

Unveiling the Narrative: A Semiotic and Historical Exploration of Hindu vs. Muslims Portrayals in Bollywood Cinema

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Keywords	Abstract
Propaganda, Semiotic, Bollywood Cinema, Muslims, Hindus.	<i>This study focuses on the historical portrayal of Hindu vs. Muslim characters in Bollywood cinema, utilising the frameworks of semiotic analysis, cinematography and the propaganda model by examining films spanning decades. Through semiotic analysis, the researcher identifies the visual signs, indices and symbols used to construct religious identity in Bollywood cinema. Historically, Hindu characters were depicted as noble, morally strong, loyal warriors, brave fighters, religiously well-framed and painted as a complete package of humanity while the Muslim characters were depicted as exotic, associated with negative attributes such as greed, power hungry, rapist, betrayal, religious fanatics and sexually predatory. This portrayal obscures the complexities of historical figures and events, further perpetuating Islamophobic viewpoints that are already prevalent. Cinematically, camera angles depict Hindu characters in a more favourable light, such as with low-angle shots that make them appear larger and more heroic. On the other hand, Muslim characters were depicted in high-angle shots, making them smaller and less powerful. These visual cues contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the reinforcement of social biases. The analysis of the films revealed that the cinema aligned with patriotic accounts to predominate in dogmatic interest. These results caused heightened tension among religious clutches that often threatened religious harmony between communities.</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

The representation of the Muslims vs. Hindus in the Indian film industry has been a central theme and topic of debate in different cultural and educational loops (Bhat, 2019). Bollywood is the biggest films industry in the world that has manipulative impact on the audience globally. It has held a significant canopy of influential content in the framing of public opinion and hidden narrative fabrication. In the context of propaganda and semiotics, the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood cinema has been a more complex phenomenon intriguing to be discovered (Dhillon, 2019).

The study of signs and symbols is called semiotics, which provides incredible insights for exploring the visual imagery and cinematic techniques to convey the message of meanings (Jha,

2020). Bollywood employs a different range of semiotics, like costumes, language, music, and visual cues, to define the portrayal of Muslim and Hindu characters (Tripathi, 2017). These cues play a critical role in manipulating the audience's perception and understanding of the meaning within the respective religious groups (Khatun, 2016).

This study aims to explore the portrayal of Muslims vs. Hindus in Bollywood cinema in the context of semiotics, cinematic analysis, and the deep understanding of representation of the cinematic analysis, like verbal, visual, and artistic cues. This study identifies the exploration of the trends and the patterns of such representation, which have contributed to the construction of meaning and hidden narratives.

1.1. Justification of Film Selection for Study

Bollywood has played a very crucial role in framing public opinion, specifically with regard to Muslim vs. Hindu relations. According to the nature of the study, films like *Baji Rao Mastani* (2015), *Padmaavat* (2018), *Panipat* (2019), and *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior* (2020) dramatised the explanation of historical events where Muslim and Hindu figures take a central role. These films have a significant cultural impact with regard to historical conflicts. Films painted the versatile imagery of Muslim and Hindu rulers and promoted a balanced historical narrative of prominent characters of the religious communities.

1.2. Rationale of the Study

This research delves into a significant framework of semiotic and visual analysis of the historical films of Bollywood, specifically Muslims and Hindu characters, which have the major source of cultural influence in India and diverse perspectives within different religious communities (Bhat, 2019). According to Riaz (2022), the historical analysis of the film is the essential part to uncover the roots of stereotypes and biases that have been integrated within the religious identities in the films. The portrayal of Muslims vs. Hindus in certain films is associated with manipulated narratives and deep-rooted biases.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The research problem pursues to address the representation of Hindus and Muslims in Bollywood historical films through the lens of semiotics and cinematic. Indian films have been criticised for disseminating the stereotypical portrayal against the Muslim community through the visual and verbal framed content. With the rise of religious tension and social division between the religious identities (Ahmed and Mathew, 2017), this type of representation has steered to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the Muslim community not only in Indian territory but also all over the world. Moreover, movies have been utilised as a strong tool of politically manufactured propaganda and agenda to promote Hindu patriotic ideologies (Khatun, 2020). This research problem identifies the need to address the semiotic and historic elements that redesign the portrayal of Hindus and Muslims in the historical films, influencing and contributing to diverse subjects of power dynamics, interreligious relations, and character formation. This study gap offers a latent framework in the field of cinema studies and for future

research in the context of representation and semiotic production with the lens of cinematic context.

1.4. Objectives of the study

1. To explore the portrayal of Muslims and Hindus in Bollywood historical movies within the dominant frames of symbols and religious contents comparatively
2. To analyze the historical context that have influenced the portrayal of Muslims and Hindus in Bollywood
3. To identify the patterns, tropes, and ideologies embedded in the portrayal of Muslim and Hindus with regard to representation

1.5. Research Questions

1. What are the dominant narratives, symbols, and discourses used to depict Muslims and Hindus in Bollywood films comparatively?
2. How have historical events shaped the portrayal of Muslims and Hindus in Bollywood films?
3. What are the patterns tropes, and ideologies embedded in the portrayal of Muslims and Hindus?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bollywood is the soft power of India (Nye, 2021). In recent years, several scholars have explored the portrayal of Hindus vs. Muslims in Bollywood cinema, analyzing it within the context of propaganda influences (Kashif, 2022). Furthermore, Yasir and Perrigo (2020) found that Muslim characters were portrayed in stereotypical form and associated with terrorism. Similarly, Bollywood is the key finance player of the Indian economy, and it adds 50% to the economy (Hong, 2021).

However, Ahmad (2019) revealed that there have been instances where Bollywood films have perpetuated negative stereotypes about Muslims. These portrayals are often derived from societal biases and can reinforce stereotypes surrounding Muslims as misogynistic individuals (Rege, 2023).

Therefore, Saeed and Asif (2023) explained that the Bollywood films spread the propaganda against Muslims by utilising the semiotic analysis. They indicated that negative stereotypes were associated with the Muslims in the films. Religious symbols and themes were used to manipulate the image of Muslims under the portrayal. However, a plethora of studies have explored the Muslims framing in Bollywood with regard to the Hindu-Muslim relationship, especially after September 2001. A study conducted by Iftikhar et al. (2021) revealed that films employ visual signs, pictures, and cues to convey specific ideologies. Another significant study conducted by Falarti et al. (2019) investigated the Hindu-Muslim relations from the films from 2008 to 2018. They indicated that Bollywood promoted a favourable image of both communities. Molaei and Babaei (2020) revealed that the term Hindu heroic started in 2014 by the Bhartia Janta Party (BJP). According to the authors, the results of the study clearly depicted that Hindus are in a favourable stance.

Another study conducted by Umar (2020) analysed the Muslim characters in two prominent films, *Kurbaan* and *My Name is Khan*. According to Umar, the film *Kurbaan* promotes Muslims as violent and harsh, while the other films defend the Muslims. Tiwari (2019) focused on the religious book, a story of Rama and Ramanya, that religion has a significant influence on literature, filmmaking, and remaking especially in the Bollywood content.

All the above-mentioned studies were conducted in the context of the portrayal of Muslim and Hindu relations, but there are still potential lines to investigate the portrayal of Muslims vs. Hindus historically and symbiotically. This research is going to be subsidised in the existing literature on the portrayal of Muslims as well as Hindus in the Bollywood landscape.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Pierce's theory of symbols to analyze the representation of Muslims vs. Hindus in Bollywood cinema as well as provide the potential avenue for the symbolic analysis. Bollywood movies often reflect societal attitudes and stereotypes and the representation (Alawi, 2021).

- **Iconic Signs:** Bollywood films used iconic signs to represent Hindus and Muslims by visually depicting their religious practices, attire, or physical appearances. For example, the Hindu community was painted with traditional symbols and visual cues, and Muslims were shown in specific traditional clothes.
- **Index Signs:** The representation of religious rituals, festivals, and cues served as the index signs in historical films as well as religious communities.
- **Symbol Signs:** As concern symbol sign films used names, language, and cultural cues integrated with the specific religious identities.

2.1.2. Why is Theory Important

The phenomenon of the research was explored historically and symbolically so the theory provides the basic framework of semiotics to understand how Bollywood films assign meaning to religious identities through their narratives. Religious portrayals of the communities are often symbolic rather than realistic. Bollywood utilised different and specific costumes, language, and framing to reinforce the dominant ideologies. Therefore, Charles Sanders Peirce's symbols theory helps and is relevant to deconstructing how Bollywood movies encode and reinforce religious characters in different historical films.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Pierce's theory was utilised to analyze the religious troops of two communities as a study of sign and semiotics is related to contextual, different forms of words, images, symbols, etc. (Alawi, 2021). Consequently, qualitative semiotic analysis plumped for digging out the representation of Muslim and Hindu communities historically. The study was also designed to expose the ideology behind the representation of Muslims and Hindus (Persada, 2020).

3.1. Selection of Films: The researcher selected four Bollywood films (Tanhaji, Panipat, Padmawat, and Bajirao Mastani) from diverse periods of time that prominently feature Hindu and Muslim characters historically.

3.2. Sampling Technique: A purposive sampling technique was used because the key focus of the study was to highlight the power dynamics and stereotypes of Muslims vs. Hindus historically.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis: The researcher watches the films multiple times and creates a detailed record of the signs and symbols identified. After this, the researcher organises the observation using a note-taking method that allows for easy retrieval and analysis.

3.4. Selection of Characters: Two prominent characters in the film were selected for the study, one of the Hindu and one of the Muslim in the films featured and articulated with historically.

3.5. Identity Signs and Symbols: The researcher conducts a close reading of selected films, identifying symbols, images, dialogue, setting, and costume choices that represent Hindu and Muslim characters. Consider how these signs contribute to the construction of identity and stereotypes.

3.6. Analyze Narrative Structures: Examine the narrative structures employed in the films, paying attention to the roles and agency given to Hindu and Muslim characters. Consider whether there are recurring patterns such as the portrayal of Hindus as heroes and Muslims as villains or vice versa.

3.7. Analyze the Data: The qualitative analysis technique is applied to look for patterns and recurring themes between the identified signs and symbols. These signs construct Hindu and Muslim identities and communicate cultural, social, religious, and political meanings.

3.8. Examine Dialogue and Language Use: The dialogue and language used by Hindu and Muslim characters in the films and also note there were specific linguistic markers or stereotypes associated with these identities to consider if there is any privileged or marginalised group over the other.

3.9. Contextualise within a Religious Framework: Consider the religious context in which the films were made and released. Analyse how religious cultural tension may influence the representation of Hindu Muslim identities.

3.10. Critically Assess Stereotypes and Biases. The researcher identifies any reinforcing or challenging of stereotypes in films. It also examined whether the portrayal of Hindu and Muslim characters perpetuates or challenges existing biases and prejudices.

3.11. Interpret and Draw Conclusion: After all examination the researcher interpret the findings with semiotic lens about the portrayal of Hindu and Muslims characters.

4. FINDINGS AND EXPLORATION

4.1. Tanhaji the Unsung Warrior—2020

Plot Exploration: The plot of the films blends the historical events with manipulated consent within the grounds of the religious identities. The Tanhaji character is constructed as mythological prototypes and brave warrior heroes; the scenes are heightened with exaggerated, emotionally thrilling dialogues that hypnotise the audience. Tanhaji is painted as a very deceitful, daring, and faithful Maratha who reclaims the fortress of Sinhagad. He is depicted as a protector of Hindu values, remaking a resonant and culturally significant. While Udaybhan Singh Rathod is painted as a cruel and brutal Mughal leader. The direction of the films crafts the scenes, revolving around the character of Udaybhan Commander, potentially reinforcing Islamophobic sentiments integrated with the religious circle of Islam. Udaybhan, a character played by Saif Ali Khan, is depicted in a villainous role, making the plot more complex and adding fuel to the historically merged Muslim community.



Figure 1: Tanhaji Character

As an icon, Tanhaji represents the valour and bravery of the Maratha warrior class. His character embodies the ideals of honour, sacrifice, loyalty, and devotion to duty, which are celebrated in Indian nationalistic narratives. Tanhaji's heroic exploits against the Mughal Empire serve as inspiration and a symbol of resistance for many.

As an index, Tanhaji's physical appearance, his attire, and weaponry represent the aesthetics and culture associated with the Maratha community. These visual cues separate him from the Mughal characters, most notably Udaybhan Sing Rathod, and emphasise his Hindu identity. His language and dialogues also reflect his allegiance to the Hindu cause and highlight the historical conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India.

As a symbol, Tanhaji represents the defense of Hindu values and the resistance against Muslim rule. Although the movie does not explicitly target Muslims, it portrays the conflict between the Marathas and the Mughals as a religious and cultural struggle. This depiction aligns with the historical narrative of Hindu–Muslim tension during the Mughal period, perpetuating the idea of a religious divide between the two communities.

Consequently, the character of the film painted by Udaybhan is shown in darker and oppressive architecture with the diverse symbol of tyranny. On the other side, Tanhaji is depicted with vibrant tones, cultural pride, and symbolic freedom. This type of portrayal and negative visual cues associated with the characters unintentionally create a dichotomy between the religious communities and target the Muslims historically and blend their reality with the religion. Udaybhan characters are painted as one-dimensional and negative with redeeming qualities, while Maratha characters were very noble and respected.

The film was released under the political climate and represented historical narratives of Mughal empires. The character of Udaybhan is portrayed as historically biased against Muslims. The element of cruelty was shown as the narrative accounts raised the hate and stakes for the hero. Furthermore, the film ignores the positive portrayal of the Mughal and the Islamic values, which were integrated with the Muslim accounts. It was just presenting a one-sided, solidifying narrative.



Figure 2: Udaybhan Character

Symbolic Analysis: As an icon, Udaybhan represents the Mughal Empire and, by extension, the Muslim rulers of India. The Mughal Empire has been widely demonised and characterised as a threat to Hinduism and the Indian nation. Therefore, Udaybhan's character reinforces the negative stereotypes associated with Muslims in Indian history and pop culture.

As an index, Udaybhan's attire and language, specifically his Mughal warrior outfit and traditional Muslim headgear, symbolise his religious and cultural background. These visual and linguistic clues not only create an association between Udaybhan and the Mughal Empire but also highlight his perceived differences from the Hindu Maratha Warriors.

As a symbol, the character of Udaybhan carries broader cultural and historical significance. Through his depiction as a power-hungry and ruthless commander, the character reinforces the narrative of Muslims as oppressors and aggressors. This portrayal contributes to the historical targeting of Muslims in India and perpetuates negative stereotypes. Moreover, Udaybhan's character aligns with Hindutva ideology, which emphasises the superiority of Hindu culture and nationalism over other faiths and ethnicities.

4.2. Panipat Film—2019

Narrative Analysis: Panipat is a historical drama film directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, which depicts the Third Battle of Panipat that took place in 1761 between the Marathas and the Afghan

king Ahmad Shah Durrani. The battle was a significant event in Indian history as it marked the end of Maratha expansion in northern India. The film's depiction of Ahmad Shah as a Muslim character is also significant in the context of historically targeted Muslims. Historically, Muslims in India have faced targeted violence, discrimination, and persecution, especially during periods of conflict with other communities.



Figure 3: Ahmed Shah Durrani Character

Iconically, Ahmed Shah Durrani is characterised as a powerful and formidable warrior. As the Afghan king, he is shown wearing traditional Muslim attire, which includes a turban and a long, flowing robe. These visual symbols are commonly associated with Islam and contribute to the portrayal of Ahmed Shah as a Muslim leader. In terms of icon, the film's depiction of Ahmed Shah's character as an antagonist and the historical context in which he lived may inadvertently contribute to negative stereotypes about Muslims. The portrayal of Muslims in historical conflicts can reinforce biases and prejudices, especially if they are simplified or essentialised.

Indexical, the film includes scenes that highlight Ahmed Shah's faith and religious practices. There are moments where he is shown praying, invoking the name of Allah, or consulting with Muslim scholars.

Symbols' can also be observed in the film, particularly in the context of Ahmed Shah's actions and motivations from a religious lens; some might interpret his invasion of Maratha territories as a symbol of Islamic expansionism.

4.3. Sadashiv Rao Bhau Character

The character of Sadashiv Rao is painted in the film Panipat as a noble, respected warrior. He is shown as a historical figure and brave leader of the Maratha Empire. In the film Panipat, the character depicted by Arjun Kapoor is focused on the third battle of Panipat against Ahmad Shah Abdali. Throughout the plot, the film depicted spirituality in the context of devotion in Hinduism. He is being portrayed as a selfless, brave leader connected with the Hindu values. In the central narrative of the films, Sadashiv is overshadowing the political and strategic dimension of the battle in the historic concern. Semiotic investigation revealed his character as a historical and cultural icon, and different visual elements reshape his identity in historical heritage; for instance, his Maratha attire, saffron turban, and kurta symbolise him as a Hindu

warrior. A red tilak on his forehead indicates his commitment and representation of Hindu culture with love for the tradition.



Figure 4: Sadasive Rao Bhau Character

As the icon position of the character in the film, it upholds the Hindu beliefs that these clusters of the scenes depicted him as a Hindu religious figure. Sadashiv is an iconic, historic type of figure framed character importance with Hinduism. The representation of Sadashiv Rao in Panipat resembles a historical Maratha leader, with his physical appearance and actions as an index; the rituals and relationships indicate his struggle. He is portrayed as an ideal heart of Hinduism in the dharma belief; the semiotic layer ensures he is not only a historical religious figure but also exposed as an icon of resilience.

4.4. Padmaavat Film—2018

Narration Description: The Padmaavati movie depicts Khilji's character as a subject of controversy with regard to fuelling anti-Muslim sentiments. The character of Khilji is portrayed as a cruel, barbaric, morally corrupt, and complex ruler historically. He is framed as a Muslim invader who is hostile to the sanctity and honour of the Hindu kingdom. His wish of lust was driven to completion for Rani Padmaavati, represented with symbolic and villainous religious terrorisations posed by Islamic rulers to Hindu society. The analysis of the plot reframes the clear picture that the Muslim rulers were intrinsically oppressed, violent, and sexually predatory. Khilji is painted as excessively power-hungry and cruel; his character is defined by more exaggerated, almost mythic traits, a frowzy appearance, and a voracious lust for power.



Figure 5: Alauddin Khilji Character

Furthermore, the central theme of the film perpetuates destructive tropes that unfairly denounce the Muslim men. The desire of the Khilji for Padmaavati reinforces the narrative labels, which the films have failed to illustrate the real picture of the historic figure. The film promotes the themes of us vs. them between Muslims and Hindus. In the context of communal tensions rising, the representation of Khilji hazards fuels Islamophobic narration style. The movie blunt binary of good vs. evil interpreted.

Moreover, according to Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, icon, index, and symbol design and remake the character in the historical symbol. Khilji is being represented in physical appearance with lined eyes and craggy attire, which made him the worst historical figure. Iconically, different scenes of dancing and meat devouring iconize the character more powerfully in a villainous context. As an indexical sign, which is designed to signify his lust for Padmaavati, hunger for power, and control.

4.5. Padmaavati Rani Character Analysis

Narrative Description: The character of Rani Padmaavati is based on courage, honour, and sacrifice. The representation of the character idealised being womanhood in the historical era. The queen Padmaavati is portrayed as a skilful individual, a brave and mentally strong lady who obeys Hindu values. The narrative of films explored revolved around the central theme of Queen with honour and pride with the Hindu culture. Her actions and depiction in the role ultimately made her identity and dignity of her character. In the film, she is painted with Raton Singh. He was a complete code of Rajput, increasing her dignity and honour. Being a noble queen, her narrative curve in the movie reflects the entire theme of love and bravery and remakes her related historically around the Hindu religion.

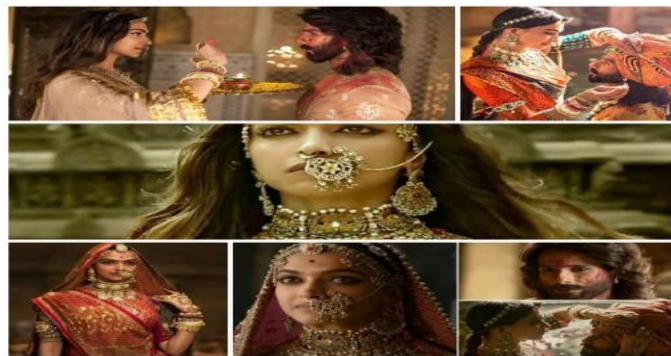


Figure 6: Padmaavati Character

Accordingly, the symbolic sign, as an icon, Padmaavati idealised as Hindu womanhood, and she sacrificed purity and loyalty integrated with values of religion. She is shown as the symbol of inspiration of the whole Hindu community. This type of character reflects not only social expectations and special places for her as a Hindu woman. Furthermore, the Rani character, as an index, depicted the diverse religious beliefs that led her to rich rituals and deities within traditional practices. As an index, the character of Padmaavati indicates a strong personality and practices with the religious circle of Hinduism.

As symbols, her character participation is painted as the resilience, honour, and strength of the Hindu community. Rani's character devotion for her husband and kingdom signified her in the heart of tradition and association with the Hindu values. Her solid spirit is depicted in the religious dignity within the community.

4.6. Bajirao Mastani—2015

Narration Description: The film introduces the main character Bajirao as a brilliant Maratha strategist. He is depicted as a man of honour to win the title of Peshwa at a young age. The heroism of Bajirao is represented on a large scale, which has an emphasis on speeches. The central idea of the film is represented by the devotion of the character of Bajirao as a Hindu warrior. He is painted as respected and committed to his duty and ideologies of Hinduism. His typescript is shown as the embodiment of Kshatriya in Hindu society. Historical analysis of the Bajirao character revealed that he is idealised as a figure of valour in the top of Hindu religion, and his deep commitment to ritual practices made him more accurate as a historical figure. Plenty of scenes painted his practices with the Hindu ceremonial reshaping his personality as a strong fighter.



Figure 7: Bajirao Pesewa Character

Similarly, in the context of theatrical framework, the physical appearance of Bajirao includes his diverse attire with a turban and sword as a Maratha leader being a warrior iconically. These pictures were directly linked with Hindu values and made him a Maratha general historically. The concept of index cause and effect relationship signifies the object indirectly. The depiction of Maratha symbols as an index described the legacy and political dominance of the historical empire. A symbol is painted with cultural and social meaning. The sword of the Bajirao is not just a symbol. It also refers to his prominence as a warrior in the Maratha Empire. A tilak on his forehead shows his dedication to the values of Hinduism. Bajirao is a character mostly associated with Shivaji Maharaj, symbolising his ambition with the glory of the Maratha Empire.

4.7. Mustani's Character Analysis

Narrative Description: The film portrayed the Mastani character as complex and multifaceted. During the film, plenty of scenes were depicted to reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with the Mastani character religiously. She is shown in different scenes in the film as an exoticized woman with the Muslim identity. Diverse orthodox tropes like deluxe attire, aura, and

sensuality. The character of Mastani fabricated and promoted the propaganda against Islamic values. Moreover, her presentation in the Maratha court was attributed to Islamic faith and manipulated with the biases. In some narratives of the films, the character is framed and overshadowed with assorted social and political dynamics over time. Mastani characters are frequently portrayed as oppressed women and religiously victimised, preserved with social prejudice.

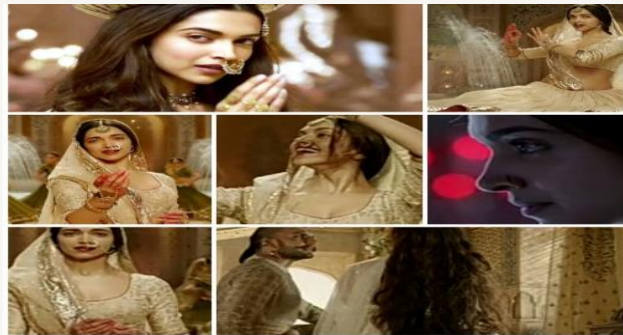


Figure 8: Mastani Character in the Film Bajirao Mastani

The Mastani is depicted in a formulaic way; for example, plenty of scenes eroticised her through mannerisms and clothing, which have fabricated the Muslim identity. Furthermore, her relationship with Bajirao oppressed her character. Historically, her character portrayed not only accurate but also stereotypical narratives regarding the religion of Islam. The arc of the narrative fetishised Mastani's personality, and the illustration undermines nuanced understanding of women in Islam. Iconically and theoretically, the character is framed as a brave warrior but led to stereotypes, reflexive and deserted in the loop of Islam. Thus, indexically, she is depicted in the film in a more complex and influential way that damages the values of Islam. This type of portrayal of characters raised the tension between religious communities. Theoretically, as Muslim women, Mastani characters are painted as intelligent, resilient, and brave warrior icons. Physical appearance equates costumes in traditional ways that are aligned with historical princes. As an index, her unwavering love for Bajirao actions was made her courage and resilience. Her representation reflects social tension between the religious communities symbolically.

5. DISCUSSION

Semiotics, as a theoretical framework, focuses on understanding how signs and symbols create meaning. In the context of Bollywood cinema, researchers have analysed the use of visual and verbal elements to represent Hindu and Muslim characters and identities (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). The core research question of the research is, what are the dominant narratives, symbols, and discourses used to depict Muslims and Hindus in Bollywood films comparatively. The current study findings revealed that Hindu characters were often depicted as righteous, liberal, respected, modern, noble, well-behaved, morally good, religiously well-framed, classy, and cultured characters historically, while the Muslim target was historically depicted as a villain, barbaric, rapist, aggressive, hypersexual, backward, traditional, and inclined towards extremism. They portrayed them semantically as evil and historically uncivilised. The current study's findings are not in line with the study results of Khatun (2020), which support the analysis of Molaei and Babaei (2020) study findings that Muslim characters are more malicious as compared to Hindu characters. The female characters of the Muslim were oppressed in the

context of the teaching of Islam. The Hindu ruler is a warrior, brave and patriotic, while the Muslim rulers are morally corrupt and cruel, portrayed as ruthless, brutal, and power-hungry, exhibiting aggression towards the Hindus. This research highlighted how dominant narratives of victimhood and heroism are constructed around specific religious groups serving the ideological agendas of those in power.

The representation of Muslims in Tanahji and Aladdin Khilji characters in Bollywood films running historical themes is that Mughals are foreigners, morally corrupt, and sexually hyper, not only conquering the homeland of India but also humiliating their wives. This type of portrayal definitely provokes a sense of hate against the Muslims. The characters of Muslim rulers were manipulated and propagated as villains having no respect for humanity. Such depictions of Muslims are not accidental but carefully framed and operated, which have been accepted by the Hindu audience. It becomes more dangerous when the illiterate audience accurately perceives it. Yet they learn the historical relationship between two prominent religious communities of India. Moreover, as a concern of Muslims in India, they have provided their contribution to the prosperity of India throughout history. The producers of the Bollywood films have not tried to put them in a dark house as portrayed in the aforementioned films.

To end, Bollywood cinemas have significant influence on polarised views shaping awareness of the public on a broad level (Iftikhar et al., 2021). This type of portrayal of political dogma, black meaning and sinful with dusky themes, raised the significant query that the Bollywood industry has failed to paint a more truthful representation of Muslim rulers historically, in its place of labelling, blaming them for being what they were not.

6. CONCLUSION

The last argument that needs to be taken into consideration, according to the Pew Research Centre, is that by 2050, the Muslim population in India will reach more than 300 million people (Hackett, 2015), having contributed significantly in the field of economy. But the results of the study revealed that historical films carefully constructed an ideological product. Through financial incentives, controlled narratives, and nationalistic biases, the movies distort history to serve commercial gains and political interests. According to the semiotic analysis, it promotes a one-sided, Hindu-centric view of history and reinforces nationalist ideologies rather than painting a truthful image of the Muslims historically. Bollywood cinema reinforces Islamophobic stereotypes by depicting Muslim rulers like Khilji as brutal, barbaric, and morally corrupt invaders as they act like beasts while the Hindu Rajputs are painted as pure, noble, and self-sacrificing. These types of alignments with Muslim characters painted them as outsiders and aggressors in Indian history. However, the movies depict its section as historical by applying extravagant sets and costumes with affected storytelling to create an illusion of legitimacy.

6.1. Implication and Recommendations

Bollywood is serving as a cultural ambassador and its diverse representation of Hindus vs. Muslims influences a global level within India's religious dynamics. This historical exploration has significant implications across multiple professional and academic fields like cultural studies, media studies, history and political domains. It is helpful for the filmmakers and

screenwriters to understand the ethical responsibility of historical storytelling. Producers should endeavour for a balanced portrayal of both religious communities. Such stereotypes should not be portrayed that lead to reinforcing communal biases. Moreover, Bollywood should reflect the pluralistic flora of the portrayal of Indian religious communities historically. Future research could be a comparative study of how Hollywood, South Asian, and Middle Eastern cinemas painted religious identities. This type of research can help contextualise Bollywood's slant and propose best practices for portrayal.

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