

## Presentation of Islamic Symbols in Indian Cinemas a Critical Study

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### Abstract

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Cinema as a medium gained popularity in this country. This study examines the Indian film industry very often portrays the Islamic symbol with type caste image, which is negative; Muslims are being looked as distrustful people and are being symbolized as terrorists. Indian film industry adds fuel to the fire by making a lot of movies on Muslims and presenting them as terrorists and negative ones. Bollywood cinema also creates the stereotypical image of Muslim characters replete with peculiar forms of cultural symbols like 'beard' and 'caps' besides portraying the Muslims either as feudal landlords, villains and gangsters. The image constructions of Muslims in Bollywood cinema have far reaching effects in shaping the dominant discourse regarding Indian Muslims that is not restricted to only Indian population but it also crosses borders to reach the diasporic community for mass conservation. In such a situation, symbol regarding Muslims, which shapes the dominant political discourses of equating Muslims with the 'terrorist/anti-national Other'. This article critically study that Indian cinema specially, Hindi cinema misrepresented the Indian Muslims in terms of characters and protagonists. Hindi films have wrongfully portrayed the Muslims either as non- modern feudal characters or as anti-national, terrorist, villain, or anti-social characters. Moreover, the problem of an increasingly 'missing Muslim' can be found in an era of liberalization and globalization. This study is being carried out to scientifically and critically search that how and to what extent Indian Cinema is distorting and changing the Islamic symbol.

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**Keywords:** Cinema, Indian Film, Bollywood, Indian Muslim

### Introduction

The Indian sub-continent being one of the oldest cradles of civilization boasts of amazing ethnic, cultural and communal diversity.

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The mosaic of religions in this region is so complicated that often the interpretations of a particular faith get hostile representations. The interesting contrast of monotheism and polytheism in the two leading religions of the region, Islam and Hinduism, the two major contrasting theological dogmas further highlight the different perceptions and images of these religions in the media. Post-Hindutava rise, the Indian Hindu revivalism has distorted the minority religion's public image and has led to a devious propaganda which perhaps

was non-existent in a country with a secular tradition for nearly 40 years in post-independence India. The iconoclastic attempts to "reinvent Islam" as a fundamentally polarized ideology and inherently opposed to Hinduism and other allied religions has created an interesting perspective within the cross-section of the media. On one hand, the images are those of a secular and all-encompassing fabric of unity which allows several centuries of melting influences between two faiths. And on the other hand, there is a schism which reinforces the inherently distinct identity of the two religions and juxtaposes Islam as the "outsider's faith". In the wake of the 'Babri Masjid' episode, the entire nation was seized with communally sensitive portrayal of Islam as the invader's religion. Subsequently, the mass psyche was assaulted with an array of anti-Islam projections which stirred up the hysteria against and even for Islam.

This paper will reflect upon the existing dichotomy in understanding Islam and its depiction in the Indian mass-media, particularly films. The Indian Cinema and specially the Hindi films have captured Islam in its numerous forms. This paper will explore how these images have been both useful and harmful at the same time in endorsing the identity of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. Being the second largest faith in this part of the world, Islam has invoked many interpretations which have either led to public disharmony or the communal bonhomie. It is significant to note that these perspectives have shaped the lives of millions of people and have hugely impacted the understanding of Islam within the Indian cultural milieu.

This is an attempt to discuss how the Islamic fervor as reflected in the local mass-media shapes the cultural exchange between Islamic and non-Islamic communities in a culturally diverse India and how the context for meaningful co-existence emerges.

## **Cinema Culture**

Cinema as an art form not only reflects the society it is set in, but also acts as a reflector to that society some films leave their mark on society and society in turn, reacts to these films in a variety of ways. The key question, which is somewhat difficult to answer at times, is whether films influence society more than the other way round. The way certain characters are portrayed in films, and perhaps the consistency of this portrayed, may bring about changes in society's perceptions over a period of time.

## **Why to Study Cinema**

Cinema has been the most powerful medium since the early twentieth century. The images projected in cinema allow individuals to look into the workings of another family through a story line that lets them forget their own worries for a while. Films encourage people to look at events in a fresh manner, suggest possible solutions to their own problems, and confirm their views and perhaps, prejudices.

Going to the cinema may reflects a desire to pry into other people's lives and get the vicarious pleasure of gossiping without really losing anything of one's own. It is less dangerous without really losing anything of one's own. It is less dangerous than theatre because one can look in but cannot be looked at. It is always fun to watch or gossip about someone who is different, and to feel smug about oneself. Also, films provide a sense of fun and entertainment, especially in the case of Hindi films; the viewers also feel that their problems are not as bad as those of the people and screen. The yearnings that these films give rise to the audience reflect a psychological existence which is on the margins of the two utopias. Hence in order to be successful, popular films should ideally have everything, from the classical to the folk in terms of music and story from the sublime to the ridiculous in terms of execution, from the terribly modern to the improved traditional, from clearly written plots to those that never get resolved and from cameo roles to the stereotypical characters which never get developed.

Film relies on the mental state of the viewers, who are "trapped" in a dark hall. The employment of images, words and music together create an atmosphere that the audience absorbs in it. Each viewer may take home the same or different message after watching the film once or several times.

In addition, the viewer can look in and gasp at the culture, customs, civilization, dialogue and marvels of modern technology portrayed in the film and yet empathize at several levels with what is happening on the screen.

## Definitions

Film draws on other arts for its connotative power. Cinematic signs are of three orders:

1. **The Icon:** A sign in which the signifier represents the signified mainly by simulation of it i.e. its likeness
2. **The Index:** This measures a quality, not because it is identical but because it has an inherent relationship with it.
3. **The Symbol:** An arbitrary sign in which the signifier has neither a direct nor an indexical relationship with the signified.

## Symbolic Cinema

The symbol is alive only as long as it is pregnant with meaning. Whether a thing is a symbol or not depends chiefly upon the attitude of the observing consciousness; for instance, on whether it regards a given fact not merely as such but also as an expression, for something unknown. The definition of the cinematic image as symbol depends, therefore, on the observer's response. The same image could be a symbol for one person and a sign for another.

## Indian Cinema and Forms

There are many forms of India Cinema, ranging from the avant-garde and art house to the mainstream commercial ones and these latter are made in many languages, but the present article is concerned with the mainstream Hindi cinema produced in Bombay (Mumbai), which is now usually known as "Bollywood".

Hindi cinema genres are infamously fuzzy and are after regarded as '*Masala*' – that is a spicy mix of ingredients rather than a single genre – although there are generic groups recognized by the industry as well as by audiences. However biopic has been a rarely used term and is not widely known, the films being classed usually as "Historical".

In India cinema there is much overlap with other genres that have a quasi – historical nature, including the founding genre of Indian cinema, the mythological biopic that focuses on gods/goddesses and heroes /heroines mostly from Hindu mythology.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to examine the Islamic symbols in Indian cinema. It is widely and clearly observed that the world has been changed after 9/11 incident. If we look at the world politics, we get the impression that the entire world has been dragged in the war against terrorism. This war was started after the unforgettable incident of 9/11. Twin Towers of New York were been hit by 2 passenger plans. The responsibility of this incident was laid upon “Muslims” by the west. After that Muslims are blamed as terrorists all over the world. The wave of terrorism and the picture of Muslims as terrorist invaded the world almost at the same time Indian film industry took a benefit of this situation and they started to present Muslims as terrorists in their films. Movies were made on the subject of terrorism and only Muslims were shown as terrorists who were fostering terrorism not only in India but in the whole world. Indian film industry has also been showing the Kashmir freedom fighters as militants and terrorists.

There was a great deal of work done by Indian cinema on Muslims in general and Pakistan in particular showing them as terrorists who were involved in all sort of terrorists acts whether it is in India, Kashmir or elsewhere, Pakistan being a developing Muslim country and archrival of India is portrayed as the shelter provider to all the terrorists. Films, generally, have enormous impact on the societies. It gives birth to new trends, ideas and traditions etc. Films not only make the opinion but also reshaped it. Films reshape old trends, customs and traditions. If one idea prevails strongly in a society then it can be transmitted from one society to another. Among the film industries around the world, “Bollywood” is one of the famous and the strongest industry. The influence and strong impact of “Bollywood” has increased and almost reached at hegemonic level.

Bollywood is presenting Muslims as terrorists and portraying Islam negatively. World view about Islam and Muslims is not as good as it should be.

Bollywood has played a notable role in making this image more stronger along with the western media especially after 9/11 incident. It is assumed that if anyone wants to see the real face of India cinema, one has to randomly pick up few flicks of a decade and see the changes taking place in Indian cinema over a period of time. In this context the representation of Muslims is something interesting to focus. The portrayal of Muslim characters in Bollywood movies has witnessed an unpleasant change over the time scale. Form being '*Badshas*', '*Nawabs*' and aristocrats they are reduced to tramps and gun totting jihad is on the Hindi screen. Now the gradual but systematic portrayal of Muslim characters in the Bollywood films silently tells the story how Muslims have fallen places in the story how Muslims have fallen places in the Indian society. Since 90s the political agenda and policies of Indian government has affected the approach of Bollywood and a symbolic relationship between Muslims and terrorism has been established. In such movies, the villain is shown mouthing slogans against India, fighting for the cause of Kashmir and Islam, all the henchmen are gun totting bearded guys, wearing "*Shalwar Kamiz*" with a "*Scarf*" over the shoulders.

They are shown with blood shot eyes bursting at the seams with irrational anger. In contrast, the boss is dressed in typical priest clothing, a skullcap and a rosary in hands. He would first mouth some Arabic words and then demonstrates his senseless itch to destroy India. For the sake of financial and economic interests, Bollywood has started creating imaginary Muslim terrorist images to frightening level and the audience unwittingly is forced to share over loaded perspective of the filmmaker. If Bollywood movies are to be believed, then all Muslims are anti-national and their faith is an extremist ideology, which is a wrong perception.

Late 80s and early 90s was the time when Bollywood started to make movies on Kashmir issue. Therefore, it was the first time when freedom fighters of Kashmir were dubbed as militants. The Muslim freedom fighters were also introduced to the world as terrorists. At that time, such movies were made in which freedom fighters of Indian Kashmir were shown as militants, terrorists and as cruel people, who would capture Hindus or Indian soldiers torture them and demand for a separate home land. In many films it was shown that these terrorists demanded and struggled to free their jailed leaders (who were known as terrorists at world level) for example, shown in '*Roja*', '*Dil Jalay*', '*Qasam Hindustan ki*', '*Hina*', '*Mission Kashmir*', '*Mian Azad Hoon*' etc. After math the incident of 9/11, the word "terrorists" was glued to Muslims.

Taking advantage of this Bollywood film industry took the privilege of accusing Muslim as terrorists most of the time. This is the image which they have been portraying of Muslims especially since 9/11. A new opinion is trying to be made in the society by this film industry. Many movies also depict that the troublesome Muslims of India, more or less are supported by Pakistan. Pakistan also supports the militants of Kashmir. Many popular films were made on the negative image of Muslims like '*Bombay*', '*Fiza*', '*Anwar*', '*Ab tumharay Hawalay waton sathiyoo*', '*company*', '*under world*', '*Encounter*' etc. The attempt of Indian cinema about portraying Muslims as bad people is a serious matter. The issue was chosen for article because terrorism and Muslims are the burning issues especially after 9/11. The global media has been very critical on this issue. Bollywood is also playing an ample role to fuel the fire with regard to portraying Muslim image as terrorists. This study aim to investigate and criticizes, the attempts of Indian cinema whether or not it is portraying Muslims as bad people.

India has a big minority of Muslims who are living in India since thousands of years But now the Hindus are not tolerating, the Muslim presence in their homeland ,and they look at Muslims as terrorists, traitors and militants etc. even women and children are also included. However, it is portraying the Muslims like this, plenty of movies are made in which Muslims are shown as had people who are not faithful to their motherland and involved in fostering violence in Indian areas. The Hindu-Muslim hatred was increased after such films due to these films the society has cornered Muslims and brought them in a defending position.

The purpose of this study is to examine the image of Muslim in Indian Cinema. Especially after 9/11. Muslims are being presented negatively in Indian movies. The Indian movies have portrayed the Muslims negatively but this portrayal is more negative after 9/11. Muslims are shown as terrorists, disloyal and criminal people in Indian movies. This whole scenario changes the opinion of Indian society as well as other societies too. To understand the phenomenon of Muslim negative presentation, this study depicts that Islamic symbol in Indian Movies by presenting them as terrorists, traitors, cruel and disloyal with their homeland. In most of the movies of destruction, bomb blasts murdering government officials or high rank people. Muslims were also shown as gangster and under world mafia .some of the movies have also been studied qualitatively and some important findings have been revealed.

## The Muslim “Other” in Bollywood Cinema

The role of Bollywood films in fabricating the past by creating disjunctive images of Muslims and misrepresenting their actions as anti-national, as a part of its apologetics for the cultural agenda of the Hindutva forces, forms a significant component of what has been called a history war. In pursuit of its divisive engagement in this history war, Bollywood cinema has constantly perpetuated the cliché of the inherently arrogant Muslim and the supposedly tolerant Hindu.

This whole notion of the history war embedded in filmic narratives is rather a culture war and is based upon contesting notions of nationhood. It surfaced during the end of 20th century, when the partition of India gained centre-stage in public discourse, resulting in the emergence of the new genre of partition history. This new sub-field sought to critique the dominant Hindutva ideology, by powerfully interrogating the right-wing stereotype that Muslims alone were the

Perpetrators of communal violence; this historiographical shift was meant to provide a therapeutic history to demystify this myth.

Bollywood’s treatment of this new historiographical transition and of the emergence of the war of cultures divides Hindi films into four categories:

- **First**, there is the category of films which are grounded in the cannons of the left-liberal and secular cultural agenda and tend to present a critique of the divisive and extremist Hindutva nation-building project.
- **Second**, category of films tends to be more sympathetic to the whole idea of the cultural boundaries of nationhood, defined in terms of the Hindutva ideologues. Kamalhasan’s film *‘Hey Ram’* is one such instance which ingenuously projects a bold narrative of Muslim bloodlust and Hindu trauma, juxtaposed with the notion of Mahatma Gandhi’s politics of Muslim appeasement. Similarly, *‘Pinjar’* also attempts to glorify in a latent manner the dominant majoritarian notion in India that the Muslims are vindictive and barbaric. Identically, in non-Hindu plots, manicured minorities have prevailed. Minority characters dominate historical and Muslim social films. In films like *‘Barsaat ki Raat’*, *‘Mere Mehboob’*, *‘Ghazal’*, *‘Mere Huzoor’* and *‘Mehboob ki Mehndi’*, a stereotyped Muslim ambiance is presented. These films essentialise Muslims as feudal and, by implication, anti-modern.



Thus, Muslim portrayal in Hindi cinema has been communal. In average Hindi films portraying family drama, Muslim socials were shown as non-political and thus conveniently avoided the identity crisis of Muslims. This has been a safe choice given the Hindutva charges against minorities. This is the kind of cinematic realism that Bollywood has reflected. To broaden the purview of our explanation, let us take the case of the biggest blockbuster in the history of Indian cinema, *Hum 'Aapke Hain Kaun'*. At the overt level there is nothing even remotely political about the film. However, a meticulous reading shows that the film, released in 1993, when the Hindutva frenzy was at its peak, reflects its discourse, though in a highly intelligent and audience-friendly manner. This is stated with reference to the portrayal of the Muslim couple in the film. Although both husband and wife are doctors, they are defined in terms of their religion, not through their profession. They are marked as Muslims, not doctors. They are thus depicted in stereotypical terms, reciting Urdu poetry, doing the ritualistic salutation—*Adab*—and wearing the mandatory *Achkan* and *Gharara*, even while performing their duties in the hospital.

The set of films mentioned in this category serve the Hindutva ideologues in nurturing their nationalist grand strategy, albeit in entirely different ways. First, films like *Pinjar* engage the audience in a dialogical discourse between barbaric Muslims and harmless innocent Hindus. Presenting a kind of kaleidoscopic twist are films like *'Hum Aapke Hain Kaun'*, which does not blatantly deal with such a discourse. But, through subtle ways of projecting the Muslim other by presenting a stereotypical image, they merely end up concurring in the same dialogical discourse that films like *'Pinjar'* articulate. Thus the agenda of the discourses built into these films narratives is apparent. Through overt or covert means, a Muslim has to be dehumanized portrayed stereotypically and projected as the most dangerous enemy of the Hindus. This aptly fits into the nationalistic agenda professed by Hindutva ideologues and facilitates them in influencing mass opinion. It is in this manner that films act as catalytic agents in structuring the nature of popular culture.

- **Third** category of films that provides a wider canvas to this discourse and, here, the debate shifts towards a focus on a good Muslim and a bad Muslim embedded within the closed domain of the Hindutva ensemble. As a result of the Kashmir rebellion and the demolition of the *Babri Mosque* in the 1990s, the portrayal of Muslims in Hindi cinema witnessed an enhanced use of the subject of the threat of a Muslim terrorist. The mannerly Musalman produced by the secular Hindi films now had no place and was replaced by terrorists, who not surprisingly wear their identities on their sleeves while carrying out terrorist activities. Many of them wear the *salwar kameez*, sport *beards*, carry AK-47 rifles and use Arab scarves. With such projections, Bollywood wants to make sure that the religious identity of the terrorist is in no doubt to the audience. Starting with films like '*Roja*' (1992) and continuing to '*My Name is Khan* (2010)', in film after film, irrespective of the genre, the recurring image of the Muslim is that of a terrorist. In fact, so great has been the overkill that in the common consciousness Islam and terrorism overlap. This is facilitated through the process of framing the terrorist in a singularly religious idiom. It is his Muslimness—the mandatory *salwar kurta*, the beard, reading the *namaz*, etc—which is foregrounded. At the other extreme are the suave, successful, urbane, corporate executive types who are even more vicious, shown in films such as '*Fanaa*', '*New York*' and '*Kurbaan*'. So, like the devil, beware the Muslim, who can take any form.

By assigning such an intense sense of threat to the image of a Muslim, Hindi films have sociologically broadened the definition of Islamic terrorism. They have reduced the discursive space accorded to Muslims, making them more vulnerable to social ostracism, state violence and mob fury. Even when there is only the 'good Muslim' as in *My Name is Khan*, throughout the film he has to keep on proving that he is not a terrorist. But that is precisely the point. The vileness of the present discourse is such that it has Muslims forever on the defensive, which is precisely the agenda of Hindutva and all such forms of authoritarian ideology.

To carry forward the point, let us consider this. In the film '*Fanaa*' Zooni, a Kashmiri Muslim girl played by Kajol, is pictured as a patriot and a passionate Indian when she is shown killing her husband Rehaan, member of a Kashmiri militant outfit played by Aamir Khan. She does this to prevent him from completing the mission of delivering a detonator (electronic trigger device) for a nuclear explosive device that would be used by his terror outfit against India.

However, the entire film reflects to the audience very subtly the debate over a good Muslim and a bad Muslim in a totally different setting and in a perspective that insists that Muslims themselves must carry the onus of culturing themselves to be a good Muslim. The film throughout exhibits a Manichean divide between these facets of Muslims, while its denouement contains a message delivered by Zooni (Kajol), who is shown training her son how to be a good Muslim. This piece of the film again symbolises the extent of the hegemonic hold of the fascist Hindutva ideology upon Bollywood cinema. Similarly, this whole discourse is placed in another different terrain in *Kurbaan*, which deals with a very loaded subject: terror, Islam, America and the rest of the world. Here, Saif Ali Khan is a smooth-talking, handsome professor, who plays the role of an extremist who is part of a sleeper cell of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists hatching a plot to bomb the New York subway. Unlike the stereotypes, he is very polished and urbane, possessing all the essentialised features that collapse under the terminology '*Bad Muslim*', except for his attire. In this vein Vivek Oberoi plays the face of the moderate, liberal Muslim (the good Muslim), who seeks vengeance for his girlfriend's death. He plays the role of a news channel cameraman, Riyaaz Masood, who manages to infiltrate the sleeper cell and foil its plans.

Thus, the Bollywood film industry, a significant agent in shaping popular culture in India, has passionately endeavored to produce a nationalist cinema with an unflinching commitment towards the ideology of Hindutva nationalism. The notion of the bad Muslim as an affront to the nation (as in the case of Rehaan, played by Aamir Khan in *Fanaa*) as compared to that of a good Muslim (like Zooni in *Fanaa* or Riyaaz Masood in *New York*), who can be co-opted within the fold of the Hindutva ensemble, has become a popular symbol to validate this hegemonic nationalist agenda. Through such portrayals Bollywood seems to have discreetly woven into its narratives the popular slogan prevalent among the Hindu right's political parlance that 'all Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims'.

The acceptance by the audience of such a position is reflected in the popularity of films portraying a bad Muslim pitted against a good Hindu. In contrast there is no proper publicity for those films showing a bad Hindu rivaling a good Muslim. A fitting illustration of this is '*Parzania*', which approaches the whole question of a good Muslim and a bad Muslim in a very novel manner and forms part of our fourth categorization.

Unlike popular Indian national cinema, for the first time *'Parzania'* boldly portrays Hindutva's anti-Muslim rage and depicts the haplessness of the Muslims as a beleaguered and alienated minority. Its sharpness and penetrative way of narrating the plight of innocent Muslims being routed by the communally blinkered Hindus is evident from the fact that it was not allowed to be released in Gujarat:

- **Fourth**, Bollywood cinema has engaged in a 'presentist' use of history, reflecting upon the contemporary debate regarding national identity and the reconstruction of India's history. It has attempted to instill in India's collective memory the newly reconstructed divisive past propounded by Hindutva history, which marginalizes Muslims from the sphere of Hindutva nationhood.<sup>29</sup> Hence, noted scholars of Indian cinema such as Vasudevan and Chakrabarti have analyzed the forging of national identity in popular Indian cinema.<sup>30</sup> Both link Hindu nationalism to the culture promoted by Hindi cinema. Bollywood production teams swear by secularism, albeit their films promote communalism.<sup>32</sup> Hindi films often implicitly suggest that India is normatively Hindu. There are justifications that the Hindi film industry is a melting pot of cultures and an example of Indian secularism. But Hindi cinema is neither politically innocent nor conveys an unequivocal secularism.

The vicious nexus between nationalist cinema and expansion of Hindutva ideology thus plays a subversive role in engendering a sense of disembeddedness among Indian Muslims. It is the type of films discussed above under the second and third categories which have largely engaged in the divisive agenda of instilling such a kind of uprootedness. This sense of disembeddedness, uprootedness and alienation is generated in the context of their imagination of India as a homeland. Deconstruction of the spirit of these films, hence, will go a long way in facilitating the understanding of their impact upon the psyche of India's Muslim minority. Mainly because the message sent out by such films to this section of audience largely shapes the meaning of the concept of homeland in their imaginations. This is because of the overt projection of a Hindu-used notion of national identity in the context of Hindu India and a radical exclusion of the Muslim other from the fold of this dominant stream of identity construction that embodies the narratives in these films. All this tend to engender a fearful psychosis in the minds of Indian Muslims and signifies that the partition of 1947 in many senses is not yet over.

It is not behind us. Since the demolition of the '*Babri Mosque*' in Ayodhya, UP, on 6 December, 1992, the rise of the Hindu right in India, and the communal violence that followed when chants of '*Jao Pakistan Ya Kabrastan*' (go to Pakistan or your graves) rang out alongside attacks on Muslim communities across North India, the invocation of partition and Pakistan reacquired a sinister meaning for Muslim minorities in India. The Hindu right's repeated portrayal of Muslims as invasive outsiders tied to a militant monotheism and temple destruction combines with a notion that partition represented an inevitable parting of the ways of two incompatible religious communities.

### **Religion Symbol in Hindi Cinema**

Religion and nationalism have been central concerns of the Indian film industry from the very first film in 1913. Three genres that were established during the early days may be loosely labeled "religions" from their titles alone, the mythological, the devotional and the Muslim social. Through these genres, filmic ways of viewing religious symbols and practices became part of the visual culture of Indian cinema. Although they may have stirred religious sentiment among viewers, they were not regarded as promoting religious nationalism or separatism but were part of a wider Indian culture. While and more ostentatious. The heroine may prefer miniskirts to traditional Indian clothes, but when challenged to sing at college, choose a bhajan (devotional song) and wears a sari once married (*kuch kuch hota hain*, 1998)

The Gods may intervene in the film, whether in directly as in '*Hum Apke hain kaun*' ...!has a Muslim couple, a doctor and his wife, who visit the family, whose main function seems to be reciting poetry, a performative version of Muslimness. There are no characters who are only distinguished from the Hindu norm by their names. Only gangster movies show the communities working side by side in their aim to depict the underworld /mafia realistically (*Satya*, 1998), Christians are usually drinkers and small-time racketeers, although several films have shown Christian heroines romancing Hindus with no comment on this as an issue (*Mohammatein*, 2000 this was the most famously seen in Raj Kapoor's Seminal *Bobby*, 1973).

Sikhs are the closet a minority community on this as an comes to being non-per formative ,but they may also be figures of fun (as in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hain* ) although they are also shown as representing the Indian military ,as in *Border* (1997),which depicts their martial prowess yet it would bee stretching a point to argue that these manifestations of religiosity and Hindu Signs and symbols are symptomatic of the growing presence of Hindutva in Hindi cinema .Another category of films has ,however ,been more closely identified with such ideology ,namely ,those that can be described loosely as nationalist ,patriotic or historical and those that are overtly hostile to Pakistan .Terrorism and security of the Indian state after the assassinations of two prime ministers (Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Rajev Ganghi in 1991) and the long –running separist campaign in Kashmir and conflict with Pakistan .despite the problem s the Punjab faced in the 1980s over issues of separatism ,this cinema ,despite its predominantly Punjab personnel .

Hostilities between India and Pakistan have been central to their histories but only very recently have Hindi films mentioned Pakistan by name or shown agents of that state ,such as in since independence ,*Border* (J.P. Dutta , 1997) is set during the 1965 war with Pakistan but shows the Indian army's respect for Islam in the daring rescue of a Quran from a burning house .Such films may show Muslims in a negative light not because they are Pakistani Indian Muslims are shown positively ,as in '*Ghulam*' (1998),where a Muslim police officer complains that he is tried of proving his Indianness to the star ,Amir Khan ,a Muslim ,who plays a Hindu police officer. '*Gadar*' (turmoil ,2001),which is a Panjabi film in all but language ,has a dramatic scene where the Sikh hero goes to Pakistan after partition to try to persuade his in laws to allow his Muslim wife to return to India .Surrounded by the Pakistani army ,the hero is willing to convert to Islam but risks his life by refusing to praise Pakistan and curse India.

Hence Islamic symbolic movies like:

### **Fiza**

In the film, the protagonist Amaan under goes a significant masculinization (Dyerv1992).In the beginning we can see Amaan laughing and joking with his mother and his sister .He is interested in the aesthetic aspects of art and painting .We can also see him laughing. In these scenes ,the female side of Amaan is stressed ,and thus there is a 'feminization' of his body.

This means that Amaan/Hrithik Roshan with his masculine body but soft heart is the object of female erotic desire. Later he is even shown as a vulnerable man and as a victim. His laughing at the beginning of the film can be interpreted as a kind of passiveness and thus as a symbol of 'dangerous' feminization of Amaan /Hrithik Roshan, the hero is shown to have lost this ability to laugh in the middle of the film.

After Amaan returns to Bombay, he sees a comedian in a park. Instead of joining the laughing audience, he starts to fight two villains who process of Amaan's masculinization starts. This masculinization reaches its definitive climax when the male protagonist prepares himself for the jihad. Amaan can be seen performing martial arts as if he had not done anything else since his childhood. He is perfectly handling the '*nunchako*' (two sticks connected by a chain or a rope). This creates an aura of invulnerability and control. His muscles and physical abilities are the embodiment of masculinity (rajuliyat). Hrithik Roshan clearly follows the tradition of actors like Sylvester Stallone or *Anrold Schwarzenegger* especially when he wears same type of clothes, namely armless shirts, or the quasi-obligatory '*muscle shirts*'. Masculine control over his own body is further underlined by the black ninja mask, which plays an important role as a symbol for terrorists. Some other symbol for the Islamic masquerade of the *Mujahidun* are the '*kaffiyya*', the traditional Palestine head wear. They are, on the one hand a sign for the pan-Islamic solidarity, on the other hand, they are a symbol of the rebellion against injustice. By means of these symbols, the male protagonist undergoes a process of anonymization and dehumanization.

Not only does Amaan undergo this process, but so does the female protagonist, '*Fiza*'. After Amaan vanishes she is no longer enduring her role as a victim of male violence. She decides not to submit to her fate (qadar) like her mother does but starts actively searching for her brother. *Fiza's* masculinization is further illustrated when she is harassed by two villains and finds the will to fight them, saying that she is no longer a weak and uniformed (be-shurur) women. She even throws a bottle filled with acid at them. This masculinization is additionally seen in the clothes '*Fiza*' wears. At the beginning of the film, she is dressed in the traditional *Shalwar – Qameez*. Later during the search for her brother, she wears jeans and a trendy and fashionable leather outfit, and thus demonstrates that she wants to have the same freedom men have, even to flirt with whom she wants and when she wants.

The development of *Fiza's* character is foreshadowed by the choice of her name. In Arabic "*Fiza*" means wideness and openness, so perhaps is a symbol for her open-mindedness. This indeed is the description of *Fiza* at the beginning of the film. In Arabic the name normally is pronounced *Fida*, which echoes '*Fida*' which means 'to ransom' or devoting oneself to save another. It is this word which is used as a synonym for assassin or suicide attack in an Islamic context. In *Fiza* the female protagonist devotes herself to the search for her brother to preserve national integrity and finally sacrifices her personal happiness and that of the family by killing that brother.

The climax of *Fiza's* masculinization is finally reached when at the end of the film, she takes the machine gun and kills Amaan, who does not see any further positive possibilities in his life. The message of the film is that terrorism is the escalation and even exaggeration of masculinity. Aggression and violence proceed from male members of the Muslim community. The excessive life style of male Islam makers men, as well as women, victims. Out of the feeling of despair, women also undergo masculinization and commit acts of violence and destruction of the family is no longer durable. The implication is that with the destruction of the family, the survival of the whole nation is endangered. The film definitely offers no solution to the conflict, except escaping from the world by committing suicide which by the way, is forbidden in Islam.

## **Kurban**

'*Kurbaan*' is one of those rare movies where the Muslim actor, Saif Ali Khan, actually plays a Muslim. However, to my disappointment, the film is set in the backdrop of terrorism and loaded with Islam phobic stereotypes, something that is so typical in both Hollywood and Bollywood cinema whenever Muslims are portrayed. Saif Ali Khan plays Ehsaan, a university professor in India, who passionately falls in Love with a Hindu professor, Avantika, played by real-life girlfriend Kareena Kapoor. Their Love carries them overseas when Avantika receives a job offer to teach in the United States. After settling in a predominately Indian Muslim neighborhood, Ehsaan, upon Avantika's encouragement, applies to teach a class on "Islam and the modern world" at the same university. Ehsaan gets the job, Avantika gets excited, the two embrace, and they live happily ever after.



But wait; don't forget about the Muslims next door. The men are mostly bearded and all of the Muslim women are wearing the *Hijaab* (headscarf). Strict gender segregation rules are set in place when Ehsaan and Avantika visit Bhaijan, their elder Muslim neighbor. To say the scene was nauseating would be an understatement — it confirms every single stereotype a person may have about Muslim women: oppressed, secluded, and subservient to men. The eldest Muslim woman, Aapa/Nasreen (Bhaijan's wife), is the controlling one, she keeps the Muslim women in line and every time she speaks about Allah, she does so in the most ominous way possible. One of the wives, Salma, tries to express her frustration at how Muslim men don't permit women to work, but Aapa interjects and says Allah has "no greater duty" for Muslim women than to be a homemaker. Avantika, a Hindu woman, represents the contrast and is familiar to international non-Muslim audiences, especially in the United States: she is unveiled, progressive, a working woman, and unsettled by the restrictive atmosphere of her Muslim neighbors. Earlier in the film, we see some reluctance from her father when he meets Ehsaan, and while he says he prefers Avantika to marry a Hindu man, he does so in a friendly manner and eventually becomes open to the idea.

Salma's rebellious attitude brings deadly consequences. One night, Avantika looks out her window and sees Salma trying to escape in her husband's jeep, but she is slapped, back-fisted, and pulled back into her house by her spouse. Typical Muslim husband. Later, Avantika sneaks into Salma's house and overhears *Bhaijan* and the other Muslim male neighbors discussing their plan to blow up a flight carrying a U.S. delegation to Iraq. *Avantika* is startled when she finds the dead body of Salma and the Muslim men catch her spying on them. She runs back to her house, locks the door, and rushes into the arms of her husband. Ehsaan tells her there's nothing to be afraid of as he walks her back into the living room. Then Ehsaan says, "You all can come out now." The Muslim men reveal themselves out of concealment. Avantika's eyes fill with horror as she comes to the terrible realization that, yep, her husband is a terrorist.

See, Hindu women (or any non-Muslim woman), never get involved with a Muslim man. Wait, Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor are dating in real life. Never mind. But still, what gives? This is something that really offends me about the movie. Saif Ali Khan is a charming and good-looking Muslim man who teaches about Islam in a university, and he's a terrorist?

The film provokes suspicion about Muslims at almost all angles. Suspicion about Muslim Lovers/husbands/professors, like Ehsaan; about Muslim neighbors, like Bhaijan and company; and about Muslim women, who join their husbands in the plot to blow up a subway station at the end of the film. No matter how loving, intelligent, or kind they look on the surface, there is furious extremism boiling inside of them. And accompanying this suspicion is the ominous Middle-Eastern music that plays every time Muslims are on screen, as if every Muslim has some connection to the Middle-East, even if they're Indian and speak Hindi!

Enter the 'good moderate Muslim', Riyaz (played by *Vivek Oberoi*). We are introduced to him early in the film as a TV reporter. He returns from a trip to Iraq and tells his Muslim girlfriend, Rihana (*Dia Mirza*), who is unveiled and dressed in Western attire, a noticeable contrast to Aapa and the other Muslim wives, about how "Iraq is a mess." When Riyaz meets with his father in a restaurant, his father is disappointed with the U.S. news coverage in Iraq. What about the Iraqi civilian casualties, Riyaz's father asks. Riyaz defensively says, "Dad, we are Americans. That is the kind of fundamentalist mentality that has made things worse for all Muslims." Whoa, to speak about Iraqi casualties is a "fundamentalist mentality"? If that is the case, then the majority of the Muslim population (and anti-war activists) would fit that profile!

Riyaz is a superficial character. He is the super-patriotic, unrealistically pro-American character that is trying to speak for the majority Muslims, but fails. He fails because he tries to take on the definition of "moderate Muslim," the kind of Muslim that Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, Daniel Pipes and other Islam phobes fantasize about. The kind of Muslim who is only good because he is anti-Muslim. The '*moderate Muslim*' label is something a lot of Muslims are fed up with because it is generated by either Islam phobes or misguided individuals who have a very superficial understanding about Islam and Muslims in general. The term, '*moderate Muslim*' reinforces the idea that '*Islam has been hijacked*', or that the majority of Muslims in the world are hostile, violent, and oppressive. It also comes with unrealistic expectations and generalizations; for example, if a Muslim is anti-war and criticizes the Iraq war, s/he cannot be a '*moderate Muslim*' because, as Riyaz establishes in the scene with his father, that is a 'fundamentalist mentality'. In other words, the '*moderate Muslim*' is a very narrow, tight box — anyone outside of that box is perceived as suspicious, dangerous, anti-American, and even violent.

Riyaz becomes a prominent character once his fiancé, Rihana, dies in the plane bombing orchestrated by Ehsaan et al. Riyaz gets in touch with *Avantika* and comes up with a plan to join Ehsaan's terrorist group. During a security check, *Riyaz* is "randomly searched" by a security guard and shows some resistance. "*I don't see anyone else getting searched,*" Riyaz says. "*It's just a random search, sir*" replies the guard. After being searched, Riyaz sits next to Ehsaan and complains about being profiled. "*I've got a Muslim name, that's why they had a problem with me.*" Ehsaan replies, "I know what you mean." At first, I appreciated this scene because it showed the experience of a Muslim getting profiled, but then you, as the viewer, are reminded that Riyaz is trying to befriend Ehsaan in order to stop him. We can't tell if Riyaz is speaking for himself or simply putting on a front to impress Ehsaan.

We get to see Ehsaan's lecture on Islam when he invites Riyaz to his classroom. I found this scene to be immensely problematic. When a student asks about why violence comes from Muslim majority countries, Riyaz raises his hand and argues the same point his father makes early in the film: "What about the Muslim casualties?" He argues points that many Muslims would argue if they were asked the same question, i.e. the violence in Muslim majority countries cannot be separated from U.S. and Israeli occupation of those countries. But this is all "fundamentalist" to us because the audience knows Riyaz is not there speaking for himself. He's simply saying it to win Ehsaan's attention.

There is something else going on in this movie that I must point out. Unlike the way portrays Muslim terrorists, Ehsaan's character is designed to gain the sympathy of the audience. He is not only seen as a good-looking, charming Muslim man, but also as a lethal and unstoppable killer who can drop six police officers faster than you can say "007." His insane stealth skills remind me of the hit man protagonist in Luc Besson's "*Leon: The Professional.*" This is interesting for a number of reasons. The Muslim terrorist is played by a no-name actor, completely unfamiliar to the audience. Saif Ali Khan, however symbol in Bollywood cinema. Audiences are familiar with him; therefore it makes sense to develop his character, no matter what horrible acts of violence he commits. A back story is given briefly — he was previously married, happily in Love, but his wife and child were killed by U.S. military forces. Thus, he was recruited by extremists.

The bullet wound on his chest symbolizes his indestructible power and guardianship of his love, Avantika. Like Leon, the hit man, Ehsaan is a killer, but he has a heart and tragic story behind him. Ehsaan decides not to bomb the subway at the end and instead, commits suicide to save his beloved Avantika. This does not make me happy about the way Muslims are depicted in this film at all, but it is certainly a very different depiction we usually see in films.

It seems that in the past ten or so years, it has been difficult to find a film in which the Muslim aspects of a main character an aspect of their identity, as was the color of their hair. Hindi films in which the central characters (i.e., hero and/or heroine) are Muslim maintain Muslim-ness as central to the storyline and the storyline is usually somehow political – either in severe (terrorism) or romantic (inter-religious love) ways, or both.

We need to see more films that accurately depict Muslims in the way the community deserves. Always setting Muslims within the backdrop of terrorism is offensive as it is nauseating. After *'Kurbaan'*, I wondered what the point of it was. What does it tell us about Muslims? One may get the impression that Muslims are mistrustful and dangerous. That Muslim women are oppressed and need saving from the 'strict' religion that Islam apparently is. Others may get the impression that Muslim men are 'tough' and 'bad-ass' individuals who struggle with extremist interpretations of Islam. All of these stereotypes reinforce Islam phobic narratives that hurt the Muslim community more than anything.

## **Conclusion**

India, a sub-continent, is inhabited by many communities. Every community should enjoy the right of maintaining its identity, preaching its faith in an unobjectionable style and adhering to its religious and social customs. No community should dictate terms to others.

At present the Indian Muslims are passing through what may justly be described as highly testing times. They are confronted with scores of difficulties and problems. Some of them are of their own making, some a heritage from the past and some a product of the unsparing march of history. But whatever these problems be they are by the very nature of things transitory.

They are bound to disappear in course of time, provided that the Muslims grapple with them in a calm and disciplined manner, which in turn, can be possible only under a leadership that in addition to being imaginative, courageous and honest is also mature, balanced and realistic. And also solution to this problems lies in the sincere and effective adherence to Islam on the on the part of the so-called born Muslims. Ours is the duty to invite others to good and to perform the role of Allah's vice-regent, as ordained by Him. What I stated above may be summed up thus; *"Be a Muslim, invite all towards the truth"*.

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