Afghanistan in Bollywood Films

Marjuque Ul Haque

Student ID: 211055033

Department of English and Humanities

17/2/2022 (Spring 2022)

Afghanistan in Bollywood Films

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Humanities

University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

MA in English

Marjuque Ul Haque

211055033

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Tabassum Zaman

2/17/2022 (Spring 2022)

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

17/02/2022

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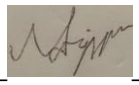
Tabassum Zaman

Associate Professor

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



Marjuque Ul Haque

Student ID: 211055033

Department of English and Humanities

Dedication (optional)

To those who work for the oppressed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Tabassum Zaman for guiding me through my work, and for having faith in abilities. I would also like to thank all my teachers for providing me with the requisite abilities to write this dissertation.

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Abstract

Hollywood films have long been known to Orientalize Arabs and Muslims. Afghanistan popularly known as “the graveyard of empires” being a site of war for centuries has received much of this oriental gaze through Hollywood films among other forms of media. Many of these films have been supervised by the US government which has made concerted efforts to present Arabs and Muslims as antagonists by conflating Islam with terrorism. Bollywood films representing Afghanistan seems to have shown no exception in partaking to an oriental gaze. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the oriental gaze of Bollywood films and the implications of such representations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

For over a century Hollywood films have been a vehicle of propaganda against Arabs and Muslims across the world. This phenomena can be attributed to what we call Orientalism. Orientalism posits that the Occident has been involved in misrepresenting the Orient for its own interests. With the eighteenth century as a rough starting point, the dominance of the Christian Occident over the rest of the world excepting the Islamic Orient, has led Europe to antagonize Islam (Said 3, 73-74). As many as over a thousand Hollywood films alongside Dutch, French and Japanese films from the pre 9/11 period have been produced, the vast majority of which dehumanize Arabs and Muslims. Such evidence demonstrate the existence of an Oriental gaze long before the 9/11 (Shaheen 2) and serve to justify invasion and oppression of the Muslim Orient. Afghanistan, having been a site of war, has received much of this orientalist gaze. Bollywood films have been no exception to this. The depiction of Afghanistan in these films shows us that Afghani people have been subjected to the same stereotypes of barbarians and turban wearing terrorists. Like the often repeated formula of the Hollywood films where the humanity of the Westerner is elevated while denigrating Arabs and Muslims (2), Bollywood films offer the same formula in presenting Afghanistan save to replace the westerner with the Indian.

To understand this recurrent pattern in such representations and the cultural politics behind them. Eight films which are either based on or have portrayed Afghanistan extensively from pre and post 9/11 period have been selected for close reading. The films chosen are: *Dharmatma* (1975), *Khuda Gawa* (1992), *Escape from Taliban* (2003), *Kabul Express* (2006), *Padmaavat* (2018),

Kesari (2019), *Panipat* (2019), *Torbaaz* (2020). These films have all depicted Afghani people in the orientalist trope of the Arab face, where Muslims are depicted as turban wearing barbarians with beards. The standard plot is the common rescue narrative where an Indian man is involved in saving an Afghani person and the polarized depiction between the Afghan barbarian invaders and the honorable Indians defending their territory, serving to make conspicuous the humanity of the Indian.

While the motivations for Hollywood's oriental gaze towards Muslims are well understood, Bollywood's Orientalist gaze towards Afghanistan raises the question. In an attempt to offer an explanation of this politics of representation, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What purpose does Orientalizing Afghanistan serve?
2. Can Bollywood's representation of Afghanistan be explained in connection to the broader socio-economic context of the current Indian government and their interest in Afghanistan?

Building on previous studies this paper shall carry out a close reading of the chosen films to trace the forms of orientalist tendency and investigate how it may be connected to the political, social, and cultural scenario in India. The analysis will be presented in three parts. The first part will address the films produced before 9/11, the next section will address films produced in the post-9/11 era which touch on the chaotic wartime setting and the final section will address the historical narratives produced after 2014 when the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in India.

Most of the selected films have been downloaded and a few of them accessed from YouTube for close reading. The films have been selected on the basis of their reference to

Afghanistan as a setting or to the Afghan persona and the consideration that the films are created by major directors and have big budgets or well-known actors as a way to define what we may understand as Bollywood productions. The selected films are not claimed to be an exhaustive list of all Bollywood productions on Afghanistan, but only a representative sample.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

So far Bollywood representations of Afghanistan and their aesthetic implications have provided a somewhat limited understanding of the socio-cultural politics inherent in them. Studies of Muslim representations in Bollywood films, however show that Muslims are progressively less represented or negatively represented compared to earlier films. Muslims in India today face deprivation all facets of life and films far from addressing this issue only exacerbate the situation by provoking suspicion and fear. A study has attempted to understand the issue by trying to understand the representation of films in the broader socio-cultural context of Indian history. Attempt has also been made to understand how Muslims as minority have contributed to the cinema industry and the transition of Muslim films with dominant social and cultural themes to those concerning the plight of women led by the transition from secular to Hindutva ideology. Due to insufficient research on Bollywood representation of Afghanistan this review takes Muslim representation in Bollywood as a starting point, and builds on it with studies on the nature of Bollywood cinema in general, the politics and political history of India, and the geopolitics concerning Indian-Afghan relations. Unlike the previous works this work apart from attempting to understand representation of Afghanistan as its primary focus, will consider Indian geopolitics alongside the historical and political lens. This outlook also deviates from the aesthetic critique of films commonly practiced.

The Hollywood film *Horseman* (1971) presents Afghans in the trope of the noble savage. In his criticism Mark Graham connects the horse-riding main character Uraz to that of the noble savage. The plot of the story mostly devoted to the struggle to retrieving “Jahil” a horse whose name translates literally to “savage” as a part of the character and the mixture of heroism and

cruelty displayed by Uraz presents him appropriately as a noble savage during a time when the Vietnam war was taking place.

In his work entitled "The Muslim 'Threat' In Right Wing Narratives: A Critical Discourse Analysis", Mohammad Omar analyzes how the victory of the right wing Bharatya Janata Party in 2014 has led to an anti-Muslim propaganda through the adoption of the Hindutva ideology. The construction of a Hindu nation requires the enemy within the self which the Muslims are convenient occupants of. Presenting Muslim as the other to the Hindu self, propaganda narratives of love jihad, overpopulation, disloyalty, and the hypersexual Muslim male are used to create anxiety among the Hindu populace to instill xenophobic sentiments and mobilize violence against Muslims. The concern with anti-Muslim sentiments insofar as they are instigated by propaganda narratives are relevant to the study of Bollywood films as they provide supporting evidence for Orientalism towards Afghanistan evinced in these films.

The paper titled "India's role in the economic stabilization of Afghanistan" discusses investments in the various sectors, types of investments, the motivations behind such investments and suggests ways to make effective use of such investments. Since the Taliban has come to power, Afghanistan has seen a reduction in foreign aid. India however has continued its foreign aid with an outlook towards securing energy rich central Asia and has invested in education, healthcare, infrastructure, etcetera coming up as one of the largest donors of Afghanistan. While securing energy is India's long term concern its immediate objective is tackling Pakistan's ISI forces involved in sabotaging the infrastructure invested by India for creating stability to impede terrorism in the country that may threaten India's security. India investment in Afghanistan due to perceived economic and national security interests are concerns that are helpful for understanding Bollywood's rescue narratives and the presentation of Afghanistan as a foil to

India.

The work titled “Indian Encroachment in Afghanistan: A New Imperialism in the Making” discusses geopolitics surrounding India’s imperial ambitions concerning its neighboring countries. India has already been well known for having significant influence in the South Asian region. To fulfill the demand for oil and energy reserves it has set its sights on Afghanistan not just as reservoir but also as a gateway to energy rich Central Asia. Gaining access to Afghanistan is difficult for India owing to the fact that Pakistan, a country India has enmity with is wedged in between the two countries. While most of the other countries in the region is under the influence of India, Pakistan is the only country that maintains itself against Indian influence and provides resistance to India’s attempts to gain influence over Afghanistan. Indo-US interests converge in regards to Indian presence in Afghanistan namely through the war on terror that will reduce Pakistani influence in the region; preventing the influence of Chinese powers in the South East Asian region; neutralizing perceived antagonistic forces like Iraq and Syria through promotion of democracy and pluralistic governments and by preventing access to WMDs. India has made concerted efforts to maintain a cordial relationship with Afghanistan and has made many attempts to instigate estrangements between Afghanistan and Pakistan. By getting a foothold in Afghanistan both the US and India achieve their interests in gaining access to oil reserves as well neutralizing Pakistan as the only Muslim country with the threat of nuclear technology. The shared interest in Afghanistan means that India is highly likely to emulate the US in gaining influence through soft power (cinema).

In the essay “Afghan Cauldron: Achieving India’s Interest” the importance of a stable Afghanistan is brought to attention as it is connected to India’s economic interests and political interests. Economically India plans to use Afghanistan as land bridge to gain access to energy

rich central Asia. On the political front India's objective is tackle the threat of Islamic extremism and to counter Pakistan's attempt to destabilize Indian presence. The effort to achieve this is done through aid programs "aimed at long term development initiatives". These objectives are again riddled with obstacles. India has to contend in bidding wars with other countries especially with China which is known to have outbid international players such as Britain, US, Russia, and Canada in a bidding war for the Aynak copper field. India also has to contend with illicit drug trafficking. Although drug trafficking into India has significantly decreased due to increased patrolling and fencing along the borders, the problem is not solved. A possible suggestion to tackle this is through education and by subsidizing farmers through "raw materials, machines, and alternative high value crops". The paper concludes by making suggestions that India ought to use its diplomatic ties to convey to Pakistan of shared interests in energy reserves; inform Pakistan of the dangers posed by the restive Pashtuns and the Taliban and in the long run alter its policy to make both countries global actors; collaborate with China for access of energy wherever possible and finally to extend aid broadly across different Afghan ethnicities and societies rather than taking concern with the periphery. This paper is helpful for understanding that the Indian altruism towards Afghanistan is ultimately motivated by their economic and imperialistic interests.

In the work titled "Religion and Nationalism: Politics of BJP" Berglund theorizes the Indian nation state through theories such as cultural and territorial nationalism. He points out that much like other nation states there is an inconsistency due to overlap between the two theories. After the Indian independence although the Indian constitution was based on secular polity an alternative Hindu nationalist narrative existed alongside the secular one which has taken over in the present day. While cultural nationalism seeks some primordial element e.g. race, ethnicity,

language, etcetera, as a cohesive force around which a nation is based on; territorial nationalism suggests that "every individual living within the political borders of the state is considered a citizen, but also a member of the nation". If territorial nationalism is synonymous with the secular polity then cultural nationalism is synonymous to Hindu nationalism. The complexity of Indian nationalism arise from the fact that India constructs its identity as a result being situated between two Muslim nations and in its attempt to formulate questions of citizenship and minority rights. The BJP government taking the Hindu nationalist position however prioritizes certain cultural values at the expense of sacrificing minority rights in the construction of a democratic state which the territorial version would not require. Berglund suggests that competing political theories like the libertarian-communitarian debate is helpful for understanding nationalism in India. The libertarian theory suggest that maximization of individual freedom on account of belief in individual sovereignty as long as the law is being followed. Communitarian theory proposes that the individual is part of the community and suggests that common values across different societies may be used define a concept of justice and democracy. The Babri masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy and the Shah Bano case are key events that suggest the surfacing of communitarian mode of thought in India. Both the cases has indicated the hostility towards the Muslim minority due to the fact that the Hindu nationalists view the Hindu culture as the framework for legal and administrative matters. Such anti-Muslim sentiments are apparent in the BJP party's current narratives where historical events such as the Mughal invasions of India and the partition of India. In this way thus forcing the minorities to pay respect to "symbols of Hindu culture" the Hindu nationalists aspire towards a Hindu nationalist state under the guise of secularism. The emerging trend of Hindu nationalism from political explains the current anti-Muslim attitude of Bollywood cinema.

In her book chapter titled “Islam in India” the author Rollie Lal discusses the roles played by the various Islamic organizations, key events, Indian politics surrounding Islam and the ongoing communal violence between Muslim and Hindus. The Islamic organizations in India has been largely apolitical focusing on the promotion of the spiritual aspects and practices of Islam. While this might be the general character of Islam some of these organizations have been involved in informing Muslim opinions on political issues and elections as well as having influence as opinion leaders and politically conscious communities. Muslim political parties not being sufficiently organized at the national level have limited influence and may be a cause for the frustrated Muslim minority. Muslims have been compatible with democracy in India. The Muslim leaders have found democracy acceptable as long as the Muslim community are able to implement their own laws among themselves. Although the Muslim votes across the political spectrum has been diverse there has been much support for a secular polity due to the minority status experienced by Muslims as a secular polity is more likely take minority rights into account. While this may have been the case there has been a rise in Islamic insurgency within India especially after the 9/11. This has been attributed to various reasons such as “long-term economic and political marginalization, the continuing and increasingly violent conflict in Kashmir, the rise of violent Hindu nationalism, and the increasing influence of radical international Islamic thought.” The events of 9/11 have been instrumental in exacerbating communal tensions. While Indian Muslim opposed both the war in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the Hindu nationalists seemed to grow suspicious of Muslim in India. In addressing issues of communal violence the problem of poverty and discrimination faced by Muslims is of tantamount importance and is helpful for understanding how soft power being anti-Muslim exacerbates the situation.

In his work “Imagining Indian Muslims: Looking through the Lens of Bollywood Cinema” Maidul Islam traces the representation of Muslims in cinema and the effect it has had on the populace. According to the Sachar Committee report, Muslims in India face deprivation in every facet of life. This is due to a lack of access to education, healthcare, public services and employment. Media and Bollywood films does not sufficiently address the privations faced by Indian Muslims, rather Bollywood cinema is involved in provoking distrust and suspicion of Muslims by reinforcing stereotypes that color Muslims as terrorists, villains and gangsters as well appearances where they have skull caps and beards. Muslims are presented as aliens where their appearances do not match that which is commonly seen. The presentation of Muslims as terrorists have been emphasized in media representations instead of representing the community’s economic and educational backwards. The aforementioned stereotypes have become especially pronounced since the events of September 11, 2001. In cinema the result has been underrepresentation of Muslims in spite of their involvement in the production of films, misrepresentation of Muslims as a feudal character or a Muslim terrorist, the trajectory of Muslims characters from Badshas, Nawabs and aristocrats to tramps and gun brandishing jehadis due shift from the secular space to one dominated by Hindu ideology where the social life of Muslims is marked by communal overtones and the subaltern and common Muslims have ceased to represented. Maidul Islam points out films such as *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro, Garam Hawa, Amar Akbar Anthony, Zakhm,* etcetera as examples where Muslims have been treated in serious themes like communal harmony, economic class and social life without prejudice. Films as such suggested to be the antidote to Bollywood’s dissemination of negative Muslim stereotypes.

The paper titled “Constructing the Nation's Enemy: "Hindutva", popular culture and the Muslim 'other' in Bollywood cinema”, Sanjeev Kumar HM investigates the othering process

present in Bollywood films produced since the 1990s due to the emergence of Hindutva for which there is a majoritarian support. The most obvious way this process is achieved is through the stereotype of a religious Muslim in the typical Muslim garb. This stereotype has the effect of differentiating the Muslims as distinct from the image of the secularized progressive Hindu. The dominant discourse of Hindutva has painted the Muslim as the other against the Hindu who are rightful members of the nation. BJP leaders have been quite overt in demonizing the Muslims who are described as enemies guided by their religion to lie in waiting to attack Hindus, and that they should be taught with kicks as words haven't worked on them. The concept of history war in films is an extension of the culture war that arose during the late 20th century based on competing ideas of nationhood. Bollywood's historiographical transition into culture wars can be divided into four categories. The first is the critique of the left liberal critique of the divisive Hindu nation building project. This is illustrated in the film *Fire* that depicted lesbian tendencies in women who were under difficult patriarchal structures and further questioned the hypocrisy in projecting women as a metaphor for the nation while treating them with misogyny. The second category pitches Muslims as barbarians and anti-modern suggesting a communal influence. A third category of films suggested to have emerged as the result of the Babri-Masjid demolition, presented Muslims as terrorists. These films set a perspective which insists that "Muslims must carry the onus of culturing themselves to be a good Muslim". Adding to this idea is the political parlance that all Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims. The fourth category of film presents the narrative of the bad Hindu against the good Muslim. The lack of publicity of this film and the fact that it was not released acts as a testament to the lack of sympathy for Muslims. This paper is relevant for understanding how the popularity of a certain film is dependent on the amount of anti-Muslim content present in the work.

In his work “Bombay Films: The Cinema as Metaphor for Indian Society and Politics” Akbar S. Ahmed traces how Bombay films is a reflection of the real Indian society and politics. Ahmed argues that popular films help us understand how Indians view themselves, its role and perception of itself as a regional power in South Asia and its impact on neighboring countries like the Pakistani cinema society. South Asian cinema can be divided into pre-1971 and post-1971 phases, categorized as A and B. In category A the films take up the philosophy of Nehru where themes such as love, struggle against oppression, injustice, peace, and duty. In post-independent India these ideas were important for the purpose of maintaining harmony as communal violence and caste differences became apparent. The hero was a representation of moral authority and embodied the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. Recent Post-independent India remembered the ruthlessness of their British colonizers and viewed oppression as a sign of their own moral superiority. The heroes of these films essentially embody this idealism where their moral position become prominent through suffering and loss. In category B, the films would discard the ideas and structure of the previous category. Urban life, European influences, indications of affluence, and a cosmopolitan culture became the norm in such films. What might have been the qualities of a villain in category A, would be reversed to a hero. He would be “boastful, epatant, violent and sadistic” and reflected the crisis of contemporary society where violence, sex, drugs, drink and technology became pervasive. The war in 1971 was a symbolic conclusion of Indian victory over Pakistan. Indira Gandhi who was a hard pragmatist took decisive actions against minorities and exercised brute forces in maintaining order in the society. The veneer of the harmonious in Indian society was replaced by it religious, atavistic and psychological forces. In category A, the heroine was a village girl embodying beauty and purity. In category B, the heroine was sexualized and sexual suggestiveness became common.

The gods that were once made of stone became marble gods in dazzling light. Gods demanding blood and death was depicted. Songs that once contained insights into human condition turned in schlock and cacophony of noises. Villains once depicted as irredeemably wicked became complex characters who were relatable. Of the minorities, Muslims play a role in Indian cinema. Urdu poets of stature were the songwriters of films and many actors took Hindu names for their acting career. Muslim films were made with social and cultural themes outweighing religious ones. Such themes in Category B have turned in films concerned with the plight of women. In the present day the Muslim presence in cinema has greatly dwindled. This is no doubt a result of the rise in Hindutva ideology. In contemporary India reality and fantasy merge together for the stars. In category B many stars made this transition by joining politics. The public desiring invincible beings, divine heroes, and religious symbols likewise received it in their films. This was a reaction to the corruption stemming from capitalism that had pervaded the society. The grievances that the state could not redress was the duty of these invincible beings to address. This image of the savior also reflected India's military interventions outside its national boundaries. India had thus turned from the passive victim to the aggressive assertor. In Pakistan the film industry withered after 1971, and took further damage from long periods of martial law. Eventually linguistic revivalism made way for the small market taken up by the four extant nationalities in Pakistan. This paper is relevant in understanding how the dwindling Muslim presence and negative representation in films is in fact connected to the dominant political ideology of the people.

Chapter 3: The Noble Savage

The pre-9/11 films on Afghanistan present the romantic version of Orientalism where the Afghan character is portrayed as a noble savage. Even though these films do not seem to demonize the Afghans with intention, they are the predecessors who present a model for the later films. The two selected films *Dharmatma* (1975) and *Khuda Gawa* (1991) presents Afghan characters in the mold of the noble savage, through the Afghan national sport Buzkashi and by presenting them as individuals who are honorable yet lawless and barbaric. These early films are significantly influenced by Hollywood productions. One such film is *The Horseman* (1971) which features the story of an Afghan man named Uraz whose ambition is to become a Buzkashi player of great prowess. Although the film is shot in Afghanistan, and the narrative is told from the perspective of the main character, the film falls into the pitfalls of an Orientalist gaze (Graham 12-13). The Afghan national sport Buzkashi presented as a spectacle of savagery in *The Horseman* is taken up in both the Bollywood films.

In Dharmatma we find the civilized Indian hero contrasted to his romantic rival and Afghan counterpart Jangura. The character is not surprisingly presented as a horseman and noble savage. As a horseman of prowess not unlike Uraz, he attends the Buzkashi tourney and gains victory. As the prize for his victory however, he demands the hand of Reshma for marriage from the tribal chief. Horse riding is featured in Khuda Gawa, to an even greater extent. The opening scenes of the film is narrated by a male voice which describes Buzkashi as no less than a brutal war and that every rider in a effort to win strikes the foe so horribly that its seems as if it is not a game, but a matter of life and death. Following the narration we cut to the scene where the corpse of a goat is lying in the field and thunderous sound of hooves approaching (*Khuda Gawa* 0:02:10-0:02:55).

In the films the sport of Buzkashi has been used to personify the Afghan characters themselves. In Dharmatma too, the Indian hero Ranveer is portrayed to be a civilized and respectable character in gray suit, whereas Jangura his rival in love is portrayed as a hot headed, uncivilized and lustful character dressed in the garb of a tribal man. Jangura is introduced to the screen as the man chasing Reshma (the heroine) through the woods. Although Reshma is being pursued, she teases Jangura and tells him that he can only have her only if she allows it. Jangura unheeding of what she says goes after her anyways and wrestles her into submission. It is at this juncture that Ranveer calls out on Jangura from his horse and saves Reshma (*Dharmatama* 0:27:26-0:29:19). Jangura's decent nature becomes apparent during Reshma's wedding to Ranveer. Having been rejected by Reshma and the tribal chief in favor of Ranveer, he accepts his rejection honorably. Even though he is deeply hurt that he cannot have Reshma, he celebrates her wedding by playing the flute and participates in the traditional dance performed during the wedding (*Dharmatma* 1:07:33-1:09:21).

In Khuda Gawa Afghans are shown as honorable people who are nonetheless primitive and barbaric, being stereotyped as the noble savage. When Badshah Khan makes a marriage proposal to Benazir, she accepts it on condition that he seeks out and avenges her father's murderer Habibullah. Her condition is accepted by Badshah Khan who agrees to the demand (*Khuda Gawa* 0:19:22-0:20:04). Badshah Khan's lawless nature is manifest when he breaks into a police station to avenge the murderer of Benazir's father. The Afghan hero who travels to India to avenge the murderer of his fiancé's father is depicted as a savage and uncouth individual. On learning that the murderer he is looking for is located at the police station, he breaks into the place on horseback and breaches the blockades of police trying to prevent him from entering into the compound. Later next day as Habibullah is about to be executed at the gallows he kidnaps

Habibullah (on horseback) from the custody of the police and kills him as he originally intended to (0:36:14-0:42:55). Being honorable however he promises Ranveer Singh that he will return to accept his punishment after a month for his infarction of the law, when confronted by him (0:46:35-0:50:9). As per his honorable nature he returns to accept his punishment after the months' time (1:08:29-1:09:18). His actions demonstrate that he is an honorable man who keeps his promise given that he returns to accept to punishment, but also the fact that institutions of law and order are subordinate to his honor code. As he had already given word to Benazir that he would avenge her father's death he disregards the institution of law and order, at the same he returns to keep the promise he had made to Ranveer Singh suggesting that keeping his word is his highest priority. The final scene of the film also ends with barbarism. Having finally gotten the villain Pasha both Badshah Khan and Benozir grab him on each sides and drag him on horseback before throwing him against a stone to kill him (3:10:36-3:11:37).

The trope of the "noble savage" originates as a term used to refer to native populations in different regions whose common populace were acquainted with horse-riding and falconry for hunting, compared to the European nobility who viewed it as a privilege reserved for themselves. The idea of nobility in the savage populations (the term "savage" imputed by Europeans) was further understood through the comparison of these cultures with the Greco-Roman golden age with which they bore greater similarity than the European civilizations themselves (Ellingson 23-27). With the growth of enlightenment ideas, the idea of the noble savage gained a negative connotations where the lowest stage of man's ascent to progress started with the hunter-gatherer society ending with eventual present civilization. The term "noble savage" a juxtaposition of incompatible values critiques what it asserts the existence of, and in the process creates a self-authenticating, self-perpetuating rhetorical program for the purpose of racial superiority and

dominance (Ellingson 295-297). Presenting Afghans characters in the trope of the noble savage implicates them as the inferior "other" contrasted to the civilized Indian hero Ranbir in *Dharmatma* (1975) and the police officer Ranveer Singh in *Khuda Gawa* (1991) presented as a parallel to the European colonizers and the otherized natives they colonized. Thus the films prepare a justification for intervening in Afghanistan in the guise of a civilizing mission. In the next chapter we shall see a transition from the trope of the noble savage to that of rescue narratives, a reflection on the actions guided by Indian geopolitics as a result of the noble savage trope.

Chapter 4: The Victim/Savior Narrative

The invasion of Afghanistan, following the 9/11 events plunged the country into chaos as competing militant groups vied for power. It is in this context that the selected films are set. In the films, *Escape from Kabul* (2003), *Kabul Express* (2006), and *Torbaaz* (2020), Indians have been portrayed simultaneously as victims and saviors of the Afghans. Beyond portraying the Indian characters as genuinely good human being who help the Afghan people in spite of having suffered much in their hands, these narratives hide the darker picture of India's imperialistic ambitions.

The film Escape from Kabul features the life of an Indian Hindu woman who elopes to the Taliban ruled Afghanistan after marrying her Afghani Husband. In Afghanistan she faces discrimination on account of her religion, and violence due to her gender. She soon realizes that her husband is an insincere and dishonest person who has cheated her with lies. While she is a victim of both her husband's treachery and social prejudices, she is simultaneously depicted as a savior of the Afghani people. Realizing that Afghanistan does not have a proper functioning government and the proper infrastructure she starts a small clinic to help women who suffer from lack of medical help as well as teaching them to stand up for their rights.

The violence and discrimination she faces can be seen in the beginning of the film when a group of Taliban riding a car smell food and appear at Sushmita's home demanding why she was cooking in the month of Ramadan. Sushmita's explanation that she isn't Muslim is responded with the demand that she take Allah's name. When Susmita refuses to take Allah's name she is beaten up and dragged to a room (*Escape* 0:04:24-0:07:13). When Sushmita's husband Jaanbaz invites his uncle to a meal on occasion of his marriage to Sushmita, his uncle refuses the invitation outright and berates Jaanbaz in her presence for marrying a *Kafir* (infidel) woman

(*Escape* 0:17:14-0:17:34). Susmita learns about Jaanbaz's insincerity when she is travelling to Afghanistan with him. She learns during the trip that Afghanistan is not the sort of place Jaanbaz had described but that the place is filled with the danger of gunshots and bomb explosions (Escape). She learns more of her husband's fraudulent nature when she catches him having sex with Gulgutti. Jaanbaaz explains to her that he was already married to Gulgutti when Susmita was brought to his home as his wife. The bitter quarrel that ensues ends with Jaanbaz grabbing her down by the hair and telling her that she and Gulgutti are going to sleep with him in the same room and that she would have to comply (Escape 0:49:06-0:51:43).

Susmita takes the initiative to start a small clinic after she experiences and observes firsthand that women who require medical help have no choice but to resort to Mullahs who are incapable of helping women in their ailment. When she falls ill her in laws get a Mullah to help with her illness. This Mullah is however not helpful in curing her illness. When she is again taken to a doctor at a hospital she realizes that the medication she was given would not cure her but would rather cause her more harm than good. Susmita is finally prompted with the initiative to start a clinic for women when a relative from among her in laws dies from a lack of medical attention (*Escape* 1:00:15-1:02:27).

In Kabul Express the victim-savior narrative is partaken by two fledgling Indian journalists who travel to Afghanistan to learn about the Taliban and the chaos in Afghanistan. Being Indians in an unknown land, the journalists are at the mercy of the various militant forces operating in Afghanistan. On their way to finding Taliban, the two journalists are first taken hostage by the Mujahedeen and later on by a Taliban. The two journalists however decide to help the Taliban after learning about his difficult circumstances.

On arriving at Afghanistan they meet a man called Khyber who promises them pictures

of Taliban captured by the Mujahedeen. However when the Mujahedeen he contacted arrive, they blindfold Khyber and the two journalists at gunpoint and have them sit at the back of the car for their trip. Later on Khyber, the two Indian journalists and a fellow American journalist is taken hostage by Imran, a Taliban who was being pursued by the Mujahedeen. While travelling to the Pakistani border with Imran, as his hostage, the journalists come to learn that Imran is originally a soldier from the Pakistani army (*Kabul Express*1:06:36-1:06:50) who had been sent on orders to fight for the Taliban. (*Kabul Express* 1:08:48-1:10:40). On their way to the borders, when the three journalists Suhail, Jai, Jessica and the Mujahedin, Khyber are going as Imran's hostages, they are shot at by the Mujahedin forces. The chaos allows Jessica and Khyber to escape while Suhail and Jai are kept as hostages behind a rock. As the Mujahedin and Imran are shooting at each other it becomes apparent that Imran will eventually be killed, being outnumbered by the Mujahedeen. This is when Suhail and Jai offer to help him, Suhail suggests that he hands over his gun and make a run for it if he intends to have a chance at survival. Imran although distrustful of the two opts to trust them and manages to make his escape (1:28:42-1:35:55).

In Torbaaz (2020) the dichotomy of victim-savior is played through the character Naseer, an Indian ex-army doctor who has lost his wife and son to a child suicide bombing in Afghanistan. Although traumatized he returns to Afghanistan at the request of a family friend named Ayesha who invites him to help run a charitable organization for children. Although he is initially reluctant he finally decides to help the kids by setting up a training camp for cricket. In the opening scenes of the film we find a depressed Naseer Khan sitting on the chair with his head bowed down. When the flight attendant asks him to come and board the plan, he replies that he had lost the boarding pass, even though his torn boarding pass is lying on the floor next to him

suggesting that he had torn out the boarding pass to avoid boarding the plane (*Torbaaz* 0:08:42-0:09:01). When he is invited by Ayesha as a guest at an NGO event, he leaves abruptly when the children arrive to honor him with flowers, haunted by visions of children holding guns, the image of a child's corpse and a dying man in the street (*Torbaaz* 0:17:46-18:57). He later explains to Ayesha that he cannot help with the NGO, that he has difficulty looking at the faces of children and will return to India in a few days (*Torbaaz* 0:20:17-0:20:37). We finally learn of the events of his wife and son's death when a man Naseer had met earlier appears at the check post of the guest house to give him an envelope containing a picture of Naseer's son taken with his own son. The picture reminds Naseer of the day when he had been to the marketplace with his family when a bomb had exploded leaving his wife and son dead among others (*Torbaaz* 0:26:42-0:29:50).

When Naseer finally decides to help the children at the NGO, he offers his services as a doctor and opens a training camp to teach the children cricket. Although these children are from different racial and ethnic background and seem to dislike each other initially, they overcome their differences through their love for cricket. The game eventually ends up as a source of salvation for the few children who have been brainwashed to become suicide bombers in the service of the Taliban.

Initially we find that the children are divided into three different factions when they are being tested for the refugee cricket team. When Imalal and Wahid are brought in to play with everyone Gulab and Sadiq raise their voice to say that they cannot play with Hazaras. Imlal however provokes Gulab by calling him a coward spurring him to play with them. When Imlal takes Gulab's wicket with balling, Baaz comes up and proves his batting by hitting a six. Although Gulab becomes impressed by Baaz and leaves aside their differences to become

friends, the two of them do not shake hands with Imlal when asked by Nasser. Instead Baaz curses at Imlal before leaving with everyone following behind him (*Torbaaz* 0:52:16-0:57:21). In his efforts to set up a good cricket team, Naseer brings Imlal and Wahid and attempts again to reconcile them with the other kids so that they agree to play as a team. This time again Gulab and Sadiq refuses to have them on their team. When Nasser appears unable to reconcile everyone to form a team he leaves. The children finally realize their mistake and calls him out to apologize, and tell him "Afghan-Afghan bhai bhai" suggesting that they will all get along (*Torbaaz* 1:00:46-1:03:21).

When the three children Bakht, Khosh Bakht and Baaz goes missing, Nasser takes it upon himself to find them. His search leads him to find Qazar whom he convinces to allow the children to play cricket against the under-16 team. Although, the cricket practice bear fruit and the Torbaaz team gains victory over the Kabul Juniors, the victory celebration is however marred by a Taliban attack at the site. Although the three kids prepare to commit suicide bombing, Nasser manages to convince Bakht and Khosh Bakht to "do the right thing" (not commit suicide) and Baaz persuaded to by Nasser opts to kill Qazar by sacrificing himself as a suicide bomber (Torbaaz 1:58:36 -2:04:44).

In the film Escape from Taliban we find the depiction of a victim-savior narrative from the perspective of an Indian woman where she is the victim of her insincere Afghan husband, the supposed norms of an afghan Muslim society that favor men over women and the poverty of war-torn Afghanistan run by the oppressive Taliban. In spite of being a victim she attempts to become the savior of Afghan women who lack access to medical care by starting a clinic. In Kabul Express the victim are two fledgling journalists who in their attempt to get pictures of the Taliban end up being taken hostage by one, to take him to the Pakistani border. On their journey

however the journalists come to learn about his difficult circumstances and become sympathetic to his plight. Eventually they decide to help him escape when the mujahedeen forces are trying to kill him. In Torbaaz the victim is an Indian ex-army doctor who loses his wife and son to a Taliban trained child suicide bomber. Although traumatized he returns to Afghanistan at the request of a family friend to help run an NGO. Albeit initially reluctant he decides to help orphaned children by starting a cricket training camp. The cricket camp ends up empowering the orphaned boys and Naseer is able to free the children from the influence of the Taliban.

All three narratives depict the Indians not just as victim of the Afghans, but also their savior betraying current Indian interests. Economically India intends to use Afghanistan as a bridge in order to connect to energy rich central Asia and augment trade (D'Souza 9, Sharma 1). From a national security perspective, investments in Afghanistan can stabilize the region and ameliorate India's own security interests in the face of radical Islamic forces as well as preventing the proliferation of drugs and weapons (Sharma 1). Such intentions are reflected in the substantial investments in development and infrastructure and further plans for investment that India has made in Afghanistan. As of 2021 India has made more than three billion dollars of investment in Afghanistan as well as being involved in bilateral trade that amounts to around one and a half billion. Other involvements include medical services and education sought out by Afghans in India, as well as preferential trade agreements between the two countries. Some of the significant investments in infrastructure include, "the 218 kilometre long Zaranj-Delaram Highway, the laying of electricity transmission lines from the Uzbek border to Kabul over the Hindu Kush mountains as part of the multi-country, multi-agency Northeast Power System, the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, and even the construction of the Afghan Parliament building." (Choudhury). These efforts are not surprising given that the Afghan-Tajik basin and the Amu

Darya basin has an estimated one point six billion barrels of oil and about fifteen point seven trillion cubic feet of natural gas (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) as well vast reserves of gold, copper, and gemstones in Afghanistan. Indian interests however, have faced much resistance from China and what is believed to be the Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) backing Afghan militants groups and the Pakistani, Lashkar-e-Taiba. Indian nationals have frequently been the target of these groups. India's attempt to access energy reserve in Central Asia has been rivaled by China. The bidding war between the two countries for PetroKazakasthan, and the Aynak copper field believed to be the largest in the world (Sharma 2).

The political circumstances surrounding India and Afghanistan would suggest that the Victim-Savior narrative would reflects India's posture as a heroic victim and savior of Afghanistan motivated by altruism, to that of an interest laden risk-taker whose imperial ambitions have ultimately led it vilify Afghani people and its own Muslim minority populace. Said in work shows that imperial attitudes are formed in media representations chiefly in reference to American media, he suggests that in our time we have an "international media "presence that insinuates itself frequently at a level below conscious awareness, over a fantastically wide range" (Said 291). This is however applicable for India given its anticipation of itself as a superpower in South Asian region. Like American media, India also has a degree of cultural hegemony in the South Asia through Bollywood films. Hence the films in their interventionist narrative demonstrate this very attitude. This vilification of Muslims as we shall see takes a more overt form for India's nation building project through historical narratives.

Chapter 5: Historical Narratives

Since the rise in power of the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014, there has been three Bollywood films which have overtly dramatized historical narratives where Afghans have been presented as outsiders against whom the Indians have defended their territory. The three films Padmaavat (2018), Kesari (2019), and Panipat (2019) have all presented the barbaric Afghan outsider as a foil to the honorable Indian. Indian Nationalism is a feature that is common in these films. It is difficult to say that the Hindu nationalist party coming to power and the production of such films is a merely coincidental.

Padmaavat (2018) is a historical drama depicting the power struggle between the Afghan sultan Alauddin Khilji and the Rajput king Maharawal Ratan Singh. The film depicts Alauddin as a selfish, raving, vain, lustful and barbaric individual as a foil to the honorable, loyal and composed Ratan Singh. The plot revolves around Alauddin's obsession with Ratan Singh's wife Padmavati whom he desires for himself even though he has only learned of her beauty from hearsay. In order to have her for himself he declares war on Ratan Singh. Even after killing him dishonorably and gaining entry into the Rajput palace his pursuit for Padmavati remain unfruitful since she leads the woman of the castle into Jauhar to preserve their honor. The work asserts the honor of the Rajputs as part of the Indian national identity in opposition to the lewd and brutish Afghan outsiders.

Depicted as the stereotypical villain, Khilji is shown to be a barbarian at its heights. On his wedding night he is caught having adultery with another woman even though he is about to be married to Meherunissa, the daughter of Jalaluddin Khilji, his uncle whom he serves. A courtier who witnesses the act is promptly killed by Khiji so that no one learns about it (Padmaavat 0:09:08-0:09:51). Khilji's cruelty can be seen in his treatment of the princess of

Deogiri, a region he invades without permission for Jalaluddin. Having the princess of Deogiri chained to a pool of water and making her hold aloft torches on her sides, Khilji struts around throwing pearls at her, contemplating aloud to her that she would make a great addition to her harem (Padmaavat 0:37:53-0:38:39). After Khiji murders his uncle he parades into the palace and unveils Khilji's head on a stick without any regard to her feelings (Padmaavat 0:41:44-0:43:03). Khilji's selfishness is seen when burning arrows set fire to the camp he has set up. When his servant Malik Kafur comes to wake him to the attacks of the Rajputs, Khilji sends him off, asking to wake him after the fires have been put out, and goes back to sleep unconcerned (Padmaavat 1:04:24-1:05:33). In comparison to Khilji, the Rajput king Ratan Singh is shown to be a paragon of honor and virtue making references to Rajput honor and how they will be viewed in history. When Khilji expresses his wish to see Padmavati, his guards point their swords at Khilji's neck. Singh enraged at his request tells him that he has spoken dishonorably. He warns him that if Khilji wasn't his guest he would have been beheaded. When Singh discusses the matter with Padmavati, she agrees to meet Khilji even though Singh does not approve it on account of his honor. When Padmavati mentions to him that he could have changed history by beheading Khilji when he had the chance, Singh replies "You know I couldn't have struck a guest unarmed in the fort. Even if it is the devil himself. History can turn its page but Rajputs don't budge from their principles." When Padmavati tells Singh to behead her so that his honor and Rajput principles may remain intact, Singh makes reference to history saying "No one will ever understand your decision to show him your face. Future generations will hold you accountable". Singh's dialogue presents an excellent example on the purpose that the historical narratives serve. It is so that in the present day the Indian Rajput identity may be viewed with honor and pride in relation to the Afghani Khilji.

Kesari (2019) is a historical drama drawing on the events leading to the battle of Saraghari, a battle between twenty one Sikhs and the ten thousand Afghans. In the film the Afghans are depicted as fanatics who force women into marriage against their will and kill them in the name of Islam for resisting their law. The film presents the Sikhs as brave and honorable men as opposed to depicting Afghan Pashtuns as barbarians. The battle between the two groups is instigated when the lead character Ishar Singh intervenes to stop the killing of a woman who has apparently not acknowledged her forced marriage. Against the orders of his superior Ishar Singh fights the jury led by mullah Saidullah and kills the woman's husband to rescue her. The battle which ensues ends with the death of the twenty one Sikhs who having bravely faced thousands of Afghans earn their respect.

Afghan barbarism is depicted quite early in the film. After the day's patrol the Sikhs prepare to return to Gulistan when they hear the echo of a woman's scream. Looking for the source Havildar Singh and the regime find a group of Pashtun men in cane and blades led by Saidullah who drags a woman by her hair before throwing her to the ground. When the woman who is being punished, refuses to accept her forced marriage, is about to be beheaded even after warnings by Saidullah, Havildar Singh goes to save the woman against the orders of his superior and is able to help the woman escape. When he is outnumbered and gets caught by the Afghan tribesmen who are about to dishonor him by taking off his turban, the other members of the regime save him, and help him fight off the Afghans who retreat (Kesari 0:05:19-0:10:33). Before the Afghans are about to launch an offensive against the Sikh regime, Saidullah drags the Afghan woman with a noose around her neck led by the horse he is riding to show the Sikh regime that their efforts to save her has been futile. The woman is summarily killed on his orders as he recites a prayer (Kesari 1:13:56-1:14:54). Saidullah also kills the cook, Khuda Daad who

was tasked by Ishar Singh with duty of giving water to injured soldiers both of the enemy and the allied force. When Daad is giving water to an injured enemy soldier, Saidullah notices him amid the celebrations of the Afghans and picks up a sword before killing him (Kesari 2:17:29-2:18:03). The film presents the Sikhs as a group that has maintained their honor even in defeat. In his dying state when Ishar Singh is lying against the wall, Saidullah tries to take off his turban to his dishonor him; Ishar Singh however takes out a knife from his Turban and stabs him to death. When the entire group is enraged and is about to kill him, the Afridi leader khan, Masood stops the angry mob. Ishar Singh tells him that they may kill him but his turban is not to be touched. The Masood gives him his word that his turban won't be touched and asks for his name. On learning it he declares that he will remember him (2:18:08-2:19:14). At the end of the film reference to the "saffron crown" the turban worn by the Sikh regime and the idea of the "motherland worth dying for" is invoked in the music following the deaths of the Sikhs (2:25:14-2:28:32). In the context of our present day the saffron color a symbol of purity in Hinduism is used to validate the Sikh identity while dying for the motherland translates to fighting the Afghan outsiders to death.

Panipat (2019) is the historical drama on the battle of Panipat between the Afghan army led by sultan Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Marathas led by General Sadashiv Rao Bhao. The film presents the sultan as a murderous individual who sets off to invade the Maratha territories while the Marathas fight to defend it. The nationalist bent present in the film places the Afghan sultan as an outsider against whom the honorable Sadashiv Rao Bhao fights valiantly to protect his motherland. The Marathas lose the battle against Abdali, but earns his respect through their valor in war.

Abdali's barbarism becomes apparent when there is an attempted assassination on him.

Although Abdali manages to evade the attack, he kills the attacker, his own cousin brutally by repeatedly smashing his head with his crown before putting the bloodied crown on his forehead (Panipat 0:41:17-0:43:48). In another instance Abdali kills one of his advisors with a dagger when he advises Abdali against his demand that their army swim across the Yamuna to face the Maratha forces (Panipat 1:53:58-1:54:28). To Abdali, the general Sadashiv is contrasted as a composed individual. The Maratha honor is shown through an ending scene where the Maratha king happens to be reading a letter where Abdali describes the Marathans as people with valor for whom he has respect even in his victory over them (Panipat 2:45:52-2:46:48). Hindu nationalism is impressed on the viewers through General Sadashiv who tells Abdali while dying that every drop of blood is screaming Hindustan will never be yours. As Abdali looks around the battle scene a speech echoes "I am ready to die for even a grain of dust of my motherland" (Panipat 2:43:34-2:44:29).

All three historical dramas present the Afghans as outsiders who are uncivilized, barbaric and backwards in their alliance to Islamic values presenting them as a foil to Rajput, Sikh and Maratha identities who are honorable, being part of the Indian nationality. These sentiments can be found in the politics of the Hindu nationalist party which has led to pogroms, coordinated attacks and vigilantism against the Muslim population. The three prominent organizations Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) represent the Hindu nationalist ideology (Jaffrelot 460).

In creating the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy, the Hindutva scholars present the Muslim as an outside force whose allegiance lay not with the Hindu nation owing to the fact that their holy place for worship was not India but elsewhere (Ahmed, ch.4). Indian history is also presented as a clash between opposites. Having essentialized Hinduism, Muslims are presented as contrary to

the national identity. The Mughal era is used as period when Muslims and Hindus clashed. The Muslims in these narratives are portrayed as barbarians and religiously intolerant. Having assigned Islam as a commonality in their identity and hence their means of guidance, these rulers were all described in a similar manner and the social, political and economic factors were ignored (Flaten 636-640).

Dichotomies of the "self" and the "other" through the religious narrative can be seen in the popular Ayodhya dispute that took place around the late eighties. The organizations RSS, VHP and BJP rallied for the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir. The temple was allegedly destroyed by the Mughal emperor Babur who had apparently built a mosque in its place. This event gained support for the Sangh Parivar who mobilized the destruction of the mosque for the construction of the temple.

A prominent feature of the Hindu nationalist rhetoric is the emphasis on the Muslim conspiracy to render the Hindu population a minority through the suggestion that Muslim fertility is greater than Hindus. Narratives aimed at demonizing Muslims, have suggest that Muslim women are oppressed by their religion to become victim to Muslim men. The Muslim man's right to marry up to four wives have been used to strengthen the claim of the conspiracy.

The proponents of the Hindu nationalist rhetoric propose the Muslim conspiracy of "Love Jihad" which is "to seduce, marry, forcefully convert, and even traffic young Hindu girls." for reducing Hindu population and for undermining their religion. (Tyagi and Sen 112). These narratives fuel anti-Muslim rhetoric, shuddhi (reconversion to Hinduism) and present Muslims as hypersexual men to whom passive Hindu women are victim. The corollary to such a projection are men from the Hindu community mobilized to protect their masculine honor by wreaking violence on Muslims (Gupta 3).

To undermine the Muslim conspiracy "Beti Bahu Bachan Mahapanchayat – Daughter, Daughter-in-law Protection Council", established by the VHP to protect Hindu women. This is done through slogans such as "bahu lao, beti bachao" to encourage Hindu men to marry Muslim women (Strohl 30). There has been a rise in vigilantism since 2014, influenced by right wing Hindu ideology. In these case perpetrators receive state protection through police complicity and non-interference. In inter-faith marriages Hindu women have been pressurized to reverse their marriage decisions towards Muslims while Muslim men are implicated with false rape charges, abduction and coercion (qtd in Omar 13).

Muslim institutions have also been described as a factory of terrorism. This is the case with the Islamic university Darul Uloom Deoband, described by Union Minister Giraj Singh as "Anatankwad ki Gangotri – Gangotri of Terrorism" (Eckert 326). The narrative of Mughalistan is another propaganda pushed forward by the Hindu nationalists. It is believed to be a plan to carve out an undivided Muslim nation by dividing India. The idea of international actors is entertained as being part of the conspiracy (Anand 55-60). In 2020 the BJP MP Tejaswi Surya addressed the protest against the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act as an example of militant Islamism suggesting that the Mughal rule would return to the country unless the Hindu majority remained vigilant ('Mughal Raj not far away': BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Shaheen Bagh protest).

The "othering" attitude reflect the real attitude present in the majority Indian populace and the leaders they support. The films take up the popular sentiments of the Hindu majority, provoked by the Hindutva leaders and circulate the very ideas in films to reinforce the existing ideology. This reinforcement help the Hindutva leaders concerned with a nation-building

narrative where they “otherize” the Muslim minority as the source of their problems to stay in power.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As my reading of the chosen films uncovers there are three major categories. The pre-9/11 films where Afghan people are stereotyped as the noble savage, the films following 9/11 where we the Afghans depicted as terrorists and victims of terrorism who need to be rescued by the Indian protagonists who are themselves victims of the Afghans, and finally the historical narratives following the Hindu nationalist BJPs rise to power in 2014, that led to the portrayal of the Afghans as barbaric villains as a foil to the venerable Indian. Bollywood's portrayal of Afghans is in part motivated by their Muslim identity and partly motivated by India's own imperialistic ambitions. In the pre-9/11 era we find a romanticized version of Orientalism where Afghans are portrayed in the stereotype of the noble savage through the Afghan national sport Buzkashi, motivated by Hollywood productions. This narrative takes a turn after the 9/11 events where we find the portrayal the Indian protagonist in the position of a savior who risks his/her life for Afghans. These narratives reflect not only the fear of Afghan Muslim as terrorists who compromise Indian security interests but also the Indian interest to gain control over Afghanistan and the Central Asian region rich in energy and mineral resources by masking Indian interest in Afghanistan as altruistic. The films following the rise of the Hindu nationalist government construct an overt propaganda narrative against the Afghans as villains against the Indians as heroes through narratives from history. This construction is the result of the populist anti-Muslim sentiments supported by Hindu nationalist leaders who oppose the secular constitution. In attempting to do so Muslims in India are viewed in the light of the demographically dominant Hindu ethos, as historical outsiders and serve to provide fuel for the Hindutva leaders to stay in power. The representation of Afghans in a negative light on the part of Bollywood in the selected

films is the result of the romanticizing tendency inherited from Hollywood films carried on by Indian imperialist interest to become a superpower in the South Asian and surrounding regions and the political interest of the Hindutva ideologues to stay in power. It would seem to be the case that Bollywood's strategy has been successful. Bollywood films are successful both in South Asia as well as in Afghanistan. This is indicated by the rise in attacks on Indian Muslims and the largely positive light in which India is viewed by Afghani people. A poll in 2015, showed that Afghans had a far more favorable view of India than of Pakistan. While 3.7% viewed Pakistan favorably, a whopping 62% viewed India favorably (Ahmadyar and Osmanzoi). Although these statistics does not indicate whether Afghanistan's relationship with the two countries have improved or worsened with time, it does however suggest that as far as soft power is concerned India has superseded Pakistan in their influence over Afghanistan. Afghani people are hence susceptible victims to Orientalized narrative of Bollywood productions that has simultaneously vilified Afghans and sanitized their Indian counterparts as altruists without ulterior motives. Thus Bollywood has foisted a false image of India on Afghanistan and south Asia, one that does not correspond to the real image of India.

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