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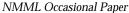## New Series
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The Islamist Terrorist in Popular Hindi Cinema: Crisis of perspective in *Kurbaan* and *New York*?

Roshni Sengupta

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The Islamist Terrorist in Popular Hindi Cinema: Crisis of perspective in *Kurbaan* and *New York*?*

Roshni Sengupta**

Abstract

The vexing question of "Muslim rage" transcends boundaries of premise, context, and media, perplexing scholars, commentators, political analysts, and policy makers in its wake. Cinema, the greatest ever medium of mass publicity used randomly both by the state and individual actors for dissemination and popularizing of themes, views, debates and politics itself, could not have remained untouched by the various contours of "rage" that has spanned the world with regions like the Kashmir Valley and more recently the playgrounds of the Arab Spring. A contiguous part of this issue of "Muslim rage" remains the representation of the Islamist terrorist in Indian cinema vis-à-vis popular American cinema or more broadly, world cinema.

The paper places on the comparative table two fast-paced, commercial popular Hindi films made not on the theme of riot victims taking to guns or sufferers from Kashmir "going over" for jihad—the most potent thematic of "issue-based" popular Hindi film screenplays—but traverses the unknown and uncharted territory of exploring "Muslim rage" in the West—Kurbaan

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(2009) and New York (2009). In its basic premise, the paper offers to break new ground and propound an alternative argument about the two films, as well as others of similar vein. The fact remains that the films themselves provide an absolutely fascinating canvas for further research precisely because of the "crisis of perspective" argument that the study assumes as its base.

Much of the academic debate on the representation of the Muslim in contemporary popular Hindi cinema has centred around the phenomenon of "demonization" of the Muslim—the negative portrayal of a character arising from his affiliation to the Muslim faith, in keeping with the Hindutva discourse on the one hand and, the post-September 11 anti-Islamic wave that has summarily shaped cultural negotiation to a great extent, on the other. Several mainstream Hindi films with their narrative rooted in the profligacy of terrorism, both home-grown and global, have screened with far-reaching impacts on the arguments for and against the concept of the "trivial" in popular Hindi cinema. While a good number of these films have focussed on the reasons for and causes of the transformation of seemingly innocent young men into fearsome terrorist masterminds (*Fiza* [2000], *Sarfarosh* [1999], *Aamir* [2008], *A Wednesday* [2008]), many have engaged with the causes and consequences of global terrorism, particularly the fallout of America's "war on terror" on the psyche of the average Muslim in the Arab world as well as the Afghanistan-Pakistan region (*Kurbaan* [2009], *New York* [2009], *Black and White* [2008], *My Name is Khan* [2010]), as well as the debilitating impact of long years of violence, terrorist and otherwise, in Kashmir (*Roja* [1992], *Mission Kashmir* [2000], *Fanaa* [2006], *Yahaan* [2005], *Lamhaa* [2010]).

That this period has been marked by films such as *Kurbaan* (produced by Karan Johar, the master of bubble-gum romances and what he terms "aspirational" cinema ensconced in unattainable grandeur, grandiose sets, exceptionally well turned-out actors, and the dominance of melodrama), and *New York* (again produced by late Yash Chopra, the patriarch of popular Hindi film romance), both of which addressed the issue of Muslim

rage, is testimony to the ability of the film medium to adapt current political debates into the mainstream. Experts might argue that both *Kurbaan* and *New York* skimmed over the surface of the problem and did not engage with it in any great detail. Quite on the contrary, this paper would like to present a case that is based on in-depth analysis of both films, their narrative structures as well as characters, which seeks to conclusively state a position as well as provoke further discussion and debate.

Based on the findings of the content analysis of fifty films produced and released between 1991 and 2012, an integral part of the doctoral work on representation of Muslim identity in popular Hindi cinema between 1991 and 2012, this paper would attempt to bring to light the prevalent complexities in the representation of the Muslim as a terrorist in films. It is noticeable that a few of the films selected for the content analysis, Neeraj Pandey's *A Wednesday* (2008) in particular, left the question of the religious affiliation of the "terrorist", a shadowy figure who holds the Mumbai police to ransom, ambiguous, leaving the arena open for speculation. The paper would further seek to establish the deep chasm between the dominant cultural discourse pervading the society as a result of the majoritarian agenda of the formations owing allegiance to right-wing politics and the ostensible attempt made by popular Hindi films during this period to rely on both "balance" and "nuance" to represent the Muslim terrorist or the Islamist terrorist on screen.

The content analysis has provided enough ammunition to assume that popular Hindi films, in general have resisted the temptation, fuelled by the dominant discourse to portray a majority of its Muslim characters as indulging in terrorist activities. An overwhelming 74.4% of the Muslim characters analysed (both male and female) were not represented as terrorists or abettors of terrorist activity. Further, in films that did have strong Muslim characters associated with terrorist violence, their presence was balanced out by the representation of equally stringent and steadfast Muslims who abhorred any form of violence, exuded confidence in the Indian project of nation-building, and propagated the virtues of peace, cultural syncretism,

unity and communal harmony, thus giving rise to speculation regarding perhaps a manner of positive stereotyping of such Muslim characters, in order to not completely break away from the dominant discourse, but in a way, supplement and further it. Thus arises the question—are such Muslim characters deliberately placed in the narrative of the film to populate the two warring conceptions of the Muslim—the "good" and the "bad" Muslim?

Jyotika Virdi has argued that the foremost project of Hindi cinema is the imagination of a unified nation.[1] In Hindi films, therefore, the image of a nation as a mythical community—a family—remains the most popular organizing principle. Spectres such as communalism, gender injustice, and terrorism inevitably bring about a disruption in this mythical and fantasy world of kinship, established on the bedrock of unimaginable wealth and prosperity. Sumita Chakravarty identifies a unique "national identity" in Indian cinema by drawing on Hindu philosophical principles in her investigation of cinema as "imperso-nation" and "masquerade".[2] Dada Saheb Phalke, according to Ashish Rajadyaksha, is considered the doyen of the Indian film industry not only because he made the first Indian film, but because he conceived of film-making as a nationalist, specifically "swadeshi" enterprise, and produced Indian images to occupy the screen.[3]

Madhava Prasad traverses a step further and locates the Indian cinematic institution simultaneously on two overlapping grounds: (1) the socio-political formation of the modern Indian state, with its internal structure as a determining factor in cultural production, and (2) the global capitalist structure within which this modern state and the cinema we are dealing with necessarily enter into

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[1] Virdi, Jyotika. 2003. "Introduction". In *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*, p. 1. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

[2] Chakravarty, Sumita. 1993. *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-87*. Austin: Texas University Press.

[3] Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. 1987. "The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology". *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 14/15: 47-78.

-Prasad, M Madhava. 1998. "Introduction". In *The Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, p. 2. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

relations of heteronomy, dependency, and antagonism. The purpose of this paper is to accomplish this analytical activity positing the representation of the Muslim as a terrorist as a determining factor. In order to bring the argument to any conclusive end, it is but imperative to provide the theoretical underpinnings of the creation of the image of the Muslim terrorist, as existing in popular consciousness, both in terms of the hegemonic discourse in India and the changes in the global context after September 11.

The representation of the "good" Muslim against that of the "bad" Muslim changed dramatically after the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001. Almost all of a sudden, the context, the heroes and the villains in popular Hindi films, changed. While the context was a deeply polarized, post-9/11 America, the protagonists were presented as FBI agents, journalists working for premier American media companies, or law enforcement officers, the villains were immigrant Muslims reeling under the ruthlessness of either themselves or other members of the community by the American homeland security agencies, thirsting for retribution and revenge. The representation of the "terrorist" was also altered in more ways than one as terrorism was no longer considered a gender-specific activity which explains the presence of a woman member in the terror cell in Karan Johar's *Kurbaan* (2009).

The terrorist was also not stereotyped as a man dressed in attire that would immediately identify him as a Muslim but was portrayed as a man of refined tastes, mannerisms and behaviour without giving away the real face behind the façade. However, what also characterized these "post-9/11" terrorist films was the religious determinant of the principal antagonist—his adherence to the faith of Islam. An exception to this rule was Karan Johar's *My Name is Khan* (2010), a film which provided a cinematic language to the common Muslim in America, keen to replace his popular imagination as a "terrorist" with that of a "normal human being" with his own failings and vulnerabilities. Films like Yashraj Films *New York* (2009) and Subhash Ghai's *Black and*

White (2008) also reflected the proclivity of those behind these projects to balance the scales in favour of the "positive" Muslim even if the "negative" Muslim character garners more screen space. Further, the films focussed extensively on the levels of motivation of the Muslim "terrorists".

In many of these films is found the underpinnings of an unconscious allegiance to the theory of relative deprivation wherein the people hitherto oppressed and dispossessed by the forces of imperialism and colonialism, express themselves through violence against the oppressor. Frantz Fanon claimed that anti-colonial violence is not an irrational manifestation but belongs to the script of modernity and progress, and it served as a warning to the colonizers that it was time to think through the full implications of victims becoming killers.[4] Native violence, Fanon insisted, was the violence of yesterday's victims, the violence of those who had cast aside their victimhood to become masters of their own lives.

With this in the background, it becomes wholly imperative for the purpose of this paper to interrogate the premise surrounding the re-definition of terrorism after 11 September. Despite important differences, Mahmood Mamdani states that genocide and terrorism share one common feature: both target civilian populations.[5] The debate on this question turns around the relationship between cultural and political identity and in the context of 9/11, between religious fundamentalism and political terrorism. For Mamdani, the dominant discourse in the post-9/11 scenario centred around the premise that unless proved to be "good", every Muslim was presumed to be "bad" and all Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against the "bad Muslims".[6] The Orientalist Bernard

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[4] Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 75. London: Penguin.
[5] Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. "Introduction: Modernity and Violence". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, p. 11. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
[6] Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. "Introduction: Modernity and Violence". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, p. 15. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Lewis, in his celebrated 1990 essay, "The Roots of Muslim Rage", was the first to use the term "clash of civilizations".[7]

Samuel Huntington, published a cruder interpretation of Lewis' appraisal of the Muslim world's response to the West, in *Foreign Affairs* titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in which he claimed that the conflict between the Muslim world and the West was based on cultural and civilizational differences.[8] Huntington's argument was built around two ideas: that since the end of the Cold War "the iron curtain of ideology" had been replaced by a "velvet curtain of culture" and that the velvet curtain had been drawn across "the bloody border of Islam". In saying this, he cast Islam in the role of an enemy civilization. From this point of view according to the post-9/11 discourse quoted by Mamdani, Muslims could only be bad. Edward Said forcefully argued for a more nuanced and less parochial reading of culture—one informed by the idea that the clash is more inside civilizations than between them.[9]

Going a step further Steven Schwartz has claimed that the roots of terrorism lie in a sectarian branch of Islam: the Wahhabis.[10] The *New York Times* distinguished the good Muslim from the bad thus: the good Muslims are modern, secular and Westernized, but the bad Muslims are doctrinal, anti-modern and

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[7] Lewis, Bernard. 1990. "The Roots of Muslim Rage". *The Atlantic Online*, September. Details available at http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/90sep/rage.html. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.

[8] Huntington, Samuel P. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3) Summer: 22. Details available at http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/48950/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.

[9] Said, Edward W. 2000. "The Clash of Definitions". In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, p. 581. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

[10] Schwartz, Steven. 2001. "Ground Zero and the Saudi Connection". *The Spectator*, London, September 22. Details available at http://www.rdpslides.com/publiclinks/FAQ00071.html. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012. (The Spectator page is currently not available.)

virulent,[11] a more civilized description of the "other" compared to the demonization of the Muslims in practice during the Crusades, when Christendom declared a "state of permanent war against the heathen".[12] The Muslim was no longer just another earthly enemy, but evil incarnate, "the personification of the very religion of the Antichrist". The main thrust of the Crusades therefore was not to convert the Muslims but to exterminate them.

Such constructions of the Muslim civilization through the decades and particularly after September 11 have fuelled myriad screen representations of "bad" Muslims in popular culture on the whole. Let us consider the construction of the Muslim identity in the American popular films before analysing Bollywood "terrorist" cinema. Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) is set during the Crusades of the 12th century. A French village blacksmith goes to aid the city of Jerusalem in its defence against the Kurdish Muslim leader Saladin, who is battling to reclaim the city from the Christians leading to the Battle of Hattin. The film script is a heavily fictionalized portrayal of Balian of Ibelin. The film attempts to take the viewer across temporal space and time to witness a period, which arguably established the foundations of the construction of the visual identity of the

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[11] Harden, 2001. "Saudis seek to add US Muslims to their sect". *New York Times*, October 20. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/20/us/a-nation-challenged-american-muslims-saudis-seek-to-add-us-muslims-to-their-sect.html?src=pm. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.
-Sachs, Susan. 2002. "Anti-Semitism is Deepening among Muslims". *New York Times*, April 27. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/27/arts/anti-semitism-deepening-among-muslims-hateful-images-jews-are-embedded-islamic.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.
-Goodstein, Laurie. 2001. "Stereotyping Rankles Silent, Secular Majority of American Muslims". *New York Times*, December 23. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/us/stereotyping-rankles-silent-secular-majority-of-american-muslims.html. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.
[12] Mastnak, Toma. 2002. *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order*, pp. 95-125. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Muslim in Western popular imagination. The portrayal of the Muslim armies led by Sultan Saladin as abject barbarians in Kingdom of Heaven creates a visual space for what can be usefully termed post-9/11, "anti-Muslim" American cinema, along with parallel representations in films such as *300* (2006), *The Kingdom* (2007) and *Traitor* (2008). *The Kingdom*[13] is an action film about FBI agents hunting down terrorists in Saudi Arabia following the bombing of the residences of American diplomats in the country. Not only does the film portray a team of highly-motivated FBI agents investigating the bombing, it also refers to September 11 terrorist attacks, particularly to the fact that most of the identified hijackers were of Saudi Arabian origin. Muslim suicide bombers in these films are clearly represented as hardened religious zealots engaging in avuncular political violence and are shown reciting verses from the Quran, ostensibly justifying the murder of the "infidel" and the killing of oneself. The binary representation of the "good" versus the "evil", now openly synonymous with Muslim in American popular culture, is taken to a new level in *Traitor*.[14] The film depicts a Muslim American, Samir as an arms dealer, who is arrested and imprisoned while in the middle of a deal with a presupposed "Islamic terrorist". Subsequently in the narrative, Samir escapes from jail with the help of his terrorist client and eventually becomes part of his terrorist group. Soon after their escape, they plan to bomb the US embassy in France and find and train suicide bombers for the accomplishment of the mission. On the other hand, an FBI agent is hot on their heels. The film similar to a number of others addressing the issue of terrorism, repeats the errors of cinematic representation that have taken the shape of staple fare in Hollywood films. For instance, the stereotypical sequence of Muslim children and young men reciting holy verses justifying the killing of innocent civilians not only determines the character of the narrative of the film as highly antithetical to the imagination of American Muslims, it also creates a visual motif which

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[13] Director: Peter Berg
[14] Director: Jeffrey Nachmanoff

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percolates the necessary preconditions of a film to be considered part of the institutional thought process. Further, Samir is portrayed as a devout Muslim. He engages in the ritual prayer five times a day, does not drink any alcoholic beverages, and is a calm, down-to-earth young man. But, he also has another face which is that of a terrorist, a harbinger of evil in the garb of an angel. The ocular message that such a portrayal delivers borders on the deliberate generation of mistrust and suspicion among common Americans about their Muslim neighbours, if any.

Zazk Snyder's 2007 blockbuster *300* disregards the inherent historical flaw in its narrative by presenting the "Asian hordes" as predominantly Muslim, led by a God-king, the Persian monarch Xerxes. Modern Iran is conflated with ancient Persia to create an imagery where the Persians are described as "soulless immortals", their king being the overlord of a land that thrived on unabashed sexual relations, between both men and women and men and men, personified in the imagery of Xerxes, an effeminate, wimp-like individual with a particular fondness for males. The analogy seeks to validate the claim that the depiction of the Muslim remains intact in Western cinema—overtly religious, bloodthirsty hordes of convoluted souls, plunged to the depths of human depravity.

Jack G Shaheen,[15] in his two books *Reel Bad Arabs* and *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*, extensively discusses the inhuman depiction of Arabs on Hollywood screen. He points out that a large number of Hollywood films has perpetuated a demeaning image of Arabs and contributed in generating several cultural misconceptions about them. Similarly, in his analysis of three particular Hollywood films produced in the seventies (*The Exorcist, Rollover, and Black Sunday*), Tim

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[15] Shaheen, Jack G. 2008. *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch.
 -Shaheen, Jack G. 2001. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. New York: Olive Branch.

Semmerling[16] contends that the misrepresentation of Arabs in these films served to stabilize Americans' feelings of superiority and control that started to shake after the oil crisis in the seventies. Prior to Shaheen's and Semmerling's works, Edward Said,[17] in his milestone books, *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, examined the essentialist approach that western media has invariably adopted vis-à-vis the social, political and economic realms of the Arab world. Said believes that the idea about the Orient as the exotic and inferior *other* can easily be discerned in the early western visual and written cultural productions. He also points out that the focus on presenting certain types of cultural "realities" instead of offering a holistic and a deeper approach is ideologically-motivated. He states that, "it ought to go without saying that the media are profit-seeking corporations and therefore, quite understandably, have an interest in promoting some images of reality rather than others."

The American popular imagination of the "Arab Muslim" and the Indian, Bollywood imagination of the "Muslim" came together in explosive fashion in two mainstream films—*Kurbaan* and *New York*—released one after the other invoking comparative analyses of the structural constructions of the Muslim identities in both films. Karan Johar's *Kurbaan* (directed by Rensil D'Silva) and Yash Chopra's *New York* (directed by Kabir Khan) heralded a new wave in Bollywood popular cinema's depiction of terrorism. As the title suggests, *Kurbaan* spans two continents in its attempt to posit the terrorists, all Muslim led by Ehsaan Khan/Khalid Anwar (Saif Ali Khan) and Bhaijan (Om Puri), against the unwilling victim, a female college lecturer, Awantika, played by popular actor Kareena Kapoor. The depiction of the personality of Ehsaan

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[16] Semmerling, Tim. 2006 . *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*. Austin: University of Texas.
[17] Said, Edward W. 1997. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Vintage.
-Said, Edward W. 2003. *Orientalism*. London u.a.: Penguin.

Khan contains within itself the turning point of the narrative of the film as he, much like Gulfam Hassan, played by Naseeruddin Shah in *Sarfarosh*, "comes out of the closet", during a significant, effect-altering sequence. The "outing" of Ehsaan Khan, however, is dramatically mounted and mediates the nuances of the mental trauma of a cheated wife with the accomplishment of a life-changing terrorist mission.

At the beginning of the film, Awantika and Ehsaan's relationship, which would eventually culminate in marriage, promises to set an example for Hindu-Muslim love stories on celluloid, predictably opposed by Awantika's father, the suspicion inherent in the following dialogue/sequence:

Father: I always wanted Awantika to marry a Hindu boy...

...I have nothing against you or Muslims in general...

...I only believe that the lesser the differences between two people...the easier it is for them to adjust...

Awantika: But Papa we love each other very much...!

Father: Beta, when two people get married, they shut the doors and windows and retreat into a world of their own making....

...when the windows open...love is the first thing to fly out...

...to keep relationships going....you need more than just love...

Ehsaan: You have experienced life and I do not want to oppose your views...but both of us have decided to get married after a great deal of thought...

Father: So if you have decided, why do you need my permission?

Ehsaan: If we marry against your wishes, Awantika will never be happy...and I do not want that...
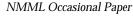
Father: So what do you want? That I give away my daughter

to you without thinking about the pros and cons?

Ehsaan: Don't give away your daughter…accept me as your son!

Once Ehsaan's credentials as the perfect, uber male have been established, the narrative introduces certain major as well as peripheral characters, essential to the progress towards the climax of the film. In due course, the viewer is witness to the suave and sophisticated Ehsaan being recruited as a teacher in a US college to teach a course on the perception of Islam in the West while he and Awantika move into an Asian neighbourhood in New York, the inhabitants of which are described by Awantika as *apne log* (our people). In representing Ehsaan Khan, the film indeed presents a highly stylised appraisal of global terrorism and the fallout of America's "war on terror". The depiction of the terrorist as a qualified, opinionated, and well-turned out individual, who is also motivated, radical, and prone to excessive violence is predicated on the changing profile of terrorists portrayed in the international media. From Quran-spouting, bearded Islamists to educated professionals gone wayward, the imagery has been quite conspicuously altered by the personal details of attackers that emerged after 9/11 as well as following subsequent terrorist strikes in America, Europe, and South East Asia. Mohamed-el-Amir Atta, an architect and a trained commercial pilot led the small army of 16 highly motivated individuals on a suicide mission—one of the biggest and deadliest in recent memory—the September 11 attacks. Financial analyst and MBA-degree holder Faizal Shehzad, a Pakistani-American, was charged by the federal court in 2010 for conspiring against the state in the Manhattan car bombing case. An engineer studying for a PhD in computational fluid dynamics in the United Kingdom, Kafeel Ahmed, was the prime accused in the 2007 bombing of the Glasgow International Airport.

Ehsaan Khan is the embodiment of the personalities and the qualifications of men like Atta, Shahzad, and Ahmed, the new generation of global terrorists emerging in the spotlight as

"Allah's avenging angels". He combines education and a highly nuanced understanding of global issues and international affairs, with, as it is later revealed, the razor-sharp mind of a terrorist. It is to this brazen yet composed young man that Awantika is attracted, notwithstanding his ready agreement towards moving to the US after the wedding vows have been taken. In New York, Awantika and Ehsaan visit their Muslim neighbours, their nationalities hitherto unknown. During the visit, Awantika is mildly surprised to find that all women in the house wear headscarves and is even more irked when she is asked to cover her head as well, an indiscretion on the part of the neighbour which she chooses to ignore. The level of radicalization of the "family" is revealed through the following dialogue/sequence:

Awantika (to a young woman): What do you do?

Aapa: Is there anything better for a woman than taking care of the home and hearth?

Salma: Women in this house do not have permission to work...our men do not like it...

Aapa: Our men earn enough for us to not have to work...

...and even so where is the logic in working in places where the purdah is not accepted...isn't that right?

Salma: Yes Aapa...who knows right and wrong more than you do?

Salma is subjected to sharp reprimand by another young woman present on the scene for making her views clear, making Awantika feel uncomfortable for having initiated the conversation. In evidence in this scene, is the proclivity of popular Hindi cinema to touch the surface of the issue but not discuss it or engage with it in any sustained or serious manner. The crucial matter about the lack of freedom of educated Muslim women in conservative scenarios is not discussed further until the curious case of Salma's murder comes to light. In perhaps an act of sheer desperation and in order to keep the conspiracy under wraps, Akeel kills her and

hides the body in the outhouse before being discovered by a worried Awantika. The motives of Bhaijan, Hamid, Akeel, Aslam, and Tahir are exposed in a tense sequence where the conspiracy to bomb underground train stations in New York is discussed as a frightened Awantika eavesdrops on the conversation.

Incidentally, the sleeper cell, involved in the bombing of an American airliner carrying a UN delegation accompanied by the press, epitomizes the Hollywood assessment of the Muslim terrorist. The cell is headed by Bhaijan, the patriarch, immersed in his radical pursuits, prepared to sacrifice the life of his wife, Nasreen Aapa. She, herself a highly motivated accomplice, vows to protect their "mission" from any influences. Other members of the sleeper cell are younger men who take orders from Bhaijan and Ehsaan Khan. They are the perfect soldiers: they go where Bhaijan tells them, they do what he and Khan ask of them, including extracting a tooth and replacing it with a cyanide capsule.

In sheer contrast to the Muslims who make up the terror cell, are two significant characters in the drama—Rehana, a journalist working for an American news channel and Riyaz Masud, also a journalist and her fiancé. Rehana and Riyaz are the archetypal American professionals, driven, successful and ambitious. While the headscarf is conspicuous by its absence, Rehana enjoys the company of Riyaz's septuagenarian father. During one such meeting, Riyaz and his father (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) conduct an acrimonious conversation about the American occupation of Muslim lands including Iraq and Afghanistan, reflective of the suspicion with which Muslims across the world view the politics of self-interest conducted by the United States over the past decades.

Father: Did you not go to cover the war in Iraq?

Riyaz (attempting to change the topic): What will you have Abbu?

Father: Try covering news from our perspective as well…try

to get our voices heard also...

Riyaz: Is this not our voice, Abbu?

Father: I am not talking about the American perspective...

...you will not understand...it is my fault...

...neither would I have brought you here nor would you have started thinking like these Americans...

Riyaz: But we are Americans Abbu!

Father: We are Muslims first, not Americans...

...you always report the number of US soldiers killed...news is never one sided...

...why don't you ever report the atrocities being committed against us Muslims?

...try and reveal the true colours of these infidels in your new reports...

Riyaz: It is because of this fundamentalist attitude that the name of all Muslims gets tarnished...

Father: Fundamentalist attitude? When did allegiance to one's faith become fundamentalism?

Fox News talk show host Bill O'Reilly, in his on-air conversations with prominent American Muslims, enumerated the numerous causes for why "the Muslims hate America",[18] represented prominently in the dialogue between Riyaz and his elderly father. The overthrow of democratically elected governments and the establishment of puppet regimes across a large part of the Muslim world, the "oil politics" agenda favoured by successive American governments, and the denial of justice inherent in the practice of capitalism by the West were the major causes delineated by the participants. Mahmood Mamdani affirms

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[18] The complete transcript of the September 17, 2012 episode of "The O'Reilly Factor" is available on http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/oreilly/2012/09/18/why-do-so-many-millions-muslims-hate-us. Last accessed on 1 October, 2012.

that the policy of "constructive engagement" by the Americans is leading to the worst civil and internal low-intensity wars in the history of the world.[19] The propagation of "low intensity conflicts" in the Third World, which includes countries in South Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa, was one of the decisions taken by the American regime in which lie the roots of the current conflict between the West and the Muslim world. For Aijaz Ahmad, "the imperialism of our time" encompasses the active pursuance of a pro-Zionist policy by the Americans and the fostering of puppet regimes in the countries of economic interest.[20]

Riyaz loses his fiancé in the bombing of the American airliner which involves suicide bomber Tahir, a member of the sleeper cell. Shattered, he chances upon Awantika's frantic message on Rehana's answering machine and decides to investigate the truth about the existence of the terror cell. Meanwhile, the "outing" of Ehsaan Khan has occurred in the narrative and the resultant shock value of the event has been effectively relayed to the viewer. The sophisticated veneer of the protagonist now collapses into the unmistakable evil of the antagonist. In this way, the persona of Ehsaan Khan is provided the agency to determine the outcome of the narrative. It is also significant to note that the man is depicted as an evil incarnate devoid of any human feelings or failings.

The now-strained love between Ehsaan and Awantika is a visible force throughout the narrative. The fact therefore remains that despite his past and present as a dreaded terror mastermind and in contravention of the reality that he used Awantika's job prospects in the United States to gain friendly entry into the country, Ehsaan did fall deeply in love with the woman, and carefully sidestepped any suggestions from Bhaijan concerning

[19] Mamdani, Mahmood . 2004. "The Cold War after Indochina". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, pp. 92-93. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
[20] Ahmad, Aijaz . 2004. *Iraq, Afghanistan and the Imperialism of Our Times*. New Delhi: Leftword Books.

the threat posed by Awantika and the resultant need for her to be eliminated. Ehsaan, aware of Awantika's pregnancy, though unwittingly protects her interests and life, even during the sequences leading up to the dramatic climax. But, in contrast to his tender side, Ehsaan is a master strategist and takes Awantika's father hostage with the help of his Indian friend, Prof. Qureishi. He debars her from stepping outside and has Nasreen Aapa keep vigil. In course of one of these vigils, Nasreen recounts Ehsaan's life story to Awantika who is summarily shocked to know that Ehsaan is a Pakistani, was married before, and had his family and home destroyed in a US air raid. Subsequently, he picks up arms and rises swiftly up the ladder in the global network.

Strewn with references to American exigencies in the Muslim world, *Kurbaan* could be read as a mini-lesson in 21st century global politics—unparalleled for films being loosely categorized as "popular" cinema. Through the character of Riyaz Masud, the investigative journalist under cover to unearth the motives of the terror cell, the film brings to the fore the root causes for the terrorists actions, in the process lending legitimacy to the narrative, while at the same time, the film does not justify the actions of the sleeper cell. The following dialogue between Ehsaan and Riyaz is illuminating. Riyaz is feigning anger after being asked to step out for a personal check at an airport.

Riyaz: Random selection, my foot! I've got a Muslim name, that's his problem…I hate it when they treat us like this.

Ehsaan: I know what you mean…but anger will fetch nothing…simmer down.

Riyaz: What good will that do? The anger inside cannot die down…

…what do you do?

Ehsaan: I am a professor!

Riyaz: And what do you teach?

Ehsaan: I teach a course on the Muslim identity in the modern world…

Riyaz: What identity Professor? Which world do you live in? …they look at us with only hate in their eyes…

The dialogue is emblematic of the deep resentment felt by American Muslims in post-9/11 America.[21] The next dialogue between Riyaz, still under cover, and students in Ehsaan's class would further cement the position of *Kurbaan* as a film expressing an attitude of engagement with global political issues, even though the issue of the freedom of women is not dealt with adequately. Interestingly, Ehsaan continues to be represented as a friendly professor teaching a volatile subject even after his "outing" as the mastermind of a terrorist cell.

Ehsaan (in class): The word jihad is mentioned in the Quran about 41 times…

…mercy, peace, and compassion are mentioned at least 352 times. Therefore contrary to popular belief, Islam preaches peace and tolerance.

Student 1: What about terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Ehsaan: One could argue that the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were also acts of terror!

Student 1: Those invasions were necessary to get rid of despotic regimes…

Ehsaan: Or to get at oil…

Student 2: Conspiracy theories!

Riyaz: If we want to talk about terrorists, then let's also talk about the white superpowers.

Student 1: Explain 9/11…!

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[21] Goodstein, Laurie. 2001. "Stereotyping Rankles Silent, Secular Majority of American Muslims". *New York Times*, December 23. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/us/stereotyping-rankles-silent-secular-majority-of-american-muslims.html. Last accessed on 28 September 2012.

Riyaz: Do you know how many people died in the attack on the twin towers?

Student 1: Around 3000...

Riyaz: Do have any idea how many people died in the bombing of Afghanistan?

...more than 15,000 people died...and these are just conservative figures...

...50,000 tonnes of explosives were dropped on innocent men, women and children...

Student 1: But that was because of the Taliban...

Riyaz: Are you aware that the Taliban was a creation of the CIA to fight the Russians?

Student 3: Whatever...but they were still harbouring the terrorists...

Riyaz: Terrorists that were never found...just like the WMDs that were never found...

Do you want to get to the death toll in Iraq? 500 thousand civilians and counting...

..and what do Britain and America say when they do not find these weapons? Simple..they just say "sorry" and refuse to relinquish control of these countries...

Student 2: What are you trying to say?

Riyaz: Just because you are American, wear a fancy suit and call yourself the President does not make you any less of a terrorist. All I am trying to say is that unless you stop meddling in other people's countries, you will face a backlash...

Student 1: If Muslims like you feel that way why don't you just get out of our country?

Riyaz: We will....the moment you get out of ours!

Any length of serious engagement with subjects like American imperialism and the resultant religious fundamentalism, which

remains untouchable for major production houses in Bollywood, represented on screen in *Kurbaan* is unprecedented. The above discussion depicted in the film even though only superficially but does engage in and elicit a debate on the reasons behind the "Muslim rage". To the credit of the film, in doing so, it does not veer away from the main narrative of the film which focuses on the actions of a terrorist sleeper cell populated by Muslims. The engagement with the geo-political reasons of the growth of Islamic fundamentalism remains a tract parallel to the primary thrust of the film-script. Similarly, the character of Ehsaan Khan is juxtaposed against that of Riyaz Masud, the calm and composed terrorist against the spirited undercover journalist. In both the narration of the film and construction of the terrorist, the film in keeping with the tradition of "balance" practiced in Bollywood, maintains a careful parity between the "bad" Muslim and the "good" Muslim.

In sparring with Ehsaan over his motivation for killing innocent people, Riyaz establishes his credentials as the steadfast, secular, the "good" Muslim. In refusing to accept Ehsaan's understanding of jihad—holy war—or "God's work", Riyaz professes the beliefs exemplifying those of a modern, educated and forward-looking Muslim—so fastidiously and regularly employed by Bollywood filmmakers that such a portrayal could be termed as "positive stereotyping" of Muslims. "Positive stereotyping" amalgamates the proclivity of popular Hindi films to project a Muslim character with positive overtones at par with a character with negative shades and develops in the narrative in a manner so that the "positive" Muslim or the "good" Muslim is represented as having had the better of the "bad" Muslim. Although the word "stereotyping" immediately points towards a negative connotation, the engagement of popular Hindi cinema with aspects of balance and nuance, particularly in "terrorist" films or films signifying the Muslim as the communal other, addresses critical yet hitherto unravelled component of the popular genre in India.

"Stereotyping"—a function of the hegemonic dominant discourse—points towards the construction of an aspirational

projection of the nature, behaviour and imagination of the Muslim, a conception that symbolizes the necessary prerequisites of a "good" Muslim. The "positive" Muslim character epitomizes the bulwark of the secular nation, the cornerstone of a vibrant and progressive democracy which presupposes inclusion as a necessary precondition, and therefore mediates cultural projection on cinema screens. This "positive" or "good" Muslim is pitted against the violent and virulent "other"—yet another construct of the dominant discourse—and emerges the eventual victor in a battle between the "good" Muslim and the "bad" Muslim. Popular Hindi cinema, therefore, remains within the boundaries of the tract of the times and the discourse dominating the landscape and within the confines of commercial interest, represents a battle between the two opposing conceptions of the Muslim identity depicted on celluloid.

The tendency to stereotype is well-known. Stereotypes—what Walter Lippman[22] called "maps of the world"—exemplify the universal human inclination to categorize. Individuals are placed into groups and then the perceived characteristics of the group, the stereotypes, are imputed to those individuals.[23] Frequently, the valence of those stereotypes serves to elevate one's own group above other groups.

Another comprehensive explication of "positive stereotyping" in popular Hindi films could be located in *New York*, commercially a bigger success than *Kurbaan*, but a conceptual copycat in many ways, although the makers of *New York* could argue that *Kurbaan* was plagiarized from its main track. Both films evoke a similar background, a post-9/11 America coming to terms with its hurt and the fallouts of the wars of retribution that the United States is fighting in both Afghanistan and Iraq. *New York* posits two "positive" Muslim characters—an Indian
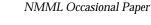
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[22] Lippman, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press.
[23] Tajfel, Henri, and John Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Group Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by W. G. Austin and S Worchel, pp. 33-48. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Muslim businessman based in America and a Muslim FBI agent against Samir Sheikh, ambitious student-turned-terror mastermind. The temporal links between the two films are strong, even in the profiles of the two Muslim men engaging in terrorism. Both Ehsaan Khan and Samir Sheikh symbolize the New Wave of terror sweeping the globe where the protagonists are educated, middle-class, and ambitious, evoking fierce debates in the policy boardrooms and university classrooms. The triggers for both men metamorphosing into terrorists point towards a single phenomenon—the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. While Ehsaan decides to take on the West in what is ostensibly his "holy war", Samir chooses to bomb the FBI headquarters in retribution of his incarceration and humiliation in a US prison after the 9/11 attacks.[24]

Omar Aijaz, an Indian Muslim businessman is detained by the FBI over suspicion of being involved with Islamic terrorists, a charge he vehemently denies while being quizzed by an interrogator of Asian origin—Agent Roshan—also a Muslim. The FBI accuses him of abetting terrorist crime, the chief perpetrator of which is his college-time friend—Samir Sheikh. Agent Roshan informs a terrified Omar that "the FBI breaks rules if it has to, in order to protect the country", an admission of guilt on part of the American establishment in the rampant detention without charges, abuse and torture of Muslims, young and old, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a phenomenon that has not ceased to the present day, in a work of popular cinematic fiction.

Pakistani filmmaker Shoaib Mansoor's *Khuda Lay Liye* (2007), a modern-day classic, set the precedent by unapologetically portraying the American law enforcement agencies as harbingers of hurt and humiliation for thousands of Muslims in America, one of the most prominent and oft-cited triggers for the pliability of many young Muslim men as future

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[24] In a case of perfunctory attention being paid to research, the film locates the FBI headquarters in a high-rise in New York whereas the FBI HQ is originally located in the J. Edgar Hoover Building, named after the founder-director.

terrorists. The graphic sequences of torture and humiliation of an innocent Pakistani Muslim man by FBI agents and police marshalls including leashing of men with dog collars and agents urinating on the faces of incarcerated prisoners, reinvented cinematic imagination of the "other" side of the story. It also brought to the fore images from prisons such as Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba where thousands of "suspected" terrorists are being held without trials for unspecified periods of time. Beginning in 2004, human rights violations in the form of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, including torture, reports of rape, sodomy, and homicide of prisoners held in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq (also known as Baghdad Correctional Facility) came to public attention. These acts were committed by military police personnel of the United States Army together with additional US governmental agencies.[25]

The extent of the torture prevalent and rampant among American detention facilities was exemplified in *New York* in the

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[25] Revealed in the Taguba Report, an initial criminal investigation by the United States Army Criminal Investigation Command had already been underway, where soldiers of the 320th Military Police Battalion had been charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice with prisoner abuse. In 2004, articles describing the abuse, including pictures showing military personnel appearing to abuse prisoners, came to public attention, when a *60 Minutes II* news report (April 28) and an article by Seymour M. Hersh in *The New Yorker* magazine (posted online on April 30 and published days later in the May 10 issue) reported the story. The United States Department of Defense removed seventeen soldiers and officers from duty, and eleven soldiers were charged with dereliction of duty, maltreatment, aggravated assault and battery. Between May 2004 and March 2006, eleven soldiers were convicted in court martial, sentenced to military prison, and dishonorably discharged from service. Two soldiers, Specialist Charles Graner, and his former fiancée, Specialist Lynndie England, were sentenced to ten years and three years in prison, respectively, in trials ending on January 14, 2005 and September 26, 2005. The commanding officer of all Iraq detention facilities, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, was reprimanded for dereliction of duty and then demoted to the rank of Colonel on May 5, 2005. Col. Karpinski has denied knowledge of the abuses, claiming that the interrogations were authorized by her superiors and performed by subcontractors, and that she was not even allowed entry into the interrogation rooms.

form of two men—one, Samir Sheikh, and the other, Zilgai (Nawazuddin Siddique), an Asian Muslim man detained in the same prison as Sheikh. Zilgai testifies, on camera — divulging gory details of being made to lie naked on slabs of ice for hours, the heads of men being dipped into commodes after the torturers have urinated in them, being urinated upon on asking for water — to Maya (Katrina Kaif), Samir's wife and Omar Aijaz's love interest as well as a human rights lawyer.[26] Eventually, as the narrative progresses, Omar is pressurized by the FBI to infiltrate Samir's life in order to ascertain the extent to which he had gained in planning terror strikes in New York. After much effort by Agent Roshan and many rounds of intimidation and threats by the FBI, the "good" Muslim, Omar, agrees to the role play as an agent of the state, making him a state actor, going after the "bad" Muslim, the "hunted".

The character of Agent Roshan exemplifies the necessary preconditions of "positive stereotyping"—he works for an American law enforcement and investigative agency, is married to an Italian-American woman, and expresses regret for the many "wayward" Muslims that he encounters in course of the "war on terror". The following monologue establishes Roshan's representation as a beneficiary of the Great American Dream and hence the quintessential native-turned-American:

I am a Muslim myself…I am perturbed when I see people go astray…

…I have been told a thousand times that Islam is a religion of peace and harmony…

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[26] *Zilgai: They used to beat me up regularly…*
…They disrobed me and tied my hands to the ceiling and made me stand like that for 30-40 hours…
…They used to tie black cloth around my head and urinate on my face…
…They did not allow me to go to the bathroom for days…
…They abused our mothers and sisters and put dog collars around our necks and dragged us around for hours…
… And then they wanted us to cooperate with them!

…Yes! America has committed mistakes…but this country also has its fair share of advantages too which we should not forget…

…I was handed this case even though I am a Muslim…

…You and I came in as immigrants and this country gave us our space and freedom…

…I am doing this so that our freedom is not taken away…

…Only a Muslim can convert the hatred against the Muslim into respect…

Omar and Roshan occupy one end of the ideological spectrum whereas Samir remains on the extreme opposite. His quest for retribution originates in a detention centre cell where images of him lying naked in a cellar are flashed on the screen, followed by sequences representing the "dog collar" torture and the tonsuring of the heads of prisoners. Various other forms of humiliation and torture recounted in detail by Zilgai were visited upon Samir destroying not only his body but his soul. He revisits his "days in hell" in the following monologue:

9/11 changed the world…and changed me forever…

…I was taken away for a random check….a hood was put around my head, disrobed and chained…

…They said I was a suspect in a terrorist attack…

…I told them that I was an American and that I wanted a lawyer…I was denied a lawyer…

…I did not know at that time that about 1200 young men were detained in various centres…

…They said I took photographs of the Twin Towers…Yes… I did but for a college project! They did not believe me…

…Only one thing was common between all of us—our faith…

…I was subjected to inhuman torture; was beaten for hours, urinated upon and we lived in the detention centre like animals for months…

The pre-detention Samir epitomized the "All American American". Popular in the university and good natured, Samir symbolized the vibrancy of youth; his faith taking a calm backseat. In fact, the film employed a star well-known for his Western persona, John Abraham, to play Samir Sheikh, a proverbial American youth shattered by the events that unfolded in New York on September 11. In detention and in realizing the cause of his segregation from the rest of the American milieu, Samir is provided with a new identity. The awareness of his identity as a Muslim, a truth that is irreversible, invokes in him a reprehensible yet enlightened need for avenging his humiliation which was unprovoked, unjust and predetermined on the part of the American law enforcement agencies. Samir's incarceration paves the way for his transformation, from a fun-loving young American man, into the "other", a "terrorist" seeking revenge for his hurt and humiliation, and in turn the humiliation of several other Muslims like him whose lives were ripped apart by the aftermath of 9/11.

The American media reported the humiliation of countless, faceless American Muslims stigmatized by the media itself, the government and its agencies and Hollywood cinema in particular.[27] In a more recent broadcast by American talk show

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[27] Goodstein, Laurie. 2001. "Stereotyping Rankles Silent, Secular Majority of American Muslims". *New York Times*, December 23. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/us/stereotyping-rankles-silent-secular-majority-of-american-muslims.html. Last accessed on 28 September, 2012.
-MacFarquhar, Neil. 2007. "Abandon Stereotypes, Muslims in America Say". *New York Times*, September 4, 2007. Details available at http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/04/us/04muslims.html?_r=0. Last accessed on 2 October, 2012.
-Karmi, Omar. 2011. "US Poll Confronts Stereotypes of American Muslims". *The National*, August 3, 2011. Details available at http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/americas/us-poll-confronts-stereotypes-of-american-muslims. Last accessed on 2 October, 2012.
-McGlynn, Katla. 2011. "Jon Stewart: TLC's 'All-American Muslim' Not Stereotypical Enough For Florida Family Association". *The Huffington Post*, November 14, 2011. Details available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/14/jon-stewart-tlc-all-american-muslim-florida-family-association_n_1147927.html. Last accessed on 2 October, 2012.

host Jon Stewart quoted the Florida Family Association as harbouring the opinion that the "All American Muslim" does not "fit in" with the stereotype of the Muslim and therefore is unacceptable for a wide number of common Americans. If considered against this literal opinion held by a section of the American population, it was inevitable for Samir's character to metamorphose into a terrorist. If considered in terms of his unlawful detention and torture as well, Samir was destined to transform into a conspirator who amasses the weapons and the know-how to avenge his humiliation. If posited against the "good" Muslims Omar Aijaz and Agent Roshan, Samir was the proverbial "bad" Muslim; the battle between the good and the bad was to be fought in the arena of faith.

Samir decides to run his covert operation away from his family, keeping the façade of a working professional alive. Omar emerges as his confidante to whom he reveals, according to the narrative of the film, the most importance aspect of his life—revenge against those who hurt him. However, it is imperative to mention that the real target of Samir's revenge in the film, as revealed by the character during the climax sequence, is the FBI and not the common American citizen. It is here that a major break occurs between the similarities hitherto ascertained between this film and *Kurbaan*. While *Kurbaan* associated *jihad* and terrorism with a set of highly motivated and focussed characters whose target remained continental America, with only Ehsaan being the exception having developed feelings for Awantika and so on, *New York* posits Samir as the terrorist who focuses his revenge on simply his torturers, the FBI, in a way converting the terror drama into a narrative of personal revenge.

The climax sequence in *New York* represented the inadequacy of the American assessment of its citizens, albeit belonging to

-Rowland, Jacky. 2004. "Muslim stereotypes challenged in US". *BBC News*, 3 February, 2004. Details available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3454115.stm. Last accessed on 2 October, 2012.
-Richardson, John E. 2004. *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Philadelphia: Jonhn Benjamins B. V.

different religious group, as the FBI authorities order the snipers to open fire on both Samir and his wife Maya, an innocent victim of the stereotypes that have grown in the American psyche, perpetuated by the media, the lawmakers as well as law enforcement. While both *Kurbaan* and *New York* postulated ideological positions encompassing humiliation, political violence and "positive stereotyping", Subhash Ghai's 2008 comeback film, *Black and White* further validates the conceptual and ideological site occupied by this study in terms of the representation of Muslims in popular Hindi cinema. The ace commercial filmmaker attempted a re-entry into the arena of popular cinema with a film which reinforced the "negative Muslim versus positive Muslim" thesis to a great extent, besides the rather historic, and perhaps the first engagement with global terror networks and their presence in India. Unlike both *Kurbaan* and *New York*, which are set in New York, the locus of *Black and White*'s narrative is the heart of India—Delhi, Old Delhi, to be precise, which invokes in the viewer a chimera of a syncretistic way of daily life. The "foreign" terrorist, an Afghan who curiously speaks Urdu-Hindi with consummate ease, is placed in a milieu of young Muslim women fighting to break free from the shackles of a protected life within the confines of their *havelis* in *purani Dilli*; Muslim travel agents catering to a largely Hindu clientele making no distinctions between groups of people taking pilgrimages to Mecca or Vaishno Devi; Hindu and Muslim neighbours sipping piping hot tea as the strains of the morning *gurbaani* is heard from the nearby *gurudwara*; and a Hindu college professor who teaches Urdu and quotes the Quran with unfailing precision.

As the Afghan "terrorist", Numair Qazi (Anurag Sinha), attempts to settle down and plan further towards the successful completion of his mission, the ideologically indoctrinated and motivated young man feels disturbed by the camaraderie he notices between the Muslims and the "infidels". Qazi, previously Mahmood Al-Baq, a victim of an American bombing raid in his native Afghanistan and a highly trained suicide bomber, now operating under a fake identity of a Gujarat riot victim, pronounces the decree of Allah and claims supremacy in understanding tenets of the Holy Quran, until he is pleasantly

surprised by a Hindu professor, Mathur (Anil Kapoor), clearly well-versed in not only the contents of the Quran and the hadith but also in the detail and nuance in the practice of lived Islam.

The "terrorist" in *Black and White* is a study in contrast to the main antagonists in *Kurbaan* and *New York*. Numair Qazi is deeply religious and is shown adhering to at least two of the five pillars of Islam—*shahada* (submission) and *salat* (ritual prayer), the others being *hajj* (pilgrimage), *zakaat* (ritual alms) and *sawm* (ritual fasting); the practice of Islam and participation in the political practice of Islam are brought together to define the character of the terrorist herein, which does not appear to be the case with the two previously discussed films. Much attention appears to have been paid to create the "look" of the Afghan terrorist as he is attired much differently than the "terrorists" in *New York* and *Kurbaan*, and is made to look insidious and dangerous. However, the three principle characters from the three films—Ehsaan Khan, Samir Sheikh and Numair Qazi—come together on one critical issue—they are victims of the summarily unjust "war on terror" unleashed by the US and its allies after the 9/11 attacks. The "motivation" therefore is singular and focused—retribution against the hegemonic aggressor.

Qazi's representation as the terrorist contains deeper underpinnings of hatred and adherence to medieval forms of vengeance—he is the perfect soldier, the face of political Islam. He considers *jihad* against the infidels to be a religious and moral duty of every Muslim, mirroring the cause of present day Islamists inspired by the founding ideologues of the practice of political Islam such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Sayyid Qutb and Maulana Mawdudi. Perry and Negrin describe Taymiyyah, a Syrian theologian, as the "medieval prophet of *jihad*" who lived during the reign of Mongol conquerors, denounced the Mongol rulers as apostates and called upon true Muslims to wage jihad against them.[28] Sayyid Qutb is the most well known among the

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[28] Perry, Mervin and Negrin, Howard E. 2008. "The Medieval Theorist of Jihad". In *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism: an anthology*, pp. 21. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

intellectual pioneers of radical political Islam, a movement that now stands for a radically reformulated notion of jihad, a doctrine shared by all Muslims, and now hotly contested.[29] Mawdudi, a Pakistani theologian and cleric, emphasized on Pakistan being not just the territorial state for Muslims but also the ideological state for Muslims—an Islamic state.[30]

The following examples, in the form of dialogues, from the film are illustrative.

Discussion with Prof. Mathur

Numaair: The Quran says that all kafirs such as Hindus should be eliminated immediately. Otherwise Muslims will face crisis of survival.

Prof. Mathur: The Quran says that you can kill only in self defence…

Numair: A child who has lost everything at the hands of Hindus thinks differently…

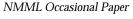On witnessing his associate, a travel agent, attending to Hindu clients

Numair: A Muslim is under the thumb of a Hindu…what more do I have to witness before shahadat?

To Shagufta on being handed a copy of the local newspaper bearing her photograph in a dancing pose

Numair: Girls wearing such clothes can never be Muslim!

In conversation with Jalal, another associate

Numair: Today's Muslim is corrupt and sold to the powers of commerce…

[29] Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. "Culture Talk". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, pp. 50-51. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
[30] Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. "Culture Talk". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, pp. 54-55. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Jalal: All of us work for money…and believe in serving our customer irrespective of their faith…

Numair: You people can never be true Muslims…and if you are not Muslims then what right do you have to live?

The character of Numair Qazi encapsulated within itself conceptual strains from the ideologues of political Islam and an innate desire to "die for a cause of greater value to him than life itself".[31] He also bore within him a desire to "kill" for such a cause, which according to Mamdani, was ignored by early scholars but is an offshoot to the theorization of violence that has emerged as a critical precondition in present times.[32] With a mission to kill hundreds during the Independence speech of the Indian Prime Minister, Qazi plots his entry into the precincts of the Red Fort in Delhi through the hearts and minds of the college professor Mathur and his fiercely loyal wife, Roma. He works his way through the wide network of sympathizers, including a Rajya Sabha MP and a prominent businessman of the city—both Muslims.

On the other side of the spectrum, the film situates the octogenarian and unheralded poet—Ghaffar Sahab (Habib Tanvir)—who steadfastly attempts to hold on to the last vestiges of syncretistic existence in what he terms as "abhorrent times". Ghaffar Sahab epitomizes the primordial notions of belongingness and cultural unity between Hindus and Muslims and professes "dialogue" as the only reasonable solution to all conflicts, thus, emerging as the "good" Muslim, against Numair, the "bad" Muslim. The character carries within itself the major elements of the "positive stereotype", encompassing the criteria that would posit him as the dominant notion of the "good" Muslim.

[31] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. [1807] 2007. "Phenomenology of Spirit" (excerpts). In *On Violence: A Reader*, edited by Bruce B Lawrence and Aisha Karim, pp. 28-38. USA: Duke University Press.

[32] Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. "Modernity and Violence". *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War against Terror*, p. 2. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

The "good" and the "bad" converge, however, as Numair stays as a guest in Ghaffar Sahab's house, the old poet obviously unaware of the true identity of the rather innocuous looking young man living as a guest in his house. On being told that Numair is a distant relative looking for shelter after being hunted out of Gujarat, his home state, Ghaffar Sahab readily agrees to provide a home to the distraught youth. His death symbolizes the breakdown of social syncretism and the film points towards Islamic fundamentalism being the cause of this schism, once again remaining within the confines of the dominant ideology. In depicting Afghanistan, the film attempts to postulate the reason behind the cold-blooded resolve with which Numair is associated. Images of the country, destroyed by the incessant bombings by the Americans, stunningly reveals the truth of the human cost of America's "war on terror"—a truth that created Numair Qazi, the perfect soldier.

The characters of Naeem Sheikh, the businessman and Waris Shah, the politician, lay claim to the argument linking local Muslims to non-Indian terrorists and terror suspects, which further associates them with the larger terror network lending credence to the suspicion of Muslim loyalty to the ummah. Both Naeem and Shah are peripheral supporters where Naeem cites the reason for his support to the terrorist action as being an "outcome of India's cozying up to America". His words during his arrest and subsequent suicide are illuminating:

Naeem: So you know that I am a terrorist sympathizer…

…today you will arrest one Naeem…tomorrow there will be many like me…willing to sacrifice their lives…

…you must dwell on why terrorists are made…no one is born a terrorist…

…that will lead to a new tomorrow…

Naeem's words are not just semantics but contain the elements of a critical inquiry into the "making" of a terrorist. Psychologists Jeff Victoroff and Arie W. Kruglanski assert that the findings

supporting the pathology model of terrorist behaviour is rare and generally of poor quality.[33] Therefore, terrorism has been ruled out as a result of clinical disorders. The narrative of the film represents terrorism as an outcome of political violence by the hegemonic powers.

The "outing" of Numair Qazi in the climax sequence of the film, another key difference between *Kurbaan* and *New York*, and Subhash Ghai's political thriller,[34] is predicated on the terrorist aborting the suicide mission at the last minute and escaping the scene, affected severely by the death of the Professor's wife and the woman he came to regard as "Roma didi". Numair is unable to come to terms with Roma's murder at the hands of some of his associates and decides unilaterally to call the mission off, thus, elevating the character of the terrorist in the eyes of the viewer by a few degrees. Here again, the difference between the "hero" and the "villain" is sublimely diffused as Numair bashes up his associates for having murdered an "innocent" woman. The "good" Muslim and the "bad" Muslim are seen emerging from the superstructure of Numair Qazi where the "good" Muslim exacts revenge for Roma's murder, while the "bad" Muslim fights his internal demons—his own personal *jihad-e-akbar*. In bringing the "good" and the "bad" Muslims together in the persona of the terrorist, the film attempts to draw a picture of ongoing geopolitical events and their fallout for the world at large, on the one hand, and the aspirational conception of the "good" Muslim within the confines of the dominant discourse on the other.

Several other popular films not only corroborate the thesis of "positive stereotyping" of Muslims, they form the crux of the large body of documentary evidence gathered during the course of research. Films such as *A Wednesday* (2008) and *Aamir* (2008)

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[33] Victoroff, Jeff and Arie M. Kruglanski. 2009. "Cheshire Cat Logic: The Recurring Theme of Terrorist Abnormality in Psychological Research". In *Psychology of Terrorism-Key Readings: Classic and Contemporary Insights*, pp. 95. Great Britain: Taylor and Francis/Psychology Press.

[34] In both *Kurbaan* and *New York*, the terrorist protagonists are revealed halfway down the narrative of the film.

figure prominently in the picture which, of course, is much wider and larger. Neeraj Pandey's *A Wednesday* and Rajkumar Gupta's *Aamir* have stood out as the two of the most credible works of cinematic art to have emerged from the New Wave stable in recent years. While *A Wednesday* nonchalantly resisted the temptation to divulge the faith of the chief protagonist in the terrorist drama, *Aamir* postulated a young Britain-based doctor emerging as the proverbial "Muslim" phoenix to defy the odds and his "handler" to save the lives of innocent passengers on a bus. The religious affiliation of the protagonist in *A Wednesday* is open to conjecture as the narrative does not at any point reveal his name, an immediate and often conclusive marker of not only the religious group to which one belongs but also the caste and sub-caste group. Again, it could be argued that the film, through the representation of the terrorists who are killed in the film as Muslims, motivated by several factors including attacks on the community during riot situations—the "bad" Muslims, and the hot-headed encounter cop, Arif Khan—the "good" Muslim, treads the traditional path of stereotyping the Muslim, even though positively, in adherence to the exigencies of the dominant discourse.

Aamir comes across as an intelligent battle of wits between a shadow "terrorist" and Dr. Aamir Ali—the unwilling and unwitting young Muslim doctor who gets trapped into a suicide mission outside his own volition. The inherent prejudice against Muslims in general is in display in the opening sequence of the film which is worth noting.

Immigration officer: What is your name?

Aamir: Aamir Ali…

Immigration officer: Where do you live?

Aamir: Address…

Immigration officer: Why have you come back?

Aamir: This is my home…

Immigration officer: Is there any other motive?

Aamir: Meaning?

Immigration officer: You have not got your visa renewed...why would you? Doctors and engineers are bringing laurels to the country...

(The officer is referring to the cases of terrorist activity in which the suspects have hailed from educated backgrounds.)

Aamir: Is there a problem? My papers are with you...

Immigration officer: No one has terrorist written on their faces...

Aamir: Look... I am a simple man...

Immigration officer: Everyone is simple till something untoward happens...

Aamir: Would you have checked my bags twice if my name was Amar?

The sequence comes to an end with the next person at the immigration counter calling out his name—Amar, bringing to the fore the injustice inherent in the manner in which a Muslim is perceived. The narrative subsequently moves at breakneck speed, the figure of a confused and tired Aamir Ali winding through the filth-infested bylanes of the "Muslim" areas of Bombay, at the behest of the shadow terrorist insistent on exposing the life of indignity that his fellow Muslims lead—a rather unique attempt at indoctrination. All the while, the shadow terrorist converses with Aamir on the cellphone presenting to him arguments that might "change" his mind and convert him into a "holy warrior" by the end of the film. The following sets of dialogues are illustrative.

Caller: Did you see the conditions in which our people live? Like insects? There is no place to even defecate...

Aamir: Please let me talk to my family...

(His family has been taken hostage by the shadow terrorist.)

Caller: Do as I say...

...its been 60 years since Independence ...the world has moved on...but our people have remained where they were...

...earlier we served the British...and now them...

Aamir: Who has stopped you? No one!

Caller: You got everything on a platter...so you progressed...

Aamir: Wrong! I studied in a government school and college...worked hard and earned a medical degree on a scholarship...I have written my own destiny...everyone has the freedom to write their own destiny...

Caller: You would not have spoke like this if you would have had religious education...

Aamir: You think like that...not me!

In saying so, Aamir consciously establishes himself on the "good" side of the seesaw on which popular Hindi cinema positions its Muslim characters. Therefore, obviously, on the "bad" side is the shadow terrorist/caller. *Aamir* epitomizes inclusion, whereas the caller symbolizes exclusion. In attempting to indoctrinate Aamir, the caller challenges the imagination of the "good" Muslim. His failure to do so mediates the thin line between the battle between good and evil, personified in the figures of central Muslim characters. At the end of the journey, most of which Aamir undertakes on foot, the caller gives up on him, relegating him to the status of a mere foot soldier, initiated but not enlightened. The climactic act of the unwilling Aamir places him in an awkward situation, one in which on the one hand he depicted as a "hero" for having saved the lives of a bus load of people, albeit only to the viewer, he is termed a "terrorist" by the media in the narrative of the film. The "hero" and "terrorist" here are embodied in the person of Aamir.

Our appraisal of the films above—particularly *Kurbaan* and *New York*—presents before us a deep-rooted need for a more nuanced reading of popular Hindi cinema, with regard mainly to

the representation of identities, religious or otherwise. There emerges a serious crisis of perspective in the films under question when read or studied against the hitherto existing debate and the wealth of writings, scholarly and popular, on the representation of Muslims in contemporary Hindi cinema. This crisis meets a logical conclusion or end when analysed as part of the larger argument on positive stereotyping and the sense of balance maintained by popular Bollywood cinema remaining within the confines of the hegemonic discourse, when compared with the singularly insidious portrayal of the Muslims/Arabs in popular American or Hollywood cinema.
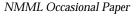
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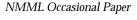
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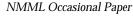
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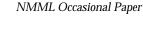
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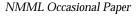Singh, Sunny. 2008. "Defining a non-Pakistan centric post-globalization

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Sarfarosh (1999), directed by John Matthew Matthan, featuring Aamir Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, Akash Khurana, Mukesh Rishi

Mission Kashmir (2000), directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, featuring Sanjay Dutt, Hrithik Roshan, Preity Zinta

Fiza (2000), directed by Khalid Mohammad, featuring Karisma Kapoor, Hrithik Roshan, Jaya Bachchan, Manoj Bajpayee

Yahaan (2005), directed by Shoojit Sircar, featuring Jimmy Shergill, Minisha Lamba, Yashpal Sharma

Fanaa (2006), directed by Kunal Kohli, featuring Aamir Khan, Kajol, Rishi Kapoor, Kirron Kher

A Wednesday (2008), directed by Neeraj Pandey, featuring Naseeruddin Shah, Anupam Kher, Jimmy Shergill, Aamir Bashir

Aamir (2008), directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, featuring Rajeev
    Khandelwal, Gajraj Rao

Black and White (2008), directed by Subhash Ghai, featuring Anurag
    Sinha, Anil Kapoor, Shefali Chhaya

Kurbaan (2009), directed by Rensil D'Silva, featuring Saif Ali Khan,
    Kareena Kapoor, Om Puri, Vivek Oberoi, Diya Mirza,
    Kulbhushan Kharbanda

New York (2009), directed by Kabir Khan, featuring John Abraham,
    Neil Nitin Mukesh, Katrina Kaif, Irrfan Khan, Nawazuddin
    Siddique

My Name is Khan (2010), directed by Karan Johar, featuring Shahrukh
    Khan, Kajol

Lamhaa (2010), directed by Rahul Dholakia, featuring Sanjay Dutt,
    Bipasha Basu, Yashpal Sharma, Anupam Kher, Kunal Kapoor