

## “Nāpāk Jism”: Vampirism as Queer Desire in Khwaja Sarfraz’s *Zinda Laash* (1967)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper will study Khwaja Sarfraz’s, Zinda Laash (1967), from a queer theoretical paradigm to explore the film’s representation of queer masculinity and womanhood. Zinda Laash is the story of a vampire who infects his victim with non-heterosexual desire, and thus the threat posed by the film’s vampire protagonist, Tabani, is the dismantling of heteronormativity. Based on Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), Zinda Laash imagines the figure of the vampire as a queer threat, and the purpose of this paper is to explore queer representation and queer desire in the film. Tabani’s infection of his victims enables them to desire beyond the confines of heterosexuality, and allows them to subvert heteropatriarchal structures of marriage and family, by imagining counter- normative ways of being, belonging, and expressing intimacy and desire. Zinda Laash, as Pakistan’s first horror film, places the element of danger and horror in the queer vampire body and through a queer theoretical study of this film, we will argue that queerness on the Pakistani cinematic screen has been represented as essentially monstrous and represents social anxieties regarding anti- normative gender performances and sexual identities.*

**Keywords:** queer desire, heteronormativity, Pakistani cinema, vampire, queer representation

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## Introduction

“I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams” (Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, 2).

This paper will explore issues of queer masculinity and contagion through the study of Khwaja Sarfraz’s 1967 film, *Zinda Laash*, one of Pakistan’s earliest horror films. *Zinda Laash* presents the story of Professor Tabani, an ambitious scientist whose sole aim in life is to conquer death and to discover an elixir which will grant him immortality. On drinking the elixir, Tabani (played by actor Rehan) is permanently transformed into a vampire, a blood-sucking creature that, on biting his victims, turns them into vampires like himself. As rumors begin to spread about the mysterious Tabani in his lonely mansion, Aqeel travels from the city to look for Tabani so as to end his reign of terror. Aqeel’s encounter with Tabani, however, triggers a horrific chain of events which results in Aqeel’s death, the transformation of his fiancé, Shabnam, into a vampire, and the manhunt for Tabani led by Aqeel’s brother-in-law, Pervez, and Aqeel’s brother played by the iconic actor Habib. Tabani is hunted down and eventually killed off by Pervez and Aqeel’s brother, an unnamed Doctor, thus restoring order in the community.

The purpose of this paper is to study the trope of vampirism in *Zinda Laash*, and in this paper we will argue that the threat Professor Tabani, the vampire, poses is his potential to subvert heteropatriarchy by “infecting” cis-het<sup>1</sup> citizens with queer desire. This paper will explore the ways in which a certain kind of queer language is used in *Zinda Laash* to talk about and thus imagine the vampire body that is essentially a site of queer desire. Furthermore, this paper will focus on Tabani’s choice of victims, the modest domestic women, and their conversion into female vampires and their consequent subversion of assigned normative gender roles. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the gender politics of one of Pakistan’s most iconic films to date and also Pakistan’s first ever horror film.

As this paper uses a queer theoretical model, it is imperative to define what we mean by the concept of ‘queerness’. The GLAAD glossary defines

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<sup>1</sup> An abbreviated form of writing “cisgendered, heterosexual”. The shortened term “cis- het” or “cishet” has entered contemporary lexicon and will be used throughout this thesis. It is<sup>1</sup> considered as a neologism, but the word has become part of popular queer culture. Cisgendered refers to individuals who, unlike transgenders, identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

queer as an adjective for people who find the terms gay, lesbian, bisexual as “too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don’t apply to them” (n.pag.). It is also used for people to express their gender identity as being genderqueer or non-binary i.e. individuals who do not see masculinity and femininity as polar opposites and find a fluid confluence between the two. Noreen Giffney writes in this respect:

Queer is more often embraced to point to fluidity in identity [...] It signifies the messiness of identity, the fact that desire and thus desiring subjects cannot be placed into discrete identity categories, which remain static for the duration of people’s lives. Queer thus denotes a resistance to identity categories or easy categorisation... (2).

Annamarie Jagose defines the word queer as “‘a zone of possibilities’ [...] always inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate” (2) whereas Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox write about queer theory that

queer theory politicizes sex, gender and sexuality in a way that severs the notion of identity from any stable reference points. In this way, queerness resists the regimes [...] of measuring, categorizing, and knowing the truth of sexual orientation (4).

In the same vein, Benschhoff defines queerness “as a collective term to describe the vast array of human sexualities that actually exist outside of monogamous heterosexual procreative intercourse” (6) and elaborates that queer identities include “sexualities that encompass both straight and gay but also the vast gray areas between them as well as the sexualities that might lie beyond them” (2). Furthermore, Eve Sedgwick writes that queerness cannot only be subsumed under the categories of sexuality and gender, but also includes race, ethnicity and postcolonial national identity (8). Hence it is false and simplistic to confuse and limit queerness to homosexuality as queerness also lies in the ways in which individuals construct alternative and counter-normative communities, and ways in which they perform sexuality and express desire.

Furthermore, queerness is more than sexual and gender identity as it is also a political identity. Phillip Brian Harper argues that “the great promise of queerness [...] lies in its potential to conceive and mobilize modes of social subjectivity not accounted for in advance by the structures entailed in ideological narratives” (25). A queer analysis therefore looks at those particular cultural archives that remain overlooked in the nation’s cultural

imaginary. Pakistan's genre cinema is a similar archive that remains largely unaccounted for in mainstream film discourse, and more importantly, the question of queer representation has so far remained unaddressed in Pakistani film scholarship.

For Harper, "queer analysis must allow for all the disparate factors comprised in the registration of various social identities and in their adjudication against the standard of social normativity" (ibid.) which means that queering a text implies that it should be read against heterocentrist bias. In this paper, we will be queering *Zinda Laash* and as Harper suggests, queering is a reading practice which makes heterocentrist texts speak for marginalized identities. By queering *Zinda Laash*, this paper will add to a queer Pakistani cultural archive, and initiate a conversation around queer representation in Pakistani cinema.

### **Queer Desires in Khwaja Sarfraz's *Zinda Laash* (1967)**

*Zinda Laash* begins with a preface which displays a Quranic verse onscreen. The verse, taken from the third chapter of the Quran, Sūratu Āl 'Imrān, states that everyone must taste death, that man is essentially mortal, and all that is living must one day perish. Along with the verse, the film's preface warns the viewer about the following story, and thus the film presents itself as a cautionary tale regarding those who embrace a life of evil by going against the natural laws of life and death as ordained by God. As the film begins, we see Professor Tabani in his laboratory, surrounded by beakers and test tubes, working on an elixir of life which he calls "āb-ē-hayāt". The idea of the mad scientist is not present in any of the original Dracula films. Hence, *Zinda Laash* goes its own way and creates a completely new opening prefatory sequence in which Professor Tabani will eventually turn himself into a vampire.

Tabani, a professor and a scientist, seeks to conquer death and the temporality of life. Benschhoff writes that the scientist-as-monster figure in the horror film are queer figures because they "dream of revolutionizing the world through some startling scientific discovery or preternatural power" (Benschhoff 1). It is therefore important to note that Tabani is not introduced as a vampire *de facto*, but as a scientist who is actively working against the tenets of Islam which in turn explains the recitation of the Quranic verses in the beginning. Tabani, therefore, not only later challenges heteropatriarchal gender roles, but also the religious nationalism which serves as the foundation of the nation-state.

After he drinks the elixir, he falls unconscious, as blood flows from his

nostrils indicating his death. He is moved to the basement and put in a coffin by his assistant, but in the next scene, inside the coffin, Tabani writhes and wakes up, slowly getting up and out of the coffin. This act of coming out of the coffin by the vampire is read by Benschhoff as being metonymic of the homosexual coming out<sup>2</sup>. Benschhoff writes about the image of the closet in the vampire film as indicative of an oppressive structure which seals off the presence of subversive sexualities from the larger heteronormative culture. He writes that “closets uphold and reinforce culturally constructed binaries of gender and sexuality” (2). Hence, despite the threat that Tabani poses to his community, he still retreats to his closet as the sun rises which indicates a precarious life on the margins.

*Zinda Laash* is therefore a text suggestive of queer readings. For Donna Haraway, queering implies the process of “undoing ‘normal’ categories” (Booth 51). Therefore, to queer a text implies doing away with gender and sexual binaries. Tabani in *Zinda Laash* not only occupies the space between the living and the dead, but he also occupies the space between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Booth further writes that in existing scholarship the figure of the vampire has been understood as a form of a “queer nature that refuses binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural, especially in terms of the sexual” (Booth, 51).

On the other hand, for scholars like Richard Dyer, the vampire has always been undoubtedly homosexual. There is no liminality present in the identity of the vampire as he is a pure representation of the homosexual. Dyer looks at vampirism as a metaphor for homosexuality and the way in which homosexuality continues to be imagined by the dominant cis-het culture. He writes that “what has been imagined through the vampire image is [...] how people have thought and felt about homosexual women and men—how others have thought and felt about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves” (73). Thus, if for Booth the vampire

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<sup>2</sup> “Coming out of the closet” is a phrase used in LGBT discourse which refers to an LGBT person’s public admission of their identity to their family and friends and their surrounding community. “Being out” refers to an openly LGBT person, and the term “in the closet” is reserved for those LGBT people who have not made their identity known and keep it a secret and hidden from others. For further discussion, see APA’s “Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People” (2015), as well as *The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies* edited by Abbie E. Goldberg (2016).

occupied the space between hetero and homo and moved fluidly between the two binaries, for Dyer, on the other hand, the vampire has always been a traditional image of homosexuality.

Furthermore, in his analysis of the vampire film, Benschhoff provides an elaborate account of the metaphorical association between cinematic representation of vampirism and homosexuality. He writes that “homosexuals supposedly represent the destruction of the procreative nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and [...] ‘family values’ [as] homosexuality is a monstrous condition” (1) and thus according to Benschhoff, the horror film’s monster represents the perceived monstrosity of homosexuality. They are monstrous by the very token of their antinormative sexuality. Benschhoff argues that the vampire has been used as a metaphor for the threat of the homosexual. He draws the correlation between vampirism and homosexuals as he writes:

[H]omosexuals, like vampires, have rarely cast a reflection in the social looking-glass of popular culture [...] Both movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these proscribed places into the sunlit world, they cause panic and fear (ibid.).

The figure of the vampire has been seen as the embodiment of queer desire by several scholars, and therefore this paper will only further these observations and it will analyse *Zinda Laash* and its vampire, Professor Tabani, from a queer theoretical framework. This paper will further these discussions on vampirism and sexuality, and the limits of queerness exhibited by the vampire figure in Khwaja Sarfraz’s *Zinda Laash*.

In *Zinda Laash*, Tabani’s vampire’s body is referred as “nāpāk jism” (impure body)<sup>3</sup>. Professor Tabani’s vampire body is therefore conceived of as an erotic site. In Carl Th. Dreyer’s adaptation of *Dracula*, titled *Vampyr* (1932), in the book which Allan Gray finds, it is written that “the *bodies* and souls of the dead” (italics mine) are corrupted. It is not only the soul of the undead vampire that is impure, but also his body. The vampire body is then eroticized as later the book in *Vampyr* also states that it is “the *lust* of the vampire” (italics mine) which must be fought. The vampire’s monstrous body i.e. his large fangs, his claws, and the fact that he is usually

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<sup>3</sup> This is ironic as the name “Tabani” means that which gives off light due to its inherent purity.

covered in blood all indicate the highly erotic nature of the vampire body. It functions not only as a tool of violence, but also as a site of queer desire.

Moreover, Tabani’s eroticized queer body unleashes desire and lust in others. Chris Dumas writes in this regard that the vampire is dangerous because it opens the doors of the Freudian id. He writes that “normality is repression, personal and social; the monster is *what returns*, that is what is created by normality and that which seeks to shatter it” (31). In his analysis of the horror film, Dumas writes that the monster is usually seen as the embodiment of repressed desires that have broken through the vaults of the Freudian unconscious and made themselves manifest to the conscious. The initial façade of normality in the horror film is, therefore, an indication of a repressed society where all transgressions are carefully locked away behind the walls of the unconscious. The monster who then suddenly, or sometimes slowly, appears represents those very repressed desires, and seeks ultimately to destroy the dominion of the superego and take his victims back to a state of pure id and a life lived under the pleasure principle.

Tabani, the vampire, in *Zinda Laash* poses the exact same threat to the community he attacks. Eric Kwan-Wai Yu writes in this respect that “vampirism, revealing in the end the very violence of reason itself, could be read as a sign of the return of the repressed, of the uncanny, which has become unplaceable in the rational order of things” (154). It must be noted that the normality that the vampire threatens refers to the normalised sexual order and gender relations which the vampire reconfigures altogether, and the desires that he unleashes are queer in nature. The vampire does not infect his victims with heterosexual desire, but with queer desires, and it is in this that the vampire’s real threat lies. Barbara Creed writes that “the horror film consistently places the monster in conflict with the family, the couple, and the institutions of patriarchal capitalism” (61) and “the couple, threatened by the monster, is always heterosexual” (ibid.).

In *Zinda Laash*, this couple is Aqeel and his fiancé, Shabnam. Both of them are first seduced, then they are bitten which transforms them into vampires. Tabani does not kill this couple, rather he introduces them to queer polygamous desire. It is in this respect that Benschhoff writes that the vampire “preys not only upon the bodies of men and women, but also on the very being of his victims, transforming them into creatures as sexually monstrous as himself” (19) and herein lies the threat of Tabani in *Zinda Laash*. Aqeel travels to Professor Tabani’s mansion in the aim of destroying him, and yet he becomes a part of Tabani’s growing vampire

family. Later in the film, Aqeel's brother, the Doctor, pleads to Pervez, Shabnam's brother, to assist him in killing Tabani as he has already destroyed two families. Tabani therefore attacks the very foundation of upstanding, heteropatriarchal families and as Benshoff writes that it is this "ability to spread his monstrous condition [that] openly acknowledges the universalizing potential of his queer sexuality" (39).

Therefore, the vampire's real threat lies in his ability to infect and thus transform his upper-class, cis-het victims with queer desire. In *Zinda Laash* this is first made evident through the conversion of Tabani's assistant, played by Nasreen, who is introduced as a commonplace assistant but after the bite becomes sexually active. The bite of the vampire transforms the cis-het bodies of the victims to bodies that begin to desire and lust, bodies that transgress the laws of heteronormative society and find their gratification in unlawful bonds. Booth writes that the work of the vampire is to "transmute desire and connection along decidedly queer lines" (52). To transform cis-het citizenry into desiring bodies becomes a subversive act. Foucault's study of sexuality explains how being sexual or expressing desire (queer or otherwise) was relegated to the private sphere. Sex had been made a utilitarian task performed by heterosexual bodies to keep the capitalist machine going. The discourse around heterosexuality revolved around the idea of utility (Foucault 155). Desire shown outside of the conjugal heterosexual bed therefore becomes transgressive and something that needs to be punished and disciplined in Foucauldian terms.

In *Zinda Laash*, Tabani sexualises normative bodies by unleashing their repressed libidos, who then dare to desire outside of marriage, or who dare to desire those who are sanctioned unlawful to them. The scene of the vampire entering the private female quarters as the unmarried virgin lies sleeping, hovering over her, and consequently biting her neck as she writhes in both pain and pleasure is the quintessential image of the vampire film, a moment which represents the actual threat of the vampire. For the vampire does not kill. It is not death that his victims or the viewers of the film fear. It is the promise of an eternal life of desire and lust that is threatening. What scares the nation-state is a kind of violent sexuality that its apparatuses cannot control, regulate or discipline. It is a kind of erotic desire which serves no purpose for it is not reproductive hence has no claims to futurity. And it is for this reason that this desire becomes queer for to be queer is to desist futurity, to be queer is to imagine alternative ways of desiring.

The vampire himself is an embodiment of queer masculinity. The vampire

is “the seducer par excellence” (Nystrom, 65) of both men and women and his queerness is strongly hinted from his sexually ambiguous demeanor. Tabani’s masculinity is at odds with the machismo of Pervez and Aqeel’s brother. Scholars like Lisa Nystrom have argued that since the vampire does not solely attack by the virtue of his physical strength but through seduction, his masculinity is compromised. We would suggest that it is not that his masculinity is compromised, but that he represents an alternate, counter-normative queer masculinity that threatens cis- het masculinity. The vampire might be effeminate, but he still poses an undeniable threat to heteropatriarchy. It is interesting to note that Tabani does not kill, he transforms. Aqeel, a cisgendered, heterosexual man, a beacon of masculinity championed by patriarchy, is not killed off but is transformed into a queer anticitizen of the nation-state.

Furthermore, the vampire’s bite itself has been eroticized by several scholars. His bite, or as referred to in Stoker’s original text, “the kiss” (37) is an intimate gesture which blurs the lines between eroticism and violence. Barbara Creed writes that “sucking blood from a victim’s neck places the vampire and victim in an intimate relationship. Unlike other horror-film monsters, the vampire enfolds the victim in an apparent or real erotic embrace” (59). In *Zinda Laash*, when Shabnam is first infected by Tabani and is confined to her bedroom, she waits desperately for Tabani to return. As he arrives, the ecstasy on Shabnam’s face and her reaction to Tabani’s bite is almost orgasmic as she surrenders to her desire. The vampire’s kiss unleashes erotic desire in the victim, hence the vampire’s threat lies in the contagion of queer desire that spreads from victim to victim, sexualizing them instead of killing them. This scene between Tabani and Shabnam is more erotic than it is horrifying, and therein lies the horror of the vampire. His capability to infiltrate private spaces and spread his queer contagion is what horrifies the bourgeois protagonists.

The queer citizenry, or the vampire’s family of victims, subverts traditional heteropatriarchal gender roles. When Aqeel’s brother goes looking for him, he stops at a hotel and interviews the manager. He informs him that Aqeel was warned before going to meet Tabani as the locals there already knew that those who enter the mansion never return. Those gone missing do not die, instead become a part of Tabani’s growing family. The vampire, therefore, multiplies by its “threat of promiscuity” (Yu 148), as for the vampire “lovemaking is [...] confused with bloodfeeding” (ibid.), as he perpetuates desire through non- procreative penetration. In *Zinda Laash*, Tabani creates “a race of monstrous women, feminine demons equipped with masculine devices” (Craft, 111) and men as well who open

themselves to homoerotic queer desire. It is in this respect that Benschhoff writes that “the vampire’s victims not only indulge in vampiric sex, but become a new and distinct type of individual/monster themselves” (19).

In *Zinda Laash*, these individual/monsters are Tabani’s assistant, Aqeel, Shabnam, and to a certain degree, even Shirin even if she is saved at the end. Furthermore, Benschhoff writes that the vampire film uses the trope of “the queer couple” (69). This couple is positioned in opposition to the heterosexual couple that is victimized. In this respect, Tabani and his assistant, the female vampire played by Nasreen are the queer couple who “create life homosexually” which refers to their mode of multiplying through non-reproductive penetrative sex (the bite).

Apart from Tabani’s own vampire family, he also actively sought to restructure existing heteropatriarchal families. For Booth vampires threaten to “reconstitute traditional human families along the lines of newly forged blood relations” (52). The vampire, therefore, does not threaten individual men and women, rather he threatens the very idea of communal living and belonging.

The vampire threatens the idea of the urban nuclear family with its prescribed gender roles, and in doing so queers the notion of the family altogether. Booth further writes that the vampire family represents “a queer new version of the incestuous human family that is produced as a mesh of conjoined characters, living and undead” (54). The vampire offers a queer, alternate mode of belonging where bodies are tied together by polygamous bonds of shared blood and sex. The threat of the vampire, therefore, is in his power to intrude and infiltrate personal, familial spaces, and reconfigure them from the inside out. In this, the vampire functions as a queer figure, as queerness relies on the disabling of capitalist modes of togetherness i.e. the nuclear family. Monique Wittig writes that living under capitalism conditions individuals to metaphorically sign “the heterosexual social contract” (xvi.). She further argues that heterosexuality, far from being natural, has been normalised as the only state of being and desiring.

Lisa Nystrom writes that the vampire’s real threat does not only lie in his own violent sexuality but “due to his ability to demonstrate and evoke ‘the existence of female passion’” (65). Nystrom further writes:

[The vampire] possesses the ability to bring out in women a personality that is both self-assured and highly sexual [...] this unleashing of female sexuality [is] the main threat to patriarchal

society [...] Once subject to (his) thrall, these women become passionate and powerful (ibid.).

Where the men become passive, Professor Tabani’s female victims become sexually aggressive. In *Zinda Laash*, chaste womanhood is embodied by Shabnam, Aqeel’s fiancé whose white spotless sari represents virtuous, desexualised femininity, as well as by Shirin, Pervez’s wife. After being hunted down and bitten by Professor Tabani, Shabnam and Shirin writhe and pant in desire, and deliberately lie about Tabani to Pervez and the Doctor to protect him. Shabnam begins to leave her bedroom windows open every night for the vampire, forgetting completely the man to whom she was betrothed. Ahmad and Khan in their analysis write that after being bitten, the female vampires in *Zinda Laash* “appear disheveled and uninterested in children and domestic life [...] Restless for [Tabani’s] return, they pant by the window and pace around their bedrooms, their husbands powerless to control them” (119). The woman is, thus, freed from heterosexuality and is queered. It is in this respect that Nystrom writes that the vampire’s own threat is not as potent “as the danger he presents as a corrupter of the otherwise well-behaved passive women...” (65).

The vampire attacks both men and women, he attacks all living bodies, but it is only when he penetrates the female quarters that he becomes a believable threat that must be fought immediately. Aqeel’s death alone does not convince Shabnam’s family. It is only when Shabnam herself comes under the sway of the vampire, and soon after, her sister-in-law, Shirin is at risk of infection as well that the threat of the vampire is seen for what it is. The two women of Pervez’s household became sexual transgressors, and it is at this moment that the men of the house take arms to fight the threat of the vampire.

In this respect, Wittig writes that under capitalism and the patriarchal regime, female sexuality is carefully regulated, disciplined, and punished, and exploited only for the means of furthering patrilinear bonds and for providing a continuing workforce to sustain the capitalist machine. She writes that:

The compulsory reproduction of the “species” by women is the system of exploitation on which heterosexuality is economically based. Reproduction is essentially that work, that production by women, through which the appropriation by men of all the work of women proceeds (6).

The vampire’s bite liberates the woman in the sense that she no longer

desires the heterosexual union with her betrothed and the promise of marriage and conjugal bliss. The figure of the female vampire begins to represent unbridled and threatening female sexuality that desires outside of the heterosexual matrix, thus representing a form of queer womanhood that has escaped patriarchal control.

In *Zinda Laash*, after being bitten and transformed, Shabnam seeks out the blood of her niece, affectionately called Baby in the film, and unsuccessfully tries to lure her into the graveyard to eventually take her life. The female vampire becomes an embodiment of incestuous, transgressive desire, thus subverting the image of the motherly, chaste virgin championed by patriarchy. The female body is queered and sexualised but not for the male gaze. The vampiric female sexuality horrifies rather than arouses, as its objects of desire are not men or other women but children. Thus, the widespread notion that women are by nature maternal is challenged by the figure of the female vampire as embodied by Shabnam and Tabani's assistant. The female vampire not only leaves the conjugal bed and the institution of marriage, she also actively threatens the product and result of heterosexuality i.e. children, thus, denying the capitalist machine its future workforce. It is not simply that the female vampire is non-reproductive, her threat lies in her power to annihilate the fruit of heterosexual reproduction, thus annihilating the foundations of the nuclear, heterosexual family.

It is in this vein that Barbara Almond writes that “when [the vampire] vampirizes women, he turns them into non-maternal sexual predators” (222), and furthermore that “[female vampires] represent a corruption of the maternal function i.e. motherhood turned vampiric” (225). With the representation of the female vampire, it is made evident that “unbound female sexuality [is] seen as totally incompatible with maternity” (Almond, 227) and the horror of the female vampire lies in “[the] horror at a maternity turned monstrous, one that feeds on children rather than feeding them” (ibid.), and so the horror of the female vampire lies in “the mother as vampire” (ibid.) and thus the image of the woman-as-mother is subverted.

Barbara Creed writes that “the female vampire is monstrous—and also attractive—precisely because she does threaten to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society” (61). After subverting patriarchal expectations, she is no longer allowed to live, and is hunted down and eventually killed by her brother, Pervez, and Aqeel's brother, the Doctor—

the two men who represent normative masculinity. In this vein, Eric Kwan-Wai Yu writes that “having been polluted by Dracula, [the female vampire], must, to conform to patriarchal expectations, either be heavily punished [...] or be sacrificed, and in so doing become a female martyr” (158). Yu further writes that “this ending comes as no surprise, because as a woman already profaned, she can no longer resume the role of angel by the hearth” (ibid.). The large knife that is driven into Shabnam’s heart by Pervez and the Doctor is a phallic symbol and, thus, an extension and expression of phallic power which restores order in the community after having annihilated the threat of the wanton and sexual woman. Lisa Nystrom therefore writes that “the biggest threat [...] is not [...] the rampaging of a lecherous demon, but rather the rise of female empowerment and the sexual role reversal that may accompany this” (65).

The female victim of the vampire is, therefore, executed as a means to restore patriarchal control over female sexuality, and the vampire himself is killed off for, as Yu writes, “he is not only the embodiment of our illicit hidden desires but a truly monstrous being capable of crossing and blurring boundaries” (ibid.). It is in this very ability of the vampire to cross and blur boundaries that his queer potential lies. To be queer is to resist categories and boundaries, and therefore, the figure of the vampire and his “family” function as queer threats to the heteronormative matrix.

Thus, Shabnam is killed off to restore patriarchal control. Hence *Zinda Laash* is conservative in nature, as its gender politics do not necessarily point to a queer future. In *Zinda Laash*, all traces of Tabani and his vampirism are destroyed, thus restoring normalcy in the community, and the reestablishment of heteropatriarchal power. The crew of men who kill off Shabnam and Tabani at the end represent heteronormative masculine power who take it upon themselves to restore order in their community and to regain patriarchal control. After the death of Shabnam, Pervez and Aqeel engage in a long manhunt in which they successfully track down Tabani and kill him. Therefore, the film does not present a vision of what a queer vampiric future might look like. In this vein, Ahmad and Khan comment that “*Zinda Laash* is in many ways politically conservative. The religious faith of the film’s triumphant survivors defeats Professor Tabani’s mistaken belief in the arrogant pretensions of rational science” (118).

Pervez and Aqeel’s brother, then, function “as the protector[s] of the patriarchal institutions” (Craft 117) and furthermore “[their] largest purpose is to reinscribe the dualities that [the vampire] would muddle and

confuse” (ibid.). By killing Shabnam, *Zinda Laash* justifies violence against the sexualised female body as the violence perpetrated against the sexual female body is graphically shown and elaborate in detail. The large phallic knife itself which is used to kill Shabnam represents the reinscription of phallic power on the female body and it is through this act that the female vampire is restored to its ‘proper’ gender and sexual identity.

In this vein it is also interesting to go back to an earlier moment in *Zinda Laash* when Aqeel, convinced that this host is a “bad-ruh”, an unnatural dangerous being, and that his own life is in danger, enters the basement and finds two coffins. He finds Tabani in one coffin and Tabani’s assistant, the female vampire, in the other. Instead of killing Tabani, the real source of the contagion, he chooses to kill his assistant, the female vampire first. After Aqeel’s first encounter with her and Tabani, he knew that the real source of the infection was Tabani, and yet he still chose to kill the female vampire first whose dying screams naturally woke Tabani, and once awake Aqeel had no chance against him, and was later bitten and infected by Tabani.

Aqeel kills the female vampire first through a sense of *ghairat*, or male honor. The act of driving a large knife into her heart becomes a form of honor killing, as mentioned above, and something he finds much more urgent than killing Tabani himself. It is this single scene in *Zinda Laash* which proves that the real threat in the eyes of the heteropatriarchal male is not the vampire himself, regardless of his own queerness, but the infected and transformed, sexually aggressive woman who must be killed off first despite the fact that she does not equal the vampire in his strength nor in the threat he poses.

But Tabani is eventually killed, if not by Aqeel, then by the combined efforts of his brother and Pervez. Aqeel’s brother, played masterfully by Habib, killed his own brother too as he discovered him in Tabani’s mansion, lying in one of the coffins, a newly transformed vampire. The Doctor therefore represents a state- sponsored punishing agency which eliminates all signs of male and female queerness. Tabani is hunted down by the city’s men, its upright, moral citizens. The last chase sequence is highly important as it signifies the banding together of the city-dwellers, comprising of men bursting with testosterone and machismo, arming themselves to fight a sexual threat. Their enemy is not a serial killer or a terrorist with weapons of any sorts. And yet he is chased to his lair where he is overpowered by the two men and dragged to the sunlight which

immediately turns him into ashes. This last scene of the monster’s death signifies an act of cleansing and purging the sexual other from within the heteropatriarchal community. Tabani dies and along with him all traces of queer desire and infection are also eliminated.

Moreland and Pervez, however, argue that despite the film’s conservative ending, it elicits viewer identification with Tabani. They write that:

[J]ust as the film’s narrative framework resoundingly condemns Tabani’s transgressive acts and their abject consequences, its visual presentation offers a celebration of Tabani’s excesses, as the audience itself is ravished by the mesmeric gaze of this vampire antihero, even as the film cautions against such seduction (191).

It would, therefore, be simplistic to argue that *Zinda Laash* is a politically conservative film. Regardless of being killed off and despite the fact that his presence is eliminated onscreen, the film invites a dark identification with the vampire rather than with Pervez or the Doctor. Tabani arouses a morbid fascination and is the true protagonist of the film. Pervez and the Doctor in comparison to Tabani are cardboard cut-outs and one-dimensional characters who fail to invite sympathy from the audience. Moreland and Pervez, therefore, argue that *Zinda Laash* succeeds in eliciting the audience’s complicity with Tabani’s dark agenda, and along with the rest of his victims, the audience itself is seduced and thus transformed by him. It is this visual seduction of the audience that lay behind the R-rating that *Zinda Laash* received. Moreland and Pervez argue that despite the film’s “narrative containment [...] the visual and auditory celebration of his transgressions lingers on” (200) and perhaps became one of the reasons why the film earned its R-rating.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *Zinda Laash*, Pakistan’s first ever horror film production was much ahead of its time in its depiction of violent eroticism and sexually aggressive women. *Zinda Laash* was one of the last films of the Pakistani film industry’s “Golden Age”, a period spanning the 1960s during which the industry churned out some of the most creatively experimental and artistically unique films ever made (Khan and Ahmad 117). *Zinda Laash* itself stands out with its elaborate production design, its masterful cinematography and special effects, its powerful script, and the performances of veterans such as Habib, Deeba, Rehan, and Nasreen.

The purpose of this paper has been to explore issues of gender and queer desire in *Zinda Laash*, and we have argued that the violence performed by Tabani in *Zinda Laash* becomes a form of sexual liberation which frees the repressed bourgeois citizenry to desire in ways which transgress state-sanctioned morality. Queer violence in *Zinda Laash* is, therefore, an eroticized, creative articulation which imagines counter-normative ways of community-building, desiring, and modes of togetherness. Queerness as a gender or sexual identity, as a way of life, and as personal politics contains immense subversive potential to question, challenge, and dismantle oppressive epistemic frameworks which structure the collective unconscious of Pakistani society. It has been our intention to initiate conversations about queer representation in Pakistani cinematic history, and to pave a way forward for future Pakistani film scholarship.

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