



Portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood: Case-Study of the *Tanhaji* Movie

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the portrayals of Hindu-Muslim relations in recent Bollywood movies with a specific emphasis on the *Tanhaji* movie. The movie narrates and depicts a religious struggle in the 17th century for the liberation of India. While Hindu-Muslim relations and conflicts have had many fluctuations throughout the history of India, evidences indicate that the contemporary situation of Muslims have worsened in the country. In parallel with the discriminatory discourses that are becoming prevalent against Muslims in the mainstream Indian society, different types of media represent and justify these actions. Cinema as the most significant type of popular entertainment in India has played an important role in this regard. The results of the present study indicate that by introducing Hindus as heroes who are smart, loyal, brave, diligent and dedicated to their motherland, and Mughal Muslims as violent, cruel and irrational, certain Bollywood movies have provided a significant contrast between the two groups.

Keywords: Bollywood; Hindu-Muslim relations; *Tanhaji*; Muslim portrayal; Narrative analysis

1. Introduction

An investigation of the history of Islam in India indicates that “trade relations have existed between Arabia and the Indian subcontinent from ancient times” (Singh, 2016, p. 1). Trade relations have existed in this region even in the pre-Islamic era. However, according to historians Elliot and Dowson, “the first ship bearing Muslim travelers was seen on the Indian coasts as early as 630 A.D (Singh, 2016 p. 1). Since then, Muslims proved a significant contribution to the economic and socio-cultural development and prosperity of the Indian subcontinent. According to the latest official statistics, which are based on the national census conducted in 2011 in India, the population of Muslims in the country was slightly more than 172,000,000, constituting approximately 14% of India’s entire population (Censusindia, 2011). Interestingly, the number of Muslims in India is increasing. As estimated by the Pew Research Centre in a report titled *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, “the number of Muslims in India will be 311 million by 2050 and the country is projected to have the world’s largest Muslim population, surpassing Indonesia” (Hackett, 2015).

Although Muslims constitute a significant part of the population in India, they have been suffering from discrimination by the Hindu Majority. Evidently, the partition of the country into two nations in 1947, worsened the situation of Muslims in India. Abul kalam Azad -the senior leader of the Indian National Congress during the Indian independence movement, in his book titled *India Wins Freedom*, describes the severe situation of Muslims during the early days after independence (Azad, 2009). The situation continued and these discriminatory activities were highlighted when the Hindu affiliated parties, particularly Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP), the most important pro-Hindu party in post-independence period in India seized power.

The roots of BJP can be found in Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), established in 1951 which was the political wing of the pro-Hindu group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The main aim of BJS was to reconstruct India in accordance with the Hindu culture and form a strong unified state (Britannica, 2020). BJP mainly supported the ideology of *Hindutva* (Hindu-ness) and defined the Indian culture based on Hindu values, which were significantly different from the secular policies of the Congress Party (Britannica, 2020). Evidences indicate that BJP has strongly used anti-Muslim strategies for gaining popularity among Hindus. In addition, whenever it reached power, BJP operationalized anti-Muslim activities. The main controversy began when Hindus believed that Mir Baqi Isfahani laid the foundations of his famous mosque by demolishing the Hindu temple in the 10th century (Khatun, 2020). The first conflicts took place during the British colonial period. In the mid-nineteenth century, the British sided with the Hindus to form a 150-year legal process over the Hindu mosque. Hindus believed that the Babri Mosque was the birthplace of Rama, a Hindu deity. However, the legal process was more in favor of the Muslims and created the ground for general revolts. The mosque was therefore repeatedly attacked and destroyed (Khatun, 2020). Following the independence of India and the appointment of Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister, the Babri Mosque was closed and the idol of Rama, which was forcibly installed in the courtyard of the mosque by Hindus, was removed. The close-down of the mosque lasted 35 years. On February 1, 1986, following the ruling of the Faizabad court, the mosque was reopened by Hindus. Now it was the turn of the Muslims to express their discontentment and protest (Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2019);

they revolted along with the formation of the "Babri Action Committee". In 1988, then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi referred the matter to the Supreme Court. In 1990, the extremist Bharatiya Janata Party, staged a Hindu demonstration. A two-way dialogue was established, but the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi undermined the dialogue. In 1992, 150,000 Hindus destroyed the Babri Mosque in the absence of troops (Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2019). Clashes escalated and Muslims were massacred. It is reported that more than 2000 people, most of them Muslims, were killed because of the conflicts (Vats, 2019). Although India's longest-running legal dispute ended in September 2010 with the division of the Babri Mosque land between Muslims and Hindus, in the last days of 2019, the Supreme Court deprived Muslims of the right to own land in Babri Mosque in order to free Mr. Mundari and his party from a historic struggle (Bhattacharyya & Pulla, 2019).

Since the inauguration of the right-wing Hindu Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, the situation of Muslims in India has been fraught with difficulties, as discriminatory activities against Indian Muslims have significantly increased. This hard situation reached its peak in 2019 when Modi was reelected Prime Minister. Two important examples of these discriminatory policies and action include "the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act" and the "Citizenship Amendment Act" (CAA).

On October 31, 2019, the Parliament of India revoked the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, under which Jammu and Kashmir were given special status and considered as Union territories. Under Article 370 of the Constitution, Jammu and Kashmir had their own constitution and administrative autonomy. More importantly, citizens from other states in India were not allowed to buy land and property there. In other words, "residents of the states live under different laws from the rest of the country in

matters such as property ownership and citizenship” (Aljazeera, 2019). The 2019 Reorganization Act, considered Jammu and Kashmir as Union territories governed directly by the Central Government of India in New Delhi (Aljazeera, 2019).

More seriously than the 2019 Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, was the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which amended the citizenship Act of 1955 by providing the opportunity of citizenship for illegal migrants of different religious groups including Hindu, Sikh, Buddhists, Jains and Christians fled from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to India before December 2014. This Act was considered discriminatory since Muslims were not included (*The Economic Times*, 2019). These discriminatory activities and other brutal actions against Muslims such as the uprisings during the recent Donald Trump’s visit to India on February 2020 (Ellis-Petersen, 2020) have worsened the situation of Muslims in the country. According to *The Guardian*, on February 25th, 2020, New Delhi was rocked by deadly protests, as Trump visited India. The protestors clashed before the US President visit, with further conflict over controversial citizenships. These protests continued to engulf Delhi, as Muslims and Hindus groups clashed violently. Another report by *the Washington Post* in 2020, indicated: as president Trump landed in India, New Delhi erupted in violence due to clashes between supporters and opponents of the new citizenship law, and demonstrators gathered along a stone-covered road.

In parallel with the anti-Muslim activities due to the recent government and other administrative bodies’ decisions, various media and cultural products are increasingly portraying Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Prominently, the number of Bollywood movies representing Muslims as ‘others’, ‘terrorists’ and ‘violent’

are increasing. Particularly since 2016, Bollywood has turned to producing historical epics such as *Bajirao Mastani*, *Padmaavat*, *Manikarnika*, *Panipat* and *Tanhaji*. Critics in India believe that what Bollywood produces is not India's history, but rather the history of Hindus. The recent wave of historical stories in Bollywood focuses on highlighting stories that "have never been seen before" (Khatun, 2020).

In this regard, a significant study conducted by Khan and Bokhari in 2011 illustrates a content analysis of 50 movies, aimed to investigate the slant picture that was portrayed of Muslims in Bollywood movies. The findings indicate that an overwhelming number of movies had an "unfavorable" representation of Muslims (65.2%) while 30.4% of Muslim portrayal were rather "neutral". The remaining 4.4% show a "favorable" image of Muslims. About ten parameters were considered for rating the Muslim image including: dress, motivation, profession, patriotism among others. Khan and Bokhari also mentioned that there is a significant shift in the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood, from movies in which Muslims are portrayed as emperors and Mughals (such as *Mughal e Azam*, *Taj Mahal*, *Razia Sultan*), to the Jihadis in the late 1980s and 1990s (i.e., *Roja*, *Mission Kashmir*, *Fiza*, *Fana*) and Muslims as present global terrorists (i.e., *Kurbaan* and *Vishwaroopam*).

Jain (2011) examined the portrayal of Hindu-Muslim relations in Bollywood. He argues that Muslims in Bollywood are mostly depicted as "others" and their image is eroticized, marginalized and demonized. Jain also investigated two Hindi language movies: *Padosi* (1941) and *My name is Khan* (2010). As his research method, Jain analyzed several movies and discovered that Bollywood movies are stereotyped based on their historical portrayal of Muslims. He discussed various films by subcategorizing them into four different groups: Hindu-Muslim

friendly relations, Indo-Pakistan partition on 1947, Hindu-Muslim violence, and modern Muslim community.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to investigate the portrayals of Muslims in the most recent Bollywood movies; the second round of Modi's administration has been selected as the study's time frame, since the various problems raised for India's Muslims have significantly increased during this period. In this regard, we are going to see whether Bollywood contributes to representing this issue. To this end, *Tanhaji* has been selected as the case study of the paper. The movie narrates and depicts a religious struggle in the 17th century for the liberation of India. The present article therefore attempts to answer the following research question:

1. How are Muslims in general, and the Hindu-Muslim relations in particular portrayed in *Tanhaji* movie?

The paper first provides a literature review on previous studies regarding the representation of Muslims in Bollywood to show the gap in the literature. It then explains *Tanhaji* as the main case study of the article. The paper provides an analysis of the movie and concludes with remarks about the recent portrayals of Muslims in Bollywood.

1.1. Previous Studies on the Portrayals of Muslims in Bollywood

Numerous studies have investigated Muslims' image in Bollywood, some focusing on the Muslim-Hindu relations and their perspectives in Bollywood, especially after September 11 2001 attacks and November 26 2008 Mumbai attacks, others focusing on the Hindu government and its effects on the Muslim community.

A recent study conducted by Narindra Khatun (2020) titled *Postcolonial Hindi cinema and neo-nationalism: The politics of Muslim identity* has focused on Hindi nationalism in Bollywood, called *Hindi Rasht Riya* (nation), and the image of Muslims in this nationalist atmosphere. The study also investigates the position of Muslims in contemporary Bollywood films by adopting a textual analysis using Edward Said's theoretical framework on orientalism, and divides the Muslim representation on Bollywood into three segments: the representation of Muslims as terrorists, the portrayal of patriotic Muslims, and the act of 'Jihad' on Bollywood.

In another study, which examines the topic of religion in Bollywood from a more general perspective, Rachel Dwyer (2017) looked at Bollywood fictions as modern mythology. The author explained the portrayal of religion through cinema by focusing on the depiction of the every-day rituals and pop religion in movies. Bollywood movies first try to represent the philosophy of religion and the strengthening of secular principles of India nation-state and the role of religion in the portrayal of this issue. A content analysis of two movies *P.K* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* has been conducted to illustrate the religious groups in a modern way by revoking their believes and practices.

In a comprehensive study, Ahmed and Matthes (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 345 studies in order to examine the role of media in the construction of Muslim and Islam identities. A quantitative analysis was used to highlight the geographic, methods, theories, media types and time frames of the published studies. The selected time frame consisted of a fifteen-year period, from 2000 to 2015. From 9/11, media and political debates surrounding the issue of Muslim and Islam have narrowed to an orientalist discourse. This study specialized the representation of Muslims both in Bollywood and Hollywood through a comparative study.

In another study, Umar (2020) explained the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood by analyzing two important movies *Kurbaan* (2009) and *My name is Khan* (2010), which represented violent Muslims after 9/11. The movies were directed, produced and acted by Muslims, Hindus as well as Christians due to India's diverse religion society and ethnic groups. *Kurbaan* introduced Muslims as harsh, violent and involved in terrorism. *My name is Khan* (2010), on the other hand, which was released a year after *Kurbaan*, made an attempt to defend Muslims. Accordingly, Umar compared and contrasted both movies to represent the September 11 events as well as terrorism, which constitute a significant aspect of both movies.

Tiwari (2019) focused on the religion textbook of *Ramcharitmanas* (story of Rama in Ramayana) and its presence in Bollywood, its hunting backdrop of the Babri mosque demolition and the debate generated in the contemporary Indian literature and literary festivals. The study concluded that religion has a significant influence on literature, filmmaking, and screen plays, especially those of Bollywood.

Thambusamy (2018) represented Bollywood and BJP vis-à-vis the analysis of Indian identity in Karan Johar's films. As BJP won the 2014 election led by Narendra Modi, this victory was portrayed as a *Hindutva* victory for mainstream acceptance. The non-Muslim plans of Modi were accepted by the United States, which led to the support of Hindus diasporas. While several indications might have contributed to the growth of Hindu revivals among the diaspora, Thambusamy's paper explored the role of Bollywood movies released in the 1990s in the construction of Hindu identity and Muslim relations among the diaspora.

Rajasekhar and Venkataraghavan (2013) focused on the

portrayal of the Muslim community and Islam in the Indian cinema in post 9/11. Their study represents the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood through a content analysis of *New York*, *Anwar* and *Vishwaroopam* movies. In Rajasekhar and Venkataraghavan's opinion, Indian cinema is the best example of the multidimensional nature of the subcontinent, as it portrays the Indian culture, society, classes and castes, art and religion.

Studies that have been conducted on the portrayals of Muslims in Bollywood or the representation of Hindu-Muslim relations in the aforementioned cinema are numerous. The above studies have been selected among the most relevant and most recent studies in this area. As indicated in the above-mentioned studies, there are still potential lines of inquiry for the most recent productions in Bollywood, such as *Padmawat* or particularly those that are constructed in the second round of the Modi's administration, such as *Tanhaji*. The present study is going to contribute to the existing literature by analyzing the presentation of Muslims in Bollywood through the lens of *Tanhaji* movie.

2. An introduction to *Tanhaji* movie

Tanhaji, a 2020 Bollywood movie, depicts a religious struggle in the 17th century for the liberation of India. Directed by Om Raut, and starring Ajay Devgan, Saif Ali Khan, Sherad Kelkar and Kajol, the movie is about the Battle of *Kondhala* and claims that in this battle, the Mughal sultan was behind the invasion of India in order to expand his territory. *Shivaji*, the king of Maratha, tries to hide this from *Tanhaji*, the commander of the emperor of Maratha, because the wedding of *Tanhaji's* son is nearby. However, *Tanhaji* discovers the matter and decides to stop the trusted soldier of the Mughal emperor, *Udaybhan*, and prevent him from reaching the

castle under his control. Unlike the film, the main battle is between *Tanhaji Malusare*, the commander of the Maratha Empire, and *Udaybhan Singh Rathore*, the guardian of Rajput Castle. The movie depicts this historical event as a battle between the sun and the darkness, as explained in more details in the following section.

3. Analysis of *Tanhaji*

In *Tanhaji*, there are different signs related to Mughals, which represent Muslims on one side and Hindus on the other side. In order to investigate the representation of Muslims and Hindus in the movie, which is the core focus of this paper, two factors will be examined. First, the article compares different aspects related to hero and anti-hero introduced in the movie. Evidently, the main hero is *Tanhaji Malusare*, the commander of *Shivaji*, the Hindu King, and the main anti-hero is *Udaybhan Rathore*, the commander of *Alamgir*, the Mughal emperor. Second, the article will look at different elements regarding the mise-en-scène used in the movie, including décor, lighting, physical appearance of different characters and selected dialogues, which provide interesting indications for a deeper understanding of the Muslim and Hindu depiction in the movie.

3.1. Research Method : Narrative analysis

This study uses a narrative analysis method to investigate the depiction of Muslims in the *Tanhaji* movie. Narrative analysis is a method used for studying the genre of analytic frames where researchers interpret stories that are told in the context of research. In this method, scholars conduct the analysis and conclude the findings focusing on different elements. These elements mostly include—but are not limited to—the way the story is stretched, the

way it functions within a specific society, the elements around which the story is constructed, and the way the story is performed (Allen, 2017, p. 1110).

3.2. The dichotomy of hero and anti-hero

The main hero of the movie is *Tanhaji Malusare*, the main character of the story, after whom the movie is named. The movie has another hero: *Shivaji*, the king of Maratha. As his commander, *Tanhaji* is very faithful, loyal and obedient toward *Shivaji*. *Shivaji* is considered as the most important person in fighting against Mughals and freeing India from their domination. In this mission, *Tanhaji* is considered as 'his right hand'.

On the other side, there is '*King Alamgir*', the Mughal emperor who has dominated a significant part of India and yearns to extend his kingdom to other parts. According to the Hindu character of the movie, *Alamgir* is going to reach this aim through an evil plan, which consists of putting Hindus against each other. To this end, he selects *Udaybhan Rathore*, who has already proved his loyalty and faithfulness to *Alamgir*.

Accordingly, while *Shivaji* and *Alamgir* are the two important opposing characters in the movie, the main hero and anti-hero are *Tanhaji* and *Udaybhan*, respectively, because the real battle for freeing India happens between these two commanders and their soldiers. In this regard, to analyze the hero and anti-hero characteristics, this article refers to *Tanhaji* and *Udaybhan*.

3.3. Main hero: Tanhaji Malusare

The movie has taken a rather positive initiative to depict the main hero, *Tanhaji*, a Hindu warrior who is loyal to *Shivaji* and his

sacred aim is to free Hindustan from the Mughal occupants. The positive characterization of *Tanhaji* starts from the beginning of the movie where his father is teaching him martial arts and battle tricks. Throughout the movie, there are several attempts to introduce *Tanhaji* as a brave, smart, diligent and faithful character. His intelligence in battle is shown when he becomes disarmed by his father and does not have any way to defend himself. At this moment, he uses his shield to defend himself and injures his father's arm. This is a rather impressive introductory scene of the movie in which the main hero is introduced as clever and courageous

Following the positive description of the characteristics of the main hero, his mission is introduced in the second important scene of the movie. In this scene, his father is killed in a brutal attack to their village by Mughal soldiers. *Tanhaji's* father, in the last moments of his life, tells him, "You are my main power. People have different wills. I want you to do an important duty and it is 'the freedom of this land'". In this respect, we have a faithful warrior whose main mission is to free his land from the domination of the Mughal occupants.

Throughout the movie other positive aspects of *Tanhaji* are emphasized. His love and passion toward his family are shown in different scenes, particularly his kind behavior with his wife, brother and son. The movie shows that he is deeply dedicated to his family. However, the most important point regarding *Tanhaji*, which makes him a real hero, is prioritizing his motherland over his family. As soon as he understands that his land is in danger, he leaves his son's marriage ceremony and goes to defend his country. In the different scenes of the movie, *Tanhaji* is depicted as 'a real man originated from his motherland'. Another positive point of

Tanhaji is shown in a scene where he is working hard on his land, doing agriculture similar to ordinary people.

3.4. Main anti-hero: Udaybhan Rathore

As explained earlier, the main anti-hero of the movie is *Udaybhan*, the commander of the Mughal emperor, *Alamgir*. Although he is not Muslim, his association with Mughals and his loyalty to them, as well as betraying his Hindu fellows make him the most negative character of the movie. In contrast to *Tanhaji*, who is introduced in different ways as a positive character, looking at *Udaybhan*, his behavior and even his physical appearance provokes a negative and unpleasant sense to the audiences. From the first scene, he is portrayed as a violent man. As an evidence, in human chess between *Alamgir* and the king of Persia, *Udaybhan* brutally kills an elephant. Although *Udaybhan* is also portrayed as a strong man, the evidences for his power have mainly negative and somehow disgusting connotations. In another scene, it is shown that he kills an eagle with his arrow without any reason. The negative portrayal of him reaches its peak in a scene where he sets fire under an alligator and wants to eat him as his dinner. In order to provide a more disgusting face of *Udayhan*, the movie shows that he starts eating part of the animal.

The movie not only shows *Udaybhan* as a violent person, but also depicts him as a cruel person who kidnaps a woman whose husband has recently been killed by his own troops, and takes her captive. In addition, he is portrayed as salacious and lustful, particularly when he has an obscene gaze at the aforementioned woman.

In another description of *Udaybhan* as a negative character, the movies shows that he has very harsh behavior with the captives: he

put them in a cage, strikes them with his arrow, pours hot water on them, and finally closes their mouth with cloths and their feet with chains. He dresses them like the Mughal soldiers and sends them to battle with *Tanhaji*. In this respect, throughout the movie, we see a negative character who is loyal to the Mughal emperor; he is truly violent, cruel, salacious and lustful and does not have any rationale for killing people. He does not have any passion and empathy towards innocent people and constantly humiliates them.

A significant contrast between hero and anti-hero is therefore shown in the movie. In opposition to *Udaybhan Rathore*, *Tanhaji Malusare* is always moral, upright and well principled. He is portrayed as a family man, and is well-mannered and polite, even when his own wife *Savitribai Malusare* wants to seat beside him.

3.5. Mise-en-scène analysis (physical appearance of the characters and lighting)

Paying attention to the physical appearances of the two groups and particularly their representatives i.e., the main hero and anti-hero of the movie, clearly indicates that on the one hand, we have *Tanhaji*, a ‘Hindu’ with Hindi, light-colored clothes, and on the other hand a ‘Rajput’, Muslim-liked man with beard, wearing dark clothes portraying his evil character. Other Hindus have always been shown in white clothes, while the Mughals are always dressed in dark colors, particularly black and dark green. While throughout the entire movie, *Udaybhan* is dressed in black, the only time that he is shown in white clothes is when he is in the palace, living with Hindus. As soon as he joins the Mughals, he starts to wear dark-colored, mostly black clothes. The deliberate selection of the white and black colors for the two groups signifies a meaningful contrast between hero and anti-hero, a contrast that shows every correct,

positive and beautiful attribute on the side of the spectrum in which *Tanhaji* stands, and every wrong, negative and ugly attribute on the other side where *Udaybhan* stands. Simply speaking, one can clearly see the contrast between good and evil.

Another interesting aspect that can be analyzed in the movie relates to the lighting effects used in the movie: Hindus and particularly *Tanhaji* and his family are mainly in day light; there is a rather colorful décor and everything is full of joy, while most of the settings in which *Udaybhan* and other Mughals play are in dark and depressing. In addition, Mughals are always associated with violent activities in which the life of Hindus are going to be destroyed through burning and destroying houses and killing innocent people. This gives an unconscious sense of fear from the Muslims and Mughals.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years the number of movies portraying Hindu-Muslim relations in different ways has been increasing, particularly, the movies raising controversial discussions and narrations. Some of these movies have been released rather recently during the first and second round of Modi's administration. This article sought to investigate the ways in which Bollywood movies released during Modi's administration, particularly his second round of office, contribute to the anti-Muslims discourse propagate by the BJP, the ruling party that has conducted several harsh attacks and discriminatory activities against Muslims. To this end, the most recent movie in this topic i.e., *Tanhaji (the unsung warrior)* was selected and analyzed. As explained in the analysis section, there are some hints in the movie that show the superiority of Hindus in terms of being stronger, braver, more diligent and more logical than Moguls representing Muslims

The disclaimer of the movie shown at the beginning, states “makers do not intend in any manner to belittle, disrespect, impair or disparage the beliefs, feelings, sentiments and susceptibilities of any person(s), communities, societies and their culture, customs, practices and traditions”. However, this statement is just a formal clime and what the audience observes in practice is completely different. Watching the movie provokes the thought to the audience’s mind that ‘once upon a time in India, a group of Muslims named Mughals attacked India in a very brutal way. They killed their men, took their women as captive and destroyed and burnt their houses wherever they went’. This provides an unconscious justification for the Hindus and other non-Muslims groups in India that the current discriminations against Muslims are not impartial; in the most positive way, they are considered as a type of historical revenge.

As mentioned earlier, these types of movies are increasing in India; such depiction of Muslims in *Tanhaji* is therefore not accidental. Similar evidences were found in the 2018 movie *Padmawat*. The violent, *Sultan Alauddin Khilji* was going to obtain the wife of a Rajput ruler. A common theme that can be seen in both movies is that anti-heroes connected to Muslim Moguls reach their goals by tricking others and not only do they want to dominate the Indian motherland, but they also aim to seize and own their women. Definitely, repeating these themes provokes a sense of disgust and hatred against Muslims. When these themes are implied repeatedly in various movies, they have greater potential to be subconsciously accepted by the audience.

In addition, in current times, it is rather difficult for the general public to find and read authentic and reliable historical books, while it is easier and more accessible for them to watch historical

movies. Yet, what they learn from these movies about the historical relationships between Hindus and Muslims are not necessarily true and complete. This issue can evidently be seen in the disclaimer of the movie where the filmmakers confess “the film though made in consultation with eminent historians, does not warrant to represent or claim to be historically accurate”. However, in reality is the movie’s storyline has a much stronger influence on the audience than its disclaimer. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the movie would be watched without any prejudgments against specific groups, as for example the case of illiterate people who may not even be able to read the disclaimer.

Tanhaji's running historical theme is portraying Mughals as "foreigners". As Mughals lived in India for years and generations, in the movie, Aurangzeb does not sound like a native Hindustani speaker, he has a foreigner Hindi accent. Most Indian movies try to portray Muslims as "others", although Muslims had a brilliant role in Golkonda and Bijapur powers in the second half of the 17th century. *Tanhaji's* Hindu-Muslim narrative for the battle has been repeatedly reinforced throughout the film subtly and overtly. In fact, in the battle of *Sinhagad* in 1670 that later was known as *Kondhala*, which is the movie's general backdrop, both sides of the war- Udaybhan and *Tanhaji*- were Hindus. However, the battle was on the basis of two rulers' army over territory, and fought on the basis of religion. This issue has been emphasized in several dialogues in the film.

As a clear evidence, after releasing *Tanhaji's* trailer and poster, *Tanhaji* played by Devgan, looked visibly like a Hindu with Tilak, while Udaybhan, played by Saif Ali Khan, wears a beard and is dressed in a way that reminds people of the image of Muslims. In the film also, Udaybhan and his army are shown in Muslim clothing styles, to illustrate that the battle was in fact fought

between Hindus and Muslims. The movie is therefore clearly an attempt to polarize Hindus and Muslims. Another significant feature that highlights such polarization is the use of specific colors during wars : saffron versus green, where green, worn by the army of Udaybhan, is considered as the color of Muslims.

The final point that needs to be taken into consideration is that looking at the current number of Muslims living in India shows that they constitute an important religious group in the country. As mentioned in the introduction, according to the Pew Research Centre, by 2050, the number of Muslims in India will reach more than 300 million people, making India the first country in terms of the Muslim population (Hackett, 2015). In addition, throughout history, Muslims have proved their contribution to the prosperity of India in terms of literature, architecture and other cultural products such as paintings. They have also had significant economic contributions to the country. In this regard, rather than focusing on the differences between Muslims and Hindus and trying to put them in complete contrast with each other, as portrayed in the aforementioned movies, it is better to open a constructive intercultural dialogue between the two groups in order to find a more fruitful way of using the potential of Muslims for the prosperity of India. Definitely, the potentials of different types of media, and in particular the movie industry as “the most important form of popular entertainment in India” (Kasbekar, 2006) can be invaluable in this regard.

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