

# PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIMS CHARACTERS IN INDIAN CINEMA

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## ABSTRACT

Bollywood films often include unflattering depictions of Muslims (both Indian and foreign). Inaccurate portrayals of Islam can combine outdated and modern ideals and beliefs. The religious practises of Muslims are often misrepresented and abused in Bollywood. After 9/11 attacks, several Indian filmmakers presented Muslims in films in an unfavourable light. Films from Bollywood, such as *Chak De India*, *Fanaa*, and *"Main Hoon Na,"* have helped disseminate stereotypes about Muslims. Indian cinema delivers potent political messages by presenting its characters in stereotyped ways. Several studies have examined Bollywood's portrayal of nationalism. In this study, we examine the representation of Muslims and Islam in well-known Bollywood films. Many Muslims feel that they have received an unfavourable portrayal in Bollywood films. According to studies, Muslims in Indian cinema often play stereotypical roles. The number of movies that portray Muslims negatively far outnumbers the number that do so positively. The percentage of films that are detrimental to the overall percentage are much higher than the percentage of positive films, which is just 13.33 percent. This demonstrates a lack of appreciation for Muslims and a scarcity of positive depictions of Muslims in media.

**Keywords:** *Bollywood, Portrayed Muslims, Indian Cinema, Positive, Negative*

## INTRODUCTION

"Cognitive frameworks that include the perceiver's knowledge, ideas, and expectations about human groupings," as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it. India has sought to revive its old image as a secular society with the media playing a sensitive role to promote varied viewpoints both political and religious (Raja, 2014). Especially since 9/11, the Indian film industry has often shown Muslims in stereotypical ways (which is negative) (Khan et al., 2011). Muslim characters are often represented negatively and are often portrayed as hostile, nasty, malicious, terroristic, untrustworthy, and anti-national. Muslims, both Indian and non-Indian, are often portrayed in negative ways in Bollywood films. There are about twice as many negative depictions of Muslim characters as there are favourable ones in Bollywood. Inaccurate depictions of Muslims can include a mix of traditional and contemporary attitudes and values. When Muslims are depicted in a bad light, it is easy to draw connections between Islam and criminal behaviour. Bollywood also misrepresents and misuses Muslim religious customs (Zafar & Amjad, 2007). This research demonstrates the prejudice of Indians as they represent Muslims in their movies as terrorists and ill thinking individuals. By depicting its characters in such stereotypical ways, Indian film sends powerful political signals to its viewers, sometimes serving to inflame underlying tensions (Ali and

Chaudhry). By analysing the depiction of Muslims in commercially successful Hindi films from the 1990s forward, this essay delves into the ways in which communalism and nationalism are constructed. "(Khatun, 2016). Hollywood's attempts to show Muslims in a more nuanced light by focusing on international terrorism and Islamic extremism do more harm than good for Muslims throughout the world. In the end, films like *Veer-Zaara* and *Fiza* show that there is an acknowledgment that Muslim characters may be nuanced, intriguing, and important; but, the very various ways in which these films tackle the subject of Islam also suggest that it is still not viable to regard Bollywood cinema as a forum in which Islam is properly understood or adequately depicted (Hirji, 2008). With its depiction of Indian culture, society, castes, classes, politics, art, and religion, Indian film has served as a reflection of the complexity of the subcontinent. Until date, the portrayal of this minority group in Indian film has mostly stayed within the mainstream discourse, even while stereotyping its members. This film makes an effort to avoid the typical caricatures of Islam. But, Muslim groups all around the globe protested the film *Vishwaroopam* because of how it portrayed Islam. The impact of Islamic extremism on the average Muslim is the primary topic in *New York and Anwar*. These films show a lot of empathy for the common Muslim's predicament (Rajasekhar, 2010). The nationalism portrayed in Bollywood has been the subject of significant research. In this research, we analyse how Islam is depicted in popular Bollywood movies. As a result of India's complex political, cultural, and religious past, Islam naturally plays a prominent but reimagined part in Bollywood. Yet *Veer-Zaara* just serves to remind us that religious themes haven't evolved to be more sophisticated. This is what the research shows (Mishra 260). The image of Muslims in Bollywood films has been portrayed negatively. Bollywood has provided the perfect stage for staging the Hindutva ideology's dyadic conflict (Kumar, 2013). In this age of openness and globalisation, when Muslims make up a sizable percentage of the global workforce, it is surprising how few films feature Muslim protagonists. This article examines the portrayal of Indian Muslims in Bollywood films through the lens of stereotypes. Bollywood must disengage from feudal nostalgia and the stereotype of the Muslim as a terrorist and villain if it is to accurately portray the lives of India's Muslim population. Bollywood movies like *Chak De, India*, *Dor*, and *Garam Hawa* have contributed significantly to the spread of false generalisations about Muslims. Instead than stereotyping Muslims, Bollywood should embrace a trend towards including more Muslim protagonists (Islam, 2007). Conversely, the majority of films featuring Muslim protagonists focus on terrorism. The first is the stigmatisation of all Muslims in society as a result of the widespread association of terrorist acts with Islam (the Muslim community). The primary goal of this research is to analyse and have a conversation about certain recent films and to draw conclusions on the good or bad portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood (Bhat, 2019). According to this research, several Bollywood films have portrayed Mughal Muslims as aggressive, harsh, and illogical while presenting Hindus as heroes who are brilliant, loyal, courageous, industrious, and committed to their nation. According to a study (Molaei & Hussain Babaei, 2020).

## Problem Statement

The focus of this research is on how Muslims are depicted in Bollywood films. Muslims have been portrayed negatively in Indian films, especially after 9/11. Films, as this literature study shows, demonstrate in spades, are an effective method of persuasion and leave a profound impression on their audiences. They influence public perception and may shift social norms. The Indian film industry is an effective platform for shaping public opinion. The representation of Muslims in Indian cinema has always been unfavourable, but it has become more so after 9/11. Indian cinema often portrays Muslims in negative ways, such as terrorists, traitors, and criminals. The Indian public, and the public at large, now see things quite differently as a result of this situation. This study was conducted to provide light on whether or not Muslims are consistently given a poor portrayal in the media or whether this is only a widespread misconception. (Khan et al., 2011)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a sharp disparity between Hindus and Muslims in a few Bollywood films. The most influential form of popular entertainment in India, cinema has contributed much to this. More than 300 million Muslims are expected to call India home by 2050, making it the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation (Hackett, 2015).

Discussions in recent publications have focused on how Hindi-language films depict Hindu-Muslim relationships. According to my research of many films, current portrayals of Muslims in Hindi cinema have contributed to the stereotyping of Muslims in the film industry. The imagined danger of a growing Hindu nationalism in Hindi cinema should diminish now that the Hindu nationalist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Parishad) has been soundly defeated in various states and at the national level. *Zakhm*, *Firaaq*, and *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* are only a few examples of how, while depicting scenes of violence between Hindus and Muslims, Indian filmmakers critique Hindu extremism rather than Islamic fundamentalism. Both Hindus and Muslims are portrayed positively in films portraying their interactions with one another, such as *Dor* and *Deshpremee*.

Films made by and for the Muslim community, such as *Salim langde pe mat ro* and *Gaman*, present Muslims in a positive light. Indian cinema has expanded on themes of national pride and religious tolerance popularised by Nehru and Gandhi. (Jain, 2011)

The image of Muslims in Bollywood films has been portrayed negatively. This study argues that Bollywood has shown a clear preference for making films that give in to the extreme nationalist ideology advocated by the Hindutva movement. Muslims in India are in a difficult position due to the prevalence of majoritarianism in the cultural sphere in which they must forge their identities and integrate into everyday life. Rooted in a dramatic assertion of majoritarian hegemony fueled by a furious anti-Muslim agenda is the stratospheric rise of Hindu political awareness after the 1990s. Hindus have used their philosophy and language to portray Muslims as foreign invaders who must be treated as such. These nationalist political movements are founded on two pillars: the dehumanisation of non-Hindus and the promotion of the idea that only Hindus should be considered to be a legitimate part of India. (Kumar, 2013)

Cinema, like many other bourgeois art forms, serves the interests of the ruling classes since it is an unusually capital-intensive medium. Only in a state where the state is interested in and needs that change for its own growth does fighting this and making it a real medium for change appear conceivable. The dynamic nature of film has been harnessed in Cuba for the purpose of bringing about profound political and social transformation. Is it true that India has transformed from a colonial power to a socialist nation? (Gupta, 2004)

Women's roles changed significantly as cultures became more sophisticated. The media's impact on the modernisation of countries and the portrayal of women in such cultures is substantial. The portrayal of women in Indian films has seen a sea change in recent years. The idea is to make a connection between the evolving role of women in Indian society and the evolving role of women in Indian cinema. The place of women in many cultures has been the subject of a great deal of study.

This shift shows that women in the film business are making their voices heard outside of the movies as well. Women's roles in Indian film are inspirational for girls and women who don't have the same opportunity. Cinema is a mirror of society; it reflects back the political ideologies, social values, group behaviours, speech patterns, and fashions that are popular at the time. (Aggarwal, 2014)

The vast majority of Indian Muslims were caricatured as barbaric, ill dressed, and violent. The Indian Muslim community was portrayed as the villain 60% of the time and the hero 40% of the time in Bollywood films released in 2016. Media in India often associates Muslims and Islam with violence and extremism. In their depiction of Indian Muslims in eight films released in 2016, these films propagandised an inaccurate and offensive picture of Muslims, their traditions, and their faith. The data as a whole showed that Muslims were more often given roles of villains and antagonists than heroes and defenders. According to a recent study (Umber et al., 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The goal of this research is to collect evidence of the influence of Indian film on how Muslims are portrayed on screen. Thirty films were analysed for this research. Movies have an impact on society because of the ripple effect they have on people's habits. Bollywood movies, but also movies made in other languages, have a powerful impact on the minds of today's youth. The study's sample size of 30 films found that 22% of them depicted Indian Muslims in a bad light, 4% in a good light, and 4% in a mixed one. These flicks were picked using a simple random sampling method. The representation of Muslims in Bollywood films is studied using a content analysis research approach, which allows for an in-depth investigation of the media's actual contents. Bollywood films that depict Muslims serve as a data source. This research looks at how Muslims are portrayed in Bollywood movies. The Muslim community was widely held responsible for the carnage and branded a terrorist organisation as a result. This research relies heavily on qualitative examination of well-known Indian films from the last decade. The documentary aims to shed light on the cultural significance hidden inside the storylines of Indian film. It's likely that in Indian films, Muslims would be portrayed negatively more often than positively. True depictions of Muslims in India are what

should be praised in films. These movies portray Muslims as actual people, rather than utilising stereotypical portrayals. In these films, Muslims are often portrayed negatively as criminals, slum dogs, terrorists, and people who work in unpleasant professions. Mix movies are those that have both good and negative portrayals of Muslims.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Table 1: Indian Movie Genres Classified By Their Representations Of Muslims**

Total No. Of Films	Positive Films	Negative Films	Mixed Films
30	4 (13.33%)	22 (73.33%)	4 (13.33%)

According to the study, Muslims in Indian cinema are often portrayed negatively. Based on the data in Table 1, it is clear that there are far more negative films than positive ones. This points to a general lack of respect and admiration for Muslims in Indian films. Generally speaking, Muslims are portrayed negatively in Indian films, according to the study's findings. As can be seen in Table 1, there are far more negative films (73.33%) than positive films (13.33%). This points to an absence of respect for Muslims and a dearth of favourable portrayals of Muslims in Indian film.

**Table 2: List of selected movies**

S.No.	Name of the Movie	Producer/ Director
<b>Negative</b>		
1	Veer-Zaara	Yash Chopra
2	Sarfarosh	John Mathew
3	Insan	K. Subhash
4	Ab Tumharay Hawalay Watan Sathio	Anil Sharma
5	Zameer	Rohit Shetty
6	Maa Tujhay Salam	Mahendra Dharinal
7	Pinjaar	Chandra Prakash
8	Dewaar	Vinod Doshi
9	The Hero	Anil Sharma

10	Ye Dil Ashiqana	Aruna Irani
11	Indian	Depak Rai Sharma
12	Jaal	Vinod Shah
13	Mission Kashmir	Vidhovindar Chopra
14	Hidustan Ki Kasm	Kumar Mangat
15	Dil Jalay	Harry Baweja
16	Kachey Dhaagay	Milan Luthria
17	Garv	Punit Isar
18	Lakshya	Farhan Akhtar
19	Border	J. P. Dutta
20	Wanted	Boney Kapoor
21	Wednesday	Neeraj Pandey
22	Fanaa	Yash Chopra
<b>Positive</b>		
1	Rang Day Basanti	Rakesh Omprakash
2	Meine Dil Tujh Ko Diya	Sohail Khan
3	Main Hoon Na	Farah Khan
4	Chak de India	Yash Chopra
<b>Mixed</b>		
	New York	Yash Raj Films
	Kurban	Karan Johar
	Dehli 6	Rakesh Omprakash
	My name is Khan	Karan Johar

## Positive

### 1. “Main Hon Na” by Farah Khan

The video shows that most people in India and Pakistan want to get along, but that certain radicals in the Indian Army are fighting against it. In the film, a man named General Bakshi promises that 50 Pakistani captives would be freed. By making such a comment, conservative Indians want to have him killed, but he is rescued. The film also depicts the harsh and intolerable circumstances endured by Pakistani detainees who were detained for using the name of their country. All in all, the film promotes a desire for peace on both sides of the border and brings attention to the fact that a small group of terrorists inside India is trying to derail the peace process. Its critical focus is inward, and its message is upbeat.

### 2. “Chak De India” by Yash Chopra

The Muslim hero Kabir Khan is presented here as a man of devotion, duty, and integrity. At first, he was seen as a traitor and a disloyal individual for betraying his team and causing them to lose the men's hockey World Cup. Yet as the coach of the women's hockey team, he was able to prove himself and earn the respect of his fellow citizens.

## Negative

### 1. “Veer Zaara” by Yash Chopra

A Muslim named Zara Hayat falls in love with a Hindu named Veer Partab Singh. In this film, Muslims are represented negatively as selfish, unfriendly, and lacking in will strength and drive, whereas Hindus are shown to have a welcoming attitude towards Muslims. This is meant as anti-Two-Nation Theory propaganda.

### 2. “Fanaa” by Yash Chopra

Despite Rehan's many identities and Zonnie's patriotism, Muslims are portrayed in the film in a negative light. The mafia is headed by Rehan's grandpa.

### 3. “Sarfaroosh” by Johan Methew Mathon

Muslims in the movie 'Sarfaroosh' are presented as terrorists and drug and weapon smugglers who use trained camels to cross the Pakistani border town of Bahid in the province of Rajasthan. Terrorist Sultan communicates with Pakistani officials and organisations in order to destabilise Indian law and order. Terrorists might find safe haven in Pakistan, and they are aided by officials from the Pakistani Agency ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). Jihad is the name Muslims give to the terrorists who pray in mosques before carrying out acts of genocide.

#### 4. “Ab Tumharay Hawalay Watan Sathio” by Anil Sharma

Muslims are represented as the perpetrators of violence and mayhem caused by Pakistan's meddling in India. In 1971, Indian soldiers captured Tiari Chowki and waved their flag over it, illustrating the stereotype that Indians are peaceful.

#### 5. “Wanted” by Boney Kapoor

In the film "Wanted," Muslims are presented as violent thugs who are to blame for all of the city's problems. The city is plagued by Ghani Bhai, the don of the criminal underground, in this telling of events.

#### 6. “Wednesday” by Ronnie Screwvala

The movie has repulsive and hateful depictions of Muslims with a central focus on terrorism. The film argues that Muslims are criminals and that Indians should wipe them out.

#### Mixed Films

The sample for this research includes the mixed-genre films My Name Is Khan, New York, Kurbaan, and Delhi 6. Both "My Name is Khan" and "New York" are the only two that show any empathy towards Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. Although "Delhi-6" showcases a wide variety of Muslims, "Kurban" zeroes in on Islamic extremism in the aftermath of 9/11. The film's Muslim protagonists engage in destructive actions and evoke sentiments of aversion towards Muslims, despite the hero's depiction as a nice and peaceful guy, Roshan.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All around India, people are watching Bollywood films, which tend to be about romance, material goods, and luxury. Of course, a more nuanced analysis of these films reveals overtly political goals. Vinzenz Hediger argues that the dramatic twists and succinct formulas of entertainment films make them ideal vehicles for exploring societal issues. Because making a blockbuster picture is an expensive endeavour, it's crucial that it's both entertaining and worthwhile.

Indian movie celebrates its many cultures and languages, but there are also scenes that highlight Hindu bigotry against Muslims. Bollywood films depict this religious tension by depicting Muslims in negative roles, such as thug con artists, gang leaders, and killers. Muslims are often portrayed negatively due to their appearance in media due to their traditional clothing, such as the shalwar-qameez, dupatta, tasbih, and beard. Despite the stereotypes, Muslims and Hindus collaborate in the film business, and there are several instances of Indians behaving in ways that are otherwise unique. Fans of Hrithik Roshan, for instance, are aware of his marriage to a Muslim lady, yet they still hold him in high esteem.

Muslims face a range of reactions in India. Amir Khan's films "Fanaa" and "Jihad" were targeted for a boycott by members of the right-wing Hindu party BJP because of the actor's support for compensating Muslims who were displaced by the building of a dam in Gujarat. The movie, however, was a tremendous hit with audiences in the other states. Indian movies from the industry known as Bollywood tend to focus on the negative aspects of strained communal relations rather than the good ones. Indian filmmakers often place emphasis on transnational terrorism, blaming Pakistan for attacks inside their own country. Some Hindu filmmakers have attempted to present Islam and Muslims in a negative light, cementing the stereotype that Muslims are the instigators of violence and the ones who benefit from it in the minds of their audiences. Hindus see themselves as patriots, whereas Pakistanis are portrayed as terrorists motivated only by financial gain. The impact of cinema on Indian culture has been the subject of several academic investigations. Many conservatives believe that movies have a negative moral and social impact. The film industry is often regarded as a significant cultural force. Protecting the impression Bollywood films have on the brains of the next generation requires urgent action. In 2020 (Balabantaray)

Muslims in the audience are looking for an upbeat portrayal that does justice to the religion. The bad stereotype has a chance to replace the positive one, inspiring further violence. They are also Indian citizens (Raja, 2014). The research demonstrates that many movies have a pattern of stereotyping Muslims as terrorists or mafia bosses (Bhat, 2019). The findings reveal that Indian film presents Muslims in a negative light and that anti-Muslim propaganda has been spread not only in India but throughout the world. To wit: (Khan et al., 2011). Bollywood movies portray the country's Hindu majority and its Muslim minority as adversaries, creating a false binary. These films have actively participated in the politics of nationalism by stereotypically portraying Hindus as superior than Muslims. The net effect of all this is that Muslims in India no longer feel safe identifying as Muslims, and Islam has been associated with negative connotations in the Indian psyche. (Kumar, 2013)

## CONCLUSION

Bollywood movies have a significant effect on culture because of the way they influence individuals and communities. This study analyses the representation of Muslims in Bollywood movies. The research claims that Muslims in Indian films are often stereotyped. Films depicting Muslims in a bad light greatly outnumber those doing so in a good one, suggesting that Muslims in India are generally not held in high regard. Films that accurately portray Muslims in India deserve appreciation. Characters that identify as Muslims in "Delhi-6" engage in detrimental behaviour and generate anti-Muslim sentiment. The film argues that Muslims are criminals and that Indians should wipe them out. Muslims are often portrayed negatively due to their appearance in media due to their traditional clothing, such as the shalwar-qameez, dupatta, tasbeeh, and beard. Many scholarly works have examined the cinema's influence on Indian society and culture. A sizable portion of the conservative population holds the view that cinema has a demoralising effect on audiences' values and behaviour. Bollywood movies often present the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority as enemies, presenting an inaccurate dichotomy. The negative stereotype has an opportunity to displace the good one, encouraging further acts of violence.

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