

The Popular Tale: A Study on Retention and Deconstruction of Collective Memory in Duffer Brothers' *Stranger Things* and Bisha Ali's *Miss Marvel*

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Stories that become history with the abutment of objective shreds of evidence cannot be appraised independently of the subjective whims of their creators, who may often occupy the loftiest position in a hegemonic order. With the advent of the school of 'subaltern studies', history was forced to articulate itself with multiple voices instead of one. Contrary to the documented history is the collective memory, which is defined as "the distribution throughout society of what individuals know, believe and feel about the past, how they judge the past morally, how closely they identify with it, and how much they are inspired by it as a model for their conduct and identity (Schwartz 12). The emergence of the term can be traced back to Emilie Durkheim's effort to integrate individual responses with cognitive learning of social scenarios. Maurice Halbwach developed Durkheim's findings and formed the term 'collective memory' which is now used extensively across various academic disciplines. Ann Rigney, in her essay "Cultural Memory Studies" notes,

Culture constitutes the 'brains' of society, permitting the preservation, and reproduction of stories across space, time, and communities. In the process, however, cultural artefacts, forms, and practices do not just provide a conduit for expressing already existing memories, as many studies have shown. They also play an active role in shaping what is to be remembered and how. (65)

The function of culture, as mentioned by Rigney, is achieved through multiple apparatuses of hegemony which mould collective memory, which is consequently forged into an omniscient configuration through commemorative form of informal documentation in the form of songs, icons, eulogies, or monuments from the past, working in collaboration with the production of history (Schwartz 11). The term popular culture is used in opposition to 'high culture' and is defined by John Storey as "culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people" (5). The term eludes definite characteristic productions as the nature of popular acceptance changes with time and place.

Paul Grainge enumerates the potency of the motion picture as a new medium of commemoration when she comments that "as a technology able to picture and embody the temporality of the past, cinema has become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life" (1). As a commemorative cultural artefact, cinema can also actively engage in the retention, deconstruction, and reconstruction of collective memory through the processes of keying and framing suggested by Barry Schwartz. In his essay "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory", Schwartz writes that "keying makes this connection by aligning current events with happenings in the past, and by activating 'frames' that shape the meaning of these current events" (15). The frame of memory thus formed serves dual purposes within the community in question. They act both as a model of society by reflecting its ambitions, insecurities, needs, and amusements and as a model for society by acting as a template into which members of a community melt their thoughts, sentiments, morality, and conduct. Thus, some events or perceptions are selectively remembered to accentuate and justify certain ideologies and prejudices of contemporary times. The echo of the past configures itself in the present as it struggles to form the meaning of lived experience. Popular cultural entertainment tends to pantomime hegemonic conditions by segregating memories worth remembering and not. The article seeks to explore the commemorative elements in the web series *Miss Marvel* and *Stranger*

Things streamed on over-the-top platforms Disney Hotstar Plus and Netflix, respectively, to study their repercussions in constructing and reconstructing collective memory.

Both *Miss Marvel* and *Stranger Things* are American science fiction drama television series that embody the postulations of commercial Hollywood production. Hollywood as a film industry has overshadowed every other film industry and diverse experience by imposing a singular American experience on every other fringe of imagination and endurance. Hollywood is often criticised for "tending to show the different groups as assimilated to the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture and values, or to promote such assimilation more or less explicitly" (Audissino 1492). Hollywood then acts as a cultural melting pot, which promotes the singular American experience. Stereotypical images of early Hollywood films include,

Irishmen are depicted as quick-tempered troublemakers and heavy drinkers when not directly compared to pigs, as in *Casey's Twins* (1903) and *Smiling Irish Eyes* (1929). Irish men were policemen, firefighters, or boxers, while Irish women were generally servants and washerwomen. Chinese people were depicted as mysteriously entranced in closed groups and devoted to underworld trades. In the best cases, they were just exotic attractions, as in the case of American-born Chinese actress Anna May Wong, who, although talented, was given only Madame Butterfly-like or "dragon lady" roles, for example, in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931). Jews were seen as greedy "penny pinchers," as depicted in *Levinsky's Holiday* (1913). During World War I, for propaganda reasons, Germans were portrayed as insensitive Huns capable of any atrocious crime. (Audissino 1492)

Some of these stereotypes were deconstructed with the extension of the market, which necessitated inclusivity. *Miss Marvel*, directed by Bisha Ali, is one of the latest productions of the Marvel Cinematic Universe that engages with a deconstructive lens. The Marvel Cinematic Universe, popularly called MCU, is one of the most successful production houses in Hollywood which has produced superhero movies since 2008. Along with the Detective Comics series, it introduced the phenomenon of superheroes into the popular imaginations through comics. Before the widespread use of computer graphics in cinema, comics remained the only medium for the transposition of such fantasies, which required mediation through images.

Since 2008, MCU, which is now a subsidiary of Disney, has produced as many as thirty-two films and twenty television series, all of which have been popular and well-received. Marvel Comics has published superhero comics since 1961, but it was the 2008 Iron Man movie starring Robert Downey Jr. that brought Marvel Comics heroes to a global audience. Since then, the global audience has been bombarded with various superheroes, including Spiderman, Captain America, Black Widow, Hulk, Scarlet Witch, and Black Panther. MCU has also given us a range of megalomaniacal villains like Thanos, Green Goblin, and Red Skull.

Superheroes with modest and traumatic origins who were raised to become protectors of justice were very much an American dream for a rescuer. It can be equated to America's intervention in international politics as the ultimate power. William Peitz relates the rise of superheroes and their relation with American ideals in his essay "Captain America: The Epitome of American Values and Identity". He notes that "The United States' entry into World War II gave superheroes a whole new set of enemies, initiated a big push for patriotic superheroes, and supplied a complete working rationale and worldview for a super-patriotic superhero such as Captain America, who epitomised American values during World War II" (8)

The story of the American-Muslim teenager Kamala Khan is an addition to this line of superheroes. Bisha Ali had to make a tremendous effort to conceptualise the first non-stereotypically depicted Muslim superhero of the MCU, whose

character and narrative of Ms. Marvel complicates assumptions of who can be a superhero and what a superhero looks like. Kamala's gender and race are foundationally incorporated into her narrative and experience as an American teenager, Muslim, and superhero. The comic book series does not break down her identity into categories of difference for exotification and instead presents Kamala as a teenager trying to learn about her multifaceted identity and community. (Chung 3)

The web series *Miss Marvel* (2022) features the third alter ego of the 'Miss Marvel' superhero identity, Kamala Khan. Sixteen-year-old Kamala Khan is introduced as an aspiring artist, an anonymous YouTuber, and an ardent fan of the Avengers, particularly Captain Marvel. When it first premiered in June 2022, it received positive responses from all over the world. Although Iman Vellani, the star of the series who plays Kamala Khan, says *Miss Marvel* "wasn't a story about a Muslim girl, it was about an Avengers-obsessed, fan-fic-writing nerd who just happened to be this Muslim girl" (Wittmer Web), MCU has made use of the collective memory of the Pakistani Muslim community to make the show as well as the character popular and relatable. When Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai gave a shout-out for the series as one reflecting the lives of Pakistani immigrant families, she was merely voicing many echoes. Yousafzai's opinion resonates with the transnational comic researcher Chung's observation that "readers are introduced to Kamala as an ordinary teenager who is trying to figure out where she belongs. Because her identity is not framed as a spectacle, Kamala is not demonised or othered. Kamala Khan's story of growing up is relatable to vast audiences"(9).

Bisha Ali has made use of immersive narrative techniques to activate the Schwartzian 'frames' of collective memory, which made the series relatable. Ali believes that music has played a major role in the incarnation of the new teenage superhero, whose ethnicity transpired as a hurdle in her trajectory. The music score of *Miss Marvel* was composed by the Grammy-winning composer Laura Karpman, who believes that when a "Marvel superhero meets a deep and significant heritage that had to also be a part of the sound of the show" (BurlingameWeb). Karpman's score incorporates hip-hop, contemporary beats, and tabla beats to supplement the teen vigour, while South Asian music accentuates the complicated diasporic position. The score was amalgamated into a single orchestra after recording remotely in India and Pakistan. She uses instruments as varied as stringed sarangi, bansuri flute, sursringar, and mridangam. The score was also endowed with the contribution of the violinist Raaginder and vocalist Ganavya Doraiswamy, who are experts in Indian classical music. The soundtrack from *Miss Marvel* includes music from artists as varied as The Weekend, Linda Lindas, Nahid Akhtar, Atif Afzal, Lata Mangeshkar, and S.P. Balasubrahmanyam. Karpman created separate theme songs for Kamala, the heirloom bangle from where she harnessed her cosmic powers, and for the series.

The music score of *Miss Marvel* is refreshing as it does not follow the conventional ethnic music that calls out 'Muslim' but rather reflects the nuances of the protagonist's thoughts as a misfit teenager and a superhero. The dominating American pop music makes way for the music of South Asian legends with the progress of the series. When the plot of the story takes the prime protagonist to her homeland, whether in her fantasies or reality, it is accompanied by the rich flavours of South Asian music and instruments. *Miss Marvel* amuses the viewer's auditory sense with Western and Eastern music, and by the domination of the latter, establishes the cultural frame to which Kamala Khan belongs, the diasporic Pakistani Muslim community of America. While the contemporary American pop music that dominates the soundtrack of *Miss Marvel* contributes to the popularity of the series, the growing space occupied by South Asian music

activates the frames of collective memory among the diasporic community. The first episode of the series commences with a comic action video of the culmination battle of the *Avengers: The Endgame*, created by Kamala Khan, establishing her artistic inclinations. Art is another common ground that Ali has used to bring in different cultural frames. Kamala inherited her artistic virtuosity from her grandmother, Sana, through her mother, Muneeba.

Kamala's art compliments her "cosmic head-in-the-cloud" ("Generation" 00:05:50) personality which has been assimilated into the WASP culture. She doodles all day, and flying superhero graffiti follows her around in her fantasies and illustrates her battle plans. Her art resembles the caliber of superhero comic books and is unreservedly dissociated from her diasporic identity. Sana, the grandmother of Kamala Khan, on the other hand, premeditatedly uses art as a medium of conservation. The narrative takes the fourth episode of the series to Karachi in Pakistan, where Sana lives. Her house is a collection of things from her homeland, India, that she was able to salvage through the partition. She is an artist with a room entirely adorned with paintings that she believes help her hold on to the past. She has even recreated moments from her memory, including a painting of her mother, Ayisha, whom she lost during the partition. Sana's collection resonates with Ayisha's affirmation that "we can take memories with us" ("Time" 00:24:52) while leaving India during the partition. Sana's room is an informal, personal museum where Kamala finds her identity as a Pakistani-American Muslim teenage girl with superpowers. Muneeba is not explicitly depicted as an artist in the series. But it is Muneeba who fashions the superhero outfit for Kamala, which integrates her newly acquired diasporic identity, thus transporting memories from Karachi to New Jersey. Kamala's superhero outfit is inspired by a traditional Pakistani female apparel called the 'salwar kameez', which consists of an elongated top with slits and matching pleated trousers. It carries around the heritage of her community along with her superhero incognito. While Kamala and Sana, separated by a generation, engage in depicting the American and the Indian through their art, the mediating Muneeba integrates both to form a hybrid culture that she embraces.

Birds' eye shots of culturally significant events are used by Ali to activate cultural frames of collective memory. The first season of the series accommodates three such events. The first two are euphoric celebrations of Eid and a grand wedding ceremony. The Muslim community in New Jersey is shown with vibrant colours and accuracy as they gather around to celebrate Eid, which is depicted as an exhaustive carnival. It also incorporates Pakistani street cuisine, such as Qatlama, Bun Kebab, Samosa, and Gol Gappa, which also appears in the wedding scene. It is also cognisant of the role played by the mosque in accommodating Kamala's family into the foreign land. Muneeba makes sure that she is there to support Kamala when she needs her. On one such occasion, she confides in her the difficulty faced by the family until they found the community. She also states that the mosque helped her find a home outside of her family. The forthcoming nuptial of Amir Khan, Kamala's brother, is mentioned right from the first episode and is depicted as a stereotypical Bollywood wedding celebration with mash-up songs and dances.

Both these celebrations activate the frames of contemporary cultural memory, while the third cultural event, the partition of India, activates frames of post-memory, defined by Marianne Hirsch as the "structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience the second-generation memory of the event across the border" (3). It is in the second episode that the series initiates conversations about the partition of India, an event that has equal implications in the lives of both Indians and Pakistanis. Amir Khan says with regret that "every Pakistani family has a partition story. None of them are good" ("Crushed" 00:21:16). The series directs Kamala's story right into the chaos of partition through the introduction of Ayisha. In the fourth episode, Kamala has her first vision of the train to Karachi, which is also shared by her grandmother, Sana. Kamala is transported to the railway station where Sana and her father,

Hassan, attempt to board the last train to Karachi. She climbs up a train, delivering the viewers with an 'overhead shot' shot of the partition. In the ensuing episode, Kamala actively participates in it to save the infant Sana from being lost. The scenes are either middle shots or close-ups, immersing Kamala in the event. In her first transposition, Kamala takes up a position that is distanced from her cultural trauma, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the second time, she integrates into it. The fifth episode features crane shots of the great migration, aesthetically depicted with lines of torches and bullock carts. The frames of partition and Aisha's story calibrate the cultural frames formed through the purposive use of art and music.

The cultural frames thus formed are accentuated through Kamala's interaction with other characters. Bruno Carrelli and Nakia Bahadir, played by Matt Lintz and Yasmin Fletcher, are Kamala's confidants. While Bruno aligns with the assimilated avenger-nerd persona of Kamala, Nakia shares the diasporic cultural memory, dispositions, and identity crisis. Kamala's interaction with Nakia provides a window through which the religious life of their community can be integrated into the personality of Kamala, the superhero. The expressive and undemanding personality of Nadia supports Kamala in growing both as a person and as a woman. While Kamala gains her strength through an amulet, Nadia represents a real-life superhero who is determined to make a change through democratic means. The conversation between Kamran and Kamala, in which movies of Shah Rukh Khan are discussed, is as much Indian as it is Pakistani. Bollywood becomes a convergence point in the collective memory of these sibling nations.

Kamala has an American accent, which makes her language dissimilar from the heavily accented Pakistani English of her family members. This is coherent with her personality, which grapples with constant identity crises until Sana facilitates self-acceptance. Sana's conversation with Kamala, in which she says that she is "still trying to find out who I am [...]. My passport is Pakistani, and my roots are in India. And in between all of these, there is a border. There is a border marked with blood and pain. People are claiming their identities based on an idea some old Englishmen had when they were fleeing the country" ("Seeing" 00:20:08), which is an extension of the personal museum of memories that was elaborately depicted in the fourth episode.

Clandestines, the supernaturals from an alternative dimension, are introduced into this framework. They are closely associated with Djinn, an enormously powerful magical being familiarised to the world through tales like the Arabian Nights and has considerable significance in Islamic legends. The association with Djinn is astutely connected with the colour purple, which evokes a close reference to the Genie who appears in Disney's *Aladdin*. Kamala's superhero costume is composed of a combination of red and blue, but her wardrobe is dominated by purple chrome. The colour of her costume orients with the colour of her eyes and the colour of pulsating energy emanating from her as she gains cosmic powers. Kamala inadvertently becomes the Genie of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and reaffirms her Islamic origins.

The framework within the collective memory is constructed by exploiting the elements of collective memory, which are compactly arranged throughout the series as aforementioned. The nuances of the plotline are conveyed through immersive storytelling techniques. According to Adrienne Resha, the live-action adaptation of the *Miss Marvel* comic satisfies the four criteria of environmental storytelling as elaborated by Henry Jenkins (Resha). She points out that

The show enables immersion not just in Kamala Khan's world but also in her story through its environmental storytelling. The mise-en-scène of Kamala's Jersey City bedroom, which looks every inch like one occupied by an American teenage girl, evokes narrative associations to the comics being adapted where another version of this girl has her own

origin story and to the Marvel Cinematic Universe where this version of this character's story will continue. (Resha Web)

The story unfolds largely through first-person shots, which help the viewer identify with the prime protagonist, Kamala. *Miss Marvel* engages actively with the menacing issue of Islamophobia. Agent Deever from the Department of Damage Control is the personification of prejudices against the Muslim community. She is characterised as a white, blonde woman who is visibly shaken by the confusing identity of the new superhero, who is not white. Deever orders a sweep in the tri-state area, targeting South Asian communities. Nakia questions Deever on her hasty decision to search the mosque and the ensuing paranoia caused by the prejudiced reception of spying the 'enhanced individual' around a mosque. They were asked to give her up as a part of "the whole good Muslim versus bad Muslim, let's self surveil our people routine" ("Destined" 00:32:11).

The series employs certain cinematographic techniques like over-the-shoulder shots, jump cuts, and montages to construct the world of Kamala. The hostility towards the Muslim community that is prevailing among the global population is conveyed through Deever's and is keyed into the framework of collective Islamic memories formed throughout the series. Deever is introduced in a classic low-angle shot and is, at times, indicated with a knee-level shot, imparting mystery and dominance to the character. The racial superiority thrust by her presence is underscored through such shots. The first episode of the series shows Kamala in her handmade Captain Marvel outfit, uneasily inspecting her reflection in the mirror with a poster of Carol Danvers in the background. The last episode parallels the shot with a confident Kamala in her superhero outfit. Together, the two shots narrate her growth from a self-conscious teenager to a young adult superhero by accepting her diasporic identity.

By instigating the origin and growth of a superhero from a globally mistrusted community, MCU deconstructs the cynical consciousness that evolved through the collective memory of terrorism perpetrated by Muslim extremist groups. 9/11 is observed as a global catastrophe with many repercussions and is reflected in MCU production. The first and third Iron Man movies are founded on the American stand against terrorism, with Tony Stark representing a patriotic American. In the essay "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility": Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics' Robert Genter relates the evolution of superhero comics such as *The Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Iron Man*, and *The Amazing Spider-Man* with the immediate necessities of cold war culture in America. "After 9/11, America's communist peril was replaced by the defensive stand against Islamic terrorist groups" (Gerges 79). MCU reflects American policies as it condemns Islamic terrorist organisations in some of its movies and has spoken out against the othering of the Muslim community in other movies. While America is forced to act like a secular agency of world peace, it has to hide its mistrust towards everything that is not white and American behind a red-blue shield of diplomacy. MCU, being the biggest advocate of American policies, follows the same suit to obtain audiences from all over the world.

It is not just the superheroes that use memories to install themselves in the hearts of their viewers. The recent Netflix series *Stranger Things* unabashedly rose to the top of the most popular series on the platform by manipulating and building on the cultural memory of the American population. Written and directed by the Duffer brothers, the series is not only about forces of good and evil but also about the geek culture of the 1980s. The term 'geek culture' amalgamates an avid interest in technology, social awkwardness, and an obsessive interest in the fantasy genre. *Stranger Things* pilots its viewer through a nostalgic journey with science and is permeated with references to Spielberg, Carpenter, Cronenberg, and Hughes classics, melted into the pop hits of the 1980s. The creative director of Imaginary Foxes, Michael Doucherty, states that the Duffer

brothers "were looking for something that felt the 80s and tapped into this nostalgia by using that typography"(Blake Web). According to Kyla McCarthy,

The 2016 Netflix series *Stranger Things* exemplifies this consumerist convergence through its use of consumer artifacts from the 1980s, which help define the show as geek metafiction and also facilitate nostalgia for a specific brand of mediated past. If *Stranger Things* and its popular media contemporaries indeed recall 1980s geek culture through consumer goods, then they also reveal how American consumerism shapes individual identities and collective memory. (664)

The series is set in Hawkins, an imaginary town in Indiana that facilitates a commodious space for the creation of Schwartzian frames, which can be broadly divided into two, the conspiracy theories on human experimentation and American hatred towards the Soviet Union which characterise the Cold War paranoia of the 1980s. The plot revolves around a group of teenagers: Michael and Nancy Wheeler, Dustin Henderson, Lucas Sinclair, Will and Jonathan Byres, Steve Harrington, and Max Mayfield. Along with their family, they are unexpectedly convoluted in events beyond their comprehension. It also follows a bildungsroman narrative pattern in depicting the formative phases of its teenage protagonists. The prime protagonist of the series is Eleven, who is a genetically mutated human being with telekinetic power. She is a product of scientific research conducted at Hawkins National Laboratory, which is operated under the United States Department of Energy.

Duffer brothers have made staggering efforts to study the costumes, hairstyles, music, television shows, and vehicles that are featured in the series as indisputable replications of the trendiest fashion of the 1980s, satisfying the nostalgic aspiration to relive the time. The references are amalgamated into the narration of the story. Season one of the series begins and ends in a game of *Dungeons and Dragons*, a geek cultural reference from the 1980s placed in the basement of the Wheelers, who represent the suburban high-class nuclear family. The Wheeler's basement is a convergence point of the group where many relevant plotlines are revealed. Nevertheless, the action of the series unfolds in the house of the Byers, who are, in contrast to the Wheelers, economically unprivileged. The suburban cultural and economic differences can be observed through a comparative study of the costumes of Karen Wheeler and Joyce Byers.

The second season breaks the dominating low-angle shots of Hawkins Laboratory in the first season to replace them with eye-level shorts of Sam Owens, who replaces Dr. Brenner. Hawkins Laboratory is endowed with a humanist relatability in the second season, thus providing a space for another dominating, negative power structure. USSR takes this space of dominating, negative power structure in the third season which begins with a panoramic shot of a Russian facility and a close-up shot of the Russian flag, flying the wind. The scene is followed by a montage of different shots from Hawkins, ending in a dropped American flag. The season has a newly constructed 'Star Court' mall, under which an illegal Russian facility operates, as the locus of action. The emerging popularity of shopping malls in the United States is wistfully described by Kenneth T. Jackson, "the Egyptians have pyramids, the Chinese have a great wall, the British have immaculate lawns, the Germans have castles, the Dutch have canals, the Italians have grand churches. And Americans have shopping centers" (111). He traces the growth of socio-economic implications of American shopping centres in his essay, "All the World's a Mall: Reflections on the Social and Economic Consequences of the American Shopping Center." The season brings every character to the mall for the final fight, thus relocating the centre of the action from private spaces to public spaces. The fourth season moves out of Hawkins as the Byers leave for California. It brings out the urban and suburban conflicts that place Eleven in a bleak predicament. It also incorporates the soviet paranoia through a parallel narrative that takes Joyce

Byers and Murray to Russia. Following the methodology of the first three seasons, the fourth season also brings all the characters to Hawkins by the end of the season.

The cultural references of the 1980s are not limited to the storyline but have dealt with astounding details in costumes, hairstyles, automobiles, streets, and background music. The significant change in Nancy's hairstyle from high school to her career as an aspiring journalist mirrors that of other young American women of the time. Sarah Hindgaul, the hair stylist of *Stranger Things* for eight years, elaborately defined the characters through the fashionable hairstyles of the 1980s. Eleven's (Millie Bobby Brown) buzz cut in the first season and short hair in the second and third is followed by an antiquated style of long curls and bangs in the fourth season. Her transition from a superhero to a bullied teenager struggling to adapt to the urban culture of California is represented through the evolution of her hairstyle. In season four, she returns to the buzzcut as she regains her powers. The volume of Nancy Wheeler's (Natalia Dyer) hair increases through the season to give her a rugged appearance. Dustin's (Gaten Matarazzo) curls and Steve Harrington's (Joe Kerry) glam rock hairstyle are in coherence with their characters and the popular fashion of the 1980s. (Richards). A similar approach is made in appropriating the costumes of the characters. Nancy is often portrayed in serious, yet bright-colored stripes, turtle neck blouses, and stiff skirts authenticating the character as an inspired young American woman. Will, Jonathan, and Joyce Byers often appear in shabby clothes which they exchange with each other. The T-shirts and jeans acquire an improved quality as they move to California, insinuating an increase in income and cultural differences between urban and suburban towns.

There is ample reference to the popularity of *The Terminator* and the growing interest in science fiction writers such as Vonnegut. Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Bill are ardent fans of *Dungeons and Dragons*. They also dress up as Ghostbusters for Halloween, which is yet another pop culture reference. Pop music becomes a platform for characters to blend in with each other. The series also features the 1985 American science fiction film *Back to the Future* in season three. Pop music of the 1980s has a salient role in reproducing retro culture.

Season one of the series centers around the missing Will Byers, who is trapped in a sinister, other world dimension called 'the upside down'. Will clings to The Clash's "Should I Stay, or Should I Go?" to maintain his composure when his life is jeopardised, foreshadowing Max in season four. Max is pulled back into reality with the help of her favorite piece of music, "Running Up That Hill" by Kate Bush. Dustin Henderson is forced to sign his version of the title song of the 1984 movie *Never Ending Story*, at an inappropriate time, causing a humorous effect intensified by pairing it with an apprehensive monster chase shot. Season four also features Eddie Muson shredding the song "Master of Puppets" by the rock band Metallica in the penultimate moment of his death. The series chronologically places the popular punk rock band The Clash, Kate Bush, and the heavy metal band Metallica in the series, to indicate the progressive timeline of the series along with the character formation of the protagonists. The Duffer Brothers give out a long list of movies, television shows, and games that helped "*Stranger Things* use objects within its diegetic and cinematic style to recreate the feeling of watching a film like *Alien* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* for the first time" (McCarthy 666).

The title of *Stranger Things*, 'ITC Benguiat', has sinister-looking block letters inspired by the cover pages of books by Stephen King (Ferria). The characterisation of the protagonists in *Stranger Things* has a close resemblance to the characters from Spielberg's *ET*. The first season also includes a bicycle chase, which is a direct reference to a similar shot from *E.T.* (Tyler Web). The Duffer brothers have also incorporated popular cultural artefact as a background for the blooming friendship of the young adult protagonists. While the friendship between Mike, Luke, Dustin, and Bill is founded upon their combined love for the game *Dragons and Dungeons*, a new member joins them with a growing interest in video games. Max Mayfield impresses the team with

her high score in the game *Dragon's Lair* and her vogue skateboard. She befriends Eleven through an accidental sleepover, during which Max introduces Eleven to the *Wonder Woman* comic books.

While pop culture references have, to a great extent, helped in placing the series within the nostalgia of the American and world populations, it is the Soviet paranoia that legitimises the contemporary relevance and renewed interest in the series. Though the hints of Soviet advancement are laid out in the first season, it is in the third season that they become the centre of the plot. By the third season, the Cold War fear of illegal human experimentation is replaced by an impending soviet invasion. The change in power relations is brought out through a change in camera angles. The narration of the story in the series is dominated by immersive over-the-shoulder shots, which contribute to identification with the characters. The authoritative figure of the town chief, Jim Hopper, is shown through portrait shots in the first series, facilitating an alienation with the character, while Mike, Dustin, and Nancy are often portrayed in first-person narration through over-the-shoulder shots. The first season also includes low-angle shots of the Hawkins Laboratory, indicating its looming dominance upon the town. The introduction of Dr. Brenner includes a ground-level shot, slowly revealing his face through a low-angle shot, which places him as the primary villain of the first season. In the fourth season, Dr. Brenner walks down the stairs to stand at eye-level with Eleven, thus deauthorising his dominating character. Dr. Brenner, who is introduced as an evil scientist experimenting on children, is venerated as an anti-hero in the subsequent episodes. The characterisation of Dr. Brenner deconstructs and disorients the detrimental memories of human experimentation in America during the cold war.

Season three characterises the Red Army as a spitting image of their characterisation in American history books, not excluding the 'elephant', a notorious torture device used by them through a subplot featuring Jim Hopper.

This Jim Hopper subplot shows the audience the horrors of Russia's prisons. This plot presents the impressions of prisoners being treated harshly like slaves who deserve to die and several scenes showing the violence of the prison guards on Jim while being interrogated about his friend Joyce Byer in the third season of *Stranger Things*. The highlight of the depiction of the Russian character as a party with bad intentions is to reveal research on the terrible monster "Demogorgon" in *Stranger Things* that has appeared since its first season. We can assume that the Russians are deliberately keeping the monster for later testing. This little depiction is enough to allow the audience to be furious. Jim Hopper, who unexpectedly managed to escape from a Russian prison, suddenly wanted to crush the Demogorgons instead of escaping and flying to America when the opportunity was at hand. Through this, The Duffer Brothers seem to give the impression that the bad and unwanted things in the future tend to be caused by Russia, while America comes to save the world. (Ayu Web)

The Duffer brothers have recreated a suburban American town of the 1980s through popular cultural references, hairstyle, costume, and appropriate characterisation. They framed the science fiction plot of *Stranger Things* into pop culture, keying the memories of Cold War paranoia and conspiracy theories to the contemporary scenario of anti-Russian sentiments reignited due to the current war with Ukraine. The Cold War frame of soviet peril is retained through such an antagonistic depiction of Soviet military research. Jason Landrum observes in his essay "Nostalgia, Fantasy, and Loss: *Stranger Things* and the Digital Gothic" that,

Set in the Reagan 1980s and during the waning days of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the series invites viewers to see the Cold War's haunting fallout on our contemporary twenty-first-century culture and politics. As the monster unleashed from the

scientific overreach at the Hawkins National Laboratory, the Cold War operates like a repressed historical referent standing ready to always return as a reminder of why we live the way we do now. (142)

While the MCU series *Miss Marvel* actively speaks against the growing tendencies of islamophobia and suspicion against the Muslim community around the world, *Stranger Things* upholds the ruthless image of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and scientific experiments. Though the dual perception might seem unrelated, it can be paralleled with the foreign policies of the United States. With the unprecedented growth of Eastern powers like Russia and China, western supremacy is jeopardised and requires cultural reintegration. *Stranger Things*, as a product of the popular culture industry, has the power to invoke this reintegration. The researcher does not believe that a single series can change the thought pattern of a generation, but it can contribute to the massive efforts taken by the Western culture industry to invoke the Cold War paranoia of the East gaining power. America considers Pakistan an ally in its stand against India and China. Its policies are in favour of protecting this age-old alliance, as are its cultural industries. By giving Kamala Khan a similar template to that of one of the strongest Avengers, Captain Marvel, the MCU is vouching for the migrant Muslim community and their equality, which can impact the global perspective. Both series have thus played into and within the cultural memory of the American as well as the world populations to frame and key their plots to suit the contemporary national requirements.

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