



ROLE OF RELIGION IN INDIAN CINEMA

1. Zubair Shafiq

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Email: z.shafiq@iub.edu.pk

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6722-9246>

2. Tanveer Hussain

Assistant professor School of media and communication studies, University of Management and technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: tanveer.hussain@umt.edu.pk

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7991-2226>

3. Hafiz Ahmad Ali

Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan

Email: hafizahmad.ali@iub.edu.pk

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0034-8448>

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ROLE OF RELIGION IN INDIAN CINEMA¹

Zubair Shafiq, Tanveer Hussain, Hafiz Ahmad Ali

ABSTRACT:

Relationship between cinema and religion is as old as the history of cinema. Since the beginning of commercial feature films in the sub-continent (now Pakistan, India and Bangladesh), religion was used as a tool of acceptance and popularity of this new medium. Until now the use of religion is common in the cinema industries of India and Pakistan. This paper is part of a major project that attempts to explore the use of religion in the sub-continent region. The current paper only focuses on its one dimension which is to study the role of religion in Indian cinema and the ways it has used religion as one of its major narrative tools. Due to the excessive use of religious and mythological elements in films, this paper offers an analysis of selected horror films. The study established that Hinduism gains a superior position from Islam and Christianity in Indian horror. However, all the films show respect to these religions. Moreover, when the religious force confronts the secular, the 'monster' in these films punishes the secular and leaves the believers.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Islam, Hinduism, Secularism, Cinema

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore how a cinema relies on the existing beliefs of a society about the existence of God and other supernatural forces. This

¹ This paper has been extracted from Doctoral Research to broaden the existing studies on religion and cinema.

research is based on the premise that Indian cinema particularly its horror films take their clues from not only the indigenous (Hinduism) and immigrant religions (Islam and Christianity) but also limits it within the socio-cultural boundaries of Indian society.

Literature Review:

The limited available literature has, to some extent, studied the genre from the perspectives of its historical development², its ideological dimension³, the ‘monster’ of Bollywood⁴, the use of intertextuality⁵, and realism in horror⁶ to which we will refer later in this paper. What is missing in these studies is a broader understanding of *how* horror has incorporated these individual elements and particularly religion to form a holistic narrative structure. We will address issues not examined in previous studies, such as why and how Bollywood horror films attract audiences, the role of religion and how it influences the representation of the monster in these films, and how contemporary horror films differ from their predecessors, if at all. We

² Tombs, Pete. *The Beast from Bollywood: A History of the Indian Horror Film*. Fear without Frontiers: Horror Cinema across the Globe. Edited by Steven Jay Schneider Surrey, UK: FAB Press, 2003: 234.

³ Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Mapping the Hindi Horror Genre: Ghosts in the Service of Ideology." *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7, no. 1 (2013)

⁴ Iyer, Usha. *Nevla as Dracula: Figurations of the Tantric as Monster in the Hindi Horror Film*. Figurations in Indian Film. Edited by Meheli Sen and Anustup Basu UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁵ Sen, Maheli. *Haunted Havelis and Hapless Heroes: Gender, Genre, and the Hindi Gothic Film*. Figurations in Indian Film. Edited by Meheli Sen and Anustup Basu UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁶ Vitali, Valentina. *The Evil: Realism and Scopophilia in the Horror Films of the Ramsay Brothers*. Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema. Edited by Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

intend to examine these issues for the purpose of developing a deeper understanding of the role of religion in cinema.

This paper is based on the premise that the horror genre in its current form is an indigenous genre that, despite borrowing narrative and visual conventions from the West, continues to develop as a mainly indigenous genre. It exists, as Meraj Mubarki argues, at the ‘intersections of myths, ideology and dominant socio-religious thoughts’⁷. The narratives in Indian horror are driven by elements of revenge and/or objects of desire within the parameters of good versus bad; morality versus psychology, religious versus secular, and/or religious versus political. Moreover, the ‘monster’ in these films is either repressed or often “struggles for recognition”⁸ and thus fights against those who challenge his/her very existence. In this context, it is the non-believers who often threaten the ‘normality’ and not the monster, as the latter is part of the normality. According to Robin Wood, normality is understood as the “conformity to the dominant social norms”.⁹ Before we discuss the role of religion in cinema, it is important to first understand the discourse on horror and to find out how it associates religion as a major narrative tool. In the following section, we present theoretical discourse on horror and the reasons of its popularity.

The academic discourse on horror can broadly be categorized into subjective and objective explanations of the genre.

The objectivists generally aspire towards a totalizing description of the genre usually based in the formulation of clearly defined

⁷ Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Mapping the Hindi Horror Genre: Ghosts in the Service of Ideology." *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7, no. 1 (2013): 39.

⁸ Wood, Robin. *The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s*. Horror, the Film Reader. Edited by Mark Jancovich London and New York: Routledge 2002: 31.

⁹ Ibid.

categories of iconography, content, or themes. In contrast, the subjectivists usually prefer a looser definition of formal elements and, instead, focus on the genre's less tangible emotional effects.¹⁰

The subjectivist approach, as David J. Russell puts it, focuses on the emotional responses of audiences and is limited in scope. As emotional responses to any horror film change with the change of spatial and temporal boundaries, something that some audiences find horrifying may be funny for others. On the other hand, objectivists attempt to expand the genre boundaries by focusing more on the film texts instead of the emotions that they create. Russell criticises this approach because of the continuously changing nature of the genre as each genre adds to the existing conventions. In that case, an objectivist approach not only fails to address thematic overlapping, but it also fails to anticipate potential variations. He then offers a solution that addresses the weaknesses of subjectivist and objectivist approaches by presenting the following definition of horror:

The basic definition of any horror film may be centred on its monster character, and the conflict arising in the fantastical and unreal monster's relationship with normality – as represented through a pseudo-ontic space constructed through filmic realism – provides the necessary basic terms for its (filmic) existence.¹¹

¹⁰ Russell, David J. *Monster Roundup: Reintegrating the Horror Genre*. Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory. Edited by Nick Browne: University of California Press, 1998: 234.

¹¹ Ibid.

Indeed, the monster is one of the main elements of the horror genre. However, we agree with Noël Carroll that it is not just the monster that is the main source of gratification, but instead the “whole narrative structure” that is based upon curiosity and fascination. The curiosity, in this context, is “the desire to know at least the outcome of the interaction of the forces made salient in the plot”¹² whereas, the fascination addresses the desire to see those elements that “transgress standing categories of thought”¹³ Thus, this complete package of horror not only fulfils the curiosity but also provides fascination in an accumulative form that attracts audiences and provides them both pleasure and gratification when they see their religion or beliefs on myths being fulfilled on screen.

CASE STUDY:

We selected the film *Raaz* (2002) for the analysis. It is the story of a couple, Sanjana and Aditya, who are struggling with their troubled relationship. Sanjana feels that she is not Aditya’s priority anymore and he does not love her the way he used to in the beginning of their relationship. She feels alienated at his parties. These feelings grow to such an extent that she quarrels with him, drives the car home and has an accident. After the accident, Aditya, feeling sorry for his previous attitude, expresses his desire to forget the past and start the relationship afresh. He offers to take Sanjana to any place in the world where they can spend time together and strengthen their relationship. Sanjana suggests a place called Ooty which is where their relationship started.

¹² Carroll, Noël. *Why Horror?*. Horror, the Film Reader. Edited by Mark Jancovich London and New York: Routledge 2002: 35.

¹³ Ibid., 39.

After reaching Ooty, some unusual things happen around Sanjana such as objects falling without any external force, air blowing her hair and whispering sounds etc. Later on, it is revealed that it is the spirit of a girl, Malini, who is trying to communicate with Sanjana. Malini had a relationship with Aditya when he used to attend to his business in Ooty. Aditya had kept this relationship secret from Sanjana. Malini who had an unstable personality fell in love with Aditya. When she discovers that Aditya is already married, she tries to force Aditya to leave Sanjana. Upon his refusal to leave his wife, Malini shoots herself with the intention that when Sanjana finds about her, she would then leave Aditya.

It is clear that as Malini could not get Aditya in her life she decided to separate Aditya from Sanjana so that they can be reunited in another life. Malini's spirit reveals the truth about her relationship to Sanjana after possessing her. When she finds out her husband's secret, Sanjana decides to leave him. At this point, a suspicious looking 'Professor' Agni Swaroop (Ashutosh Rana), who "*has great insight*" and "*can set right what is wrong*", advises Sanjana not to leave Aditya by reminding her that "*Sanjana is devoted to her husband and a woman who is devoted to her husband, acts as his shield. Even god is afraid to meddle with her husband's life whereas this is only an evil spirit*".¹⁴ In the remaining part of the film, there are several sequences in which Sanjana and Malini's spirit confront each other. As per the advice of Professor Agni Swaroop, Sanjana manages to burn the body of the dead Malini in order to get rid of her spirit. Sanjana then reunites with Aditya. The film concludes with a narration by Sanjana:

¹⁴ These quotes have been taken from film subtitles.

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To fall in love is easy, to live up to it is very difficult. Only after I had passed this test of love, did my married life really blossom. Only after travelling through the depths of death could I reach the zenith of life, the zenith where I was blessed with the nectar of love forever.

The narrative structure of *Raaz* can best be studied from the perspective of its hybrid nature. This hybridity relates to the duality of its plot, which can be divided into two parallel plots; plot one deals with the relationship between the couple, whereas plot two deals with the supernatural elements. The emphasis on family in plot one is typically Indian and similar to the family genre of the 1990s. The film involves a love triangle which comprises of Malini's spirit, Aditya and his wife Sanjana. In the second plot, *Raaz* departs from the family genre and focuses on the horror story in which the spirit enters the couple's life in order to take revenge on Sanjana, who the spirit blames for her failure to win Aditya's love. Almost all horror films in Bollywood depend on this hybrid nature in which two parallel plots are adopted. They allow for some variety in the film following the pattern of Masala films, and this helps the filmmakers to target a wider audience.

The contemporary horror films of Bollywood, in almost all cases, balance rational and supernatural approaches and elements. In the rationalist plot various social, political, cultural and religious issues are addressed. These issues are then confronted and resolved by the supernatural plot in which the monster enters the rational space. Rationality usually fails here and often requires the help of those who believe in the supernatural. A conflict is created between the rational and the supernatural. At the end of the film, this conflict is either resolved or left unresolved for future films.

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We suggest that it is neither the couple nor the monster on which Bollywood horror focuses exclusively, instead, new horror films focus on narratives of revenge and/or an object of desire. Thus, the couple or the monster in these films is just another device which helps to advance the wider narrative aims of revenge and desire. The genre continues to repeat this narrative structure in almost all horror films. Both revenge and/or the object of desire rely on the supernatural elements. The revenge may be taken by the natural monster and/or the supernatural monster by using their own physical strengths or by using supernatural abilities such as controlling of various objects and/or possessing different objects or human beings.

Keeping up with the conventions of the genre, this revenge and desire narrative in *Raaz* involves several other processes, such as creating fear of the unknown and the use of supernatural forces in order to seek revenge and/or desire. Starting from its name *Raaz*, which literally means secret, the film manages to create the fear of unknown - something hidden of which the audiences and the characters in the film are not aware - which the film ultimately reveals. This secret potentially refers to two things. Firstly, the hidden secret of the heroine's husband's extra marital relationship¹⁵ and secondly, it suggests to the audience the existence of supernatural forces around them – something which is unknown to them but exists.

In addition to the monster, narratives in these films involve a second category of characters, who are in direct confrontation with the monsters. These characters may belong to either the category of believer or non-

¹⁵ This plot is similar to Robert Zemeckis' film *What Lies Beneath* (2002).

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believer. It is worth mentioning that the believers believe in god, myths, folklores and legends. Non-believers are usually killed by the end of the film, while believers survive. None of the characters are capable of fighting the monster alone even if they are believers, and thus seek help. This help is then provided by *the helpers* – the third category of characters. The *helpers* may be called a *Tantrik*, a *Priest*, a *Molvee* (a Muslim pious person), a *Peer* (A Muslim saint), a *Baba* (an old man) or even a *Professor* (someone who has knowledge of supernatural forces). These helpers usually belong to the real world. They possess knowledge and even powers that help the protagonist fight the monster or any other supernatural elements. *Helpers*, in almost all cases, are believers who believe in religion and myths. These characters often belong to the deprived, alienated and neglected part of society, and tend to live away from the normal society. A *helper* is called in when all other possible options in the fight against the evil fail. This *helper* may live or die at the end of the film after fulfilling their task of helping.

A good example of the strategies can be found in *Raaz* and *Raaz: The Mystery Continues*. In *Raaz*, Malini (Malini Sharma) believes that she has suffered because of Aditya's wife Sanjana and blames her for her death. She then wants to take revenge on Sanjana not because she would feel satisfied by the revenge but because as a result she could possibly obtain Aditya. In this process, the *helper* in the form of the professor comes to help Sanjana. In *Raaz 2*, the ghost or spirit appears to be good and wants to take the revenge on those who were involved in putting the toxins from the chemical factory into the lake where people come to take sacred baths. The spirit is that of Veer Pratap Singh (Jackie Shroff), who was a government officer and was killed when he was trying to expose the toxin

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issue. Here, Prithvi Singh (Emraan Hashmi) performs the role of the *helper* whose paintings predict the future. In this scenario, it is the human beings who are acting as the monsters; the spirit is there as someone challenging the monster, whereas a human with supernatural ability is there to help the spirit. This same formula of characters can be seen repeatedly in almost all horror films. For instance, in *Raaz* and *Shappit: The Cursed* (2010), there is a *helper* character called the professor, in *Ragini MMS 2* the *helper* comes in the form of a US doctor. As per the convention of the genre, this *helper* (even if she is a US doctor) not only believes in ghosts and spirits but is also familiar with *mantars*¹⁶ that ultimately help them fight against the monster. Among these three major types of characters, there are other types of characters too such as maids, servants and gardeners.

Throughout these films, the police and other security officials are not helpful in dealing with the monster. The police represent the state and its power, although we do not see them playing any significant role in saving the public from the monster. They either do not believe in the ghost, or if they do, then they seem to be as afraid as other characters in the film and thus they also depend on the *helper*. This suggests that contacting the police in any risky situation in which spirits and ghosts are involved is pointless. Thus, the victims will need to fight the battle alone. An example of this is the first sequence of *Raaz* in which the police find a possessed girl and take her to the hospital. The doctors seemingly fail to treat her and the police go to the *Professor* to seek his help. There are no police fights

¹⁶ Magical verses

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with the spirits as in the other genres, and also, the spirits do not attack the police officials but instead attempt to stay away from them as if they have a mutual agreement. This suggests the failure of the police and other authorities and thus religious policing is arranged.

Religion has been an integral part of Indian cinema since its inception. Most of the genres in Bollywood can be categorised on the basis of their religious and secular orientations. In horror films, the use of religion and secular references become more pronounced as it is probably the only genre that uses religious references in almost all of its films. From Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal (Mansion)*, 1949 to the horror films of 2014, religion has provided a significant narrative undercurrent. Valentina Vitali has rightly argued that,

unlike in mythological and devotional Indian cinema, in the Hindi horror film goddesses, demons, crucifixes, and curses are not the objective or end of narration, but rather the means to achieve sensational narrative effects, pretexts to stage moments of fear, suspense and surprise.¹⁷

The use of religious elements and seeking help from them is not unknown in the horror genre. However, they have extra value when used in Bollywood films because, as will be discussed in following section, a large section of the population still believe in supernatural forces and that

¹⁷ Vitali, Valentina. *The Evil: Realism and Scopophilia in the Horror Films of the Ramsay Brothers*. Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema. Edited by Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011: 79.

religion has the power to fight against them. In fact, the presence of supernatural elements is itself deeply rooted in the mythologies which are part of Hinduism. Even the term ‘secular’ has different meanings in an Indian context. Rachel Dwyer argues that the Indian film industry is secular in nature. However, the understanding of *secular* varies depending on socio-geographical and political boundaries and the meaning and understanding of secular is different in India from the way it is considered in the West:

It rarely means the separation of the religious and the non-religious or ‘equal disregards’ for all religions, which can come close to meaning atheism, but it usually means ‘equal regard for all religions’. This in turn usually means ‘high regard’ as religiosity is generally highly valued in India. It is the former pluralistic meaning that is used in the film industry where the word ‘secular’ is often employed to describe the industry itself or the films that it makes.¹⁸

Dwyer has presented the case of the social genre and argues that social films use direct or indirect references to religion, however, it is not considered as ‘the Hindu social’ mainly because of the status of religion in Indian society. She argues that any reference to religion is nothing new for Indian audiences and is ‘the standard default position’ and thus often passes unnoticed. Dwyer rightly points out that the ‘removal of these elements would make the Hindi film seem not only unrealistic but would

¹⁸ Dwyer, Rachel. *Filming the Gods*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006: 133.

also take away from its emotions, its spectacle and so on'.¹⁹ In that case, religious references are not actually referring to religiosity, instead religion, particularly Hinduism, is more of a genre convention. Thus, Hinduism is not merely about a religion as Dwyer argues:

The facile expression that 'Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life' is based on a misunderstanding of 'religion' as only 'belief' rather than also "culture" and "practice". Hinduism, a term which is many centuries younger than the religion it describes, refers to diverse, if not always contradictory, religious beliefs and practices. Some forms of Hinduism are centred on culture and on practice, where the world is sacred, while others are based on belief and devotion to a god or a higher principle, though still drawing on culture and practice.²⁰

Thus, horror can be seen as a genre which has the ability to incorporate those folklores, legends, myths and religious elements. Keeping this scenario in mind, horror provides the audience with the opportunity to see what they believe in their day-to-day life. This establishes a connection between the film and the audience.

Horror, as stated previously, has derived these conventions from the mythological, religious and devotional genres, which is visible in the first wave of horror in the 1970s. Valentina Vitali has rightly noted with reference to Ramsay films that,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Living corpses, graveyards, crosses, vampires, and stakes, haunted Islamicate mansions, tridents, shape-shifting females, angry, many-handed goddesses, and animated objects, all of which form the basic props of these films, were inspired largely by Christian ritual, unashamedly borrowed from the British Hammer films, while simultaneously drawing from Hindu myths and reproducing much of the iconography of Indian mythological and devotional films.²¹

The first wave of horror, contemporary horror films continue to rely on Hindu myths and folklores. For instance, monsters in the horror films, in almost all cases, stay away from modern life. Monsters seem to believe in religion and thus can be influenced by various religious elements such as use of Trishul²² in Hinduism, the cross and holy water in Christianity and the Quran in Islam. Similarly, some of the monsters live through some other object or living entity. Thus, the monster cannot be killed until that other object or living being is killed, or in case of Dyan/Churail, her power is in her *Ghutthi* (entangled hair). To kill the *Churail*, her *Ghutthi* needs to be cut by an innocent. These conventions among others have been borrowed from the folklore.

One very striking example is the burning of the body of the spirit. According to Hinduism, a body is burnt after death and if this is not done, then there is the possibility that the spirit will go astray. In order to send lost spirits back to 'their' world, the body of the spirit must be found and

²¹ Vitali, Valentina. *The Evil: Realism and Scopophilia in the Horror Films of the Ramsay Brothers*. Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema. Edited by Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011: 78.

²² The Hindu god Shiva's trident, which is considered sacred by followers of the Hindu religion.

burnt. This convention is used many times in horror films. In *Raaz* the only way to get rid of Malini's spirit and save the family is to find her body and burn it, which Sanjana successfully does and wins.

The common traits of the horror genre are to frighten, horrify or disgust. Added attractions for Indian audiences are the way the genre uses religion, myths, folklores and legends. In that case, it is not the *unknown* to which the audience feel attracted, instead, it is the *known* which attracts them more. It is these features of Bollywood horror that make it unique. Gordon Sinclair shared his personal experience of India in his book *Khyber Caravan* that,

ghosts are no worry to the Indian. He is perfectly satisfied that he, his wife, his children and everyone he knows will one day die and come back to India as somebody or something else depending a lot on their own choice in the films.²³

A similar argument is offered by Pete Tombs who notes:

Horror, for most Western audiences today, is very much something “out there”, something alien and exotic. It touches on distant folk memories and stories that we only half-remember from childhood. In India, by contrast, it is much harder to exploit those kinds of images precisely because they aren't hidden or lost. They are still very much present in the public's mind as living, contemporary ideas.²⁴

²³ Sinclair, Gordon. *Khyber Caravan*. Lahore, Pakistan: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003: 233.

²⁴ Tombs, Pete. *The Beast from Bollywood: A History of the Indian Horror Film*. Fear without Frontiers: Horror Cinema

In almost all horror films it is the non-secular segment of society that wins over the evil and secular forces. Thus, the attraction of horror is dependent on how the narratives in the film are developed, and on the existence of secular and non-secular consciousness. These narratives depend on religious explanations and methods in order to deal with the supernatural. In order to understand this on-going conflict between secular and religious, one needs to understand the political, religious and cultural conflicts that have existed in wider Indian society since the Independence of India.

Since the 1940s, the Indian National Congress has been the dominant political party and has ruled India longer than any other political party. In the 1960s, India faced industrial problems because of the economic and administrative policies of the Congress. Valentina Vitali has presented a comprehensive account of the situation of this industrial crisis and by mapping the economic and political developments in India between the 1960s and the 1990s. She has demonstrated their impact on horror films, particularly those of the Ramsay brothers. To summarise Vitali's argument, the economic policies of Congress from Independence until the mid-1960s affected the working and lower middle-class of Indian society. This was due to the lack of developmental projects and weakening of the Planning Commission. Moreover, other significant events such as Nehru's death in 1964²⁵, the split of Congress in 1969 and finally the state of emergency imposed by Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi in 1975 resulted in Congress losing the domination that it had maintained since Independence.

²⁵ Vitali has noted Nehru's death in 1966 which is incorrect. Nehru passed away in 1964: 79.

The rise of Hindu nationalism was a reaction against Congress being the pluralistic secular political party, and its dominance throughout this phase. Michel Foucault has rightly noted that, ‘where there is power, there is resistance’²⁶ Similarly, as Reza Aslan says, “whenever people - for one reason or another – feel left behind in a progressive society, they will rebel and react against it”.²⁷ Vitali notes that this ‘series of events culminated into the ascendancy of Hinduism as a major ideological force and its institutionalization in the political sphere’²⁸ which continues to this day. Congress lost in the general elections in 1977 for the first time since Independence. As mentioned earlier, the horror genre gained significant popularity in the Indian market in two main phases. The first was the period of the Ramsay brothers in the 1970s and the second started in the late 1990s and reached a peak in the post-2000 era. Considering this backdrop of political scenarios, it is no surprise that the films of the Ramsay brothers – which relied heavily on religion, legends and myths – managed to attract large audiences.

The resistance to secularism in India has continued until the present, and became visible in the Indian general elections of 2014. In these elections, 537 million votes were cast with a total turnout of 66.38% of the Indian population. The Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi has been sworn in as the

²⁶ Michel Foucault cited in Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Mapping the Hindi Horror Genre: Ghosts in the Service of Ideology." *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7, no. 1 (2013): 41.

²⁷ Nazish, Kiran. "Reza Aslan: The Misunderstood Scholar." *The DAWN*, 2014.

²⁸ Vitali, Valentina. *The Evil: Realism and Scopophilia in the Horror Films of the Ramsay Brothers*. Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood: The Many Forms of Hindi Cinema. Edited by Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.

15th prime minister of India after the unprecedented success of Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP). The Times of India reports that it was the "biggest-ever win posted by any party after the landslide win Congress achieved"²⁹ in 1984. The general election of 2014 in India is very important for understanding the on-going change and the reactions of the public towards secularism and other liberal forces in India. There were other reasons³⁰ too, however, the nomination of Narendra Modi as a candidate for prime minister by the BJP did raise concerns amongst the secular community about the rising influence of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics. Just before the elections, several writers, filmmakers and politicians wrote an open letter³¹ raising concerns about Modi's role as future prime minister of India. Modi's political training has taken shape under the umbrella of the Hindu revivalist group RSS. He joined RSS when he was ten years old. This RSS is now the affiliate party of BJP. Another indication of this rising influence is the representation of Muslims - the largest religious minority in India - which appear to have been marginalised. Among 482 candidates of BJP, 7 were Muslim, and they all lost in the general elections of 2014. This is the first time in India that the ruling party does

²⁹ *Election Results 2014: India Places its Faith in Moditva*, 17 May 2014, Times of India Group, Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd, Available: <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/news/Election-results-2014-India-places-its-faith-in-Moditva/articleshow/35224486.cms?>>, [accessed 8 June 2019].

³⁰ Public anger against corruption and weak economy was another important factor that led the public to vote against Congress

³¹ Imran Khan, and others, *If Modi is Elected, It Will Bode Ill for India's Future*, 10 April 2014, The Guardian, Available: <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/10/if-modi-elected-india-future-gujarat>>, [accessed 10 June 2014].

not have any Muslim representation in the Lok Sabha.³² This scenario clearly indicates the growing popularity of Hindu nationalism in India. This popularity has its impact on almost all aspects of Indian culture and society, and cinema is no exception. As is evident from the general elections of 2014, the majority of the Indian public is in favour of Hindu nationalism, which they believe is a better choice for them than a Congress. Meraj Mubarki rightly points out that:

[The] pluralistic Nehruvian secularism embracing a range of political opinions, ranging from socialism and secularism to scientific rationalism and aligned against conservative Hindu orthodoxy, sought the submission of the sacred/spiritual to the secular/temporal.³³

This attempt at submission is most visible in horror films which, as mentioned earlier, support the sacred/spiritual stance. It is for this reason that those who do not believe in the scared/spiritual are punished in horror films. Mubarki argues that,

lying at the intersections of myths, ideology and dominant socio-religious thoughts, the Hindi horror genre reveals three major strands: the secular conscious, the traditional cultural and the

³² Seema Chishti and Anubhuti Vishnoi, *BJP's Muslim Score: 7 of 482 Fielded, No Winners*, 19 May 2014, The Indian Express, Available: <<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/bjps-muslim-score-7-of-482-fielded-no-winners/>>, [accessed 4 June 2014]

³³ Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Mapping the Hindi Horror Genre: Ghosts in the Service of Ideology." *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7, no. 1 (2013).

Hindutva ideological, roughly corresponding to the way the nation has been imagined at different times in Post-Colonial India.³⁴

The secular in the above quote refers to the respect of all religions, ‘the traditional cultural’ mainly focuses on the family relationships whereas Hindutva, as discussed earlier in detail, provide support for the legends, folklores and myths. These three strands provide us the syntax under which Bollywood horror films are made as it is evident from various examples from *Raaz* discussed above.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, this discussion suggests that the contemporary horror films in Bollywood not only adopt the ideas of revenge, injustice and punishment but the narratives of these films, in almost all cases, refer to the idea of conflict between believers and non-believers or as Mubarki notes between sacred/spiritual and secular/temporal.³⁵ These films not only address this but they also consciously differentiate the social classes, the rich and poor of the Indian society and male and female. The monster appears not just to take revenge but also to help believers to fight against the secular. In this respect, horror is the genre of the poor, the weak and the *believers*. The monster in these films often takes revenge on the oppressor, punishes those who do not believe and also seeks ‘justice’ by punishing those who

³⁴ Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Mapping the Hindi Horror Genre: Ghosts in the Service of Ideology." *History and Sociology of South Asia* 7, no. 1 (2013): 39.

³⁵ Ibid.

have escaped unpunished. This process is supported by legends, myths and religious beliefs that are based on the concepts of reincarnation, the existence of the supernatural in the world, black magic, karma, straying spirits, the religious scripts and religious elements.



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