

THE PK CONTROVERSY

Analysis of the Bollywood Blockbuster – PK

¹Saima Riyaz, ²Toyeba Mushtaq

^{1,2} Doctoral Scholars

^{1,2}University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

Email - ¹symriyaz@gmail.com, ²toyebapandit@icloud.com

Abstract: *Cinema is a unique vehicle used for education, entertainment and for propaganda as well which makes films ubiquitous within human culture. In the widest sense of what stories or narratives cinema chooses to tell and how it chooses to tell them, it has always been involved in politics.*

The paper will discuss the controversy surrounding the movie PK and the reasons behind it. It has been reported that Aamir Khan starrer PK has already crossed the Rs.200 crore mark at the domestic box office, but the Rajkumar Hirani directorial faced rage of Hindutva elements in various cities across the country. After the first poster created undulation at various regions all over the nation, once the movie released various religious groups started outraging against the PK makers for allegedly hurting their religious sentiments. Even as Hindu organizations continued to demand a ban on Aamir Khan starrer PK, Muslim clerics were also seeking removal of controversial scenes from the film. The paper will discuss and analyse the controversy over PK.

To capture all the nuances of the controversy over PK, the method of content analysis has been employed in the study.

Key Words: *Hindi Cinema, Portrayal, Islam, Muslim, Prejudice.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Cinema is one of the strongest mediums of communication and that is what Anwar Huda (2004) opines in his book *'The Art and Science of Cinema'*. The visual medium has always been a powerful instrument to change opinion, lifestyle and thoughts. During the Stone Age itself, man drew pictures to express his thoughts and ideas. Today the world of moving pictures plays a unique role in communication. The reach and appeal of the world cinema is growing day by day and people in urban and rural areas alike are responding to the impact of the visual medium. The films express ideas, messages, and information to the people irrespective of their race, creed or colour. Images are continuously expressing those truths, imaginations and ideas what language labors to tell or write. Therefore, audience and the viewers are always at the receiving ends. Cinema has perhaps the greatest potential to be the most effective mass media instrument. Besides proving 'economical' entertainment for masses, it can easily become a means of mass instruction and mass education. However, cinema can also mould public opinion. The cinema caters to the artistic and intellectual needs of the people but also cultivates new ideas and norms in society on political as well as economic problems. The ideas can be 'bad or 'good' but they have an impact, such that it leaves a viewer thinking for a while. The same idea is communicated by Jake Lule (2012), i.e. just as movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce them; they also help to shape and solidify a culture's beliefs. The influence can be trivial but sometimes the impact can be so profound that it leads to social or political reform, or the shaping of ideologies. The relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic; while movies certainly influence the mass culture that consumes them, they are also an integral part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of prevailing concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. Therefore, cinema as an art form not only reflects the society it is set in, but also acts as a reflector to that society. Some films leave their mark on society and society in turn, reacts to these films in a variety of ways.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Belinda Marie Balraj (2011) in a paper *"My name is Khan and I am not a Terrorist": Representation of Muslims in 'My name is Khan'* discusses how Muslims are portrayed in *'My Name is Khan'* (MNIK) post 9/11 attack using Edward Said's 'orientalism' idea. The paper concludes that movie, MNIK, does portray Muslims as the "other" whereby just by having the name 'Khan', one is seen as a terrorist. The author suggests that the gate keepers or editors should play a pivotal role in selecting representations that are appropriate for viewers without judging a religion or person in particular.

Angie Mallhi (2005) in a paper *THE ILLUSION OF SECULARISM: Mani Ratnam's Bombay and The Consolidation of Hindu Hegemony* says that Ratnam's film certainly can be interpreted as giving expression to the two divergent perspectives. The author argues that while the film seeks to promote values of secularism by placing the experience of an inter-religious family at the centre of the irrational violence caused by religious strife, it ultimately undermines this through what is essentially a proclamation of Hindu hegemony. The paper demonstrates the ways in

which Hindu hegemony is both covertly and overtly established in the film, the former through the narrative and characters, the latter through its (mis)representation of the riots.

Shahnaz Khan (2009) in a paper *Nationalism and Hindi Cinema Narrative Strategies in Fanaa* draws upon the narrative strategies of the Bombay cinema blockbuster *Fanaa* and examines larger questions of culture, nation and citizenship in contemporary India. The author concludes that the narrative strategies of Bombay Cinema identify intense cultural contestation about the current forms of national narratives and under what terms various subjects will be granted citizenship.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

RQ 1: What were the main controversies revolving around the film *PK*?

RQ 2: Did the film *PK* malign Hindus and singled out Hinduism to criticise?

RQ 3: Did Aamir Khan have a hand in making *PK* 'anti-Hindu' because he being a Muslim has double standards for Hindus and Muslims?

RQ 4: Did *PK* make baseless allegations against Hinduism and Hindu gurus to promote other religions and campaigned for "Hindu hate" and "love jihad"?

4. ANALYSIS:

About *PK*

- Release Date: 2014
- Genre: Comedy, Drama, Fantasy

An alien lands on Earth in some area in Rajasthan. He is on a research mission but is stranded after his locket is stolen. He cannot contact his people back home planet because his locket also acts as a remote control and the story revolves around his struggle to get his remote-control back. He tries to understand the complexities of life during his stay on Earth and ends up questioning the most sensitive aspect of its inhabitants – religion.

5. CONTROVERSIES RELATED TO *PK*:

PK has been in news ever since its first nude poster came in public. Even though the audiences have been raving about the film, there are a lot of people who have criticised the Rajkumar Hirani's directed film *PK*. The film has crossed Rs 200 crore mark at the domestic box office, but the film faced ire of many religious outfits. There were many controversies surrounding *PK*. Below are some that were in limelight. The paper discusses the most famous or lime lighted controversies related to the film.

5.1. Controversy No 1: *PK* has singled out Hinduism to criticise.

Answer: *PK* shows few clips of people who inform the news channel about the wrong numbers in the society and that is not only about Hinduism. Christianity is explicitly accused of converting people using fear tactics. A poor farmer is wooed by a Christian missionary to convert to Christianity to escape hell fire. The farmer argues that God would have made him born in a Christian family if He wanted him to be a Christian.

A Muslim girl is shown complaining about a *fatwa* in wake of which the education of girls is stopped by the Muslims. She refuses to accept it saying our God cannot be so intolerant that He will have any issue on girl education. Pertinently the "*fatwa*" that the film talks about is that any girl who goes to school will be shot dead. Here *fatwa* is made synonymous to warning when *fatwa* just means a legal ruling given by a scholar of Islam not by a suicide bomber or terrorist. There are other times Islam and Christianity are criticized and even mocked. For instance when *PK* tried to walk in the Masjid with wine bottles, and the Muslims react with violence instead of calmly making him understand the disapproval of alcohol in Islam. The belief of 'god died for the sins of humanity' among Christians is made fun of when the character *PK* is told in the Church that god died for his sins. *PK* portrays the character *PK* praying to gods of all religions, even sects within religions and not getting any answer. Hence it does not single out Hinduism in any way.

5.2. Controversy No 2: Aamir Khan has double standards and as per Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists, he should go to Pakistan.

Answer: The whole film crew in *PK* is Hindus except Aamir Khan and the director has probably chosen him for his acting skills but definitely not because of him being a Muslim. Aamir Khan is accused of hurting the sentiments of Hindus because he is a Muslim. Notwithstanding the fact that it just happened that the actor in the *PK* is a Muslim since he is hired by the director of the film. Nobody would have batted an eyelid had the actor would have been a Hindu.

Aamir Khan has also worked in many films like *Sarfarosh* (1999) or *Fanaa* (2006) that portrayed Muslims as 'villains.' Therefore, *PK* is not 'his' conspiracy against Hindus or Hinduism as is said by many extremist Hindu groups. The Shiva chasing scene could have been avoided since it does not make any genuine point but can hurt the

sentiments of Hindus. But if anybody should be answerable, it should be the director/writer Rajkumar Hirani and the co-writer Abhijit Joshi since they are the ones who put the scene in the film. How can Muslims in general and Aamir Khan in particular be blamed for it. He is just an actor like any other actor who is 'hired' to do acting in the film. How does one justify of targeting Aamir Khan (the lead actor) on having double standards and told to go to Pakistan? He is the same person who gets kudos and standing ovation for a programme like *Satyamev Jayate*. Aamir Khan has been dragged and targeted unnecessarily for the film while his character in the movie clearly is that he is an alien and aliens don't have any religion. People have every right to agree or disagree with the contents of the film or even its idea but why target a single individual just because he is a Muslim while ignoring the fact that all the people involved in the making of the film, from director to producer to writer to singers are Hindus.

5.3. Controversy No 3: PK promotes other religions and made baseless allegations against Hinduism and Hindu gurus.

Answer: PK does not demean Hinduism or promotes other religions. The fact that Hindu god men fool people for their own gains is just one aspect of the bigger idea that the film conveys. The protagonist in the film points out that there are planets in the universe, other than and bigger than Earth like his own planet. He conveys it in the film that people don't lie on his planet and the reason for his truthfulness is portrayed that people on his planet don't fight on religious differences. In fact they don't even follow any religion as is made clear when he is amazed after knowing that people of Earth know their Creator. He also questions the diversity of religion and calls it a conspiracy of faith healers to divide people. He looks for a mark of religion in newborn babies and puts the same question before the Hindu guru Tapasvi Maharaj in the film and the rest of the world. The idea conveyed is that no one has a birthmark that they are Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs or Christians. Therefore 'religion is an insignificant concern' is what can be gauged by the logic that the film conveys which makes PK a film that upholds the core ideal of 'secularism'.

As far as maligning god men of Hinduism is concerned, the news about their involvement in crimes is sufficient to prove that it is not a baseless allegation. The film does not make a statement that all Hindu priests are bad, it just shows one person – Tapasvi Maharaj who mints money by fooling even educated masses. If showing one Hindu as a fraud makes a film anti-Hindu/Hinduism, then all Muslims are villains since majority of Hindi movies portray Muslims so or at least one Muslim character is definitely a villain. However, the ground reality is that the Muslims are dragged unnecessarily in films that criticize religions for their extravagance in spending on their places of worship and their god men. Hindus spend heavily on their temples and worship since they believe there is a separate form of worship (pooja) for almost everything. They need their priests to perform different forms of worship to various gods for various needs and this concept is touched upon in the film *OMG: Oh My God*. Muslims built a mosque and pray five times a day standing next to each other, shoulder to shoulder and a demigod is not needed to get to the God. Even the faction of Muslims who go to mausoleums offer a blanket or flowers which is nothing compared to what Hindus do in their temples. There is discrepancy when it comes to worship among Hindus. As in pointed in PK that wealthy Hindus are given first chance and the poor people are supposed to stand in line. Christians light candles and have Sunday ceremonies where they sing hymns from Bible. They have pope who is considered the highest authority in Christianity and one pope is succeeded by another one. The clergy continues but there the money spent is not near anywhere to the level that the Hindus spend on their temples and priests. Therefore, the god men of other religions are no match for the priests of Hinduism and such priests are to be mentioned in a film that in some way discusses religion and that is what is done in *OMG: Oh My God* and PK.

5.4. Controversy No 4: PK encourages "Hindu hate" and campaigns for "love jihad".

Answer: Some so-called proponents of Hinduism call PK a scheme to encourage marriage of Hindu girls with Muslim boys, thus it promotes 'love-jihad'. However just a glance over 100 years of Hindi cinema will make it clear that there are few Hindi films where the hero is a Muslim or a Pakistani in particular and the heroine is a Hindu. Raksha Kumar (2012) in an article *How Bollywood's Views on Pakistan Evolved* quotes Ms. Joshi of Outlook who in agreement said that there is hardly a film where the girl is from India and the boy from Pakistan since India had to have an upper hand sexually as well.

6. DISCUSSION:

The film shows PK asking question that no one has asked before. PK doesn't directly question God but questions the belief system that humans have created to reach God. People who are busy in their own life are forced to rethink about the complexities of their religion and see the world through PK's eyes. PK sees the world as it's filled with people who lie, who have no generosity, who are blind each one another's suffering, brainwashed by orthodoxy and straitjacketed by fear. The film shows a viewer happiness and gives some giggles too but leaves with a sudden attack of unexpected cynicism. The film highlights religious issues like Tapasviji who doesn't hesitate to fan communal flames and encourage his Hindu devotees to look at all Muslims suspiciously. He is shown so powerful in the film that his photos are all over the places at Jaggu's home: photos of him on the pillows, bed covers, bags,

geometry boxes, washroom walls etc. At the same time Tapasvi who is considered pious by most of his followers goes on lying about having direct connection with God and claims that PK's pendulum is 'Shiv Ji ke damro ka toota huwa manka' who is given to Tapasvi by Shiva himself. Tapasvi asks his fans to know who PK is and where he came from and says that may be the full form of PK is Parvaiz Khan or Pasha Kamal. The godman is clearly shown as someone who uses the people for his own benefit, when Bhairav Singh is killed in a bomb blast Tapasvi alleges that the blast is done by a Muslim. He even from the beginning doubts Sarfaraz since he is a Pakistani Muslim. Tapasvi's dialogue: "Itihaas gawa hai in logoun i.e Muslims ne chal kapat aur dhoke ke siwa kiya hi kya hai? Yeh i.e Sarfaraz tumhare tan ka upyoh karega, vivah nahi karega. Delete button dabao..." (History is witness to the fact that Muslims have always deceived us. This boy Sarfaraz is lustful, he won't marry you... Press delete button) clearly depicts his hatred towards Muslims in general and Pakistani Muslims in particular. PK also highlights the uneasiness between the people of India and Pakistan. When Jaggu's mother comes to know about her love affair with a Pakistani Muslim, all the words one can hear are 'Burqa payegi (will you wear burqa?)', 'nimaz padhegi (will you offer nimaz?)' and 'Jaggu teri matt toh nahi mari gayi (have you lost it Jaggu?)'. The film from the beginning shows that Sarfaraz Yusuf is a kind and loving person but is doubted because he is a Muslim rather a Pakistani Muslim. After a long time Bollywood produced a film that shows a Pakistani Muslim as a normal human (with no kohl, beard and shabby cloths). However, the film highlights some social issues as well. For example, when PK goes to a temple, he locks his sandals to the gate of the temple so that nobody steals it. He gets confused with the complexities of the dresses on earth. A white coloured dress is a sign of mourning in Hindus while as a Christian bride wears white on her wedding day; similarly, most of the Muslim ladies wear black burqa to cover themselves while Christian ladies wear black as a sign of mourning. To understand what religion people actually belong to he goes around checking the seals on the babies (he thinks maybe people come with seal of religion on their body). Since PK doesn't have a religion he is so confused that he asks God what should he do to impress Him: should he take a bath in Ganga, should he get baptized in a church, should he offer nimaz, should he fast like Muslims or Hindus, should he fast before sunrise or after sunrise, should he go barefoot to a temple or enter the church with shoes? All this clearly shows his frustration. The film has lots of subtle messages in it like PK says that there is not one God but two gods: The One Who made people and the other whom people made. He is of the opinion that people don't know anything about the God Who made them but should trust Him only and not the god whom they made because he is a fraud and liar like them only.

PK asks some basic questions about the religion in the film like why do we need to make idols and worship God when we say that he is everywhere? PK speaks about idol worship, but it is not the first film to do so. Films like *OMG: Oh My God* have done it way too bluntly. In addition to that the Hindu reform movement like Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj are against Idol worship and has spoken against it. There are some sects of Hinduism that believe in idol worship and some reject it. PK is talking about the Hindus who believe in idol worship. And this is done in almost all Hindi movies in case of other major religions like Islam as well. For instance, Hindi movies show Muslims, especially hero and heroine praying together, in shrines, asking the dead saints for help while the *qawwali* is playing in the background. It can be argued that the mainstream Islam considers worshipping and asking other than God to be blasphemous and there is complete segregation of genders in mosques because intermixing is forbidden in Islam and so is music. However, there are certain sections of the Muslim community, who don't follow Islam strictly, hence don't agree with this interpretation. And Hindi movies always take the side of the latter and the former are almost never shown on the silver screen. By this logic, all the Hindi movies that show Muslims worshipping dead should be banned; else they are a plot against Islam. Hindu extremist organisations created mayhem on Rajkumar Hirani's *PK* (2014) and not on Umesh Shukla's *OMG: Oh My God!* (2012) giving the reason that PK bashed Hinduism. The fact is that PK deals subtly and carefully with the subject of religion unlike other films like *OMG: Oh My God!* (2012). PK is a social satire and brings out the quirks that the masses can relate to. The film deals with the concepts that are embedded and strictly followed in the society like the concepts related to dressing, language etc. The masses keep following without questioning the sensibility of the norms set in the society. PK questions such societal norms and one such norm that is blindly followed is religion. Therefore, the film tries to reason with this concept as well, not that it singles out Hinduism to bash it.

Below are some of the additional controversies, less famous nonetheless related to PK.

Controversy No 5: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Subramanian Swamy alleged that PK has been funded by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and asked the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) to investigate in the film's funding. Swamy even tried to rally people of other faiths against the film and by extension against the Muslims. He highlighted a scene of a Sikh begging in the film and tweeted that a Sikh delegation has approached him regarding the same issue, demanding actions against the film. Controversy No 6: There are reports that Aamir Khan and Rajkumar Hirani paid the critically acclaimed '*OMG: Oh My God*' director, Umesh Shukla a hefty sum of eight crores to stop the shoot of the film, as the plot of the film was very similar to that of PK. But the director has come out in support of the crew of PK and issued a statement rubbishing the story. Controversy No 7: A lawyer in Kanpur moved to court against the star saying that the poster was "obscene." Aamir Khan defended nudity on PK poster saying that

it's not for publicity. He called it "key art", and that it depicted the story of the film. The poster features Aamir posing nude with a strategically placed boom box hiding his modesty. The poster was later approved by a government panel.

Controversy No 8: After Uttar Pradesh, the Bihar government decided to give Aamir Khan-starrer *PK*, entertainment tax exemption. After watching the film, the former Bihar Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar recommended that the film be made tax-free. But some people objected and 15 were booked of the protest over tax exemption to *PK*.

Controversy No 9: According to a PTI report, the Delhi High Court issued notice to the producers and directors of *PK* on January 21, 2015, on a novelist's plea accusing the makers of the film of plagiarising certain portions from his Hindi book *Farishta* published in 2013. The notice alleged that Hirani has stolen the characters, expression of ideas, scenes (sequences) from the novel.

Controversy No 10: Reportedly, Aamir Khan was shocked to read some websites carrying a fake interview credited to him, with reference to his film *PK*. In reply to this controversy, Aamir Khan issued a statement that interview carried by Pakistani websites in the name of religion and Islam was a fabricated one and published with the intent to impersonate him and that he has never given such an interview.

Controversy No 11: According to a PTI report, Sanjay Sharma, Founder of Transparency, Accountability and Human Rights Initiative for Revolution (TAHRIR) had also moved an application with the Hazratganj Police on January 2 for lodging an FIR against Akhilesh Yadav for the offence of downloading the film from a website and watching a pirated copy of the film.

Controversy No 12: According to a PTI report, a case has been registered against the director, producer and actor of *PK* at the Bajaj Nagar police station. A case under section 295A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings) and 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language) of the IPC was lodged against director, producer and actor of the film.

8. CONCLUSION:

The above are some of the main controversies related to the film *PK*. *PK* is one of that kicks off social debates on the issues that matter to everyone. The film questions the deep rooted superstitions in the social consciousness of the people in India. Aamir Khan who is an alien in the film is innocent like a new born baby. He meets good as well as bad people. He doesn't just visit temples but also visits masjids and churches. *PK* is not the first film to be a controversial one but it definitely brings into limelight the religious practices in India. The film definitely deserves credit for bringing such a sensitive topic in a mainstream commercial film. The reason why *PK* or any other Hindi film related to religion talk about Hindus predominantly is simply because Hindus form more than 80% of the population of India. The questions raised by the character *PK* in the film are genuine and most Hindus, if not any Indian, will testify to the fact. There is a tendency to get defensive when one's beliefs are challenged but going to the extremes as is done by the extremist organizations and labeling *PK* as the film that targets Hinduism is not acceptable. There are times when issues like religion conversions are discussed in parliament and prominent priests of different religions have been arrested on charges like rape and murder. It is hard to understand why people have problems when the same issues are debated in a film. *PK* takes a hard-hitting swipe on false claims of fake god men. People need faith for life but blind faith or *andh vishwas* is unnecessary because many people exploit others under the garb of such masks. Especially the needy and the poor are exploited the most. Most of the times it is not the religion that demands people to do a particular thing but people still do it and call it faith. Therefore *PK* has no hidden agenda rather it sticks to the magic formula of Rajkumar Hirani. Rajkumari Hirani has a magic formula of an amalgam of sharp dialogues and genuinely funny moments that subtly bring the social stigmas in the society into limelight. For example in *Munna Bhai MBBS* (2003) the message was that doctors should be compassionate towards patients. The director did not malign doctors in any way and the film did not portray that all doctors are uncompassionate. Similarly the message in *PK* is for a particular section of people who exploit and use others for their own benefits, in the name of religion and not to malign any religion particularly. On the face of it *PK* is a simple film that teaches a beautiful lesson to those willing to learn: "Believe in the God Who created you, not the one you created."

REFERENCES:

- Balraj, M. (2011). "My name is Khan and I am not a Terrorist": Representation of Muslims in 'My name is Khan'. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 2 (6) (pp. 91-95). *Academic Journals*. Retrieved from http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379500095_Balraj%20pdf.pdf
- Huda, A. (2004), *The Art and Science of Cinema*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, New Delhi
- Khan, S. (2009), Nationalism and Hindi Cinema: Narrative Strategies in Fanaa. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media 1*. 1. Intellect Ltd. Wilfrid Laurier University. doi: 10.1386/safm.1.1.85/1
- Kumar, R. (2012). How Bollywood's Views on Pakistan Evolved. Retrieved from http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/how-bollywoods-views-on-pakistan-evolved/?_r=0
- Lule, J. (2012), *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*. Retrieved from catalog.flatworldknowledge.com/catalog/editions/lule-understanding-media-and-culture-an-introduction-to-mass-communication-1-0
- Mallhi, A. (2005). *The Illusion of Secularism: Mani Ratnam's Bombay and The Consolidation of Hindu Hegemony*. University of Victoria. Retrieved from http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/capi/assets/docs/Mallhi_-_Illusion_of_Secularism.pdf