



HORROR THROUGH THE AGES

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From the penny dreadful style of Gothic literature of the Victorian era to the movies of today with multi-million dollars of budget - horror has come a long way. From then to now, the one thing that has remained constant is the love and admiration for this genre. That shudder in our hands as we turn a page or the grip on our seats as we see something on that screen that we wish we didn't - are all products of the same thing, a well-executed crescendo to a horror driven plot.

To have an insight to how horror adjusts itself to the changing times, we need to first ask ourselves the simple question - "Why do we like being scared so much?"

There are many things that keep us glued to a plot that is meant to repulse us - the main reason being the adrenaline rush that comes with facing your fears. Our brain likes to take the easy way however, by preferring fiction over real life when it comes to it. We enjoy the idea of being in danger in the comfort of a much more secure reality. The more engrossing and atmospheric the story is, the easier it is for us to construct a fictitious universe around it with believable frights and captivating terrors.

To make a story that will be able to tap into our dormant fears, the storyteller has to first identify the things that scare us. And this is where the change in this genre comes from. We are not scared of the same things that someone from the 60's was scared of. The first known endeavours in the horror genre is believed to have come from the "penny dreadful", a cheap form of literature that was accessible to a

large crowd and resorted to exuberant over-the-top stories to draw in its audience. A common premise prevalent in them was the Gothic theme. A ball gown donned mistress in an isolated castle, an eerie path haunted by a fallen soldier - these were the perfect recipes to conjure up a horror story of then. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Bram Stoker's Dracula are two notable examples of such work.

As the years passed and World War II

struck, the horrors of real life finally caught up to the monsters in the books. The fear of nuclear warfare stemmed the next stage of horror, the fear of an abomination created by radiation or such extremities. This was also the time when the movie industry was buzzing in its growth spurt. Movies about unstoppable disfigured monsters wreaking havoc drew in the youth like nothing before. We went from the fear of a spectre or an unseen calamity to visual and

gory monsters. Slashers and teen horrors followed to capitalise on the thrill seeking youth with titles such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Halloween.

If we look at horror from the perspective of our own subcontinent we see the abundant use of folktales and local fables which is comparable to the Gothic literature of the West. They had their Headless Horsemen while we had our *Rakkhosh Khokkosh*. But since we were never in fear of a nuclear warfare and Bengalis not being particular admirers of gore, horror based around folktales persisted while being marginally influenced by western literature.

So what does horror have in store for us in the near future? Well to know that we need to first realise what we're afraid of now. The romanticism around castles and knights has faded a tad bit and abominable monsters don't shock us anymore. But the fears have most certainly not left us. Even with the blue tint of social network in our lives we're afraid of being alone, under the comfort of all the technology that makes our lives easier we're afraid of not being in control, in the tangled web of the internet we're afraid of losing our way. Quite possible for horror to dabble in these fears or perhaps it will take a route that we haven't foreseen.

Whatever road it takes towards its constant evolution, one thing that is certain is that horror will always be there for us when we need to set our synapses buzzing with the bittersweet thrill of peril.

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