

Film, Religious Representation and Cultural Politics- An Analysis of Bollywood Movie's Representation of Inter Religious Relationship Through Historical Epics

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Abstract- *It is said that films are the reflection of particular society and social problem. But sometimes films failed to replicate the only the dominant ideology of the people in power. This replication can be very biased and dominated by the political scenario and hegemony of power. This paper attempt to reveal that a globalized phenomenon like Bollywood reflecting dominant ideologies through its cultural production by creating tension of communalism and harming inter religious peace.*

Key words- *Religious conflict, religious dichotomy, Hindu-Muslim, Dominant ideology, political power,communalism*

Introduction-As a part of media film plays a very important role in knowledge making. William A.gramson in his article 'Media Images and Social Construction of Reality' stated that " we live in a media generated world where media generated images help us to construct meaning about the social world. But this images some time can be very biased. Images on the one hand reproduction on the other hand has a second meaning as well a mental picture of something which is not real or present."(Gramson:1992)

Many scholars and social scientist state that the field of film making is such a world where there is always an interplay power, hegemony, politics. This position is very compatible when it's comes to the question of Historical films. By revitalizing the past days they tend to describe our present day and reshaping the future. In the era of globalization when the Indian films are itself a global product represents its idea in the stage of the whole world and in the process of creation desired image Historical films are its best companion. This films by projection of the past actually presenting the national narratives of present day i.e the very image of the 'Hindutva' need to be glorified by pulling down its counterpart the Muslim population of this nation.

Cultural revivalism through History- E. Shohat and R.Stam in their book 'Multiculturalism,post coloniality and Transitional media' showed that in today's world the idea ,beliefs and notions about the nation comes through the description of the past in the disguise of a Historical stories.

Through the reinterpretation of History these Historical films replicate concern in the present day society. This ideas are very similar to the notion of Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community. Where nationalist narratives reinvented the past,redescribing the historical facts to make it believable ,true to the audiences. Though it has some more role to play as it reflects the hopes and desires of the larger public specially those who are in power.

From the very past,Bollywood movies through its representation power reflect the dominant ideology and power relations between different religious groups.These films often reflects the state of ideology of a particular time period in which they are made. This projections ultimately reflects ideologies which are essentially political. India is a land of diversity home of different religious group. In this scenario there are many Bollywood movies which reflect dominant religious ideology through the standardization of religion and national narratives .Some recent Bollywood movies like 'Bajirao-Mastani(2016)' and 'Padmaavat'(2018) reflects one of those dichotomy of religious identity. Making this difference more prominent through its projection which is already very sensitive issue in the present scenario. Both of the films get good business and acclaimed world wide still there are some issues in the film that needs to be addressed when it comes to peaceful co-existence among different religious groups..if we look at previous era when prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru take centralized economical model and developmental policies ,reflect in the films like 'Mother India'. Infact there is also the projection of national emergency era of Indira Gandhi by dramatization and mere allegory of then national scenario. Anti-communalism message was found in the movie like 'Amar Akbar Anthony',where three men representation of three religious groups of India. Hindu-Muslim dichotomy always been a interest among the different film makers..many of films clearly defined the very nature of Muslim beings ,where Muslim men are bad nature and females are merely submissive and neutralizes the sin of their men.Some of the Muslim ladies played the role of the courtesan, seductive in nature and mere entertainer probably of the larger audiences out there. Muslim women's representation of a court dancer is high rather than their Hindu counterpart makes an impression of their sexual availability for the larger masses out there.

Though India has a past of Muslim rulling. Muslim still hold a marginal position in Indian subcontinent. The Hindu-muslim relation which getting bitter day by day has a long history itself .the dichotomy of hindu and muslim lay it's foundation in the colonial era where the British ruler divided the Indian population with in different Linguistic ,class,caste,religion.They make divide and rule policy to rule this subcontinent. Because of this India witnessed partition. Now the modern state of India is not free from such religious divisions. Infact media and films exploit it's idea to make business and reflecting the dominant ideology of the state to create false proud with in religions. Communities by showing low light it's counterparts. The present Indian state can be held responsible for the religious chaos and by reinterpreting History they are giving more fuel to fire of communalism .where peaceful co-existence of inter religious relationship is at stake, give birth to polarizational politics .

Madava Prasad in his book 'Ideological Construction of hindi cinema'(1988) pointed out that in today's modern indian state Hindu nationalism is the foundation of political agenda in India it attempts to establish political unity which is essentially based on orthodox religious foundation(1988:8,9).

Hindia cinema as a mere apparatus of the state by redefining History, making the base of communism strong which is essentially related with political power and political benefit. It describing indian state as a Hindu nation it construct against it counterpart Muslim and creating a illusive consciousness of 'Hindutva. There are many examples available in the Bollywood movies where terrorist are always Muslim man harming state. There are also film like 'my Name is khan'(2010) which attacked the stereotype thought that all Muslims are not terrorist but this number is very low.

But we look at recent scenario there is trend in Hindi cinema to took forward the religious issues in cinematic manner. Historical movies play pivotal role in them. But this this projection also affected by the time of their reproduction. Like, if we look at Mughal-e-azam it voices on peaceful co existence of Hindu-Muslim while Historical movies like 'jodhaa-akbar' advocated unity among religions but now with the changing time Bollywood becoming an advocate and mere puppet of state apparatus which only glorifies 'Hindutva' by defaming the other religions. There are two Historical movies in this regard which reshaping the past and by that reflecting contemporary ideology, one of them 'Bajirao-Mastani'(2016) and the other is 'Padmavaat'(2018) which was previously named padmavati though in the beginning of this two film there is a long disclaimer of not hurting anyones religious,cultural sentiment,still it is doing so much more than that and the disclaimer is just a formality of written rules which hides it's hidden agenda of anti-tolerance and communism.

'Bajirao-Mastani' is basically a story of revolved around peshwa Bajirao and his half Muslim women mastani. In the opening where Bajirao welcomed in the Maratha court for cutting a peacock feather into two halves and said that the soil is India and the feather is Mughals, one need to attack the roots for uprooting the existence of this community and this allegory also indicates Hindu-Muslim tension in present day India. Audiences tend to believe in the dialogues for themselves that Bajirao told his fellow man in the Maratha court. Bajirao in the beginning clearly declares his dream of Hindu raj by brutally expanding his territory. The saffron coloured flag and the sky and total screen becoming saffron indicating the emerging 'Hindutva' in today's scenario which is marked by political consciousness. This film is entirely based on Hindu heroism not about the Muslim ruler like we seen in 'Jodhaa-Akbar'. It is directly linked with the present political scenario where the right wing political group came into power, got victory in election and in this context the Maratha victory in the film seems very synonymous. Mastani on the other hand is the representation of India's minority groups namely Muslim. Though she was half Muslim in the entire film she considered Muslim and treated very harshly, who needs to stay outside of the house better to perform in a court rather than be a wife and who is a home breaker. Like in today's scenario Muslims are treated as foreigners, invaders and threat for India specially for the Hindu sovereignty making Muslims 'Other' in their own mother land. Through Mastani's characterization this message comes to audiences that Muslim need to behave accordingly in terms of the major religious population of the country namely Hindus to be in India. In this movie Bajirao's wife Kashi bai seems as a representation of the Hindu population who bleed and cried because of her counterpart. Bajirao as a representation of the state it is seemed to the audiences that the wife is betrayed and she has the actual right like the Hindu population residing this country from the age old days and India is basically a Hindu nation the state constantly bleeding because of this so called 'Foreigners'.

'Padmavat' on the other hand released in the sensitive time of Gujrat and Rajasthan election also talks about the Hindu superiority and showing the Muslims in the dark light. In this movie Muslims showed as brutal, blood thirsty, disloyal, lustfull, barbaric and savage. Every frame of this film establishing dichotomy between Hindus and Muslims.

Alauddin Khilji who was the most powerful ruler of the Khilji dynasty have done many memorable work still showed in low light. A man who saved India from Mongol invasion, who reform the price and tax system which was followed even in the British period, portrays as savage in his evil laugh to eating habit. In fact the choosing of costume and the colours is very biased. In the film the Muslims always uses dark colours mainly black in everything which indicate darkness of their nature and the rajputs mainly given the light colours like white, saffron to symbolizes their purity. The film present rajputs as 'good Hindus' where there counterpart is 'bad Muslim'. The dialogues of the film also make khilji compared as demon by making his nature synonymous with 'Ravan'. Where Rani Padmavati was Savitri who saves her husbands, devi kali and shiv who drinks poison for the good of the common masses.

The film in its religious projection also has gendered notion where the purity of women needs to be maintained at any cost and directly linked with the honour of the society. The 15th century poem becoming the symbol of Hindu identity in 21st century interlinked with present day political scenario. The last scene of Jauhar is at the same time presenting honour and indicating ofv beginning a 'Dharm-Yudh'. Against the Muslims. The films showed that Muslim won the battle unfairly and cunningly and even after the death in war Hindu's head held high to the sky. This film is mainly reflecting the dominant ideology of upper caste Hindus backed by political scenario.

As film is the powerful media impacting the masses film makers, policy makers and those who are in political power need to be careful about any projection of religion in the movies as it can give rise to communal violence. Because film makers by their projection fuelling religious conflict, scholars needs to address this issue very much so that a peaceful co-existence among different religions in our beloved country possible.

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