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Constructing the Nation’s Enemy: 
*Hindutva*, popular culture and the Muslim ‘other’ in Bollywood cinema

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**ABSTRACT** This paper aims to investigate how in contemporary India the process of ‘othering’ of the Muslim minority has been the product of politically motivated and manipulated majoritarian cultural assertiveness, reflected in the Hindu right’s clamour to underline the significance of drawing the geographic and cultural boundaries of what its ideologues call the Hindu nation. Situating cinema as a crucial distribution source of popular culture, the paper contends that Bollywood cinema has exhibited an overt bias towards producing films that capitulate to this radical nationalist discourse professed by the Hindutva ideologues. Making a discourse analysis of selected films produced by Bollywood since the 1990s, the premise of this contention is interrogated by examining how Hindi cinema’s portrayal of the image of Muslims has been carried out in a pejorative manner which stems from the strong grounding of its stories in a Hindu majoritarian setting. The paper concludes by arguing that, with such a penchant, Bollywood cinema has actively engaged in the politics of nationalism engendered by the right-wing neo-fundamentalist Hindutva movement.

Popular culture represents a synonymous interpretation of mass culture wherein, a large section of people of a society, cutting across class barriers, go through a collective experience. The source of this experience emanates from different directions, but there is a kind of intermingling of multiple sources of origin that happens in a complementary manner. This brings into the collective experience a symmetrical feeling of common tastes, thus assigning a sense of intertextuality to the multifaceted texture of its display mechanism. Mass media, especially the electronic ones, with their transnational sweep and influence, have emerged as crucial agents in structuring this entire process. Particularly in this regard, cinema has assumed a crucial role by virtue of its pervasive mass appeal and its ability to deeply push itself into the popular psyche and create a penetrative impact upon people’s thinking and imagination. This is because it has proved to be one of the best mechanisms for not only reflecting the contemporary trends in popular culture, but also for playing a critical role in shaping the same.

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Thanks to such an overbearing influence cinema also acts as capacious cultural space for politicians, reactionary ideologues and the defenders of a particular social belief system to reconstruct and reinterpret the archaeologies of the imaginary world built on celluloid, in a manner that suits their own agenda. While engaging in such reconstruction, they peep through the cinematic world and establish linkages between the filmic world created by cinematography and the broader historical and socio-political meanings that largely remain contested in the public sphere. In doing this, their attempt is to situate the subtext of socio-political and ideological contests within the deep spaces vacant between the lines of a film’s story. The cultural boundaries of communities defined in terms of nationhood are one such fertile ground for inviting intrusive practices of interpretation of the subtle nuances that criss-cross the map of a film’s setting.

In India such intrusions take place in circumstances wherein the question of defining the cultural boundaries of the Hindu nation and its protection from alien interventions are involved. Here, the definition of that alien and non-Hindu other has been categorical, with Muslims being visualised as the distinct ‘other’ and as being outside its geo-cultural boundaries. This definition of the nation, with ‘Hinduness’ at its core and the explicit designation and interpretation of its enemy as the Muslim, is being ideologically carried out in the name of Hindutva, with the Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (rss), its affiliates and its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (bjp), becoming the socio-cultural and political trustees of this hegemonic construct. The Bollywood film industry has acted as a techno-cultural transmitter in this regard, with its engagement in the production of nationalist cinema that projects in its setting the definition of this Hindu nation. This definition in turn is characterised by a discrete construction of the Muslim enemy, who constitutes a major threat to the Hindutva imaginary of the nation.

The easiest way by which Bollywood does this is by presenting to its audience a stereotypical image of a Muslim, who appears in typically Muslim attire, reflects mannerisms considered to be purely Islamic and is also depicted as a strict adherent of the codes of Islamic religiosity. Such a projection leads to the clear demarcation of Muslims from the supposedly more secular, modern and progressive Hindus, whose appearance, mannerisms or religiosity is not exhibited in terms of what could be called here pure ‘Hinduness’. In this way films provide an excellent arena to examine the intricate linkages between culture and politics and the complex modes by which the interplay of the two take place. The present paper thus aims to understand the ways in which Hindi cinema since the 1990s has pictured minority Muslims pejoratively, mainly to validate the hegemonic designs embedded in Hindutva majoritarianism. This will be done by narrating some significant aspects from the stories of selected Hindi films. By doing this, an attempt is made to show how the discourse regarding the Muslim other, who is an alien, distinct from the native Hindu, is obliquely knitted into the narratives of nationalist cinema produced by the Hindi film industry.
Hindutva and minority Muslim identity

When we problematise the issue of cultural space and identity of India’s Muslim minority, it may be observed that it is the dominant discourse embedded in the Hindu majoritarianism that has constructed, defined and imagined Muslim identity. The pre-eminence of the ideology of Hindutva has resulted in the stereotyped imaging of Muslims and the painting of a picture of the Muslim other as against a Hindu, who is the only rightful member of the Hindu Rashtra (nation). The manifestations of this sectarianism seems to lie in the growing Hindu backlash in the name of nationhood against the perceived Muslim enemy that has gained strength since the 1990s, resulting in a rapid expansion of Hindutva politics that has deeply penetrated throughout the country. Hindutva thus has emerged as a majoritarian ideology and has been used extensively in interpreting the boundaries of cultural spaces and do’s and don’ts in the public sphere.

Regarding the question of nationhood, Hindutva clearly defines India as the land of the Hindus and expresses a zealous commitment to the preservation of the cultural and geographic boundaries of what the Hindutva ideologues call the ‘Hindu Rashtra’, by way of eliminating or subversively assimilating non-Hindus, especially Muslims. Hindutva restrictively seeks to mobilise people’s imagination on the need to define the Hindu, to sharpen the boundaries from others—especially Muslims but also Christians and (sometimes confusingly) Sikhs, to demarcate who belongs to India. According to Hindutva philosophy and political practice, a Hindu is one who at a minimum accepts two things. At one level a Hindu is one who is ready to fight Muslims militantly, particularly in the cultural sphere, as an alien, bestial presence in India, an other who poses a threat to the self of the Hindus. At the other level a Hindu is one who equates immemorial nation India with Hindu culture and religion.

Nations themselves, for their part, are not merely cartographic illustrations but, as is widely accepted, symbolise a distinct imagination emanating through the popular consciousness of a set of people and hence exhibit apparent connotations of cultural symbolism. To put this in terms of Homi Bhabha’s ideas, nations are narrations and are inscribed in and disseminated through a variety of narratives and discourses. The category of people or people-nation for instance, is found constructed by means of double-writing: people as a pedagogical object in the state discourse (that is, the nation’s self-generation in and through its people) and people as the performative subject which splits the nation into It/Self and represents it as a space internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations. It can thus be stated here that nations and nationhood exist beyond tangible physical structures and are manifest as abstract conceptual trajectories that are often used by different groups for popular mobilisation to achieve their socio-political ends.

The conceptualisation of a Hindu nation (Hindu Rashtra) by the Hindutva ideologues is one such instance, the ideological antecedents of which can be traced back to the days of colonial India. Its first concrete expression was visible in the ideas of Hindu extremist, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966),
and other Hindu fanatics like MS Golwalkar, who emerged as the progenitors of contemporary Hindu nationalism. They affirmed that ‘India was a Hindu land, sacred only to Hindus and not to the foreign Muslims and Christians. They had no ties to India; their holy places were all in Arabia just as Christian holy places were in Palestine’. Today the rhetoric of Hindu Rashtra is being propagated in this framework of the contesting notions of nationhood and is being used to attain political ends. This is manifest in the speeches and statements of Hindutva zealots belonging to the right-wing Hindu extremist organisations such as the rss, the Hindu Mahasabha, Bajrang Dal and its political wings, the bjp, and Shiv Sena, all forming part of what they call as the sangh parivar (family of the Sangh). The following tape recorded speech by Uma Bharti, bjp leader and the former chief minister of the State of Madhya Pradesh provides one instance of the ideological discourse and the contemporary nature of Hindutva. She stated:

Declare without hesitation that this is a Hindu Rashtra. We have come to strengthen the immense Hindu shakti into a fist. Do not display any love for your enemies … the Quran teaches them to lie in wait for the idol worshipers to skin them alive, to stuff them in animal skins and torture them until they ask for forgiveness. We could not teach them with words, now let us teach them with kicks … Tie up your religiosity and kindness in a bundle and throw them in the Jamuna. Any non-Hindu who lives here is at our mercy.

This represents contemporary Hindutva’s interpretation of the geopolitical and religio-civilisational boundaries of the Hindu Rashtra, the modern version of that fanatical idea of a nation which was so passionately contemplated by Savarkar, Golwalkar and company who were its intellectual fathers. Its essence lies in the idea of Hindutva or ‘Hinduness’, by which it means the recognition and acceptance of the culturally Hindu foundation and character of the Indian nation. But this is not all. ‘Hinduness’ must form the marrow and spine of the Indian polity in the same way as Jewishness does for Israel and Islam does for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. A Hindu Rashtra and its obvious corollary, the Hindu state, is directed against the perceived other, the Muslim. Thus, modern India has witnessed intense anti-Muslim political ideologies, discrimination, marginalisation and violence that have implicitly or explicitly challenged the place of its Muslims as full citizens of the polity.

Such a condition is characterised by an overtly expanding Hindu-ised public domain, where symbols of Hindu religiosity such as the Ram temple, have rapidly acquired nationalist overtones and deeply penetrated the political consciousness of the powerful Hindu middle class. For their part Muslims are being widely projected as the greatest threat to this epitome of nationalist pride. This has led to the distortion of the very image of India as a homeland for Muslim minorities. Bollywood cinema, through its brazen provocations indicating the need to uphold the values of nationhood defined in terms of Hindutva ideology and by clearly drawing cultural fault lines in order to separate those communities who do not form part of this nationalist project, has emerged as one critical
tool in fomenting the process of marginalisation of the Muslim minorities. It must be noted that cinema in this context acts as a potent analytical tool to understand both the influence of minority behaviour on society as well as the effects of societal behaviour upon the formation of minority cultural identity. The filmic arena in this regard emerges as a mirror and a communicative idiom that reflects a range of interactions that take place between the two.

**Portrayal of Muslims 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 apologia 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.7

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. Through their the use of ‘queer’ methods to critique the dominant majoritarian culture and by conveying reformist measures in a manner considered heretical by the traditionalists, they have emerged as sources of fierce contestation to the practitioners of conservative ideology. Zealous nationalists for their part have made these films an arena where they can indulge in adventitious foisting of their reactionary nationalist agenda. One such example is Deepa Mehta’s 1996 film, *Fire*. Its reception in India reveals much about Hindutva’s fundamentalist agenda and the use of women as symbols of nation, done by its protagonists. Through their ardent opposition to the film, nationalists attempted to construct India as a Hindu nation made up of appropriate subjects.

According to the Hindutva world-view, India is for Hindus, and should not accommodate homosexuals, Muslims, Pakistanis, lesbians or art that troubles these national definitions or constructs alternate subject positions. As it asserted a world-view markedly diametrical to this, *Fire* elicited violent opposition from Hindu fundamentalists when it was released in 1998. The film, which tells the story of two women reflecting lesbian tendencies in their relationship, despite being locked in the strangulating conditions of a conservative patriarchal structure, evoked fanatical reactions. This was also the result of *Fire’s attempt to critique the hypocrisy of Hindu society, which projects women as the*
metaphorical symbol of the nation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, treats them misogynously by imposing upon them the burden of holding the social values and ethics established by the patriarchal Hindu order. Thus, the Shiv Sena claimed that the film was an affront to Indian values and that it was defending India from alien influences such as same-sex desire. When asked what he would do if the censor board allowed the rerelease of Fire, Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray asserted, ‘if they pass the film as it is, then I’ll welcome the extremists from Pakistan. If you don’t have that much respect for the nation, then allow the nation to go to the dogs.’ Thackeray’s equation of the art depicting same-sex desire and Muslim extremists makes clear that ‘queer’ status is outside the Hindu nation that the Shiv Sena constructs through its discourse. Allowing representation of desire between women to circulate is akin to showing disrespect for the nation. The boundaries of the nation, for fundamentalist movements like the Shiv Sena, must keep out many threats, from Islam to contagious lesbianism. This, then, demonstrates how representations of female sexuality are particularly charged sites in discussions of national identity. It also shows that, for the fundamentalists, the link between the ethnic other and same-sex desire is clear.

The 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. Kamalahasan’s film Hey Ram is one such instance which ingeniously 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 Raa, 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. This is the easiest way to homogenise the entire community, erase all
kinds of fragmentations, and slot people into a pre-constructed groove in quite the same way as is routinely done in the dominant political discourse.13

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 dehumanised, 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.

There is a 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.14 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.15

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.16 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.17
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 unons 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 endeavoured 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 rivalling 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 categorisation. 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.
It is not the case that cinema in India has never addressed the question of the existential predicaments of Muslims and the precariousness of the process of their identity formation. In fact, since the last two decades of the 20th century, Bollywood has been considerably influenced by the work of cultural critics, who have sought to reinterpret the complex structural linkages between religion and nationhood. In this regard works by scholars such as Alam, Brass, Hansen, Hansen and Jafferlot, Kazmi, Nanda, Nussbaum, Talbot, Vanaik and Brass, and Varshney can be considered. Through their philological interventions, they have endeavoured to critique the established paradigms and meta-narratives like majority/minority in order to reframe the very concept of geopolitical space and examine the implications of such reframing in the contemporary epoch. The epistemological impact of this scholarly intervention began to be visible in the making of films which seriously endeavoured to revisit the episteme like majority and minority and, in the light of this, understand the structure of the relationship between nationhood and religion. In this genre of films Parzania stands out as an exceptional piece because of its brazen heretical way of projecting the majoritarian Hindu communal frenzy. The film is different from those that we have examined above because it revolves not around the debate between good Muslims and bad Muslims which the popular Bollywood films have done. Rather, the discourse in Parzania revolves around a bad Hindu, whose communally blinkered approach makes him engage in genocidal acts perpetrated in the name of eliminating the communal other. It is this very plot that has fostered grounds for majoritarian resistance to this film.

This, we may argue, has factored deeply in Parzania’s lack of pervasive impact on the popular imagination in India’s public sphere. It is also because the film largely consists of English conversations crafted by an overseas director, thereby preventing it from getting to the bottom of the demotic consciousness. To put it in the words of Arjun Appadurai, there has not been a vernacularisation of the issue, wherein the modes of cultural production are re-inscribed in peripheral contexts.

In contrast, this is succinctly done by popular Hindi cinema. Hence films like Kurbaan and Fanaa, with all their cosmic blend of romance and violence, penetrate deep into the popular consciousness and also manage to glamorise the nationalist ideology. In the case of MS Sathyu’s Garam Hawa, Deepa Mehta’s 1947 and Govind Nihalani’s Dev, the nature of the reception was similar to that for Parzania and these films figured very low in the popularity chart. However, this is not because of their language but because of the nature of the films. They do not fall into the category of mainstream cinema attuned to the spirit of pure kitsch embedded in the breath of popular culture. Rather, they address a more elite and smaller class of well-informed gentry and did not seep into the rationale of the common person. The increased marginalisation of Muslims, with the rapid upsurge of a powerful Hindu middle class might also have underpinned the negligible popularity of these films. It also led to the constriction of the Muslim social space and the subsequent decline in the number of films made with a purely Muslim ambiance as their setting. Henna, Sanam Bewafa and Khuda Gawah remain the last manifestations of this genre.
In the final analysis we can take note of the cogent argument of Giacomo Lichtner and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay that 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 instil in India’s collective memory the newly reconstructed divisive past propelled by Hindutva history, which marginalises Muslims from the sphere of Hindutva nationhood. Hence, noted scholars of Indian cinema such as Vasudevan and Chakrabarti have analysed the forging of national identity in popular Indian cinema. Both link Hindu nationalism to the culture promoted by Hindi cinema. Bollywood production teams swear by secularism, albeit their films promote communalism. 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-ised 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, 1991, signalling the rise of the Hindu right in India, and the communal violence that followed when chants of ‘jao Pakistan ya Kabristan’ (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.

Conclusion

Indian Muslims are facing a serious predicament as far as the issue of their identity formation and assimilation into a cultural space infested by majoritarianism is concerned. At the bottom of this lies the meteoric upsurge in Hindu political consciousness after the 1990s and its translation into a radical assertion of majoritarian hegemony, propelled by a fierce anti-Muslim agenda. As part of
the ideology and discourse of this agenda the Hindutva movement has sought to demonise Muslims as aliens and to treat them as outsiders. Such demonisation and marginalisation is effectively crafted with the epistemological tool of the notion of nationhood, dwelling upon the need for strict demarcation of the geographical and cultural boundaries of the Hindu nation. The result of this delineation is that non-Hindus, especially Muslims are reckoned to be outside the purview of this conception of nationhood. Thus the hegemonic Hindutva discourse, and the politics surrounding it, thrives on two core principles. First, it emphasises consideration of only Hindus as an integral part of India and, second, to validate this conviction, it dehumanise Muslims to such an extent that Hindus develop an inherent sense of abhorrence towards them and in the democratic consciousness their image becomes defined as an alien other.

The end result of all this is that the place of Islam in the Indian ethos and the identity of Muslims as citizens have gained negative connotations and Hindutva as a movement, according to its ideologues, is supposed to be on a collision course with this alien presence. This is constantly portrayed in various forms of popular culture and the notion of Hindu nation, coupled with the feeling of Muslims as being outside its fold, is represented as a type of collective experience in popular mediums such as films and television soaps. In today’s India cinema, which has arguably emerged as one of the dominant forms of popular culture, has thus proved to be an ideal platform to theatre this dyadic contest conceived by the Hindutva ideology. The dichotomy has been presented in Bollywood cinema by placing the categories of the Hindu nation and the Muslim minority into a kind of Manichean rivalry.

Thus, it has reflected an adherence to the Hindutva ideology, but in a subtle way and in a very apolitical manner. Films possess the uncanny knack of weaving into their stories highly charged political issues cloaked in a suitably non-political garb of pure kitsch. Hindi films have done this dexterously by elaborately projecting the cultural hegemony of the Hindu majority over the minority Muslims and, in this way, have seriously engaged in the politics of nationalism. This nature of India’s national cinema poses a serious challenge to its Muslim minority. This is mainly because the latter tends to encounter the dyslexia of defining its cultural space in its own homeland, which is portrayed as so alien, with its identity being established as an outsider on the silk screen.

Notes
HINDUTVA, POPULAR CULTURE AND THE MUSLIM OTHER IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA

11 Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, ‘Indian cinema and the presentist use of history’, p 452.
14 Deshpande, ‘Indian cinema and the bourgeois nation state’, p 99.
15 Kazmi & Kumar, ‘The politics of Muslim identity and the nature of public imagination in India’, p 184.
16 Deshpande, ‘Indian cinema and the bourgeois nation state’, p 98.
17 Kazmi & Kumar, ‘The politics of Muslim identity and the nature of public imagination in India’, p 184.
24 Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay, ‘Indian cinema and the presentist use of history’, p 452.
26 Deshpande, ‘Indian cinema and the bourgeois nation state’, p 95.

Notes on Contributor

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