

## **Exploring the Image of Muslims in India**

**Salma Umber**

*Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.*

**Muhammad Junaid Ghauri**

*International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.*

**Hassan Nawaz**

*International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.*

### **ABSTRACT**

Indian film industry is one of the biggest film industries in the world which produces highest number of movies every year. Indian media and film industry overwhelmingly link Islam and Muslims with terrorism. Especially since 9/11 attacks, the Bollywood have portrayed the Muslims in stereotypically negative way. After the 9/11 incident, Muslims have been constructed as distrustful people, terrorists, and antagonists. The study at hand was set out to identify the overall dimension and nature of portrayal of Indian Muslims in the Bollywood. For the purpose the researcher opted convenient sampling as a tool of data collection and quantitative content analysis along with SPSS was used as data analysis technique. Bollywood movies, released during the year 2016 with Muslims as prominent characters in it, were selected as ample to be studied. The results indicated that majority of the movie contents contained negative and stereotypical image of Indian Muslims. Overall findings evidenced that the Muslims were assigned non-patriotic and antagonistic characters more than the patriotic and protagonist characters.

**Key Words:** Image of Muslims, Portrayal, Stereotyping, Content Analysis  
Bollywood, Movies

### **Introduction**

#### **Film**

A film is an event or a story recorded by some especial camera in the form of moving images and shown on TV screen and/or cinema. Somehow it's relative term *Movie* slang for a *moving picture*, and first documented in the early 1900s (Beaty, 2015). Over the last fifteen years there has been an explosion of new digital technology entering the movie production process. So, although most cinema movies are still shot and projected on 35mm film. Its related term is Cinema which is derived from Greek word Kinema means movement also Cinema refers to the building where films are shown (Beaty, 2015).

Film is universal power communication, which communicates the audience on large level. Similarly, film is popular source of entertainment. Film is also used for educating the masses. Film is also used for information, gives information to audience about history, present, past and future (Shah, 2011). In a 1963 report for

the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization looking at Indian Cinema and Culture, the author, Baldoon Dhingra, quoted a speech by Prime Minister Nehru who stated, "...the influence in India of films is greater than newspapers and books both combined" (Shah, 2011).

## **Propaganda**

Impact of current-affairs, politics, social issues and corporate interests on film is very high. Some movies take sides. Some create a conversation, and that conversation can be in any area it may be political, social, or even within specific disciplines such as action. Movies can create controversy (Shah, 2011) and gave some specific message. Most of the time movie serves the interest. Sometimes objective, remained central, precise, or projected something forward. Similarly VisitBritain (formerly the British Tourist Authority) estimated that almost 20% visited the UK due to its portrayal through television and film. During the WWII American movies inculcated a feeling and sense of heroism and valour (Shah, 2011).

## **Bollywood and Muslims**

Indian film industry is considered as the reflection thinking, social and cultural life, and traditions in the society. The presentation of Muslims through the Bollywood has gradually and systematically shifted from *Nawabs* and *Badshah* to terrorists, thieves, thugs and rascals over the years. This change in depiction of the Muslim characters through the Bollywood is the reflection of the changing thinking of Indian society about them. There are movies in which the Muslims were portrayed as rulers and their era as a splendid era. Such movies include; *Chaudwien ka Chand*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Shah Jahan*, *Bahu Begum*, *Mumtaz Mahel*, *Mere Mehboob*, and *Anarkali*. These movies presented an informative and comparatively better image of the Muslims from the perspective of Muslims (Ali, 2012).

Since the decade of 70s the image of the Muslims began to change in the movies. They were started to be presented as violent, futile, sex mongers, squandering their money on prostitutes, and as unethical people. Some of the movies that depicted the Muslims in this way are; *Bazaar*, *Umrao Jaan*, *Mere Hazoor*, *Nikah* and *Pakeezah* etc. These movies were rich and prolific in text and content but the intent was negative (Shahzad Ali, 2012).

The depiction of the Muslims as members of the underworld was the trademark of the movies produced during 70s and 80s in Bollywood. Although the Muslim characters were anonymous in nature but through a particular dress and costume like; a *Romal* on the shoulders, *Shalwar Qameez*, and a specific cap on the head, the viewers were made to believe that they were Muslims. This kind of Muslims' representation appeared to be direct, clear, open, and evident in the

## *Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

movies like *Angaar*, *Ghulam-i-Mustafa* and many others during the last part of 80s and throughout the 90s (Shahzad Ali, 2012; Ali, 2012).

After 9/11 attacks in America, the depiction of the Muslim characters took the shape of extremists and terrorists. Such presentation of the Muslims has become evident not only on the Bollywood scenes but throughout the world. Subsequent terrorist incidents around the world have fuelled the fire against the Muslims internationally and in India also (Ali, 2012; Balraj, 2011; Nurullah, 2010).

In Bollywood majority of the movies represent Muslims negatively and in bad ways. If the Indian cinema and film industry is not under any political influence or not following any specific agenda then it has to revisit its thinking, policy and perception about the Muslims. Bollywood has to adopt an objective, fair and unbiased approach towards the Muslims (Ali, 2011; Raghvan, 2015; Sheikh, 2013). There is a plethora of research studies available that evidence that the Muslims have been portrayed negatively by the Bollywood over the years. Hirji (2008) in her article entitled “Change of Pace? Islam and Tradition in Popular Indian Cinema” analyzed the image of Islam and the Muslims in the Indian movies arguing that the Bollywood portrayed the Islam and Muslims overwhelmingly in a negative way. She pointed out that in Indian movies the intercultural misunderstandings, and the norms of violence and terrorism were associated with the Islam and Muslims (Hirji, 2008).

According to the previous records and researches, most of the times and in many movies the Muslims have been portrayed negatively. There is a significant difference between the movies which were released a couple of decades ago and those which are being produced by the Indian film makers now-a-days. So this is significant to find out that how the Indian Muslims are being presented by the Indian directors and film makers.

### **Problem statement**

Film is a powerful tool of entertainment and also a major tool of propaganda. Films have also the ability to change the mind set, behaviour, thinking process and habits of people. Film has been very successful in delivering propagandistic message as compared to other form of media and entertainment sources. This research analyzed the image of Indian Muslims that was presented in the films during 2016.

### **Research questions**

1. How have Indian Muslims been portrayed in Bollywood movies during 2016?
2. What characters were assigned to the Indian Muslims in the movies?

## **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this research are:

- To find out the image of Indian Muslims portrayed in Bollywood.
- To map out what characters and roles were assigned to the Indian Muslims in Bollywood.

## **Significance of the study**

India is one of the world's largest countries in terms of cinema ticket sales to the public. This shows the level interest of Indians for film and cinema. Only Bangalore city and its different near areas in 1997–98 had roughly 102 theatres. Similarly, Muslims are the largest minority in the country with significant participation in all walks of life in India. Studies have proved that a large quantum of Bollywood movies carry a Muslim representation phenomenon in it. And, the Bollywood have been biased in such representations over the years. This study was an attempt to look at the Bollywood movies' contents regarding image of the Indian Muslims during 2016 and to sought out if the trend remained the same even for the 'Indian Muslims' during this period.

## **Research design**

The study at hand was set out to identify the overall dimension and nature of portrayal of Indian Muslims in the Bollywood. For the purpose the researcher opted convenient sampling as a tool of data collection and quantitative content analysis along with the SPSS was used as data analysis technique. Bollywood movies, released during the year 2016 with Muslims as prominent characters in it, were selected as sample to be studied.

## **Categorization**

For the purpose of content analysis the researcher devised two major and exhausted categories of the data i.e. image of Muslims in the Bollywood movies; Protagonists and Antagonists. These two categories further divided into five categories to analyze the overall character and roles assigned to the Indian Muslims in the movies; Patriotism, Language, Character assigned to the Muslims, Appearance/dressing of the Indian Muslims, and the Profession assigned to the Muslims.

## **Operationalization**

Patriotism means if a Muslim character was supporting his country (India) then it was assumed that he was patriotic or protagonist, on the other hand if he was

## *Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

against his country or having linkage with foreign countries then he would be considered as anti patriotic or antagonist.

Second category of content analysis was Language, On the basis of language researcher found that either Muslim character port as Antagonist or Protagonist. While level of standard language was any international language e.g. English, Sober Hindi and Urdu considered as protagonist. On the other hand slang language, abuse, specific words and local terms related to abuses were also considered as category of antagonist.

Third category of the content was the character of Muslims in the specific movies. If the character of the Indian Muslims in the movie was as Hero or supportive role in the favour of Hero then assumed to be Protagonist. On the other hand if the appearance of Muslims character was as Villain or negative role, which was favour of Villain then it was considered to be Antagonist.

Fourth category of the content was appearance of the Indian Muslims in the movies i.e. how did they appear in terms of dressing and costumes. The appearance was measured through identifying the type of dressing and costumes used by Muslim characters in the movies.

Fifth and last category of the content was Profession related to Muslim characters. If the Muslim character was working in the movie as positive character like honest police officer, Doctor, Lawyer and he was honest with his profession then it was considered to be a Protagonist. On the other hand, If the profession of Muslims character was negative like Gangster, terrorist or dishonest then it was assumed to be an Antagonist.

All the scenes of the movies were taken as coding units for identifying the stance. Similarly, the overall expression of the whole scene was also considered coding unit as each scene was studied and coded as favourable or unfavourable in view of nature of its content's slant.

Researcher differentiated the Protagonist and Antagonist categories on the basis of following variables; Protagonist meant- civilized, wealthy, joyful, open minded, and hero while the Antagonist meant- mysterious, violent, fundamentalist, barbaric, and terrorists.

### **Population and sampling**

Different sources mentioned different number of movies released during 2016. Maximum number was shown as much as 50 movies and the researcher studied themes of all the movies. Out of the 50 movies 08 movies contained Indian Muslims as prominent characters in them and the researcher considered those 08 movies and sample size of the study. These movies were selected through convenient sampling.

Data were analysed and interpreted through quantitative content analysis along with the SPSS.

## **Data analysis and interpretation**

The overall analysis showed that 44% of the Muslim character were shown non patriotic in all the films that were selected for the research. On the other hand, only 4% of characters were Patriotic shown in Bollywood during the year of 2016. At the same time 52% characters were shown neutral.

Main category of patriotism was divided into sub-themes as non-patriotic and patriotic which were observed on the basis of characters like; love to the country, faithful to the home land, links with terrorists, and supported by Pakistan. Findings showed that there was only one character representing Muslims as protagonists

### **Patriotism**

<b>Film Name</b>	<b>Patriotism</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Patriotic</b>	<b>Non Patriotic</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	
Wazir	0	3	1	4
Dear Zindgi	0	0	2	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	0	0	4	4
Azhar	0	1	1	2
Dishoom	1	2	0	3
Freaky Ali	0	3	1	4
Fitoor	0	1	3	4
Mirzya	0	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>

while rest of the characters portrayed Muslims as antagonists who were having links with terrorists and with Pakistan.

*Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

**Subthemes of patriotism**

Film Name	Subthemes of Patriotism			
	loving his country	Not faithful to their homeland	Link with terrorists	Supported by Pakistan
Wazir	0	1	1	1
Dear Zindgi	0	0	0	0
Ae dil hai	0	0	0	0
Mushkil	0	0	0	0
Azhar	0	1	0	0
Dishoom	1	1	1	0
Freaky Ali	0	0	3	0
Fitoor	0	0	0	1
Mirzya	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

Language was another subcategory to map out if Muslims were represented as antagonists or protagonists in Bollywood during 2016. Results showed that 60% Muslim characters were associated with good language and 40% of Muslim characters with negative language.

Language

Film Name	Language		Total
	Good Language	Bad language	
Wazir	1	3	4
Dear Zindgi	2	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	3	1	4
Azhar	2	0	2
Dishoom	1	2	3
Freaky Ali	1	3	4
Fitoor	3	1	4
Mirzya	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>

To understand the type of language associated with Muslim characters the researcher divided the language category into seven subthemes; Normal, decent, standard Hindi, harsh, slang, abusive, and negative specific words. Results have shown that 44% of characters used normal language and 8% Muslims characters spoke decent language, 8% of Muslims characters used standard national language like Hindi. On the other hand, 24% of Muslims characters were associated with harsh language out 40% negative language characters and 8% characters abused other characters. Some of the Muslims characters also used some specific negative words that were related to negative language. So, overall, considering the use of language it can be concluded that Muslims were represented as antagonists in Bollywood movies during 2016.



*Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

**Sub them of Language**

Film Name	Sub theme of language							Total
	Normal	Decent	Standard National Language	Harsh	Slang	Abuses	Negative Specific Words	
Wazir	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	4
Dear Zindgi	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	4
Azhar	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Dishoom	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Freaky Ali	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	4
Fitoor	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Mirzya	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>

As far as character of the Indian Muslims is concerned, Bollywood movies portrayed them through negative characters in 60% of the characters while 40% of the all characters contained a positive role regarding Indian Muslims.

### Character

Film Name	Character		Total
	Protagonist Roles	Antagonist Roles	
Wazir	1	3	4
Dear Zindgi	2	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	1	3	4
Azhar	2	0	2
Dishoom	1	2	3
Freaky Ali	1	3	4
Fitoor	2	2	4
Mirzya	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>

Characters and roles of the Indian Muslims in the films were further understood through dividing the 'character' category into six different subthemes; hero, supporting role, purses the story goal, villain, supportive role with villain, prevent the story goal. The results showed that the 20% of the Muslim characters contained an image of a villain, 20% were supportive to the villain and 20% were those who prevented the story goal. While, only 12% characters contained the image of Indian Muslims as hero, 8% supportive to the hero and 20% with purses to the story goal.

### *Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

Film Name	Sub Theme of Character						Total
	Hero/Positive Character	Supportive Role with Hero	Purses the story goal	Villain	Supportive role with Villain	Prevent the story goal	
Wazir	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
Dear Zindgi	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	0	0	1	0	0	3	4
Azhar	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Dishoom	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Freaky Ali	1	0	0	1	1	1	4
Fitoor	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Mirzya	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>

Appearance of the Indian Muslim characters was measured through positive and negative dressing and by dividing this category into four further subthemes; formal dress, casual dress, shalwar qameez, and taweez around neck. The results showed that 52% of the Indian Muslim characters were shown in positive/appropriate dressing and costumes while 48% in negative/inappropriate dressing and costumes.

Film Name	Appearance of Muslims		Total
	Positive Dressing	Negative Dressing	
Wazir	2	2	4
Dear Zindgi	2	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	3	1	4
Azhar	2	0	2
Dishoom	1	2	3
Freaky Ali	1	3	4
Fitoor	2	2	4
Mirzya	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>

Findings have shown that out of 52% positive dressing and costumes 4% characters were shown in formal dressing and 48% in casual and shalwar qameez with simple looks. While out of 48% of the negative appearances, majority of the

characters were portrayed as gangsters wearing shalwar qameez and taweez around their neck.

**Sub theme of Appearance of Muslim Characters**

Name	Film	Appearance of Muslim Characters				Total
		Formal Dress	Casual Dress	Shalwar Qameez	Taweez around Neck	
	Wazir	0	2	1	1	4
	Dear Zindgi	0	2	0	0	2
	Ae dil hai Mushkil	0	3	0	1	4
	Azhar	0	2	0	0	2
	Dishoom	0	1	1	1	3
	Freaky Ali	1	0	0	3	4
	Fitoor	0	2	2	0	4
	Mirzya	0	0	0	2	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>

Profession with which Indian Muslims were associated was another subcategory to measure if the Muslims were portrayed as antagonists or protagonists. To analyze this category, the profession associated with the Indian Muslims was further divided into six subthemes; honest police officer, doctor, any positive character, working against society, gangster, and dishonest.

## *Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

### **Profession assign to Muslims**

Film Name	Profession assign to Muslims		Total
	Profession Related to Protagonist	Profession Related to Antagonist	
Wazir	1	3	4
Dear Zindgi	2	0	2
Ae dil hai	2	2	4
Mushkil			
Azhar	1	1	2
Dishoom	1	2	3
Freaky Ali	1	3	4
Fitoor	2	2	4
Mirzya	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>

Results have shown that 60% Muslim characters were associated with antagonist professions while 40% characters contained a protagonist image of Muslims with respect to their professions in the movies. Subthemes contained 28% Muslims associated with professions working against the norms, values and traditions of the society. Similarly, 24% Muslim characters were associated with dishonesty and 8% with gangsters. On the other hand, 32% Indian Muslims were associated with positive and favourable professions for the society and 8% Indian Muslims were shown as honest police officers.

Film Name	Sub theme of Profession						Total
	Honest Police Officer	Doctor	Any Positive Character	Any person working against society	Gangster	Dishonest	
Wazir	1	0	0	1	2	0	4
Dear Zindgi	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Ae dil hai Mushkil	0	1	1	0	0	2	4
Azhar	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Dishoom	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
Freaky Ali	0	0	1	2	0	1	4
Fitoor	0	0	2	1	0	1	4
Mirzya	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>25</b>

## Discussion and conclusions

This study was set out to analyze the portrayal of the Indian Muslims in Bollywood movies screened during 2016. Total 25 different characters assigned to the Indian Muslims were analyzed and the results have shown that Bollywood portrayed the Indian Muslims as antagonist, negative, gangster, terrorists, and dishonest during the period under study.

The movie *Wazir* was the exact depiction of this trend; 4 Muslims characters were observed in *Wazir*. Three characters were shown against the homeland. According to the results explicitly antagonist characters and roles were associated to the Muslim as compared to the protagonist characters. Most of the roles assigned to the Muslims were depicting them as villains, uneducated, uncivilized, barbaric and harmful to the society. For example, in the movie *Ae Dil hai Mushkil* all the Muslims characters were shown as dishonest, and those who prevent the story goal.

Majority of Indian Muslims were depicted as uncivilized, poorly dressed and gangsters wearing shalwar qameez and taweez around their necks. These eight Indian movies during 2016 through the portrayal of the Indian Muslims have represented a distorted, stereotypical and propagandised image of Muslims, their culture, values, norms and the religion.

## *Exploring the Image of Muslims in India*

So, there was a 60% to 40% ratio of the antagonist and protagonist portrayal of the Indian Muslims in the Bollywood movies during 2016, respectively.

### **References**

- Admin. (2009, January 04). *Bollywoodtourism*. Retrieved June 02, 2017, from [www.bollywoodtourism.com](http://www.bollywoodtourism.com): <http://www.bollywoodtourism.com/bollywood-history>
- Admin. (2017, January 10). *En.oxfordisctionary.com*. Retrieved June 04, 2017, from [OxfordDictionaries.com: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/film](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/film)
- Ali, S. (2012). Portrayal of Muslims Characters in the Indian Movies. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 138-159.
- Balraj, B. M. (2011). My name is Khan and I am not a Terrorist. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 91-95.
- Beaty, T. (2015, May 05). *Qoura*. Retrieved June 07, 2017, from [www.quora.com: https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-movie-and-a-film](http://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-movie-and-a-film)
- Christopher, R. (2012, June 20). *News and feature from Bournemouth and beyond*. Retrieved June 05, 2017, from [buzz.bournemouth: http://buzz.bournemouth.ac.uk/2012/06/history-film-timeline/](http://buzz.bournemouth.ac.uk/2012/06/history-film-timeline/)
- Grant, A. (2017, May 20). *ThoughtCo*. Retrieved June 05, 2017, from [www.thoughtco.com: https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-bollywood-3549901](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-bollywood-3549901)
- Hirji, F. (2008). Change of Pace? Islam and Tradition in Popular Indian Cinema. *South Asian Popular Culture* 6(1):57-69
- Nurullah, A. S. (2010). Portrayal of Muslims in the media: “24” and the. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 1020-1046.
- Prasad, B. D. (2017, June 05). Content Analysis A method in Social Science Research. *CSS*, p. 10.
- Raghavan, V. (2015). Portrayal of the Muslim Community and Islam by Indian cinema Post 9/11. *JMS*, 1-16.
- Ramachandran, N. (2017, May 13). *The Guardian*. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from [www.theguardian.com: https://www.theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com)
- Shah, V. (2011, June 19). *Thought Economics*. Retrieved June 03, 2017, from [thoughteconomics.com: https://thoughteconomics.com/the-role-of-film-in-society/](https://thoughteconomics.com/the-role-of-film-in-society/)
- Shahzad Ali, S. C.-e.-A. (2012). Portrayal of Muslims Characters in the Indian Movies. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 138-159.
- Sheikh, S. (2013). Green on Silver: Manufacturing Muslim Image through Bollywood Cinema. *Muslim South Asia Conference*, (pp. 1-12). South Asia.
- Zuria Bokhari, A. K. (2011). Portrayal of Muslims in Indian Cinema: A Content Analysis of Movies during (2002-8). *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research*, 1-15

**Biographical Note**

**Dr. Salma Umer** is HoD Mass Communication Department, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.

**Muhammad Junaid Ghauri** is a Lecturer at DMCS, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Hassan Nawaz** is M.S Scholar at DMCS, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

---