Portrayal of Muslims in Indian Cinema: A Content Analysis of Movies during (2002-8)

Abstract

This study examines 'Indian cinema and Muslim image' from 2002 to 2008. From the very beginning and particularly since 9/11 incident, the Indian film industry very often portrays the Muslim with stereotype image (which is negative). After the 9/11 incident, Muslims are being looked as suspicious people and portrayed as terrorists. Indian film industry adds fuel to the fire by making a lot of movies on Muslims and presenting them as terrorists and negative ones. This research is being carried out to scientifically explore that how and to what extent Indian cinema is distorting and changing the Muslim image. This study tests by using content analysis of 50 Indian movies which were taken out from 350 Muslim-characters based movies. Ten variables were developed to test the hypothses. Code sheet has been made to get the results in statistical form. Favorable, unfavorable and neutral were the three slants through which the content was analyzed. These slants show that whether Indian movies present Muslims as favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The overall results of these slants show 4.4% favorable images, 65.2% unfavorable and 30.4% neutral images of Muslims portrayal by Indian cinema. The results indicate that Indian cinema is distorting the Muslim image and an anti-Muslim propaganda has been carried out not only in India but also at international level.

Keywords: Muslim Image, Indian Cinema, Propaganda, Portrayal.

Introduction:

It is widely and clearly observed that the world has been changed after the 9/11 incident. If we look at the world politics, we get the impression that the entire world has been dragged in the war against terrorism. This war was started after the unforgettable incident of 9/11. Twin towers of New York were been hit by 2 passenger planes. The responsibility of this incident was laid upon "Muslims" by the west. After that, Muslims are blamed as terrorists all over the world without any discrimination of gender or age. The wave of terrorism and the picture of Muslims as terrorist, invaded the world almost at the same time.

^{*}Muhammad Ashraf Khan (Ph.D.)

^{**}Syeda Zuria Bokhari (M.Phil)

^{*}Chairman & Associate Professor-Dept. of Mass Communication B.Z. University, Multan.

^{**}Student, Department of Mass Communication B.Z. University, Multan.

Indian film industry took a benefit of this situation and they started to present Muslims as terrorists in their films. Movies were made on the subject of terrorism and only Muslims were shown as terrorists who were fostering terrorism not only in India but in the whole world. Indian film industry has also been showing the Kashmir freedom fighters as militants and terrorists. There was a great deal of work done by Indian cinema on Muslims in general and Pakistan in particular showing them as terrorists who were involved in all sort of terrorists acts whether it is in India, Kashmir or elsewhere. Pakistan being a leading Muslim country and arch rival of India is portrayed as the shelter provider to all the terrorists.

Film, generally, has enormous impact on the societies. It gives new trends, ideas and traditions etc. Films not only make the opinion but also reshape the opinions. Films reshape old trends, customs and traditions. If one idea prevails strongly in a society then it can be transmitted from one society to another.

Among the film industries around the world, Bollywood is one of the famous and the strongest industry. The influence and strong impact of Bollywood has increased and almost reached at hegemonic level. Bollywood is presenting Muslims as terrorists and portraying Islam negatively. Worldview about Islam and Muslims is not as good as it should be. Bollywood has played a notable role in making this image more stronger along with the western media especially after 9/11 incident. It is assumed that if any one wants to see the real face of India cinema, one has to randomly pick up few flicks of a decade and see the changes taking place in Indian cinema over a period of time. In this context the representation of Muslims is something interesting to focus. The portrayal of Muslim characters in the Bollywood movies has witnessed an unpleasant change over the time scale. From being *Badshas, Nawabs* and aristocrats they are reduced to tramps and gun totting *Jihadis* on the *Hindi* screen now. The gradual but systematic portrayal of Muslim characters in the Bollywood films silently tells the story how Muslims have fallen places in the Indian society.

Since 90s the political agenda and policies of Indian government has affected the approach of Bollywood and a symbolic relationship between Muslims and terrorism has been established. In such movies, the villain is shown mouthing slogans against India, fighting for the cause of Kashmir and Islam, all the henchmen are gun totting bearded guys, wearing *Shalwar-Kamiz* with a scarf over the shoulders. They are shown with blood shot eyes bursting at the seams with irrational anger. In contrast, the 'boss' is dressed in typical priest clothing, a skullcap and a rosary in hand. He would first mouth some Arabic words and then demonstrates his senseless itch to destroy India. In a constant commitment to *Jihad*, he would soberly deliver the punch line; "*Jihad Zaroori hay*". For the sake of financial and economic interests, Bollywood movies started creating imaginary Muslim terrorist images to the frightening level, and the audience unwittingly is forced to share the overloaded perspective of the filmmaker. If Bollywood movies are to be believed, then all Muslims are anti-national and their faith is an extremist ideology, which is a wrong perception.

Late 80s and early 90s was the time when Bollywood started to make movies on Kashmir issue. Therefore, it was the first time when freedom fighters of Kashmir were called as militants. The Muslim freedom fighters were also introduced as terrorists. At that time, such movies were made in which freedom fighters of Indian Kashmir were shown as militants, terrorists and as cruel people. Who would capture Hindus or Indian soldiers, torture them and demand for a separate homeland. In many films it was shown that these terrorists demanded and struggled to free their jailed leaders(who were known as terrorist at world level), for example, shown in *Roja, Dil Jalay, Qasam Hindustan Ki, Hina*, Mission Kashmir, *Main Azad Hoon*.etc.

Aftermath the incident of 9/11, the word 'terrorists' was glued to Muslims. Taking advantage of this, Bollywood film industry took the privilege of accusing Muslims as terrorists. They showed the Muslims as terrorists most of the time. This is the image which they have been portraying of Muslims especially since 9/11.A new opinion is trying to be made in the society by this film industry. Many movies also depict that the troublesome Muslims of India, more or less, are supported by Pakistan. Pakistan also supports the militants of Kashmir. Many popular films were made on the negative image of Muslims like Bombay, *Fiza, Anwar, Ab Tumharay Hawalay Watan Sathiyoo*, Company, Underworld, Encounter etc.

The attempt of Indian cinema about portraying Muslims as bad people is a serious matter. The issue was chosen for research because terrorism and Muslims are the burning issues especially after 9/11. The global media has been very critical on this issue. Bollywood is also playing an ample role to fuel the fire with regard to portraying Muslim image as terrorists. This research study aims to investigate the attempts of Indian cinema whether or not it is portraying Muslims as bad people.

Literature Review:

Parsad and Madhave (2004) say that the Indian film industry is the largest around the globe with regard to ticket sales and number of films produced annually (877 feature films and 1177 short films were released in the year 2003 alone). The industry is primarily supported by the huge cinema going Indian public. The Central Board of Films Certification of India mentions on its website that millions of Indian inhabitants visit cinema halls every month. Indian films are popular in various parts of world, especially in countries with significant Indian communities.

Thoraval (2000) says that Bollywood has been recently significantly criticized for violation of Indian cultural values and its dialogue of controversial topics. It is considered the most liberal out of the Indian language film industries. Regional movies are usually different from Bollywood (Hindi) movies, as the story and theme of these movies portray the culture of the region from which they originate, while most Bollywood movies now days are heavily influenced by the Western culture.

Bollywood movies are watched by a majority of Indians movie goers. It has also international recognition especially in western countries such as UK, USA, Canada and Australia, where large South Asian communities are residing.

Goswani (2006) says that younger generation is copying the characters of films, and the typical terms related to drugs are now in fashion. Youth gets a lot of impact through movies and they try to imitate the characters. They think that all which is shown in movies is fashionable and something cool, and if they adopt all these things then they have recognition in the society and people will look up to them. Same is the case with violence; the underworld things are being cute and are 'hip n cool',

Mahmood(2004) depicts that effect from the movies is not only in social structure but also in other areas. Like one can find India playing matches well after watching the 'Chak De India' or the family functions are marked by the songs and dances played in Sooraj R.Barjatya movies. The college going students watch the movies to copy the latest trends and hair styles or dresses. Many times people finds the way of talking is effected by the movie dialogues.

Tarpati (2007) says that the recent 'Taray Zameen Per' starring Darsheel Sarfary and Aamir Khan, compelled many parents to question the current educational system. Further more, it caused parents to look at their own parenting techniques and how they have influenced their children.

Whitney (2006) explains that the media is a vital part of the state power-structure. In its practical application, it is more valuable than the military. There are definite drawbacks of using force; where as, propaganda and public relations tend to be less inconvenient to the normal flow of business. The media's prime objective is to shape public opinion, and reshape it again if needed.

Jessop (2000) sheds light on the change of public opinion and subsequently change in the Indian society. The author says that now it is creating differences between Indians on the sect's level. India has a big minority of Muslims who are living in India since thousands of years. But now the Hindus are not tolerating the Muslim presence in their homeland, and they look at Muslims as terrorists, traitors, and militants etc. even women and children are also included. However, it is due to cinema because the cinema is portraying the Muslims like this. Plenty of movies are made in which Muslims are shown as bad people who are not faithful to their motherland and involved in fostering violence in Indian areas. The Hindu-Muslim hatred was increased after such films. Due to these films the society has cornered Muslims and brought them in a defending position.

Saeed (2007) explains about the stereotypes of Indian Muslim community established by Indian popular media which termed them as "Indian Muslims". It is practically impossible to put all the followers of Islam residing in India into one huge category. They are culturally, linguistically, demographically, economically,

professionally, and perhaps politically as diverse as the rest of the Indians. They even follow the cannons of Islam differently all over South Asia.

Mishra and Gho (2003) describe that terrorism and low intensity conflicts are not new in South Asia but the 9/11 incidents consequently gave the events a new direction. From regional, terrorism acquired global concern and changed perspective.

Raman (2008) tells that India has been facing a similar danger of increased penetration of terrorists from Pakistan as a result of the relaxation of the restrictions on the anti-India terrorist organizations. Moreover, after a quiet period of two years, there have again been reports of violations of cease-fire by the Pakistan Army along the Line of Control (LOC) in J&K.

The literature review advances the notion that Indian movies portray the image of Muslims as bad people and it also indicates the Hindu mind set about the Muslims.

Statement of the Problem:

The purpose of this study is to examine the image of Muslims portrayed in Indian cinema. Espacially after 9/11, Muslims are being presented negiatively in Indian movies. The literature review establishes that films are a strong way of persuasion and they have deep impact on its viewers. They affect the societies and built the public opinion, and reshape it too. Indian film industry is a very strong medium to build public opinion or reshape it. Indian movies have portrayed Muslims negatively but this portrayal is more negative after 9/11. Muslims are shown as terrorists, disloyal and criminal people in Indian movies. This whole scenario changes the opinion of Indian society as well as other societies too. To understand the phenomenon of Muslim negative presentation, this research has been carried out, so that we can clearly see that whether Muslims are portrayed in a negative image or it's just a perception.

Following research questions and hypotheses have been advanced to investigate the issue:

Research Questions:

- 1. Is Indian cinema presenting a negative image of Islam?
- 2. Are Muslims being portrayed as terrorists/bad people?

Hypotheses

H1. Portrayal of image of Muslims in Indian movies will be more negative than positive.

Method:

This study explores the portrayal of Muslim image in Indian cinema from 2002 to 2008. The researchers have selected this time period because after the unfortunate

incident of demolition of the twin towers in New York, an anti-Muslim wave had been started. Muslims were blamed for this destruction and consequently labeled as terrorists across the world. The world media was very critical on that issue where as Indian film industry was already making movies on Muslims, presenting them as terrorists and criminals. After 9/11, this act of blaming was increased and many more movies were made which presented Muslims image more as bad people.

Content analysis method was used for this study. Fifty movies have been analyzed. Data were analyzed quantitatively and tables and graphs were made for detail analysis. To some extent, qualitative method was also used to understand the effectiveness of film medium.

Content Categories and Coding Unit:

In order to conduct the content analysis, the researchers made 10 categories; 1. Dressing/Getup 2.Language/Body Language 3.Rituals 4.Religious practices 5.Behavior 6.Patriotism 7.Planning 8.Motivation 9.Profession and 10.Subliminal message. The motive behind conducting this study is to discover the slant of the content appeared in the selected Indian movies. The word slant refers to the stance taken in the movie. The researchers divided slant into three categories; Favourable, Unfavourable and Neutral giving them codes 1, -1 and 0 respectively. If the content of the whole scene reflected positive tilt, it was coded as Favourable while the negative stance was coded as Unfavourable and the scenes neither having Favourable angle nor Unfavourable were coded as Neutral.

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

Findings:

Over all 50 films were analyzed on the basses of 10 categories with classified slants. Distribution of slants in these 50 movies are 22(4.4%) Favorable, 326(65.2%) Unfavorable and 152(30.4%) Neutral (See Table No.1).

Table: 1 Distribution of Slant for 10 categories

Variables	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral
Getup/dressing	17 (34%)	17 (34%)	16 (32%)
Language/body language	3 (6%)	27 (54%)	20 (40%)
Rituals	1 (2%)	25 (50%)	24 (48%)
Religious practices	0 (0%)	28 (56%)	22 (44%)
Behavior	0 (0%)	47 (94%)	3 (6%)
Patriotism	0 (0%)	36 (72%)	14 (28%)
Planning	0 (0%)	41 (82%)	9 (18%)
Motivation	0 (0%)	25 (50%)	25 (50%)
Profession	0 (0%)	40 (80%)	10 (20%)
Subliminal message	1 (2%)	40 (80%)	9 (18%)
Total	22 (4.4%)	326(65.2%)	152(30.4%)

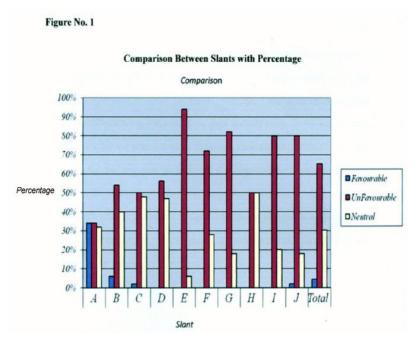
In the above table, total numbers with percentages of slants in different categories are presented.

Favorable slant in Getup/dressing is 34% where as unfavorable slant is 34%. The percentage of neutral slant in this category is 32%. In the category Language/Body language, favorable slant is 6%. Unfavorable is 54% and neutral slant is 40%. For Rituals category, favorable slant is 0% where as unfavorable slant is 50% and neutral is 24%.

In the category of Religious Practices, favorable slant is 0%. Unfavorable is 56% and neutral is 44%. In Behavior category, percentage for favorable slant is zero and unfavorable is 94%. In neutral category, percentage is 6.

Favorable slant again touched 0% in the category of Patriotism where as unfavorable slant is 72 and neutral is 28 percent. In the category of Planning, the favorable slant is 0% and unfavorable approached to 82%. Neutral slant shows 18%.

In Motivation category, favorable slant is 0% and unfavorable is 50%, neutral is also 50% in this category. Percentage of favorable slant in the category of Profession is once again zero. The percentage of unfavorable slant is high and touched 80%. Neutral slant is 20%. In the category of Subliminal Message, favorable slant is 2% where as unfavorable is 80% and neutral slant is 18%.



 A. Getup/dressing B. Language/body language C. Rituals D. Religious practices E. Behavior F. Patriotism G. planning H. Motivation I. Profession J. Subliminal message

Figure No 1 shows the comparison between percentages of all slants related to respective ten factors. For instance, for factor J, favourable slant lies between 0% to 10%, unfavourable between 0 to 80 and neutral lies between 0 to 30 percent and so on.

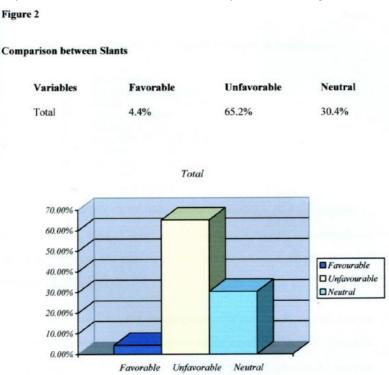


Figure No. 2 shows that overall favourable slant lies between 0% to 10%, unfavourable between 60 to 70 and neutral slant lies at 30%.

Fifty films (see Annexure No. 1) have been viewed against the ten factors. In each film every factor was ranked as unfavorable, neutral and favorable, by means of codes, -1, 0 and +1 respectively. Although the assignment of these ranks was subjective, enough care was exercised in assigning these ranks even minute consideration was taken care of in doing so.

Each film was assigned ten ranks corresponding to each of the ten above mentioned factors. To gauge each film for the depiction of portrayal of Muslims and their image, one should ideally be equipped with "total" valued index. Researchers used some of these ranks as an index. Groups of films have been formed on the basis of this index value. (See Annexure No. 3)

All the ten factors of every film have been summed up by their value and got the total figure. Then these total values of every film were arranged in a descending

order and percentages have been made on the basis of their total sum. Percentage of every film decides the hypothetical result of the study.

The "total" value index for all the fifty films carries negative algebraic sign with a magnitude ranging from -2 to -10. It means the over all depiction of Muslims and their image in all these films was unfavorable and portrayed negatively. A closer look at the index reveals that films with ID 9 to 49 carry the total of (-10) depicted Muslims and their image in its most negative perspective, while in contrast this content was found at its lowest level (-2) in films carrying the ID 31 to 26. (See Annexure No. 2) The "negative" index is translated in terms of percentage in relation to the worst case. (See Annexure No. 3) This gives another aspect of categorizing particular films in relation to the negative case scenario. In this situation the negative case arises if all ten factors in the film are unfavorable. In this situation, all factors should be ranked at -1 (unfavorable) giving the total index value of -10. Percentage of the negative index against this value of -10 is calculated as 100% and formed to be ranging from 20% to 100%. (See Annexure No. 3)

Annexures are with the author.

After taking the data, percentage was calculated then the movies were rated by their percentages. The percentage given in a negative column, means, how negative a particular movie is. Here the researchers used the term negative, which means that, these movies portrayed Muslims as bad people. So, the movies were rated in terms of their percentages as 100% negative is at the top and 20% is at bottom. There is no movie in the list which is 10% or less negative. The scenes of all the movies were studied and then the values were allotted.

On the bases of these calculations, further table and figures were made. As in Table No.1, the whole data of slant (favorable, unfavorable and neutral) of all ten variables/factors was summed up individually. Their percentage was also calculated. Total of all slants (favorable, unfavorable and neutral) was also mentioned with their percentages; in front of the index "Total". (See Table No.1 and also see Figure No.1). The total result was presented on the basis of slants (favorable, unfavorable and neutral) only. Figure No.2 clearly tells about the positions of slants (favorable, unfavorable and neutral). It shows that the unfavorable slant lies between 60 to 70 percent which is the highest rating among all slants. (See Figure No.2)

First research question stated that, is Indian cinema presenting a negative image of Islam? After the analysis of data, the researchers got the findings which proved this research question right. In Indian movies, Islam is being presented negatively. The phenomenon of *Jihad* is misunderstood. It is always presented in Indian movies that all terrorists are Muslims and their *Jihad* is against innocent people and non-Muslims. It is shown that terrorists are performing religious rituals like praying, performing prayers. The head of terrorists is always dressed up in Muslim priest's clothes who is using *Quranic* verses while lecturing terrorists against non-Muslims and the state (India).

Second research question tends to investigate whether Muslims are being portrayed as terrorists/bad people. The research findings revealed the truth about this question. Indian cinema is portraying Muslims as terrorists and bad people. While analyzing the Indian movies qualitatively, the researchers found that Muslims are, more or less, shown as terrorists, traitors, disloyal, cruel and barbarian type of people. They are also shown as underworld people. Muslims are portrayed negatively who had connections and support from Pakistan and Afghanistan. So, this research question is also proved right.

Hypothesis **H1** depicts that portrayal of image of Muslims in Indian movies will be more negative than positive. Results of this study supported the hypothesis as unfavorable slant was 65.2% in all 10 categories in comparison with favorable 4.4% and neutral 30.4%. As the researchers investigated the ten categories with regard to 3 slants, researchers got most of the answers in negative. Muslims were shown negatively in Indian movies by presenting them as terrorists, traitors, cruel and disloyal with their home land. In most of the movies, Muslims were shown as plan

makers of destruction, bomb blasts and murdering government officials or high rank people. Muslims were also shown as gangsters and underworld mafia.

Discussion:

Some of the movies have also been studied qualitatively and some important findings have been revealed. In the movie "Black and White" subliminal message has been used. A Hindu professor has been shown who recited a Quranic verse related to Jihad and explained its meaning to young men who were debating on Jihad. And in another scene it was shown that the Muslims in Afghanistan were planning a bomb blast in India. The basic purpose of showing these Afghan Muslims in the movie was to show their terrorist approach by saying "jaan ka badlajaan, mal ka badla maal. Zameen allah ki malkiyat hai, is pay musalmanoon ka haq banta hai ke woh is per hakomat karain, Aur gher muslimoon ko jinay ka koi haq nahi" (in Hindi). And in another scene a Muslim character wearing Shalwar Qameez (Pakistani dress), a checked scarf on shoulders and had a beard wearing thick kohl said with very negative and aggressive expression that "Allah ki raha main kafroon ko maar ke jannat milay gi" (in Hindi). In the movie, Muslim characters mostly used the word "Allah and Allah Talla" while making some destructive plans and said "Inshallah" or "Inshallah hum kamiyaab hoon gay". Persons who were assigned the duty of suicidal bombing were also instructed in Urdu language (Pakistani style). And then they were sent to India. This movie got 100% worst in the results.

In film "Chandni Bar", a worst character which was shown as a Muslim, raped his own young niece and forced her to work in a night club as a dancer. That person was portrayed as the most evil and a cruel person who had no heart, not even for his sister's daughter. And then most of the characters which were related to underworld, or were criminals or wanted by police were shown as Muslims. They had Muslim names and when they conversed they used words like "Assalam-o-alikum" and "Allah". Muslims were shown as murderers belonged to underworld and they killed people with brutality. This film is rated 50% in the worst index.

In the movie "Dhoka", a molvi (Muslim priest) siad that "apna badla khud laina hai" to that girl which was raped by a police officer. That molvi also said to her that" tum aik musilman ho is liay tumhari izzat looti gai hey" and he instigated the girl to take her revenge by herself and should not go to law or the authorities, because the authorities will never give justice to her. In another scene, a Muslim religious scholar said to the girl that "apna badla khud laina jihad hai allah ki nazar main". That molvi gave strong suggestions to the raped girl that she should take her revenge from hindus, whether they were involved in her case or not. This film was rated in the worst index as 100%.

In "Highjack", a group of people highjacked a plane. Highjackers were shown as Muslims; they demanded Indian government to release a terrorist who was a religious scholar. Those Muslims characters were in modern and casual dresses but they were very determined, and had strong faith that they were doing "Jihad" as

their head told them that "hum jihad ker rahain hain" and that "yeh sub kafir hain". He used this line for all passengers in the plane. Although the dresses of highjackers were favorable in slant but they were rigid in their behavior and they had only one mission in mind that they have to force the government by any means even the killing of the innocent passengers for the release of a dangerous terrorist who was a Muslim scholar. Their leader was in *Shalwar Qameez* and with beard which was coded unfavorable in slant. This film comes up to 20% in the worst index. This is the lowest level of this index.

In the film "Traffic Signal", most of the people who were shown criminals and related to underworld were Muslims. The main Villain of the film was head of a specific area and owned criminal business. He earned his best and basic earnings form baggers racket. He was portrayed as a very cruel person forcing people for beggary. He was shown as a performing Muslim, a rosary in his hand, wearing *Shalwar Qarneez* and red and white scarf on his shoulders. He frequently used words like "Inshallah", "Aameen", "Mashallah" and "Allah". This film was rated at 60% in the worst index.

Above mentioned films are some of the examples of Indian movie makers' prejudice. Negative characters were usually shown by using typical Muslim words in all these "Mashallah", "Aameen", "Allah", "Khuda movies. Words like "lnshallah", hafiz", "Assalam-o-alikum" were frequently used. When any of their men going on a mission they mostly said "Jihad farz hai", "Tum allah ki rah main ja rahay ho" Tum ko shahadat naseeb ho gi, jannet milay gi". They usually said "Shukar Allah ka hum kamiyaab huay" after every bomb blast or any terrorist activity. Moreover, it is also shown that when ever a person who is going for a suicide bomb attack usually says his/her prayers then go for such inhuman act. In the scenes, pictures of "Khana Kabba" or "Musjid-e-Nabvi" (holy places of Mecca and Madina) were shown in the background. In sum movies it was shown that there was floor sitting arrangements in their houses with simple living. These characters were shown eating typical Muslim traditional dishes such as *qoarma*, *baryani*, *kababs*, in which mutton and beef has been used.

As far as the behavior of Muslims in these films is concerned, they are shown very rigged and strict and not flexible. As in the movie "Veer Zara", parents of Zara (a Muslim girl) were very strict and rigged and they did not allow their daughter to marry a Hindu boy. Even the fiancé' of Zara was so vindictive that he made a plot for Zara's lover and put him in the Pakistan's jail for a long period of time. Same level of rigidity can be seen in the film "Anwar". In the movie a Muslim girl wanted to marry a Hindu boy and ran away with him, but the girl's cousins got hold of both of them and killed the Hindu boy. It showed that how brutal and strict Muslims were and the acted against the humanity. Where as it is not the question of humanity but the Islamic belief and law.

On the bases of aforementioned analysis, it has been concluded that with the help of powerful and effective medium of communication; cinema, Bollywood has considerably distorted Muslim image.

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