 2011), the film utilizes lighting to enhance its narrative for a global audience. Techniques like high-contrast lighting signify the central conflict, while low-key lighting highlights suspense and moral ambiguity. Backlighting and soft lighting align characters with global archetypes and deepen audience connection, respectively. Naturalistic lighting grounds the film in its specific context, and color temperature reinforces thematic elements familiar to a broader viewership. The film's color palette also operates on multiple scales.

Figure 10 (Gandasa).

The Gandasa *(see figure 10)*, a traditional Punjabi axe, serves as a potent symbol of indexicality in the narrative of Maula Jatt. It is not merely a weapon but a cultural artifact that encapsulates Maula's identity, power, and the burden of vengeance that drives his actions. This weapon operates on multiple scales, simultaneously reflecting local cultural values and universal themes of power and masculinity. On a local scale, the Gandasa is deeply embedded in Punjabi folklore and culture, symbolizing physical prowess, honor, and a legacy of violence (Sevea, 2014). Its presence in the narrative immediately indexes Maula Jatt as a figure of authority and power within his community, aligning him with the cultural expectations of masculinity and heroism prevalent in the region. However, the reimagining of the Gandasa transcends its initial

cultural confines, allowing it to resonate with audiences familiar with global superhero narratives. The parallel drawn between the Gandasa and Thor's hammer (2022) is not merely a superficial comparison but a strategic cinematic choice that aligns the film with a global narrative archetype — the hero's weapon as a symbol of their strength and moral authority (Park, 2005; Augustyn, 2004).

This alignment is a conscious move by the director to infuse a locally rooted symbol with a broader, more universal appeal, thereby expanding the film's reach and relevance beyond its regional origins. Furthermore, this transformation is indicative of director's adeptness in navigating the polycentric nature of modern narratives, where local and global elements coexist and interact within a single narrative framework. By situating a traditional Punjabi symbol within the context of global cinematic iconography, the director preserves its cultural specificity while repositioning it within a wider, more diverse narrative space. In essence, the reimagining of the Gandasa in *The Legend of Maula Jatt* demonstrates an understanding of the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural symbols and narratives in the context of global cinema (Steenlage, 2013; Tom, 2014).

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that the transformation of "Gandasa" to *The Legend of Maula Jatt* reflects both the preservation and recontextualization of the narrative's cultural values through an interplay of local and global cinematic elements. This evolution maintains the core themes and cultural characteristics of the original narrative while adapting them to resonate with a global audience.

The *preservation of cultural values* is evident in the film's adherence to key thematic elements of the original "Gandasa" narrative. Themes of honour, vengeance, and familial duty remain central, reflecting the deeply ingrained cultural values of rural Punjab. These themes are articulated through character motivations and plot developments that stay true to the original narrative's focus on personal and communal honour. For example, Maula Jatt's quest for vengeance following the murder of his father preserves the narrative's exploration of familial duty and the cultural significance of retribution within Punjabi society. This thematic continuity ensures the film retains the cultural elements of the original story, thereby maintaining its cultural authenticity. Moreover, the use of culturally specific symbols and language further anchors the film in its Punjabi roots. Traditional elements such as the Gandasa, wrestling festivals, and communal gatherings around the hookah serve as visual and linguistic markers of local cultural identity. These elements function as indexical signs that continually reaffirm the narrative's cultural origins, embedding local values within the global cinematic framework.

However, significant *reinterpretations* align the narrative with global cinematic standards, enhancing its appeal to a broader audience. The adaptation employs advanced cinematic techniques such as high-contrast lighting, dynamic camera angles, and dramatic color palettes, hallmarks of Hollywood cinema. These techniques elevate the visual storytelling, making the film visually accessible to international viewers. For instance, high-contrast lighting and dynamic camera angles in fight scenes enhance dramatic tension and emotional intensity, aligning with global audience expectations

for action-packed, visually dynamic cinema (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018). Further, the narrative structure of *TLoMJ* incorporates non-linear storytelling elements such as flashbacks and parallel plotlines, adding narrative complexity and depth. These elements align the film with contemporary global cinematic trends favouring intricate and multi-layered storytelling. This complexity appeals to a global audience and provides a richer, more nuanced exploration of the characters and their motivations. Similarly, the introduction of new characters such as Daaro, Mukkho, and Maakha, absent from the original "Gandasa" story, represents a strategic expansion of the narrative's scope. These characters bring additional subplots and thematic layers, enhancing the film's narrative depth.

Integrating perspectives from heritage politics and diplomacy provides an additional critical lens through which to discuss the film's strategic engagement with global cinematic trends and the preservation of cultural identity. Heritage politics, as explored by Huttunen (2022) and Elliott & Schmutz (2012), offer insights into how nations navigate their cultural heritage in a global context, advocating for a dynamic interpretation of cultural artifacts that transcends national borders yet respects local significances. These studies enable us to understand how *The Legend of Maula Jatt* portrays and strategically adapts Punjabi folklore for global consumption. Moreover, the reinterpretation of national cinemas for global audiences, as discussed by Jablonická (2020) and Wilson (2008), aligns with the film's approach to blending local narrative elements with global cinematic practices. These studies highlight how adaptations like *The Legend of Maula Jatt* serve as cultural intermediaries, negotiating between local identity and global marketability.

Significantly, the study's findings align with existing literature on folklore adaptation in cinema, which highlights the dynamic interplay between local cultural narratives and global cinematic trends. The film's strategic use of cinematic techniques, such as high-contrast lighting, dynamic camera angles, and dramatic color palettes, enhances the narrative's reach while indexing cultural and thematic messages. These techniques are instrumental in scaling the narrative to a global dimension, ensuring that the film resonates with international audiences while preserving its cultural authenticity.

This approach, grounded in the scales and indexicality notions (Blommaert, 2010), demonstrates how local cultural elements are not just depicted but are recontextualized within a global cinematic framework. The adaptation's response to globalization is multifaceted, reflecting the internationalization of film distribution networks and the influence of global market forces. *TLoMJ* stands as Pakistan's most expensive movie production (Rehman, 2022), a testament to the country's film industry's aspirations to compete on a global stage. This financial investment and the film's high production values reflect a strategic alignment with global cinematic standards, aiming to expand the film's reach and appeal. This alignment also introduces challenges, notably the balancing act between cultural integrity and commercial viability in a global market.

In terms of authenticity, this study aligns with Dridi's (2023) proposition to assess authenticity through aesthetic and experiential dimensions, particularly in genres transcending realism. *The Legend of Maula Jatt* prioritizes a holistic cinematic experience over strict adherence to the original "Gandasa" narrative. This approach

aligns with Dridi's concept of "metadiscursive authenticity," where the film actively negotiates its dual role as a cultural artifact and a global cinematic product. By transcending the traditional confines of Punjabi folklore and embracing global cinematic dynamics, the adaptation strategically expands its appeal without compromising its cultural integrity. This is achieved by maintaining core thematic elements and cultural markers while incorporating universal cinematic techniques that resonate with a broader audience. *The Legend of Maula Jatt* exemplifies a successful adaptation that balances cultural authenticity with global cinematic appeal, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of authenticity in cross-cultural filmmaking. It demonstrates how cinematic adaptations can navigate the complexities of authenticity, balancing fidelity to source material with the need to engage contemporary global audiences effectively. This balance is crucial for redefining authenticity in the context of globalized media, contributing to broader discussions on cultural representation and adaptation.

In the realm of cultural and film studies, the adaptation of "Gandasa" is not merely a cinematic event but a cultural phenomenon that reflects broader societal transformations within Pakistan. Historically, Pakistani cinema has predominantly been a bastion of local culture, with narratives deeply rooted in indigenous traditions and societal norms (Ahmad, 2016). However, *TLoMJ* represents a departure from this trend, embodying an inclination towards a narrative structure and aesthetic that resonates with a global audience. This shift is indicative of a strategic reorientation, where the film industry, cognizant of the global cinematic landscape, is adapting its narrative techniques and thematic content to align more closely with international filmmaking standards. Moreover, this transition towards global orientation in Pakistani cinema can be understood as a response to the increasing hybridization of cultural expressions within Pakistani society. In an era marked by rapid globalization, traditional Pakistani narratives are no longer isolated cultural streams but are part of a larger, more complex global cultural system. This ecosystem is characterized by a constant flow of cultural ideas, practices, and commodities across national boundaries, leading to a cultural amalgamation where local and global influences are continuously interacting and reshaping each other.

The adaptation of "Gandasa," therefore, can be argued as a microcosm of the larger cultural dynamics at play in contemporary Pakistan. The film, through its narrative and aesthetic choices, mirrors the evolving cultural identity of Pakistan, one that is increasingly defined by a blend of local traditions and global sensibilities. Further, this transformation highlights the potential of folklore to transcend its cultural and geographical origins, facilitating broader cultural exchange and accessibility. Finally, the adaptation of "Gandasa" participates in a larger dialogue on globalization, where local narratives intersect with diverse cultural contexts. This global exposure of local folklore fosters cross-cultural understanding and enables originating cultures to assert their identities and narratives on the international stage, contributing to the global cultural mosaic.

Conclusion

The adaptation of "Gandasa" into *TLoMJ*, offers significant insights for folklore studies, cultural studies, and media studies, highlighting the evolving nature of folklore in the age of globalization. This adaptation exemplifies how local narratives can be transformed and elevated, gaining transnational significance while navigating the complexities of preserving cultural authenticity amidst global cinematic trends. For *folklore studies*, this transformation highlights the role of folklore as a cultural bridge. By reimagining traditional narratives within a global context, folklore can facilitate cross-cultural understanding and exchange. The adaptation of "Gandasa" into *TLoMJ* allows for the sharing of Punjabi cultural values with a global audience, promoting cultural diversity and fostering a greater appreciation of different cultural traditions. In the realm of *cultural and media studies*, this adaptation signifies the burgeoning trend of integrating local cultural narratives with global cinematic languages. It focuses on the role of media in shaping and redefining cultural identities, emphasizing the importance of understanding media as a powerful tool in the negotiation of cultural expression in a globalized world. The adaptation also raises critical discussions about the balance between commercial viability and cultural authenticity, a vital consideration in the global market dynamics.

More importantly, this study widens the scope of Blommaert's notions of scales and indexicality by applying them beyond traditional linguistics and examining how cinematic adaptations navigate cultural and social strata. Significantly, such an expansion has two main implications for folklore studies and their cinematic representations. First, it allowed a thorough examination of folklore's transition from cultural roots to cinematic portrayal, highlighting cultural continuity and change in the face of globalization. Second, it transcended the traditional academic boundaries, reassessing the Global South's cultural narratives in global cinema, challenging their conventional marginalization, and fostering diverse cultural identities. Such an application provided an intricate view of the recontextualization of narratives from the Global South, revealing the interplay between cultural authenticity and global adaptation. This methodological progress was crucial in analyzing global influences on the creation, reception, and interpretation of these narratives, acknowledging their dynamic nature and evolving role in the global cultural landscape.

Specifically for Pakistan, this approach offered key insights into the national and international reinterpretation of local stories, thereby contributing to broader discussions on cultural exchange and representation in the globalized era. However, future research could delve deeper into the audience reception and interpretation of such adaptations, examining how different cultural and demographic groups perceive the balance between cultural authenticity and global appeal. Moreover, while the current study remains within the scope of Blommaert's sociolinguistic frameworks to maintain coherence and focus, future research could explore integrating visual semiotics to analyze images as forms of language. This approach would expand our understanding of how visual elements contribute to narrative storytelling and cultural representation in cinema. Engaging with visual semiotics could provide deeper insights into the interplay of visual and textual narratives, particularly in the context of global cinematic adaptations like *The Legend of Maula Jatt*. Additionally, comparative studies

examining similar adaptations in different cultural contexts could provide a broader understanding of the glocal dynamics in folklore adaptations.

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