

# From *Padosi* to *My Name is Khan*: The Portrayal of Hindu–Muslim Relations in South Asian Films

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The portrayal of Hindu–Muslim relations in Hindi-language films has been a topic of discussion in several recent writings; for instance, in Chadha and Kavoori [2008], Hirji [2008], Ghuman [2006] and Rai [2003]. These articles mostly argue that Muslims in Hindi films are “exoticized, marginalized, and demonized and they are portrayed as the ‘other.’” To test this thesis I surveyed several films and found that Hindi films themselves are being stereotyped, based on their recent portrayal of Muslims. As an example, I will first examine an article by Booth [2004] which argues that Muslims were the political Other even in some older films. I will then compare Mishra’s article [2002] with Lal [1998] in light of the film *Khalnayak*; and then, following Lal, I will provide my own analysis of some films that are woven around the relationship of Hindus with Muslims but have escaped the attention of film scholars. Although the recent upsurge in “cinepatriotism” and “Hinduness” in Hindi films is (rightly) criticized by scholars, in this article, I look at examples from several films to argue that secularism, embraced by films such as *Padosi* [1941] and *Hum ek hain* [1946], has been maintained by most Indian filmmakers. I discuss these films in four categories: India–Pakistan partition, Hindu–Muslim violence, Hindu–Muslim friendly relations, and films about modern Muslim communities. Although most of the films I discuss are Hindi ones I will also make brief references to Pakistani, Bengali-language and other South Asian films.

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## HINDU MUSIC, MUSLIM MUSIC: LOOKING FOR DIFFERENCES

Before starting my analyses, I want to respond to scholarly critique of some films that have allegedly targeted Muslims and have shown Hindu hegemony. In a different context Philip Lutgendorf notes the scholarly agenda of excessive criticism of Indian films:

The grand theories of our own yuga sometimes seem to me to have a similar aim: the product of increasingly marginalized humanist academics who perceive the greater prestige of “hard” science on the one hand and of mass-market entertainment on the other, and who advance haughty analyses of the latter that imitate the former’s technical jargon. Academic criticism of Indian popular cinema displays a particular penchant for reductive typologies and stern agendas of improvement, based on a standard that no actual filmmaker ever seems to achieve—only the scholar-critic possesses the knowledge to imagine the ideologically perfect film. [2006, p. 240]

An article by Booth [2004] can stand as an example of such academic criticism of Hindi films. He discusses *Jhanak jhanak payal baje* (hereafter, *JJPB*) [1955], *Tansen* [1943], *Kohinoor* [1960], *Sangeet samrat tansen* [1962], and *Baiju Bawra* [1952], and sees an underlying Hindu–Muslim opposition in them. Unlike several other scholars who have noted the Nehruvian secularism being portrayed in the films of that era [e.g., Ahmed 1992; Levich 2002; Sardar 1998], Booth attempts to see an underlying communalism even in these early films.

According to him, in *JJPB* Hindus and Muslims are portrayed in opposite camps because they play different instruments and wear different kinds of (male) costume [2004: 62]. However, he misses the point that most in an Indian audience watching Hindi films are rarely trained in classical music and cannot be expected to know which instruments were historically played by Muslims or by Hindus, as wrongly claimed by Booth. Similarly there is hardly any male costume that is exclusive to a Muslim community. The best example to deny Booth’s argument is in the Punjab where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs wore the same kinds of costume before Partition and were thus indistinguishable. Therefore the North-Indian cinema-going public in 1955 could hardly be expected to notice the Hindu–Muslim opposition agenda that Booth now sees in *JJPB*. Moreover, the maker of *JJPB*, V. Shantaram, is well-known for his many other social and secular films such as *Padosi* that were meant to promote Hindu–Muslim unity, as Booth rightly notes elsewhere in his article. I would therefore argue that it is somewhat problematic to read a communal dichotomy into *JJPB*, as Booth has suggested.

Having established a highly problematic thesis that is not verifiable by any account (as he admits), Booth then goes on to discuss *Tansen* and *Baiju Bawra*. He equates the humorous depiction of classical musicians in Hindi films with the “humorously intended racism” found in American popular culture [2004: 66]. According to Booth, comic representations of Muslim classical musicians generate a subtle spotlight on attitudes toward such musicians because such films “are participating (intentionally or otherwise) in the reinforcement of communal prejudice.” I think that Booth is stressing the Muslim identity of Naushad, who was the music director of several musical films in the 1950s and 1960s and was

famous for using classical music and musicians in his work. However, agreeing with Dwyer [2006: 109] I would argue that Indian classical music was never a “Muslim-only” tradition. Therefore any comic portrayal of classical music cannot be reduced to a (mis)representation only of the Muslim musicians; it would indeed be a misportrayal of both Hindu and Muslim musicians. Moreover such comic representations were adopted in several later films to produce humor, such as in *Boot Polish* [1954] and *Padosan* [1968], in which the actors, singers and music directors were not Muslims. I would argue that such comic portrayal of classical musicians was historically done by filmmakers simply to exploit an avenue to insert the *rasa* of comedy in an otherwise serious film, as also noted by Mishra [2002: 171]. Therefore I cannot accept Booth’s “communal” reading of such images. Perhaps Booth realizes the weakness in his argument and further notes that *ustad*, a term that is used to refer to musicians in these films, denotes a “Muslim” master. He again misses the point that during the period in which these films were released the popular language of North India had not made a communal distinction that would equate an Urdu term for Muslims and a Sanskrit term for Hindus. Popular Hindi language (what used to be called Hindustani), especially in early Mumbai films, differed from the official language spoken on State-owned television, and has always borrowed liberally from the Urdu, as shown by Dwyer [2006: 103] and Kesavan [1994].<sup>1</sup> Thus I fail to understand how the mere word *ustad* might fix somebody’s identity as Muslim.

Booth continues his agenda of finding communal tension with three more films: *Baiju Bawra* and two films based on the Moghul emperor Akbar’s court-musician Tansen [2004: 76]. Booth notes an early scene in *Baiju Bawra* in which the father of the protagonist Baiju dies in the hands of Moghul soldiers, disrupting his performance in the vicinity of Tansen’s house. Since both the rivals Tansen and Baiju in this case are Hindus, Booth’s thesis is rendered weak at this point. So he continues with two more films based on Tansen. Not even once does he mention that the highlight of this film was its music with great “Hindu” *bhajans*, such as *Man tarapat hari darashan ko aaj*, written by Shakeel Badayuni, composed by Naushad, and sung by Mohammed Rafi—all Muslim artists. The fact that a Hindu audience has wholeheartedly embraced these Hindu *bhajans* even though performed by Muslim artists was apparently unimportant to Booth. *Baiju Bawra*’s songs have remained some of the most memorable songs in the history of Hindi films, in sharp contrast to the two films based on Tansen in which the “Hinduness” of Tansen is pitted against the Muslim emperor Akbar’s court, something that Booth focuses on in his article as a strong example of the communal agenda of these films; while ignoring that even this tension could be interpreted in political terms, as I would argue, rather than communal ones, as Booth does. But as I just noted, both these films are largely forgotten by Indian audiences (they are not even available in DVD format, for instance), while *Baiju Bawra* remains an “all-time favorite”<sup>2</sup> (its DVD is widely available and its songs remain popular on radio and TV shows among Indians worldwide). This argues that the communal opposition, if we were to agree with Booth, shown in the two films about Tansen was emphatically rejected by the masses. I should also point out that Mishra [2002: 157–202] convincingly shows that in *Baiju Bawra* all the old rivalries are resolved in the end and the protagonist in fact mercifully forgives Tansen.

In a scholarly zeal to over-analyze Hindi films one of the most important components, audience reception, is often ignored, as I have just shown in Booth's writing. While he saw Muslims as "outsiders" in several Hindi films, I now compare two articles by Mishra [2002: 203–234] and Lal [1998: 228–259]; both analyze *Khalnayak* [1993] and reach completely different conclusions. Here I would like to present my own reading of several more films below.

#### KHALNAYAK: APPLYING AN INSIDER/OUTSIDER DICHOTOMY ON HINDU–MUSLIM RELATIONSHIPS

In their articles both Mishra and Lal choose Subhash Ghai's *Khalnayak* to make two different points. Mishra reads the use of Hindu symbols and myths as the "filmmaker's acceptance of the new order of Rama that the fundamentalists have established in India"; but he raises more questions than answers:

Why is a heavy and often unmitigated discourse of Rama essential for a film about drug overlords, Bombay criminals, creative song-and-dance sequences and the sacrificial mother? Why is it that when another religious icon is needed *Khalnayak* uses the image of the sacrificial Christ and not many martyrs of Islam? If the connections between evil and Ravana are inevitable, is it important for filmmakers to actually foreground these connections? What is the nature of a political imaginary that forces the Indian to make the analogies in the first instance? What is being repressed? What is it about the nation's history that cannot be articulated, represented? Is this an ethics of forgetting or a principle of misguided overcoding of the text? [Mishra 2002: 227]

In contrast to this (anti)"fundamentalist" reading of Mishra, Lal reads the same film from a different hermeneutical framework, and makes a compelling argument that the Hindi films have "almost no notion of the outsider or the significant 'Other.'" In addition to *Khalnayak*, Lal also discusses *Deewar* [1975], *Shakti* [1982], and *Gardish* [1993], and hints that "in the school of *advaita*, villainy can have no place, for when man commits an error or does some wrong, he does so from ignorance." For Lal, the "bad men" of Hindi films are "not the Satan of Indian tradition." So, in *Khalnayak* it is the *nayak* (hero) inside the *khalnayak* who triumphs. His real self establishes its lordship over his ignorant self, and he eventually locates himself within an inclusionary polity, and renders himself up to the laws of community. Thus the same film leads the critics Mishra and Lal in two different directions. While Mishra is perturbed by its Hinduness and equates it with fundamentalism, creating more walls between Hindu "insiders" and Muslim "outsiders," Lal argues that the very notion of "outsiders" is virtually absent in most Hindi films. I tend to agree with Lal and would even suggest that this film, instead of conveying a message of Hindu fundamentalism, criticizes one of the most "fundamental" texts of Hinduism, the *Rāmāyana*. It pleads for the acceptance of the "impure" Sita against the original text in which she is humiliated and banished.

I want to apply Lal's thesis to a reading of several Hindi and other South Asian films in which Hindus and Muslims are portrayed. Do these films consider Muslims as "outsiders" or "insiders"? As mentioned earlier, I have chosen films

in which Hindus *and* Muslims are shown as having different social relationships, and have not chosen “Muslim social films” in which only Muslims are shown, as this has already been done by Dwyer [2006: 97–131], for instance. I have also not chosen films that are already discussed by other scholars such as Kazmi [1994: 226–243], Daiya [2008: 150–174], Chatterjee [2008: 77–116], Dissanayake [1994: xix], Desoulières [2007: 123–146], or Hines [2007: 147–170]. I mention only relevant sections from the plots of films such as *Zakhm* [1998], *Train to Pakistan* [1991], *Salim langde pe mat ro* [1989], *Dor* [2006], and *Iqbal* [2005]. Basic plots are now available on websites such as *IMDb* and *Wikipedia*, and other printed encyclopedic compilations such as Rajadhyaksha and Willemen [1998] and Gulzar and Chatterjee [2003]. In addition to presenting plots of a few films, I will also refer to several other films in which Hindu characters appear with Muslim counterparts.

#### FILMS WITH INDIA–PAKISTAN THEMES

In this category of films, I discuss *Train to Pakistan* [1991], *Khamosh pani* [2003] and a few other films based on Hindus and Muslims living in India and Pakistan respectively, such as *Mammo* [1994]. *Mammo* is a sensitive portrayal of a Muslim woman who had migrated to Pakistan during Partition, but whose family did not treat her well after her husband’s death. She returns to India to live with a sister in Mumbai, and eventually produces some fake documents to stay in India forever. While *Veer Zaara* [2004], *Henna* [1991] (made in India—discussed in Viridi [2003]), and *Lakhon mein eik* [1967] (made in Pakistan—discussed in Morey and Tickell [2005: 208–210] and Gazdar [1997: 109]), all have love stories crossing the political boundaries of India and Pakistan, only the first film ends happily while the latter two end in the death of a Muslim and a Hindu woman respectively, on the national border.

Another unique portrayal of a Hindu/Indian and Muslim/Pakistani relationship is done in the Oscar-nominated short film *Little Terrorist* [2004], in which a young Muslim boy accidentally crosses the border from Pakistan and stumbles upon a Hindu Brahmin who protects him from the Indian army and eventually lets him go back to Pakistan. *Ramchand Pakistani* [2008] is a similar Pakistani film in which a Hindu father and his son cross over to India and suffer in an Indian jail while the mother-wife struggles alone in Pakistan. Such films present human relationships that often succeed in transcending the religious barriers, though unfortunately they fail to cross the political boundaries created in the mid-20th century. Thus the “outside” element in these films is the political identity of the characters, *not* the religious one, as also is suggested by Dwyer [2006: 128].

Bhaskar Sarkar in his book *Mourning the Nation* [2009] makes just a fleeting reference to *Train to Pakistan* [1991], a film based on Khushwant Singh’s celebrated novel of the same title [1956] set during the aftermath of India–Pakistan Partition. Sarkar claims that the film treats the Partition in a very “temporal” way, as if its significance can only be imagined as an event frozen in time some decades ago that has very little, if any, relevance to Indian society today. While Sarkar contends that the trauma of Partition has indeed been mourned by Indian society

in general and Indian films in particular, I tend to disagree: having recently watched that film after reading Sarkar's book, I would argue that it makes several important points about Hindu, Muslim and Sikh relationships in that traumatized time, and yet today after more than six decades the event can be imagined as largely a temporal event. Going even further I would argue that its trauma was indeed limited only to families directly affected in the Punjab, Bengal and some other northern areas of India. In the aftermath of the recent "rise" of India in the global economy, all the traumatic traces of Partition are indeed distant fleeting memories, especially for Indian youth—the biggest component of its population today. Be that as it may, let me dwell a bit more on this particular film.

The film succeeds at several levels to portray the roles of several agencies involved, the governments, the armies, the local police, the local administration, and even local Indian social workers. The film shows a Sikh-dominated village in Indian Punjab during August 1947 which suddenly starts receiving trains full of refugees from Pakistan, people initially alive but now some are dead bodies. Meanwhile, a communist worker has already arrived in the village hoping to maintain the social calm, and so have Indian military forces trying to control the social unrest. In the midst of this simmering communal tension, in reaction to seeing the dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs arriving from Pakistan, the handful of Muslim families in the village are apprehensive about their own safety. The local magistrate and the police inspector are also unsure of how to deal with the situation and keep fabricating stories to misguide different religious factions, hoping thus to avoid any communal outburst. The magistrate is also the narrator of the film and recalls his loss of both wife and daughter, in his nightly meetings with a young prostitute. Another important character in the story is the local Sikh *dacoit* who is in love with the daughter of a Muslim weaver; a love affair that makes him sacrifice his own life trying to stop other Sikhs from killing the Muslim refugees leaving for Pakistan. A somewhat similar story was also presented in *Partition* [2007].

Who is the "outsider" in this film? Instead of being outsiders, Muslims are shown as an integral part of the village throughout the film. Crane [2005: 181–196] has argued that Hindus are portrayed as "outsiders" or as stereotypes while Sikhs and Muslims are the dominant players in the story. However, all the village decisions are taken at community level in the *panchayat* council setting where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs participate, speaking the same language (Punjabi) and wearing the same kind of clothes. Even the social worker Iqbal who has come from elsewhere to this village is perplexed by the harmony in the village and is not sure about his role. He is quickly arrested by the police and thus rendered even more helpless in the fast-turning communal situation; thus this communist social worker indeed "fits the bill" as an outsider for the village. Beyond all such "outsider" attempts for social harmony, it is the human relationship at the most basic level between a Sikh *dacoit* and a Muslim woman which in turn works to save the lives of hundreds of Muslims in the train going to Pakistan in the film's climax. There it succeeds in conveying a message of communal harmony and unity: the outside forces fail while the internal inter-religious relationships succeed.

While Indian filmmakers always found it too risky to show atrocities done on Sikh women by Pakistani Muslims, *Khamosh pani* has no such qualms and boldly

portrays Muslim fundamentalism working against the Sikh minority in Pakistan, both during Partition and after 1979 when Pakistan officially became an Islamic republic led by General Zia-ul-Huq. While the Indian Hindu political party, the BJP, failed to win in Indian elections in 2004 and in 2008, religious fundamentalism has only grown stronger in Pakistan (and in Bangladesh), a phenomenon only recently appreciated in Western countries. *Khamosh pani* shows the misery of a Sikh woman who had to hide her religious identity and adopt a Muslim name just to be able to survive in a society suffused with fundamentalism and fanaticism, especially after 1979. Unfortunately her true identity was revealed in the end and she had to throw herself into the “silent water” of a well where several such Sikh women had already committed suicide to escape Muslim rioters—also depicted in the Indian TV miniseries *Tamas*. In their zeal for balanced portrayal Indian Partition films, such as *Tamas* and *Gadar*, have never blamed Muslims alone for the riots and violence. Both Hindus and Muslims are equally blamed as perpetrators [Sarkar 2009: 245–248]. Thus, I would argue, *Khamosh pani* may be the first film in which Muslims are singled out for their communal violence—something which Indian films could never afford to do, partially from the influence of Nehruvian secularism but undeniably to ensure their box-office success too.<sup>3</sup>

A recent Bangladeshi film, *Matir moina* [2002], also dares to explore religious conflict in Bengali society and the role of Islamic fundamentalism there. It’s a heartbreaking story of a Muslim family in Bangladesh in the late 1960s, in which a Qazi patriarch forces all of his family members to forego all traditional Bengali things that he considers “un-Islamic,” including traditional Bengali festivals that incorporate Hindu myths, allopathic medicines, paintings on the children dresses, use of colorful dresses during the Eid celebration, and even the use of tissue paper. The Qazi’s younger brother Milon once takes the Qazi’s son Anu to the village fair—reason enough for the Qazi to send Anu to an Islamic *madrasa*, a residential school where dozens of children are taught the Classical Arabic language, Islamic theology and history. Here again the use of Bengali words is strictly prohibited, as is any contact with “Westernized” or “Un-Islamic” children. Unfortunately two children suffer harshly from such dogmatic beliefs. While Qazi’s daughter succumbs to her high fever, Anu’s friend Rokon is tortured at the *madrasa* for, supposedly, an evil spirit in his body. The film’s climax shows the invasion by Pakistani forces of poor Bengali Muslim villages. The Qazi’s house, his books, and medicines are all destroyed in the attack, not to mention his faith in an “Islamic peace-keeping” military. After suffering all her life under the Qazi’s zealotry, his wife ultimately leaves with her son Anu, while the Qazi’s brother Milon dies battling the Pakistani forces. Unlike some Indian films, this film does not take a far-left stance and it even ridicules communism as a Western import, asserting that Islam is an indigenously developed hybrid tradition of Bangladesh. Elsewhere one of the employees at the *madrasa* also criticizes the mind-closed instructor and the politically motivated use of Islam. Overall this film succeeds in criticizing fundamentalism and fanaticism in some sections of Islamic society in Bangladesh. Such a stance was never politically or financially safe for Indian filmmakers, as I will now show with several more films below.

## FILMS ON HINDU–MUSLIM VIOLENCE

In this category of films I will discuss *Zakhm* [1998], with a few others whose theme is Hindu–Muslim riots in independent India. *Zakhm* was the last film directed by Mahesh Bhatt, one of the most important Indian filmmakers, whose earlier films *Saaransh* [1984] and *Arth* [1982] were widely acclaimed by the critics for their powerful portrayal of contemporary social conditions. Like most of Bhatt's earlier films, *Zakhm* weaves a personal narrative (often alleged to be based on his own life) with social realism. In the initial scenes the protagonist Ajay is shown with his wife and their troubled relationship. While Sonia wants to leave India and give birth to their child in England, due to the social insecurity caused by continuing Hindu–Muslim riots, Ajay is ambivalent about leaving India. Suddenly he is also caught up in the latest round of violence because his mother is seriously burnt by rioters. Only Ajay is aware of the Muslim identity of his mother, and wants to bury her after her death according to her wishes. However, his brother Anand, a colleague of the Hindu fundamentalist leader Subodh, is against all Muslims, and this leads to the dilemma in the final part of the story. The film also has several flashbacks showing Ajay's mother and her relationship with her Hindu lover, whose own mother is strongly against their marriage. The film shows several other Hindu fundamentalists like Ajay's grandmother, such as Anand, Subodh and other rioters who are attacking Muslims either physically or verbally. It is only the happy ending that finally resolves all tensions.

So who is the "outsider" in this film? Once again, the mother of the protagonists, and Muslims in general, are not shown as outsiders but are an integral part of the society being treated like "outsiders" by the real culprits in the film, who are people like Subodh and Ajay's grandmother. The film thus develops as a strong criticism of Hindu fanaticism and tries to heal some of the wounds inflicted upon Muslims during recent communal riots. A similar conclusion might also be drawn from one of the most widely acclaimed films on Hindu–Muslim riots, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* [2002], made by Aparna Sen, in which Hindu rioters attack the passengers of a bus and kill some Muslims. The heroine's Hinduness is also problematized through her companionship with a Muslim co-passenger. A similar theme is also in *Aloo chaat* [2009], where a Hindu hero and Muslim heroine try to convince the hardliner Hindu parents.

Both *Firaaq* [2008] and *Parzania* [2007] are similar in their portrayal of Muslim and Parsi minorities in the wake of the Gujarat riots of 2002. Both are critical of Hindus and of the BJP state government of Gujarat for their role in this, one of the most ghastly incidents of communal violence in recent Indian history. Both show no part played by Muslims in the violence, and portray them simply as the helpless victims of a Hindu majority. Thus instead of an objective exploration of the reasons for communal violence, these films simply show the oppressive aftermaths on non-Hindus—something that was also done in regard to Sikhs in *Maachis* [1996], *Kaya taran* [2004], and *Amu* [2005]. Thus in this category of film it is the fanatic face of modern Hindus that is being criticized by filmmakers such as Mahesh Bhatt and Aparna Sen.



## FILMS ON FRIENDLY HINDU–MUSLIM RELATIONSHIPS

A relatively recent film, *Dor* [2006], is still fresh in the memories of Hindi film audiences and critics for its sensitive portrayal of two Indian women, a Rajasthani Hindu and a Himachali Muslim. This is one of the rare Indian films in which there is *no* lead male hero. Although it becomes clear that these women must persevere to change their plight, we have to notice that it is the Muslim woman who is shown in stark contrast with her Hindu counterpart. While the latter is a widow who must undergo all the taboos and tortures attached to the stigma of being a Hindu widow, the Muslim woman is a modern progressive person freely moving from one town to another in pursuit of her goal. Thus, I would argue, the plight of the Hindu woman is here shown in stereotypical ways. To the urban and the diaspora audience a Hindu widow under the tyranny of a medieval-thinking family will appear as an “outsider” while the courageous Muslim woman charting her own destiny will appear as the real protagonist of the film. While the portrayal of Muslims is criticized, that of Hindus is rarely criticized.

My next film continues with this stereotyping of Hindus while showing a disabled (deaf and mute) Muslim protagonist emerging as a successful cricketer. *Iqbal* [2005] is the name of a Muslim boy born amidst the widespread cricket enthusiasm in his village, a microcosm of cricket-loving India. Although his father is against his ambition to become a cricketer, he is accepted by *Guruji*, the ex-captain of the Indian cricket team who is now running a cricket academy to train young boys. I would argue that, unlike words such as *ustad* and *master* which are commonly used in the Hindi language to refer to a teacher or trainer in any skill or art, the word *guruji* used here is singularly meant to highlight the conservative and orthodox Hindu identity of this coach against the Muslim Iqbal. It is this orthodox coach who is seen as easily influenced by corruption and who indulges in different kinds of immoral behavior—such as first removing Iqbal from his academy but then trying to bribe him in the climax of the film. A *guru* is one of the most respected and revered titles in the Hindu tradition, usually applied to saints and sages. One wonders why this title was applied to an evil coach. Contrariwise, Iqbal proves his name right, proves *Guruji* wrong: trained by another coach Mohit, Iqbal secures his place on the Indian national team. Although this other coach also has a Hindu name, the success that Iqbal enjoys serves as a strong criticism of the dubious intents of his earlier coach *Guruji*. Once again, far from being an “outsider” or stereotyped Muslim, Iqbal is an epitome of all underprivileged subaltern Indians who have to struggle against the prevailing dominance of rich and powerful social forces. Iqbal’s Muslim identity is not shown as an impediment to his success, even though the film makes a mockery of the Hindu *Guruji*. Similarly, in *Halla bol* [2008], a Muslim boy Ashfaque becomes a superstar, Sameer Khan, despite his Muslim identity. Another sports-based film, *Chak de! India* [2007], is inspired by the unfortunate humiliation of a Muslim hockey coach; but there is a tremendous celebration of his hockey victory in the climax; and the huge success of this film at the box-office also seems to join in his victory. While *Chak de! India* criticizes the earlier humiliation of the Muslim coach, the two films *Dor* and *Iqbal*, both directed by one of the most recent and critically acclaimed filmmakers, Nagesh

Kukunoor, make a point of criticizing some Hindu characters and celebrating Muslim protagonists.

There are many more films in which Hindus and Muslims appear as close friends or colleagues. In *Andhaa kanoon*, for example, both Vijay and Khan are victimized by criminal elements in the society and are deprived of their families in different incidents in their earlier lives. Years later they meet and Khan becomes a key ally in Vijay's personal battle to avenge the perpetrators. The Muslim and Hindu identities of the protagonists are treated with equality here, far from showing anybody as an "outsider" or as a stereotype.

I may mention several films where Muslim characters are in "game-changing" important roles. In *Zanjeer* [1973], a Khan helps a Hindu police officer in his revenge mission. Religious identities are reversed in *Raakh* [2001] when Aamir Khan (also his screen name) is helped by a Hindu police officer to avenge his girlfriend's rape. In *Bas itna sa khwaab hai* [2001] Naved Ali is the main inspiration who changes the life of the Hindu protagonist Surajchand. In *Pyaar ki jeet* [1987], in contrast to other Hindu doctors, a Muslim doctor Rehman is shown as an honest and kind person. In *Hey Ram* [2000] it is Amjad Khan who ultimately stops the Hindu protagonist from killing Gandhi. In *Munna Bhai MBBS* [2003], the death of Zaheer is the turning-point in the story. In *Kismat konnection* [2008], a female Muslim psychic reader is the central character. In *Khuddaar* [1982], a Muslim provides shelter to the two estranged young brothers. In *A Wednesday* [2008], while several terrorists are Muslims, one of the most dynamic and honest police officers is also a Muslim. In *Yaadon ki Baaraat* [1973], Hindu Shankar's best friend is Usman, a Muslim. In *Vidhaata* [1982] revenge by the Hindu protagonist for the murder of his Muslim caretaker becomes the central theme of the film. In *Junoon* [1978] the Muslim protagonist sacrifices his love interest in the service of the Indian freedom struggle in 1857. In *Khuda gawah* [1992], Amitabh Bachchan, playing the role of a Pathan from Afghanistan, is aided by a Hindu police officer in completing his mission. In *Muqaddar ka Sikan-dar* [1978], Amitabh is adopted by a Muslim woman and later guided and inspired by a Muslim *darvesh*. He has loved a Hindu girl since his childhood but can never express his feelings. In the climax, he evokes strong sympathy from the audience when he sacrifices his life for his love. In *Ghulam-e-Musthafa* [1997] early hatred and bitterness between a Hindu woman and a Muslim man are eventually overcome by their mutual trust. In *Saawariya* [2007], an adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short story *White Nights*, the Muslim girl Sakina charms the Hindu boy Ranbir Raj but eventually is united with her older lover Imaan. Although Sardar [1998: 19–47] has criticized the portrayal of Muslims in the famed *Sholay* [1975], I would argue that it is the old Muslim Imaam Saheb in that film who is shown as a more courageous and inspiring figure than all the other Hindu villagers, who hesitate to fight against the villain. It is Imaam Saheb who loses his son first and exhorts others to be ready for such a sacrifice, and to lead lives of honor rather than selling their self-esteem to an evil *dacoit*. In all the foregoing examples, Muslims emerge not as outsiders but as important characters, often as a protagonist or his/her friend.

I now discuss several other films in which Hindus and Muslims appear not only as friends in their personal lives but work together in the service of nationalism.

I am thinking of films such as *Saat Hindustani* [1969], *Kranti* [1981], *Deshpreme* [1982], *Karma* [1986], *China Gate* [1998], *Lagaan* [2001], *Imaan dharam* [1977], *Insaniyat* [1994] and *Jodhaa Akbar* [2008]. All are overtly or covertly nationalistic in their themes. However this nationalism, although using some Hindu myths and legends in its narrative (as shown in the case of *Karma*, cf. Derne [1995: 191–216], and of *Lagaan*, cf. Wright [2007: 143–165]), cannot complete its project of nation-building without incorporating Muslims and other minority groups. Instead of treating the minorities as second-class citizens or creating an impossible Hindu-only nation, these nation-building projects are Gandhian in their approach, treating all religions and castes on equal terms. This last point is especially important. When scholars observe the “exoticization” of Muslims in Hindi films, it has to be seen in the context of such stereotyped portrayal of several other communities. Though filmmakers commonly portray Punjabis, Gujaratis, Rajasthanis and South Indians with exotic accents and costumes [Dwyer 2006: 140–144], perhaps Muslims escape at least the linguistic stereotypes because Muslims in North India speak with very similar accents to their Hindu counterparts.

Although *Imaan dharam* is not a nationalistic film *per se* it is not difficult to interpret it in such terms, especially when the reformer’s name is Kabir and the two characters to be reformed on the path of honesty are Hindu and Muslim. In another film, *Kachche dhaage* [1999], Hindu and Muslim stepbrothers unite to rescue their mother Mariam. A somewhat similar message appears from the titles of some films that are not available to watch, e.g., *Shankar Hussain* [1977, in Hindi], *Pandit aur Pathan* [1977, in Hindi], *Ram Rahim* [1930, in Hindi], *Ram Rahim* [1983, in Oriya], and *Ram Robert Rahim* [1980, Telugu remake of the Hindi *Amar Akbar Anthony* [1977] which was also made in Pakistan as *Akbar Amar Anthony* [1978]; cf. Jain [2010]). Also *Aap ke Deewane* [1980] and *Paappi devataa* [1995] are both based on friendship of the two leading men, named Ram and Rahim, although the title of the films does not suggest that. In *Johar-Mehmood in Goa* [1965], Ram and Rahim once again appear together and rebel against the five-centuries-long Portuguese occupation of Goa. *Kal ki awaz* [1992] may be a rare national security film in which the entire cast is Muslim, including the home minister and the protagonist police officer. Similarly, in *Maa aur mamta* [1970], a Muslim provides shelter to a Hindu woman who raises a boy originally given to her by a Christian priest. In *Chak de! India* [2007], hockey players speaking various languages also include a Christian, a Muslim and a Sikh player who all ultimately unite as a team to play for national victory. In *Vijeta* [1982] four friends training to become fighter pilots in the Air Force Academy are all from different religions, the Hindu Venkat, Muslim Aslam, Christian Wilson, and Sikh Angad. Angad is also shown in a romantic relationship with Anna, a Christian. It seems that there are innumerable such Indian films in which people of different faiths are personal friends or colleagues in nation-building or -defending projects, without the slightest hint of “othering” toward any faith, especially not the “minority’s” faith, as I have shown in some examples here.

V. Shantaram’s *Padosi* [a.k.a. *Shejari* in Marathi, 1941] may be the first Indian film where Hindu–Muslim unity is the main emphasis of the story. It is a story of a Hindu and a Muslim family living adjacently in a village, each led by a patriarch, Thakur and Mirza, who work for a dam-construction company. Both families also have young adult sons, their wives and their children, who play

and work together harmoniously. In fact, many early scenes are woven around the game of chess—which was poignantly displayed years later in a Satyajit Ray film, *Shatranj ke khilari* [1977]. While Ray's film is credited as based on Premchand's 1924 [2006] novel of the same name, it can only be speculated whether Shantaram was also aware of the novel; at least the chess scenes are quite similar to those in Ray's film. Not only are both Thakur and Mirza but even their grandchildren addicted to the game. All seems to be going well until the local dam company announces the expansion of its dam into the village and Thakur adopts a stand against it: he exhorts the villagers not to sell their land for this project—almost a precursor to the opposition to various dam construction projects in India after the 1970s. To teach Thakur a lesson, the dam company lays him off. By this sudden turn of events, Thakur is mistaken that Mirza must have conspired against him. Meanwhile, Thakur's son is shown to be in love with the daughter of the company's owner. To make the matter worse, Thakur's son is also falsely blamed for arson and is penalized by the village *panchayat* which is headed by none other than Mirza. The stage is now set for flaring up the misunderstanding between the two long-time neighbors. As a reaction to continuous humiliation and verbal attacks from Thakur, Mirza decides to move his family out although both the families mourn for each other for the rest of the film, especially in the song when Thakur compares their separation with the *Rāmāyana's* episode of brotherly separation of Ram and Bharat. In the climax, Thakur's son decides to teach a lesson to the villagers who start selling their lands to the dam company. He steals some explosives and plants them in the building of the dam. When Mirza's son shares his doubt about this activity with Thakur, they rush to the dam site only to witness the explosions. Soon Mirza also rushes to the site and in the final scene both he and Thakur are killed amidst the explosions with their hands joined in eternal friendship, in repentance for their earlier misunderstanding. In addition to the idea of Hindu-Muslim unity, the film's other ideas have also reappeared elsewhere, such as its depiction of urban industrial modernity invading the rural society in *Naya Daur* [1957] and in a Marathi film, *Pandhar* [2004]. Of course, the idea that communal harmony among Hindus and Muslims can be shattered by outside forces is depicted in several films after *Padosi*; for instance, in *Train to Pakistan*, as mentioned above. Perhaps the most outstanding achievement of *Padosi* is its futuristic symbolic depiction of the impending partition of India and Pakistan by way of looking at two neighbors. And this was later repeated in a number of films, several of which are discussed above.

Based on the examples offered, it is clear that seeing Hindus and Muslims as personal or "nationalistic" friends has been the norm in Indian films. I now examine some films that focus on Muslim communities living in the larger non-Muslim society.

#### FILMS PORTRAYING ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Like *Khamosh pani*, discussed above, *Khuda kay liye* [2007] is a rare Pakistani film about social problems among Muslims. It seeks solutions in a reformed Islam without pointing fingers at outside agents. Probably for the first time in a feature film, a fundamentalist Muslim leader is shown brain-washing innocent young

Muslim boys and turning them into terrorists. However, it is because of such terrorists that the larger Muslim diaspora is also seen in a suspicious light—a subject which also appears in the Indian films *New York* [2009] and *My Name is Khan* [2010]. Also shown is the plight of Muslim women, given the medieval mind-sets of Muslim society in Afghanistan. I have chosen to mention these two films briefly, *Khamosh pani* and *Khuda kay liye*, just to make a contrast with Indian films, which could never take such bold approaches in criticizing Muslim social and religious customs—even though they can do so with medieval Hindu customs, as we saw.

Like *Garam Hawa* [1973], *Salim langde pe mat ro* [1989] has been acclaimed by scholars for portraying real Muslim conditions in Indian society [Chatterjee 2008; Dissanayake 1994]. According to the film it is the harsh economic conditions that make Muslims easy prey for politicians who use them for selfish and evil motives. While this thesis is generally acceptable, a similar thesis would also apply to Hindu “subalterns” who live in Mumbai slums: two similar films immediately come to mind, *Mashaal* [1984] and *Arjun* [1985], both written by Javed Akhtar, one of the most respected writers for Hindi cinema. In both films the unemployed slum-dwelling youth, who happen to be Hindus, are shown leading lives quite similar to the Muslim protagonist Salim in *Salim langde pe mat ro*. My point is simply that Muslims are not alone in suffering poverty and unemployment, though at least *Mashaal* and *Arjun* would have us believe that. Instead of singling out Muslims in the Mumbai slums, films such as *Gaman* [1978] and the TV series *Nukkad* [1986] include both Hindus and Muslims in portraying their socioeconomic hardships in Mumbai: this in my view is a more realistic representation of Mumbai’s millions of slum-dwellers.

## CONCLUSION

With the defeat of the Hindu nationalist party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Parishad) in several states and at the national level in the 2004 and 2008 elections, the perceived threat of a burgeoning Hindu nationalism in Hindi films should also subside. To ensure the box-office success of their films and to maintain the official secular policy of the Indian nation-state most Indian filmmakers, I am optimistic, will not veer toward jingoism and will not attack or criticize any particular religion. This is evident from all the films discussed above. In all the categories of film presented here Muslims are rarely, if at all, singled out for criticism. In India–Pakistan Partition films, the religious identity of Pakistanis or Indians is a much less important factor than their *national* identities, as in *Henna* and *Mammo*. In films that involve Hindu–Muslim violence, it is the Hindu fanaticism that is criticized in Indian films and not Islamic fundamentalism, as we can see in *Zakhm*, *Firaaq*, or *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*. In films about Hindu–Muslim relationships, both categories are on friendly terms, often in the service of nationalism, such as in *Dor* and *Deshpremee*. And lastly, in Muslim community films, their portrayal is quite sympathetic, as we see in *Salim langde pe mat ro* and *Gaman*. In their entire history, Indian films have built upon the legacy of Gandhian social harmony and Nehruvian nationalism and secularism, as illustrated in *Padosi* and *Hum ek hain*. If Muslim ethos in Indian cinema is celebrated in one word as “harmony” by the

veteran film critic Iqbal Masood [2005], I hope that this harmony will continue its tradition into the future.

It must never be forgotten that India is one of the largest *Muslim* nations on earth; and for business reasons, if none other, no commercial filmmaker is going out of his way to make a potential audience of around 160 million Indian Muslims feel uncomfortable at the movies. Moreover, those filmmakers are well aware that their films are heavily consumed by almost all the Muslim nations, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries with a big Muslim majority throughout the Middle East and Africa.

## NOTES

1. I have found some disagreements with Kesavan's article in Trivedi's one on the Hindi language [2006].
2. In contrast to Booth's approach, Philip Lutgendorf acknowledges the enthusiastic reception that *Baiju Bawra* continues to enjoy: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/baijubawra.html> (accessed June 30, 2009). This is one example showing the importance of an ethnographic study of Indian films as against a "textual" study.
3. Just as Hindu-Muslim harmony is maintained in other businesses where both these communities have their financial interests interlinked [Varshney 2002].

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- Parzania*. Director, Rahul Dholakia; starring Naseeruddin Shah and Sarika. Rahul Dholakia, 2007.
- Pyaar ki jeet*. Director, Saawan Kumar; starring Rekha, Ashok Kumar, Vinod Mehra and Shashi Kapoor. Saawan Kumar, 1987.
- Raakh*. Director, Aditya Bhattacharya; starring Aamir Khan, Supriya Pathak and Pankaj Kapoor. Asif Noor, 1989.
- Ram Rahim*. Director, K. P. Bhave; starring E. Bilimoria and Mazhar Khan. 1930.
- Ram Rahim*. Director, Sushil Mukherjee; starring Bijoy Mohanty and Uttam Mohanty. 1983.
- Ram Robert Rahim*. Director, Vijaya Nirmala; starring Rajnikanth, Krishna and Chandra Mohan. 1980.
- Ramchand Pakistani*. Director, Mehreen Jabbar; starring Nandita Das and Navaid Jabbar. Javed Jabbar, 2008.
- Saaransh*. Director, Mahesh Bhatt; starring Anupam Kher, Rohini Hattangadi and Soni Razdan. Tara-chand Barjatya, 1984.
- Saat Hindustani*. Director, K. A. Abbas; starring Amitabh Bachchan, Utpal Dutt and Jalal Agha. K. A. Abbas, 1969.
- Saawariya*. Director, Sanjay Leela Bhansali; starring Ranbir Kapoor, Sonam Kapoor and Salman Khan. SPE Films, 2007.
- Salim langde pe mat ro*. Director, Saeed Akhtar Mirza; starring Pavan Malhotra, Makrand Deshpande, Ashutosh Gowariker and Surekha Sikri. National Film Development Corporation of India, 1989.
- Sangeet samrat Tansen*. Director, S. N. Tripathi; starring Bharat Bhushan. Sur Sagar Chitra, 1962.
- Shakti*. Director, Ramesh Sippy; starring Dilip Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan and Smita Patil. Musir Riyaz, 1982.
- Shankar Hussain*. Director, Yusuf Naqvi; starring Pradeep Kumar. Tajdar Kamal and Hari Singh, 1977.
- Shatranj ke khilari [The Chess Players]*. Director, Satyajit Ray; starring Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffrey, Shabana Azmi and Farooq Shaikh. Devki Chitra, 1977.
- Sholay*. Director, Ramesh Sippy; starring Sanjeev Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Jaya Badhuri, Hema Malini, A. K. Hangal and Sachin. Sippy Films, 1975.

- Tamas*. Director, Govind Nihalani; starring Om Puri, Bisham Sahni, Deepa Sahi, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Manohar Singh and Dina Pathak. Govind Nihalani, 1987.
- Tansen*. Director, Jayant Desai. Ranjit Movietone, 1943.
- Train to Pakistan*. Director, Pamela Rooks; starring Mohan Agashe, Nirmal Pandey, Rajit Kapoor, and M. S. Sathyu. Ravi Gupta, R. V. Pandit and Pamela Rooks, 1991.
- Veer zaara*. Director, Yash Chopra; starring Shahrukh Khan, Preity Zinta, Rani Mukherjee, Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini. Yash Raj Films, 2004.
- Vidhaata*. Director, Subhash Ghai; starring Dilip Kumar, Sanjeev Kumar and Sanjay Dutt. Gulshan Rai, 1982.
- Vijeta*. Director, Govind Nihalani; starring Shashi Kapoor, Rekha and Kunal Kapoor. Film-Valas, 1982.
- A Wednesday*. Director, Neeraj Pandey; starring Naseeruddin Shah. Ronnie Screwvala, 2008.
- Yaadon ki Baaraat*. Director, Nasir Hussain; starring Dharmendra and Vijay Arora. Nasir Hussain Films, 1973.
- Zakhm*. Director, Mahesh Bhatt; starring Pooja Bhatt, Ajay Devgan and Sonali Bendre. Pooja Bhatt Productions, 1998.
- Zanjeer*. Director, Prakash Mehra; starring Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bhaduri, Pran and Ajit. Prakash Mehra Productions, 1973.

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