HINDI FILMS: PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIMS AS 'OTHER' IN 21ST CENTURY HISTORICALS

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Introduction

This research article investigates how Muslims are often shown as suspicious people and symbolically represented as 'others' in medieval historical films released in the 21st Century and deals with the otherization and stereotyping of medieval period in cinema. Nevertheless, to understand a film and its content, one should focus on the political and social milieu in which the film has been made, which can help us understand the reasons behind imagined stereotyping. Gerd Baumann said on ethnicity, "Because you differ in looks, you must differ in thinking." this becomes suitable here. It is claimed that Muslims must be distinct because they are frequently perceived as 'other' because of how they behave and look from a Western perspective. This Euro-centric perspective is also reflected in Hindi films, where the filmmaker constantly imagines and stereotypically represents one religious community. After independence, the important aspect common to many Hindi films on medieval period was that the Indian 'historicals' were merely the stories created for people influenced by the socialist and pluralist ideals of Nehruvian philosophy. This representation shifted towards fundamentalism and antagonistic films after 1990 with the arrival of liberalization.From 2010 onwards, films like Padmaavat(2018) by Sanjay Leela Bhansali or Panipat (2019)by Ashutosh Gowariker, and even Tanhaji(2020) by Om Raut all have been made in more politically polarized times. Thus, they are bitter while dealing with the Muslim characters who subsequently communalize the past with the modern perception. Janisaar (2015) is the only film with an exception in which the Hindus and Muslims fight together against the cruelties of the British Empire.

Literature Review :

In the last few years, film studies have become popular and gained importance in academics in India. The audio-visual media is increasingly filling the void between the quest for literacy and post-literacy. The Polish cinematographer Boleslaw Matuszewski, a co-worker of the Lumière brothers during the 1890s, published a booklet Une nouvelle source de l'histoire (The New Source of History) in 1898. In this text, he suggested that film

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could offer a source for historical research and a suitable medium for historical narration. From there on, historians started analyzing the relationship between the content and form of history writing. Scholars such as Louis O. Mink and Hayden White focused on the significance of the narrative in 'historical enterprise.' It is the responsibility of social scientists to think beyondwritten documents. Sorlin expressed his feelings, "Historians must take an interest in the audio-visual world if they are not to become schizophrenics, rejected by society as the representatives of an outmoded erudition." In this context, films and their relationship with history have attracted rich scholarly debate and research.

Pierre Sorlin defines and categorizes films as 'historical films or history films' based on their characters, dialogues, and representation of the past. The genre-based criticism of films discusses what are called 'history films or historical films.' These films are theorized as being based on 'historical events' or 'historical personae.'

Sometimes, a 'history film' deals wilfully with a particular past, and the audience's opinion of its depiction may differ from the filmmaker's intention and portrayal. The filmmaker also chooses to represent history on the screen to articulate a 'new' language of desire vis-à-vis the cinematic apparatus. The historical film, in short, makes a distinct break with normative expectations of realism and transparency of the text and strains toward the grand, the opulent, and the classical. These studies of historical films warn us against searching for a "truthful' or 'accurate' rendition of the past. Instead, they reiterate that popular films have a unique relationship with history. Henceforth, these films based on history recreate their history for people.

Films that were made after 2010 explicitly underline the idea of otherness. Therefore, an essential aspect of this discussion is the image of the 'other' built through many stereotypes about medieval period and Muslims. Stereotypes often constitute learned behaviour and are unconsciously activated generalizations, including commentary traits, performance, abilities, interests, physical characteristics, and expected role behaviours. H. Bhabha defines the term stereotype in particular and argues that "Stereotyping, in particular, is based on selective perception and information and consequently results in the biased assessment of others." In the colonial setting, Bhabha submits that "the stereotype is the major discursive strategy of colonial discourse; it is a form of knowledge that oscillates between what is already known and what is always in place, and something which must be constantly and anxiously repeated to sustain its credibility." Stereotypes are sometimes overgeneralized, inaccurate, and resistant to new information, but they can sometimes be accurate, too. Based on these definitions, Medieval 'irrationality' became a stereotypical notion informing the portrayal of every aspect of medieval life, from sensual love affairs to

the transactions of the despotic state. From the early period, films were made on numerous stories of Hindu social life that helped to set a Hindu pattern of social life for the entire country, with the result that people never had a chance to know how our Muslims lived behind the veil. Kaushik Bhaumik mentioned that in the context of Bombay cinema, the term "Oriental" is used for a particular cinematic mode of address that utilizes the spectacle of adventure against a semi-historical setting marked by a particular configuration of dress, décor, action, and sexuality that evoked, in most cases, the Islamicate atmosphere of bazaar, towns and cities.

The Medieval Past in Hindi Cinema

The Indian subcontinent is one of the ancient civilizations' cradles, offering enormous ethnic, cultural, and communal diversity. A particular religion's interpretations are frequently inadequately portrayed due to the region's complicated religious environment. The conflicting media portrayals of these religions take on fascinating dimensions thanks to the two fundamentally opposed theological dogmas of monotheism and polytheism in the two most widely practised in the region-Islam and Hinduism. Indian Hindu revivalism has transformed public perceptions of the minority religion in the wake of the Hindutva rebellion and given rise to deceptive propaganda, which may not have existed in a country with a secular tradition for years in post-independence India. The Hindu majoritarianism escalated after the Babri Masjid demolition (1991) and Hindutva steadily tried to replace secularism as the preferred ideological configuration of the Hindu middle classes. Politically, this manifested in support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over Congress. Sumaiya Ahmad pointed out that in the wake of the 'Babri Masjid' episode, the entire nation was seized with a communally sensitive portrayal of Islam as the invader's religion. Subsequently, the mass psyche was assaulted with various anti-Islam projections, which stirred up hysteria against and even for Islam. The effects of the World Trade Center attack on 9/11(2001) have been extensively acknowledged.

The idea that the war on terrorism has included the entire world comes together in global politics. After that, most Western countries charged Muslims, regardless of gender as terrorists. The anti-corruption movement (2011) was led by Anna Hazare, to which Aamir Khan was one of the first Bombay actors to pledge support publicly. After all, Brand Aamir was wedded to a middle-class vision, which disparaged politics as the incubator of conflict, divisions, compromises, and corruption. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) eventually became the political vehicle for this voice. It is crucial to remember that the context in which feature films have been made has had a significant social impact. Cinema offers viewpoints on people's cultural and traditional habits and practices in addition to telling stories. Robert

Brent Toplin points out that though people mostly think of feature films as 'popular entertainment,' history-oriented movies sometimes impact public attitudes and behaviour. Thus, films should figure prominently in discussions about the past. Similarly, Justin Smith opines that films never exist in isolation and are always related to the broader cultural output of an era.

In the recent past, animosity towards Muslims and the normalization of hate proliferated several issues that arose in India, like Love Jihad and Ghar Vapsi, Hijab banand anti-conversion regulations being implemented to stop 'Good Hindus' from being 'Muslim Others.' Due to these circumstances, Muslims undergo a cultural identity crisis as they attempt to fit into a country where Hindus are the majority. This problem is exacerbated when the majoritarian system demonizes and "ghettoizes" them. It is difficult to repress any religion in a country where it is legal to practice and disseminate. The otherization of Muslims in Indian Hindi films is visible. From the early days of Hindi films, several movies have shown Muslims in stereotypical ways, frequently clothed in traditional Islamic costumes and acting in overtly religious ways, even in open, secular areas. This portrayal has contributed to the ideological construction of Muslims as aliens, which has become ingrained in people's minds. Muslims are typically portrayed in Hindi films as having beards, evil stares, and wearing Kurta pyjamas. Muslim diets are typically restricted to meat consumption in films. Nandita Das explained that "conventional cinema shows different representations of Muslims based on the popular perception of the community. Over the years, Islamophobia and the marginalization of Muslims have influenced the decisions of producers and directors to exclude and portray Muslim characters". Ravi Vasudevan emphasizes the shift, as Bollywood has decided to tackle Islamophobia in its films, even though this was not always the case. In the 1960s or the post-independence era, films like Amar, Akbar Anthony and Mughal-e-Azam, which were deftly produced, captured the nation's secular and national spirit and the post-Partition socio-political concept of communal peace.

Jaanisaar (2015) by Muzaffar Ali, with Pakistani actor Imran Abbas Naqvi playing the main character of Raja Amir Hayder, a prince from a princely state, is a period drama set in 1877 and a few flashbacks with the 1857 movement, the first struggle of India for independence. The film revolves around the romantic relationship between Noor, a tawaif and the prince. Noor's lineage is linked to Wajid Ali Shah's ex-Courtesan wife, Begam Hazarat Mahal, who led the 1857 movement in Lucknow. In the climax,the English-educated prince also participated in the freedom fight against the British with Mohsin Sahab, a revolutionary leader of the group. Ruth Vanita points out an interesting fact about the film: a group of courtesans, clad in black and led by the Noor, recites soz-khwani(laments) at

Muharram, having closed the Kotha for the period. This was a common practice in Shia-dominated cultures such as Lucknow but was not depicted in any film before this one. Jaanisaar is one of the rare films depicting Tawaif, who is also the heroine making paan, which is generally not portrayed in other courtesan films as that work is considered beyond her status. The film portrayed Muslims as the Landlords and the Raiyat as 'Hindu,' and both came together against the British power. The film relates to one of the princely states of the United Provinces, where it denounces that Muslims only help Muslims - as the Muslim protagonist is seen helping the Hindu raiyat. The film also shows the elite culture and traditions where the concerns regarding religion and race take a back seat and their class becomes the common identifying feature.Recently, it has begun to rewrite well-known historical events, casting a Hindu as the virtuous protagonist and a Muslim as the evil.

The Padmaavat (2018) by Sanjay Leela Bhansali serves as an illustration of this rewriting. The poetry that inspired this movie, Padmaavat, deviates from Malik Muhammad Jayasi's original compositions. In this film, Maharawal Ratan Singh, the "Good Hindu King," is pitted against Sultan Alaudin Khilji, the "Muslim Other." They only have one thing, Rani Padmini, common as their love interest. However, the two go about their desire for her in remarkably different ways. Rani Padmini was Ratan Singh's second wife, which was highlighted in the film.

The initial scene, in which Khilji is seen deceiving his wife on the wedding night, makes it clear how different they are from one another. His first scene introduces him as a sadistic, misogynistic dipsomaniac who commands a band of masked marauders and engages in a range of typically non-consensual sex acts with women. It is problematic for a Muslim to perform on the main stage because it encourages the audience to stereotype Muslims based on their behaviour. He displays his "wildness" with various dance moves and by ravaging portions of flesh and chewing them off the bone. His solitude is heightened by suggesting he is homosexual and attracted to the general, Malik Kafur. This relationship was judged aberrant at the time of his release. However, it is noteworthy that Marshalness, a transgender marshal, is also portrayed. Khilji is portrayed as having matted hair, hungry eyes, and shabby clothing to make Muslims appear untidy and repulsive.The use of spectacle and the representation of characters in popular memory are characteristic of historical films. As in the case of films like Padmavat, questions over historical accuracy become contentious fields for ideologically variant representations and reconstructions of the past.

On the other hand, Raja Ratan Singh is highlighted as a good, honourable man whose valour has no bounds. Khilji's affection and love for Rani Padmini are pure, contrasting

with his sexified longing. Furthermore, Ratansen and Padmini's polygamous union, regarded as the model of love, is utterly ignored. This implied approval of Ratan Singh's polygamy exemplifies a bias towards Islam, as it was uttered during a tremendous political hysteria about the alleged demographic threat Muslims presented to Hindus due to their polygamy and "Love Jihad."

The war between Rajput chieftains and their houses is unimportant in the film. In contrast to the text's claim that the Rajputs were in strife with one another, the representation of these Hindu princes as a family and a clan evokes a feeling of Hindu "oneness." The movie can deviate from the book's plot since Raja Ratan Singh is killed on the battlefield by the neighbouring Rajput ruler of Kumbhalner, Raja Devpal. Devpal was envious of Ratan Singh's wealth and riches and lusted after Padmini's beauty. In the movie, Khilji, not Devpal, is depicted as having murdered this fair ruler.

Nevertheless, the climactic act of Jauhar is alarming. Rani travels to a fire pit with thousands of Rajputana women to perform "Jauhar." Jauhar portrays the "honour" of thesewomen who sacrificed their lives rather than submit to the enemy to uphold their beliefs. The "honour-shame martyrdom" mentality that causes people to commit suicide is lauded rather than condemned. The glorifying of Jauhar, a traditional Hindu rite, while advancing the stereotype that Muslims are lusty, bloodthirsty, and morally bankrupt, further marginalizes a group with a minority position in the nation and elevates Hindu sentiments.

The film Panipat (2019) , directed by Ashutosh Gowarikar and based on the Third Battle of Panipat (1761), is historically reconstructed. In this movie, Sanjay Dutt, a well-known actor in mainstream films, plays Ahmad Shah Abdali, who established modern Afghanistan and is affectionately referred to as "Baba" in that nation. He is paired with actor Arjun Kapoor, who is relatively young as Peshwa Chief Sadashiv Rao. Rao leads the Marathas and is portrayed as a man of valour, while Abdali, wearing a black robe, is depicted as a vicious bloodsucker in charge of a regiment of ravenous Afghans. The filmmakers' depiction of the (Hindu) Marathas as "uber-macho" suggests that they intended to give them a competitive advantage over the drab, elderly (Muslim) Afghans. In reality, Abdali was only eight years older than Sadashiv Rao Bhau; hence, this interpretation is not historically accurate. In the introduction of Peshwa, the Maratha are portrayed in a masterfully orchestrated battle sequence in a perfect setting, in contrast to Abdali's introduction, which begins with a violent knife fight in his court. The Marathas' designation of Abdali as a "ghusbaithia" only supports the script's repeated assertions that he wanted to govern and conquer India. Abdali did not desire it; his numerous excursions to India were only conducted to search for the money in this region's geography, which was then brimming

with it.

The presence of women in such historical dramas is essential. One of its objectives is to enhance general impressions on the audience of the Marathas and the phenomenon of a "Good Hindu." The viewers have a more negative opinion of the other side because it is evident that there are not enough women in the room to support a family. This depiction contributes to the audience's erroneous belief that Muslims are radicalized extremists willing to die for Islam. Last but not least, although the Third War of Panipat was not fought to save motherland India but rather for the Maratha Empire, the Marathas are given the spotlight in the movie as the "real" winners and are portrayed as defending their homeland. Even though the Afghan victory is a well-known truth, it is important to note the overt semiotics in each of these works, from using a low camera angle to create a perilous image of Muslims to the decision to dress them in dark colours. On the other hand, Marathas are recorded in a happy, positive environment to further boost their appeal to the general audience. Similar to the components mentioned above, the directors' underlying saffronizing intention is tough to overlook due to the juxtaposition of the scary background score with the Hindus' triumphant song.

Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior (2020) is a film based on the Marathas and their relationship with the Mughals. Mughals were portrayed as outsiders in the film, and the villainous Udaybhan Singh Rathore, played by Saif Ali Khan, is depicted as a henchman of Aurangzeb. This is one of the rare occasions where Mughal ruler Aurangzeb is portrayed in a Hindi film. Tanhaji draws attention to a particular feature of 'Hindu' nationalism and militaristic glory, which Sinhagarh (1933) from Prabhat Studio also engages on the one occasion when Tanaji Malusare ardently defends his king Shivaji as the emblematic icon of 'Hindu' nationalism with the song 'Tyachi Kirti Saarya Jagat.' In reality, social harmony during the Mughals was normal in north India in which Sufi saints played a significant role. Muzaffar Alam's work on the significance of the Chisti-Naqshbandi debate in shaping Mughal polity in South Asia is well known. Because the current political environment is crucial in understanding the past, the film shows more conflict and less social harmony in the Maratha-Mughal relationship.

Conclusion

The cinema of India has gone through many stages, each providing a distinctive viewpoint on the same subject. Religion and religious people were the main themes of the films made from2010 onwards,demonstrating the influence of the political and social environment. However, in recent years, a brand-new pattern has emerged: utilizing films that depict societal upheaval to fuel Islamophobia,eventhoughtheconflict was an essential

part of the historical past, whether sectarian, religious, or political. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for modern historians to bridge the gap between historical and popular histories since, if the general public accepts a projected notion as fact, what historians believe becomes obsolete on a social level. The medieval Indian history depicted in the movies Janisaar, Padmavat, Panipat, and Tanhaji is not a complete picture of the period. In its place, it reflects modern concepts and views imposed on the medieval past or one of the many strands of the medieval past arbitrarily selected in a particular context while ignoring the others.

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