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Portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood Movies: A Comparative Analysis Pathan, and Kerala Story

Abstract: *This research delves into the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood cinema, analyzing two significant films released in the first half of 2023, 'Pathaan' and 'The Kerala story'. With one film adopting a balanced and neutral perspective and the other propagating highly biased and factually inaccurate information, the study scrutinizes the complex and evolving dynamics of Muslim representation in the industry. This research also underscores the powerful role of Bollywood in shaping societal norms, challenging stereotypes, and influencing perceptions. It calls for a more conscientious approach to filmmaking, emphasizing authenticity, inclusivity, and ethical considerations. The study advocates for responsible storytelling that fosters understanding, respect, and harmony, rejecting the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and biases in favor of a more inclusive and interconnected world.*

Key Words: Bollywood, Film Industries, Pathaan, Inaccurate, Neutral Perspective

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Introduction

One of the largest film industries globally, Bollywood, renowned for its vibrant storytelling and cinematic extravaganza and has played a crucial role in shaping the cultural imagination of India. Bollywood productions, enjoy substantial viewership not only in Asia but also across Western and African continents. With the Muslim population accounting for approximately one-fifth as compare to the population of the world

and India being home to the second-largest Muslim community, the depiction of Muslims and Islam in their movies films holds immense significance.

Historically, Bollywood has had a complex relationship with the portrayal of Muslim characters/ Agenda setting and framing techniques used by media which means biased production against a group, can have a passive as well as active impact on the audience which already had a rival history.

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Events like partition of sub-continent and 9/11 attack are made the base to justify the negative portrayal. Many Indian films draw inspiration from real events and historical themes but by using the card-stacking propaganda technique, mold the story line for their best image, resulting in the distorted image of the second party, Muslims in this context. Other propaganda techniques introduced by *the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA)* also describes this one-sided production of content. These include Name-Calling; attaching derogatory language or negative labels to Muslims, Glittering Generalities; Indians in-favor content - by generating positive emotions and create a favorable impression without providing substantial evidence or information, and Transfer; associating a positive or negative sentiment, symbol, or idea with a person or product to transfer the feelings associated with that sentiment to promote or discredit the target.

The stereotypical representation i.e., associating adjectives like barbaric, foolish, women abusers, disloyal and dishonest are widely used in crafting Muslims characters. The aftermath of 9/11 led to the widespread association of Muslims with the term "terrorists." Exploiting this situation, the Bollywood film industry portrayed Muslims' predominantly negative image since the incident. Early depictions often relied on labels and limited narratives, perpetuating biased representations that failed to capture the diverse experiences of the Muslim community. However, in recent times, there have been notable attempts to present Muslim characters with depth and sensitivity, challenging the prevailing stereotypes and highlighting the richness of Muslim culture.

With a massive viewership both domestically and internationally, Bollywood movies possess the power to influence social norms, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to the collective understanding of various communities within the country. As the power of media cannot be denied keeping in view the

magic bullet theory, hyper-needle effect, and even two-wayflow of information, media as a gatekeeper remains a significant source of deciding what to discuss and how to discuss for its audience.

This study is being performed to systematically discover how Bollywood is portraying Muslims' image currently, by the content analysis of its two blockbuster movies of the running year.

Aim

This study will provide a systematic examination of how Muslim characters, narratives, and cultural aspects are depicted in these movies, shedding light on the extent to which the movies adhere to or challenge existing stereotypes. This study also aims to help Muslims identify their current representation in Bollywood films and their intensity. To understand how the selected movies challenge or reinforce stereotypes associated with Muslim characters and how do they impact the overall perception of public perception and awareness.

Objectives

- The main objective of the study is to determine whether Muslims are portrayed negatively or in a supplementary manner or it has only been a perception now.
- By conducting a content analysis of Pathaan and Kerala Story, we intend to contribute to the existing literature on media representation and provide a nuanced understanding of Muslim portrayal in Bollywood movies.
- This research will serve as a stepping stone for future discussions on promoting accurate and diverse representation of Muslims in the media.

Research Questions

Q. Whether overall portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood movies is positive or negative?

Q. What are the dominant themes, narratives, and tropes associated with Muslim characters in the selected Bollywood movies?

Q. How do these movies contribute to the overall narrative and discourse surrounding Muslim representation in Indian cinema?

Literature Review

Bollywood is one of the world's largest film industries and have substantial audience. An article (Umber et al., [2018](#)) accentuates the significant influence of **films** on audience and questions Muslims' portrayal in Indian movies. They applied content analysis technique on the 2016's Indian movies including prominent Muslim characters. The results revealed that majority negatively portrayed of Muslims. The antagonist and protagonist portrayal of the Indian Muslims was found in ratio of 60% to 40% respectively.

The relations between India and Pakistan have always been in a clash but the article by

Molaei and Babaei of [2020](#) relates these increasing tensions to politics. Bhartiya Janta Party BJP which has been in power since 2014 has used the "anti-Muslim strategies for gaining popularity among Hindus." According to the authors this enmity is also shown in films portraying Hindus as heroic characters, which are, intelligent, hardworking, and devoted to their country, while portraying Muslims as cruel.

Another article (Bhat S., [2019](#)) emphasized on the significant impact of media content especially entertaining content as movies draw inspiration from reality and create captivating stories that resonate with viewers. The negative portrayal adds to the existing tensions and reinforces stereotypes about Muslims, fueling misunderstandings and biases. A survey was conducted with a sample of 100 students; 28% - Muslims (24% male, 4% female) and 72% - non-Muslims (41% male, 31% female). The results indicate a tendency in several films to depict Muslims in negative roles, such as terrorists or underworld figures. The results concluded, "It seems that in the

past 15-20 years, it has been difficult to find a film in which the Muslim aspects of the main character plays their role an aspect of their identity, Bollywood cinema in which the central characters (i.e., hero/heroine) are Muslim maintain Muslim-ness as central to the storyline and the storyline is usually somehow political - either

in severe (terrorism) or romantic (inter-religious love) ways or both."

Similarly, another article (Ali, S. et al, [2012](#)) highlights the impact of biased Indian representation on the bases of religious conflict and international conflict by India and Pakistan. Such irresponsible production exacerbates the existing conflicts by strengthening the public's opinion against Muslims and Pakistani through propaganda, showing Muslims as ruffian swindlers, mafia dons, assassins and sex-workers etc. A recent addition is the image of terrorists after 9/11.

A study (Khan, M. A. et al, [2011](#)) have 50 Indian movies content analyzed from the time period of 2002-2008. As the period starts right after 9/11 Muslims shown in suspicious terrorist characters has been very common. According to the three developed slants favorable images, unfavorable and neutral images of Muslims portrayal by Indian cinema, the results came out as 4.4%, 65.2% and 30.4%, respectively. This indicates a distorting Muslim image and an anti-Muslim propaganda has been carried out by Indian cinema not only in India but also at international level (because of the reach of Bollywood).

Applying Semiotic Analysis and Ferdinand De Saussure's theory, Iftikhar, M., Zia, A., Iqbal, N., & Javed, S. ([2021](#)) explore the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood films. The researchers analyze five Bollywood movies released between 2017 and 2018 that feature Muslim protagonists. The study reveals that these films employ signs, visuals, and pictures to convey specific ideological messages about Muslims' identity, shaping viewers' perceptions. The research aims to raise awareness about the role of Indian cinema in

portraying Muslims positively, encouraging filmmakers to produce more inclusive films, and rectifying the declining image of Muslims in the media.

Bollywood's portrayal of Muslims not only influences Indian society but also shapes international perceptions. Zafar, A. & Amjad, M. (2015) examine the image of Muslims in Bollywood movies from 2009 to 2013 and highlight the negative stereotypes and misrepresentation of Muslims in these films. The research analyzes ten Bollywood movies, identifying 90 Muslim characters and categorizing their portrayal as positive, neutral, or negative. The findings indicate that many Muslim characters are negatively represented, perpetuating stereotypes of disloyalty, cruelty, and terrorism. The research underscores the need to address and rectify the misrepresentation of Muslims in the film industry.

Indian cinema often includes negative and inaccurate depictions of Muslims, perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting their religious practices. However, Nawreen, M. examined the representation of Muslims and Islam in Bollywood films, emphasizing the prevalence of negative and inaccurate portrayals that perpetuate stereotypes and misrepresent religious practices. The author highlighted the increase in unfavorable portrayals of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks and expressed the need for more positive and accurate depictions in Indian cinema.

According to Singh, A., & Azeez, E. A. (2021), the researchers aim to explore the depiction of the caste system in mainstream Bollywood movies, which has been largely overlooked in existing research. By critically analyzing 22 highest-grossing Bollywood movies from 2014 to 2017, the study investigates how the caste system is portrayed, the indicators of castes within the film, and how they reinforce existing caste stereotypes. The findings reveal that lead characters in these movies often carry surnames associated with dominant castes and are depicted according to traditional caste-based

occupations. Also, the study highlights these castes' intentional erasure and marginalization within the cinematic portrayal, perpetuating caste discrimination.

On the other hand, In the study, Mozaffari Falarti, Molaei, and Karim (2019) investigate the representations of Hindu-Muslim relationships in Bollywood movies from 2008 to 2018, following the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 26/11. Through content analysis of 11 selected films, the researchers explore the portrayal of these relationships and their impact on public attitudes. The findings reveal that most scenes (66.17%) depict a favorable image of the Hindu-Muslim relationship, while only a small percentage (14.70%) present an unfavorable view. The study suggests that Bollywood promotes a positive image of the relationship and attempts to strengthen ties between the two religions and neighboring countries, India and Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

For this research framing technique as well as the propaganda theory & techniques are taken as base.

Framing Technique

In the context of media, framing, pertains to a strategic and deliberate approach to devise information and disseminate with the intention of influencing public perception and understanding of a particular issue. It involves accentuating specific elements while minimizing or excluding others in order to manipulate or guide audience interpretations, evaluations, and subsequent actions. By leveraging a range of cognitive mechanisms and psychological strategies, it constructs narratives that resonate with their desired message.

Other prominent methods that come under framing include:

- Priming: The repetitive exposure to specific information or imagery.
- Selective omission: Downplaying or

excluding certain information.

- **Episodic framing:** Presenting an issue or event as an isolated incident rather than part of a broader pattern or systemic context.

Framing is a pervasive and legitimate tool employed in media discourse but it also rises ethical concerns when it is utilized to deploy or distort information, leading to prejudiced or misleading interpretations. The technique is used to capitalize on inherited cognitive biases in human thinking processes, exploiting heuristics and predispositions to direct public comprehension in an intended direction. However, scrutiny and critical awareness of framing techniques are crucial to ensure a nuanced understanding of media messages and their potential impact on audience opinion.

Propaganda

Adolf Hitler introduced propaganda theory in his book 'Mein Kampf'. Which revolves around the idea of Big Lie. It suggests that when someone tells a huge lie people consider it to be untrue completely and start believing to some extent.

Propaganda is a set of strategies designed for persuasion and influence public opinions. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis existed from 1937 to 1941, they devised 7 propaganda techniques to analyse media's coverage. These are

1. **Name-Calling:** Within the story, name-calling might involve characters using derogatory language to label or demean other characters or groups, contributing to conflict or tension in the narrative.
2. **Glittering Generalities:** The story can use glittering generalities to create a sense of wonder or idealism, presenting concepts or ideals that evoke positive emotions without providing specific details. For example, a utopian society in the film may be described in broad, positive terms.

3. **Transfer:** Transfer in a movie's story might involve associating a particular character or object with another unrelated concept, often to evoke emotions. For instance, a symbolic object like a rose may represent love and beauty.
4. **Testimonial:** Within the movie's story, testimonials can be presented as characters vouching for or endorsing a particular idea, belief, or course of action. This can influence the decisions and actions of other characters in the narrative.
5. **Plain-Folk:** Characters in the story can embody plain-folk qualities, presenting themselves as down-to-earth and relatable individuals, fostering connections between the audience and the characters.
6. **Card-Stacking:** Within the story, card-stacking can occur when the narrative emphasizes certain aspects or details of a character's life, past, or motivations while downplaying or omitting contradictory information to create a particular impression.
7. **Bandwagon:** In the context of the story, the bandwagon effect might be portrayed when characters or groups follow popular trends or ideologies, without critically evaluating their choices, simply because "everyone else is doing it." This can lead to plot developments driven by peer pressure or conformity.

Methodology

Sample Technique

A sample is taken from overall Bollywood movies on the following bases:

- i. Time period Jan-May 2023
- ii. IMDb blockbuster movies with prominent Muslim characters

Hence, among the top five movies in an *IMDb report - Indian Films Box Office* (Ali, N., B., A.

2023), 'Pathaan' and 'Kerala story' are taken as a sample.

Indicators

For a research method content analysis in combination with semiotic analysis are applied on the above-mentioned movies. For the purpose of categorizing 'sentiment analysis scale' is used. According to it there are three possibilities positive, neutral and negative, applied to the following indicators:

Dialogue

The dialogue indicator plays a crucial role in analyzing Muslim representation in Bollywood movies. This indicator involves coding the words or lines spoken by Muslim characters in the films. The focus is on assessing the content of the dialogue about Islam and Jihad. It is considered conservative or hostile if the dialogue negatively portrays Islam and Jihad or speaks against other religions. On the other hand, dialogue that presents Islam in a positive light, advocating for its principles and against violations, is categorized as modern or positive. Any dialogue that does not strongly favor or oppose Islam is considered neutral in this analysis.

Dressing/ Appearance

This indicator focuses on Muslim characters' attire and physical appearance. It involves coding and categorizing their clothing choices, including traditional Islamic garments such as hijabs, abayas, and kurta-pajamas, as well as their overall grooming, hairstyles, and accessories. It aims to assess whether Muslim characters are depicted in a manner that respects and accurately represents their religious and cultural identities and whether their clothing choices align with authentic and non-stereotypical representations.

It also examines and provides insights into authenticity and inclusivity in portraying Muslim individuals in Bollywood movies.

And discusses colors choice and background visuals.

Behaviors

This indicator delves into the behavioral aspects of Muslim characters, focusing on their actions, reactions, and interactions within the storyline. It involves meticulous analysis of their dialogue delivery, body language, and facial expressions, aiming to gauge the authenticity and depth of portrayal. The indicator considers whether characters' behaviors align with nuanced and realistic depictions or if they fall into stereotypical patterns. Additionally, it explores the dynamics of their relationships with other characters, providing insights into the overall authenticity and inclusivity in the portrayal of Muslim individuals in cinematic narratives. The analysis extends to consider context-specific behaviors and cultural nuances, aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how characters' actions contribute to the overall narrative and representation.

Incorrect facts and Misconceptions

This indicator scrutinizes the presence of incorrect facts and misconceptions in the portrayal of various elements within a movie. It involves an analysis of the narrative, dialogue, and scenes to identify instances where information is presented inaccurately or stereotypes are perpetuated. Focus areas include misrepresentation of religious practices, historical events, cultural traditions, and socio-political contexts related to Islam. Additionally, it evaluates the movie's adherence to authentic sources and its potential to reinforce misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. The indicator seeks to highlight instances where the film deviates from accurate and nuanced depictions, contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypes and fostering a distorted understanding of Muslim culture and beliefs.

Overall View

It provides an overarching assessment of how Muslim characters are portrayed and represented in the films. It involves considering multiple aspects such as dialogue, role characters, dressing/appearance, profession/activities, and other relevant indicators to form a comprehensive view of the depiction of Muslims.

This indicator considers the balance between positive, negative, and neutral portrayals, the avoidance of stereotypes, and the extent to which Muslim characters are given agency, complexity, and depth.

Findings and Analysis

Movie - Pathaan

The film "Pathaan" features a central character as a Muslim, yet the narrative deliberately avoids any substantial reliance on religious themes. Nevertheless, the storyline may incorporate elements involving extremist organizations, notably the ISIS, as a component of the plot or thematic exploration.

The movie adeptly conveys a nuanced perspective within its narrative. Notably, both of the antagonists are portrayed with one hailing from Pakistan and the other from India. However, it is discernible that the movie meticulously underscores the distinction between individual actions and the broader connotations of nationality. While scrutinizing the portrayal, one can discern certain

archetypical stereotypes, such as the depiction of Afghanistan as an underdeveloped region. This portrayal, as presented by the media, may inadvertently cultivate a perception within the audience that the nation is predominantly characterized by arid landscapes and dwellings fashioned from adobe.

Movie - The Kerala Story

The Kerala Story' has emerged as a significant success at the box office, becoming the second highest-grossing Hindi film of 2023. Despite its financial triumph, the film has been embroiled in controversy from the beginning, with its narrative claiming to depict the true story of 32,000 young women from Kerala held captive in ISIS camps after their conversion to Islam. The film, through its storytelling, has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and contributing to the stigmatization of Muslims. The controversy intensified as some politicians called for a ban on the film, alleging that it propagated false claims about women's conversion, radicalization, and involvement with ISIS. Many criticize the movie for potentially disrupting communal harmony, underscoring the complexities of cinematic narratives and their impact on societal perceptions.

Analyzing the film requires carefully examining its portrayal and the ensuing controversies. The tables below present key aspects that can be subject to a more detailed analysis.

Table I

Dressing

Dressing	Symbolic Relation
Abaya, Hijab	In cinematic narratives, the abaya and hijab are recurrently portrayed as intrinsic to the identity of Muslim women. Nevertheless, from media's perspective, these attire choices are at times intentionally used to perpetuate stereotypes, particularly through their symbolic associations with vulnerability and dependence. This portrayal aligns with media theories on visual semiotics, where certain clothing choices can reinforce preexisting cultural assumptions and expectations, potentially limiting the diverse representation of Muslim women in film.

Dressing	Symbolic Relation
Beards, caps	Media representations often rely on visual cues and symbolism to convey complex ideas and emotions. In the realm of visual semiotics, certain styles of beards and caps that have been linked to various movements, and it can perpetuate stereotypes that generalize Muslim men having beards as aggressive or militant.

Table II*Visuals and Background*

Visuals and Background	Technique	Depiction
Deserts, adobe houses and no hospital facility at the time of birth	Stereotyping propaganda	Depicting poor lifestyle and underdevelopment. Lack of facilities. Carry negative connotations. Reinforce biases and preconceived notions.
Violence on children and women and chained women	Appeal to emotion propaganda technique	Emotional manipulation: Evoking strong emotional responses among audience, such as empathy, anger, or outrage.
Blood, guns and dead bodies	Associating terrorism with a religion. Transfer, Cardstacking and Namecalling techniques	Suggesting that these elements are inherent to, or emblematic of, that religion. Perpetuating harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

When depicting Muslim characters, subdued color palettes are often employed. Women are frequently attired in somber black, while men are seen in pristine white. This aesthetic choice

imparts a monochromatic, antiquated ambiance, which, in turn, may unintentionally convey connotations of underdevelopment, a scarcity of exuberance, and a dearth of personal liberties.

Table III*Incorrect facts and misconceptions*

Description	Portrayal in Movie	Correct Facts
Trailer controversy and portrayal change	Claimed 32,000 conversions of women by ISIS	The mentioned number lacks credible evidence and is likely an exaggerated or false claim within the movie. In reality, the movie's revised trailer now states that it tells the story of 3 girls, a significant deviation from the initial claim of mass forced conversions and involvement with ISIS. This has caused public concern and sparked debates over the film's accuracy.
Misrepresentation of religious concepts	False claims about restrictions on wearing lipstick, cutting hands for wearing it, or prohibiting phone usage for women due to Sharia	Islam encourages modesty but doesn't dictate extreme measures. In Islam, such extreme actions are baseless; instead, Islam emphasizes compassion, individual choice, and respect for personal freedoms. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Allah is

Description	Portrayal in Movie	Correct Facts
Justification of harassment based on appearance	The movie implies that wearing a hijab protects women from harassment, justifying mistreatment based on appearance.	Gentle and loves gentleness in all things" (Sahih Muslim).
Forced Conversion and Ridiculing Other Religions	The movie falsely depicts forced conversions and ridicules other religions, going against the principles of religious freedom in Islam.	Islam strictly prohibits forced conversions, stating "There is no compulsion in religion" (Quran 2:256). Islam promotes respectful dialogue: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction" (Quran 16:125).
False Linkage of Violence to Religious Duty	The movie incorrectly justifies violence as a duty in Islam.	Islam strictly condemns unjust violence and promotes peace. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Do not kill the soul which Allah has made sacred except by right of justice" (Quran 17:33). Jihad, often misinterpreted, is a struggle for justice, not an excuse for violence against innocent people.
Misrepresentation of Hell Concept	The movie distorts the concept of hell to justify negative actions and implies it as a means to control or to manipulate others.	In Islam, hell is not a tool for justifying harm; rather, it is a reminder of consequences for wrongdoing. The Quran states, "And Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Quran 2:173). Narrated by Abu Huraira: "Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer.' It was asked, 'Who is that, O Allah's Messenger?' He said, 'One whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil.'" (Sahih al-Bukhari). It highlight the importance Islam places on kindness and good behavior, regardless of religious affiliation,
By Islam as a Tool for Personal Vendettas	The movie depicts using Islam as a tool for personal vendettas and	Islam condemns using religion for personal gain or vendettas. Prophet

Description	Portrayal in Movie	Correct Facts
	forcefully converting others.	Muhammad (PBUH) said, "The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger" (Sahih al-Bukhari).
Misuse of Religious Symbols	Celebration of harmful actions (burning abaya as a symbol of freedom)	Burning an abaya as a celebration contradicts the respect Islam places on clothing and symbols. It goes against the principles of humility and gratitude taught in Islam.
Targeting Other Religions	The movie portrays targeting and demeaning other religions, as a means to justify the forced conversion to Islam, also suggesting God's helplessness and mocking religious figures.	Islam promotes respect for all religions. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whoever harms a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state, I am his adversary, and I shall be his adversary on the Day of Judgment" (Hadith in Sahih Al-Bukhari). Islam encourages peaceful coexistence and dialogue.

Table IV*Music*

Category	Song Title	Lyric Tone	Played in scene
Triggering	"Kis nay zaher ghola, joothi tasweer dikha, mazhab ki kambakth insaa badal dala."	Illustrates a negative tone, suggesting manipulation of religion affecting people negatively	Played during the scene of girls accepting Islam
Emotional	Aakhir Kyun	Reflective, Questioning	The song is played during a scene where characters are contemplating the reasons behind certain events, evoking emotional reflection Played in a dramatic or suspenseful moment,
Scary	Pagal Parinda	Intense, disturbing	possibly contributing to the overall tension and mood of the narrative. The song adds an eerie atmosphere, contributing to the intensity of the moment

Sound is a powerful purveyor of ideas, just as language and imagery are designed to evoke emotion and convey messages to an audience.

The connection between music and emotions is deeply rooted in psychological and media theories, such as the Mood Management

Theory (Zillmann,1988a), which suggests that individuals are drawn to media content that aligns with their current emotional states, especially In a scene where conversion to Islam portrays intense music. The music heightens the emotional intensity, potentially manipulating the audience's perception and eliciting a more negative response. It also aligns with The Emotional Index Theory, which suggests that background music

intensifies emotional experiences in media content. In The Kerala Story's case, music's negative influence is evident in scenes where it may contribute to reinforcing stereotypes or manipulating emotions to create a biased perspective. These sounds raise important questions about the ethical use of music in film and its potential implications on the audience's emotional responses and interpretations.

Table V

Behaviors

Behavior	Description
Spitting	Indicates defiance and rejection of cultural norms, showing disrespect to one's parents. In Islam, respect for parents, regardless of their faith, is emphasized. As the Quran states, "And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small'" (Quran 17:24). irrespective of their religious beliefs. Islam encourages compassion and kindness towards all, including non-Muslims. The act of spitting in defiance goes against these principles, reflecting a rebellious tone in the movie's portrayal.
Nudes uploaded	Highlights the violation of privacy and societal stigma, reflecting the reluctance to challenge traditional notions of masculinity. The portrayal of toxic masculinity, especially linked to a Muslim character, underscores the propagation of misleading narratives.
Fire on the house	illustrates the peril and intimidation faced by dissenters, showcasing the authority's ability to exert influence even on those who haven't emigrated, emphasizing their control.
Medicine	Represents indoctrination and radicalization.
Suicide bombers	Depicts the severe outcomes of radicalization, portraying it as the sole occupation for Muslims.
Rape and abuse	Illustrates the portrayal of women's vulnerability and victimization by Muslim characters, contradicting Islamic principles where such actions are strictly prohibited,
Militant/Violent	The movie portrays a militant undertone with references to ISIS and the propagation of Islam through violent means.
Radicalization	Associating religious practices with violent extremism, contributing to negative stereotypes.
Terrorism	Linking conversations purely to terrorism raises concerns, challenging the perception of those willingly embracing Islam and perpetuating negative stereotypes about Muslims.
Accusation	
Justification of Physical Intimacy	Portrays a misguided justification of physical intimacy by linking it to marriage and service to Islam, deviating from the accurate teachings. as stated in the Quran: "And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way." (Quran 17:32).

Behavior	Description
Forced Conversion Training	The depiction of forced conversion training in the movie contradicts Islamic principles, as Islam explicitly prohibits coercive conversion. As the Quran states, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Quran 2:256), highlighting the importance of free will in matters of faith.
Violence Against Women	Depictions of rape, suicides, and violence against women highlight distressing incidents, contradicting Islam's teachings that emphasize respect and protection for women. "And live with them in kindness..." (Quran 4:19) Rasulullah (SAW) said: "None but a noble man treats women in an honorable manner, and none but an ignoble treats woman disgracefully." (At-Tirmidhi)
Surprise over Hell Concept	The female lead's surprise stems from the absence of the concept of heaven and hell in Hinduism. It portrays a negative portrayal of Muslims by justifying their beliefs as weird, possibly reinforcing stereotypes about their concepts of afterlife, creating a biased perspective, presenting them as strange or undesirable.

Table VI

Dialogue

	Dialogue	Context	Analysis
1.	<i>Women cannot keep phone under Islamic law... it (having phone) is a sin. A sin is only punished by death.</i>	When the female lead reached Afghanistan and wanted to call her mother. She was not allowed to.	Inaccurately portrayal of Islamic law and jurisprudence. Contains elements of fearmongering and sensationalism.
2.	<i>I could earn more in U.S so I'll be able to give more in charity.</i>	A male Muslim character said this in response of why he wanted to go abroad.	Suggesting that this character is justifying a decision to go abroad, potentially for economic opportunities, by framing it within the context of religious duty, particularly the Islamic concept of charity or "zakat.
3.	<i>Eating without a prayer is a huge sin.</i>	The main Muslim woman character who is trying to convert them to Islam in order to transport them to Syria, kept bringing religion in normal conversations.	This statement appears to exaggerate the significance of this practice. While it is true that many Muslims choose to say a prayer before meals as an expression of gratitude, this is not generally equated with a significant transgression in the Islamic faith. It also perpetuates stereotypes of Muslims as always being overly zealous or pushy about their faith, which can be misleading and harmful.

	Dialogue	Context	Analysis
4.	<i>You're a nonbeliever you'll surely go to hell.</i>	The sentence was said multiple times in the movie.	Under Islamic principles believers are suggested to avoid making such judgements and assumptions about people. (Also explained in 'wrong concepts.')
5.	<i>They (Afghanis) will either sell or kill, a lone woman (without a man).</i>	The husband told her wife when she said that she would leave him.	The statement perpetuates fear and stereotypes about Afghanistan and Afghan people.
6.	<i>Asifa said scary things. And I had no answers to counter that fear.</i>	The main female lead said in the interrogation.	According to the "Card Stacking" technique a character can consistently be shown naive without any realistic evolution, it can hinder the depth and authenticity of the character. Showing her no capacity at all to counter her colleagues' opinions or maintain her own.
7.	<i>Give them drugs, distance them from their families, get physical and even pregnant them if that is needed to handover them to us.</i>	A maulvi who was linked with ISIS asked the Muslim students to talk into the non-Muslims girls.	Associating incorrect information, unethical and unlawful actions with a religion.
8.	<i>You were not wearing hijab that's why you they harassed you. Those who wear hijab never get harass.</i>	The Muslim female said when the non-Muslims got badly harassed in a mall.	Suggests a problematic justification for harassment based on appearance. The harassment was also an arranged event to convince the girls to convert to Islam. Hence, trying to associate every unethical activity possible to a particular religion's believers.
9.	<i>God could not help his son when he was hanged, how can such God help you.</i>	The Muslim female said to persuade the Christian girl by making her question her faith.	Islam orders to respect every prophet.
12.	<i>In Islam, physical intimacy is allowed if both are agreed. In Nikah they ask if you both accept each other, so it's only about both of their consents.</i>	A male Muslim told his non-Muslim girlfriend when she said 'Islam doesn't allow physical relation before marriage.'	Explained in wrong believes.

	Dialogue	Context	Analysis
13.	<i>The work left by Aurangzeb and Jahangir is now looked after by ISIS.</i>	Maulvi said to a male Muslim.	Creating illogical connections.
14.	<i>If you'll get marry to this pious man and go to Syria to spread Islam & serve caliphate then god will forgive thousands of sins.</i>	Maulvi told the girl who had converted to Islam while mentioning her past sins.	Associating information incorrect
15.	<i>Your father is a nonbeliever. This sin won't wash away unless you spit on him or throw stones at him.</i>	The female Muslim told one of the girls who had embraced Islam.	Associating information. Also explained in behavior table. incorrect
16.	<i>I am happy that my daughter has gotten married by her choice. I'll also accept Islam. She is my only daughter I just want to take her and my son-in-law to home.</i>	The female lead's mother adjured the maulvi.	Creating emotional appeal
17.	<i>These private images are uploaded from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Malaysia.</i>	A news caster said.	Targeting Muslim majority countries. Name-calling propaganda
18.	<i>Bad things have happened to them. It's probably their sin's that are coming in front of them now.</i>	The female lead said to her husband when she found out that one of her suicided and the other had been physically assaulted.	Unbalanced representation
19.	<i>Shall I pay for my love with my bones.</i>	Written on a wall in background.	Dealing sensitive topic love-jihad irresponsibly
20.	<i>The girls who refuse to go to Syria are tortured.</i>	The female lead said in the interrogation.	Islamophobic
21.	<i>It's not a matter of conversion, but a threat to our national security... more than 30,000 girls are missing and the unofficial number is 50,000... only 261 are rescued... they're raising a ruthless armers of suicide bombers. by an apparent harmless conversion. Is this really harmless?</i>	The Christian girl who didn't fall in the trap but was physically assaulted said in a police station where some common people were also sitting.	In 2021, after the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan, Indian officials had said that four women from Kerala who had joined the IS were in jail there. A police official from Kerala told the BBC in 2022 on condition of anonymity that "there are not more than 10-15 women who have got converted and left to join the IS from Kerala since 2016.

	Dialogue	Context	Analysis
22.	<i>In bomb blasts of Sri Lanka, Singapore and Afghanistan Karela's boys are found.</i>	The Christian girl who didn't fall in the trap but was physically assaulted said in a police station where some common people were also sitting.	No evidences found in support of this statement.
23.	<i>A widow woman has no option here other than to become a sex slave or to wore a bomb and blast it on non-believers while saying Allah u Akbar.</i>	In a camp where a group of women in abayas were chained, one of them said while crying.	Extremely negative ideas tried to associate to a religion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper sheds light on the alarming biases in Bollywood movies, indicating the spread of propaganda and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. The Semiotic analysis has revealed a clear negative portrayal of religious symbols associated with characters, focusing on themes related to terrorism. It raises questions about the motives behind targeting ISIS in films released in early 2023. Specifically, "The Kerala Story" serves as an example where storytelling is not aimed at fostering informed discussions but at inorganically arousing hate sentiments. Despite concerns, "The Kerala Story" was a box office hit, earning over 2x returns compared to "Pathaan." This success suggests that sensationalism and controversy can lead to commercial triumphs.

Furthermore, Bollywood distorts and misrepresents the religious practices of Muslims, portraying them negatively and often associating their unfavorable activities

with Islam. As a global communication medium, Bollywood's influence extends to the East and the West.

From a symbolic standpoint, it is evident that Bollywood plays a detrimental role in tarnishing the image of Islam. This phenomenon prompts a critical reflection on the film industry's responsibility to contribute positively to social cohesion rather than perpetuating biases and potentially harmful stereotypes.

The research advocates for a more conscientious approach in filmmaking that prioritizes authenticity, inclusivity, and ethical considerations in portraying diverse narratives, urging the industry to move beyond perpetuating biases and potentially harmful stereotypes. As Bollywood continues to wield significant influence, the stories on the silver screen must reflect a commitment to fostering understanding, respect, and harmony in a diverse and interconnected world.

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