Chapter 4

THE MUSLIM SOCIAL

The fading away of the Muslim Historical genre in the mid-1960s and the emergence of the Muslim Social genre have been discussed in the last section of the preceding chapter. This chapter is an attempt to critique the Muslim Social genre by examining the pattern of Muslim representation in terms of culture, and social and economic status through film texts and also based on narratives obtained from in-depth interviews with scholars, film critics and filmmakers. Some of the participants have themselves made Muslim Socials, while others have been closely associated with those who have made films in this genre.

The Muslim Social as a genre of Hindi cinema spanned almost five decades, from the end of 1940s through 1980s, but was most visible in the 1960s and 1970s. This genre is a counterpart of the broader genre, ‘The Social’, in which films represent family life, marriage and love story. The Muslim Social genre refers to the films which characterize Islamicate world. The social construction of Muslims in this genre reflected stereotypes of Muslims in terms of language, culture, region and socio-economic status. Shyam Benegal, in his article ‘Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema’ (2007) sketches the genre and writes,

While the social is loosely defined term for melodramas with the modern setting, the term ‘Muslim Social’ is broadly used to describe a sub-genre of narrative films that focused on social issues distinctive to Muslim culture and lives. Often imbued with a sense of nostalgia for an older traditional culture even when set in a contemporary framework, these films tended to constitute Muslims as an isolated and archaic community faced with singular problem (2007: 238).

This chapter looks into the representational scheme of Muslim Social and the political economy relating to socio-economic status of people of the period. Reading film texts and analysing the in-depth interviews brought out three major themes: the Muslim Social as a genre; the important role Muslims played as side characters; the demonization of Muslim characters. The first part of the analysis deals with the film texts that are based on the Muslim Social genre, their image and the ideology of the films. The second section deals with the status of courtesans
and how they were the objects of ‘male gaze’. The third section examines the social and political aspects of portraying Muslims as side characters and the reason behind demonising the Muslim character.

THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS
IN MUSLIM SOCIAL GENRE

There is no separate Hindu genre, as Hindu rituals and beliefs are the dominant norms of the society. Thus, film historians like Rachel Dwyer, Ira Bhaskar and Ravi Vasudevan mentioned and categorized the Muslim Social genre separately. In the Muslim Social genre, the focus of representation was mostly on the Muslim aristocratic life of the north Indian region of Awadh, ignoring the vast majority of the Muslim community in the country. This genre was marked by its focus on the decadent feudal aristocracy, on the one hand, and the grandeur of architecture and opulent interiors of the aristocratic households, as shown in *Najma* (1943), *Chudhvin Ka Chand* (1963), *Mere Huzoor* (1968), and many other films (Bhaskar and Alan 2009) on the other. While advertising the film *Najma* (1943), Mehboob Khan referred to ‘the grand Majestic yet serene Domestic life of the U.P. Nawabs’ (cited in Bhaskar 2009: 70). As *nawabs* were the primary focus in classical Muslim Social films, Irfan Engineer states,

> During its early periods there were a whole lot of Bollywood films that represented life of elite Muslim. There are very few stories where poor Muslims are central characters. There are films that focus on Muslims, Muslim lives, Muslim culture, but always elite Muslim, the upper class converts, the Nawabi Muslims. So the films like Mere Mehboob, is all about Nawabi culture (Personal interview, 14 September 2012).

Rarsa Venkateshwar Rao mentions,

> The Muslim characters in these films spoke a strange and stilted Urdu—which a majority of non-Urdu speakers took for a sophisticated and delicate language—and recited verse at every turn, spent an enormous time in saying their hellos and goodbyes—elaborate *aadaabs* and the *khuda hafizs*. They were mostly from *nawabi* families, and they almost always came from Lucknow. All they ever seemed to do was move in and out of their *havelis*, visiting the *tawaif's kotha* as one would perhaps a movie-hall, falling in and out of love, and all that, and all that (1997: n.p.).
The earliest Muslim social films such as *Yad* (directed by Mazhar Khan) and *Najma* (directed by Mehboob Khan) were both released in 1943. These films became a site of controversy for the representation of Muslims in exaggerated way. They were not well accepted by the film critics of the time as well. For example, Mazhar Khan’s *Yad* was vilified as:

Was it necessary that because *Yad* happened to be a story of Muslim family life, one of its legal situations should also be decided in a multi-bearded court? This was rather too much of a Muslim colour to a Muslim subject. The court scene should not have had Pakistan paint on it (*Filmindia*, March 1943: 57).

Similarly, Shayam Benegal mentions that, after independence, there was a conscious effort to make the Muslim characters as secular because of conflicting issues like Partition and riots. To represent them as secular, they were repetitively portrayed as *nawabs* and, as a result, they have become the victim of stereotyped image. Benegal says,

*Because you became self consciously secular, if I have created a Muslim character, we always had to be very good and that is another reason of representing Muslims as Nawab all the time* (Personal Interview, 29 June 2013).

These stereotyped images were portrayed not only by Hindu filmmakers but also by many Muslim filmmakers. Being a Muslim, Mehboob Khan made the earliest Muslim Social, *Najma* (1943), which laid the foundation of the Muslim Social genre, and followed it by another Muslim Social, *Elaan* (1947). Both these films critiqued *nawabi* class and put emphasis on western education (see Masud 2005: n.p.). Because of the critical approach of these two films by Mehboob Khan, *Filmindia* (October 1943: 57) reviewed the film *Elaan* (1947) and stated that ‘the film misrepresents Muslim life’, and, that ‘as a good Muslim himself’, it was Mehboob’s ‘sacred duty to present his community in the best light possible’, because the ‘crude and vulgar behaviour towards her husband’ of Raziya cannot be taken as an accurate portrayal of the ‘relationship between a middle-class Muslim husband and his wife’ (cited in Bhaskar and Alan 2009: 70). Similarly, if we look at the making of the Muslim Social genre in the 1960s and 1970s, we find that most of those involved in those films were Muslims such as Mehboob Khan (director of *Elan* and *Pukar*), Aghajani Kashmeri (writer of *Najma*), Mahammad Sadiq (director of *Chaudhvin Ka Chand, Bahu Begam*), Kamal Amrohi (director, producer and writer of *Pakeezah*), Muzaffar Ali (director of *Umrao Jaan*), and Jan
Nissar Akhtar (producer of *Bahu Begam*). Ghulam Mahammad, Rafiq Ghaznavi, Naushad, Shakeel Badayuni, Mahammad Rafi, and Shahir Ludhianvi were among the main music composers, singers and lyricists of the time. Though there was a strong presence of Muslim filmmakers, they did not explore the key issues faced by the community. The same issue is critiqued by Chada and Kavoori, who say, ‘these films explored a rather limited terrain in that they were almost exclusively focused on the lives of the “ashraf”, or former aristocratic elites of the Northern Indian state of Awadh, a very minor part of the Muslim community in India’ (2008: 136).

But filmwriter, Shibani Bhatija thinks differently,

> Again it has got to do with the changing aspects of society also the people making the films. You had people like Mehboob Khan. They were well versed with the life of Lucknow and wherever else. There were novelists, writers. If you go back to the time and look at the names of the writers, how many Muslim writers were there? (Personal interview, 11 April 2013).

We discussed that Muslim Social films were criticised for not being realistic, though a lot of Muslim filmmakers were involved in making films in the Muslim Social genre, be it as director, producer, music composer and sometimes all of them. But Nandini Ramnath thinks that the Muslim Socials were the portrayal of Muslim world and those films aimed for basically Muslim audience. She mentions,

> Muslim social is fantasy based genre, fantasy is a too strong a word, but even escapist is a too strong a word, but the genre that are part real and part romantic fantasy. Muslim socials which are partly based on real-life. There are definitely neighbourhoods like that, people like that, but they behave in a slightly different way. I usually see Muslim characters these days in those contexts as you know films like 60s, 70s, Tawaif, Chaudhvin ka Chand, later Nikaah, essentially films that were set in a Muslim world or feature Muslim’s world, are often not necessarily made by Muslims but I think were aimed at treating Muslims as a separate audience and catering to their needs and desires and fantasies and their sort of the moral values and moral ecosystem (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

Although there were many criticisms about the absence of ordinary working-class Muslims in the Muslim Social genre, there were two films — *Yad* and *Naukar* — which represented the lead protagonists as working-class individuals. *Yad* (directed by Mazhar Khan, 1943) interpreted the love story of a *tanga-walla* and horse-shoe artisan’s daughter. Another film *Naukar* (directed by Shaukat Hussain Rizvi, 1943) focused on Fazlu who is the servant of Islamudin. In the
course of events, Fazlu is wrongly accused for the death of his master’s son. Apart from these two films, ordinary Muslim life is represented in the New Wave films.

One interesting development took place in the earlier period in which Muslims were represented in non-Islamic social genres. Though they were portrayed as side characters, they played an important role. For example, films like Padosi (directed by V. Shantaram, 1941), Bhalai (directed by Nazir Ahmen Khan, 1943), Bhai Chara (directed by G.K. Mehta, 1943) and Dhool Ka Phool (directed by Yash Raj Chopra, 1959) propagated themes like national integration through inter-community amnity, brotherhood and friendship between communities. Bombay film industry very conciously represented community relations to combat burning communal tensions before the independence as well. Whatever may be the reason, there was an increased presence of Muslims in the films which were produced in the 1940s and 1950s.

From the 1970s, there was a new trend in representing Muslims; they were portrayed as ‘lower-class Muslims rather than aristocrats associated with a glorious past’ (Dwyer 2006: 126). Coolie (directed by Manmohan Desai, 1983) was the first Muslim film which represented a superstar like Amitabh Bachchan as downtrodden person standing up against upper-class people and raising voice for the rights of the downtrodden. Fareed Kazmi states, the socio-political reason behind making Coolie by giving an account of the political scenario of the time. Mrs Indira Gandhi had returned to power again in 1980. Having used both populist (Garibi Hatao, abolish poverty) and coercive measures (the Emergency) before, she did not have much left in her political armoury for survival. Finally, she opted for the ‘number game’ by ‘emphasising the numerical power of the majorities versus the minorities’ (Kazmi 1999:116). Later, after the army action in Punjub, ‘Mrs Indira Gandhi openly and directly said in Garhwal that the Hindu dharma was under attack. And she made an impassioned appeal to save the Hindu sanskriti (culture) from the attack that was coming from the Sikhs, the Muslims and the others’ (ibid.). Kazmi further mentions that the repeat value of the film among Muslims is the reason for the huge success of the film: ‘Coolie was released at a time when the Muslims were generally sulking, feeling insecure, cornered and on the defensive...thus its timing was such that it was bound to go down very well with Muslim audience’ (ibid.: 117).
Further, the dominance of middle-class Muslims became more prominent may be because of the association of Amitabh Bachan in the films like Mukaddar Ka Sikandar (directed Prakash Mehra, 1978) and Coolie. The latter film became more famous for its symbolic use of the number ‘786’, which is considered as an auspicious number by Muslims, as it literally means Bismillaah al-Rahmaan al-Raheem (In the name of God, most Gracious, and most Compassionate). Though, in Islam, there is no special meaning for this number, it is translated and used in India and Pakistan. The following dialogue from the film Coolie made the number most famous: ‘Apni taarif jara lambi hai. Bachpan se hain sar pe Allah ka haath aur Allahrakha hai apne sath. Baju pe 786 ka hain billa, 20 number ki bidi pita hu. Kam karta hun Coolie ka aur naam hai Iqbal’. In a personal interview, Rauf Ahmed mentioned about Amitabh Bachhan’s famous character in Coolie and how ‘786’ was loosely interpreted:

*I mean even using constantly, 786 that thing which Amitabh used in his film, 'Coolie', is a kind of stereotyping. These are all symbolic use of things; there is no such thing as a representation of a Muslim character with all the complexities involved being a Muslim character* (Personal interview, 28 August 2013).

To mention the transition of Muslim characters, Teesta Setalvad narrates,

*You have certain kind of images in cinema in 1970s and 1980s. The film, like Amar Akbar Antony, used the formula of unity and later was followed by many films, although Hindu used to be a big brother or the main protagonist* (Personal interview, 4 September 2012).

Women in Muslim Socials were positioned in the most marginalized manner than men because the genre mystifies the body of woman with the idea of purdah (veil/curtain) ‘which confines women to the interior spaces of the home and physically segregates them through walls, curtains and screens as well as restrict their activities outside the home’ (Bhaskar and Alan 2009: 81). Muslim women in Hindi cinema, especially in the Muslim Socials, are doubly marginalised because of being a woman and a representative of a minority community. Purdah upholds the dignity of a woman; nevertheless, she suffers from confusion associated with the veil. But purdah also ‘dramatises the romance’, because it mystifies women’s body through concealing secrets. Najma is the only Muslim social film, which criticises purdah system because of its oppressive nature. On the other hand, purda acted as a catalyst for mystifying romance in Mere Mehboob. The Muslim Socials
express both tragedy and romance through purdah system. I interviewed veteran film director Shyam Benegal, who has used burqa (veil) in an oppressive way or to mock the society (Well Done Abba). During the interview, when asked the reason for the same, he said,

If you take my opinion, I think the custom of wearing burqa, which I find is not very interesting. It also has a sense of security and safety for a lot of women. You are much more secured when you have burqa. They feel that they can't be attacked. It’s like armour, precaution. I asked many women they tell it’s not because of belief but I feel safer when I go out alone on the street. If you are going in a bus and a lady is wearing burqa, people will leave her alone and there will not be any sexual gesture (Personal Interview, 29 June 2013).

Irfan Engineer says, Muslims and specially Muslim women were represented in a stereotyped way from the early history of Hindi cinema:

They were very much stereotypical. Muslim women, burqa, mostly hardly, or at least that salwar kameez dress. It is a typical Muslim salwar kameez dress with head covered and all that. So mostly, you will rarely find a normal secular character having name as Muslim (Personal interview, 14 September 2012).

Courtesan characters are mostly visible in the Muslim Social genre. The next section will focus on the Muslim courtesan films.

THE MUSLIM COURTESAN FILMS

Courtesan films can be categorized into two broad categories: the Hindu and the Muslim courtesan films; contemporary and historical courtesan films. The Muslim courtesan films are the focus of this study. The Muslim courtesan films constitute an independent genre, but I have kept them as a separate section in the chapter on Muslim Social genre because courtesan films also can be categorised as a sub-genre of social or historical films. In fact, courtesan characters are mostly visible in the Muslim Historical and the Muslim Socials genres: the famous Muslim courtesan films (for example, Umrao Jaan (directed Muzaffar Ali, 1978); Pakeezah (directed Kamal Amrohi, 1971) were mostly produced in the 1970s and 1980s when the Muslim Social genre was most popular. Another reason for putting courtesan films in this chapter is that they mainly carry patriarchal social values and focus on women’s status in Muslim society, and so on. Moreover, these films
are not too elaborate to be kept as a separate chapter and I do not have much primary data on them.

Courtesans are the central characters or main protagonists in the courtesan genre. Courtesan singer-dancer is ‘a figure of ancient lineage in Indic culture’ (Bhaskar and Alan 2009: 44). The courtesan culture was a part of the early history of Hindi cinema where courtesans were presented in minor roles that were mostly represented as Hindu. Rachel Dwyer says, ‘Many of the courtesans in north India took Muslim, often Shi’ite, names even if they were Hindus to associate themselves with Lucknawi culture’ (2006: 117). Courtesan culture flourished in Lucknow, in present day Uttar Pradesh in North India, and a cultural hub until the early twentieth century. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Lucknow, courtesan culture achieved the maximum popularity and became a highly sophisticated and respected institution that was patronized by the nawab’s. Dwyer (2006) draws close similarities between Oldenburg’s study on courtesans and Umrao Jaan’s story as narrated by Ruswa. Courtesans were either sold — much like Umrao was kidnapped and sold by her father’s enemy in the film Umrao Jaan — or sometimes they were born into the trade. They were given lessons in ‘music, Persian and Urdu poetry, Arabic grammar, and to dance the mujra, a dance where she pays her respects to the assembly rather than offering an erotic spectacle’ (Dwyer 2006:117). Sometimes, the king associated himself with a kotha, by bidding for a virgin. He became the sole patron of that lady and later his friends were also privileged to enjoy exclusive sexual relationship with the twaif. In exchange, they, along with the king, were obliged to make regular contributions of cash and jewellery. Moreover, the sons of the gentry were sent to the kothas to learn etiquette and the art of lovemaking.

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7 A native governor during the time of Mughal period in India. Nawabs enjoyed a high social status.

8 Dancing and singing by twaif in the mehfil (gathering) infront of male or mixed audience.

9 Twaif is defined in different ways such as a dancing-singing girl, a prostitute, and courtesan. In this study, twaif and courtesan are used interchangeably.
**Courtesan: An Art of Seduction**

The courtesan films are considered to be classic examples of female objectification in cinema. In these films the audience put themselves in the position of heterosexual men and fantasise courtesans as ‘spectacle par excellence: she is a body to be looked at, the place of sexuality, an object of desire’ (Chakravarty 1993: 273), thus making courtesan characters the objects of ‘male gaze’. Laura Mulvey, in her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, introduces the idea of male gaze: ‘The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness’ (1975: 19).

The courtesan film stars enjoyed the power of seduction and that marked a new behavioural norm, propagated new values and served as a mode for the construction of women’s self-image in Indian society. The films of this genre convey the concept of seduction as a form of art through the visual aesthetic, that is, by their use of Islamicate costumes, flowery Urdu language, gesture, and expression. The Muslim courtesan film genre objectified women as a subject of male desire by representing them as the epitome of culture in the persona of the *tawaif* (courtesan). Along with seduction, the courtesan films locate Muslims in the glamorous past where they are represented as exotic with their glittery jewellery, dazzling clothing and alluring dance steps. The representation is so out of the ordinary that they are archaic and outmoded in the modern world.

In an attempt to portray the courtesan as desirable and seductive, filmmakers use glittery and richly coloured cloths, transparent veil, heavy jewellery, and heavy make-up including eyes darkened with kohl and painted palms and feet, thus making their identity an exotic one. In these films, elaborate cloths were used to objectify women through costume, which is an important component of eroticism and sexuality. Stella Bruzzi argues that clothing ‘is foreground in the courtesan film, where the heroine’s clothes heighten sexuality by their opulence and rich colours and textures, and their elaboration presents an exaggerated exhibition of gender difference. The veil is used to effect the film to hid and conceal, in a display of eroticism than modesty, seen in the first song of Pakeezah (‘Inhen logon
ne...)’ (cited in Dwyer 2006: 119). In the course of interview, Divya, one of the participants just remembered the intricate clothing and said,

There were films, which had all these dance sequences, and the characters dressed with all the gold, bigger chains much like Aiswariya Rai wore in Umrao Jaan Ada (2006) (Personal Interview: 14 January 2013).

Courtesan films locate Muslims in the exotic and glamorous past, much like the Muslim Historicals discussed in the earlier chapter. In both the cases, Muslims are represented as exotic and different, ‘meaning that their presence in the modern world is anachronistic, for they are archaic, outmoded and non-modern, even if they are exotic and beguiling’ (Dwyer 2006: 122). Looking at the representational pattern, we can say, Hindi cinema is the dominant form of public culture where Muslims are always represented as exotic and Others. ‘Indian public culture continues to position the Muslim as Other, making it clear how Muslim can be a citizen of modern India’ (ibid.)

Echoing the same, Al Nasir Jakaria mentions that films on Muslims basically represented them in a stereotyped way, which leads to negative conclusion that men are mostly as nawabs and women as tawaifs.

Even if you see Muslim women, usually you see them what they call in Hindi like sitting in a quota [tawaif] or you know there is a mehfil arranged and rich people [nawab] come to that place. The boss [head mistress] over there is arranging other courtesans for them. The lady is apparently given some fancy Muslim name. I think by and large the representation is negative (Personal Interview, 27 August 2012).

In the Muslim courtesan films, lyrics and music have also played an important role. The best courtesan houses used to keep skilled male musicians who had mastery in Urdu poetry. In the film Umrao Jaan, Umrao Jaan used to discuss Urdu poetry with Maulvi Shahib the lyrics of the songs are always seductive. This became very clear in Umrao Jaan, when she sings: ‘In aankon ki masti masti ke, aah aah aah aah, in aakhon ki masti ke mastaane hazaaron hain’ (The lust of these eyes, there are thousands intoxicated by the lust of these eyes). Similarly, Shaheebjaan sings in Pakeezah: ‘Tere aakhon ko aakhon se choomne hum lage, tujkhobaahon me lekar jhoomne hum lage’ (I am kissing your eyes with my eyes, taking you in my arms, I am swirling around). Sometimes, courtesans detailed their beauty regimen in their songs as Shaheebjasan sings: ‘Thare rahio o baanke yaar, thaharolagayaau, naino me kajarachotee me gundlaauphulokaagajara,
maiko karaoke shringaar re’ (Stay, I shall adorn my eyes with kohl, darling, I shall braid a garland of flowers into my top knot, I shall adorn myself with sixteen traditional ornaments). Along the lyrics, the sensuous and well-modulated voices of singers heightened a ‘level of intimacy between the protagonists and articulate yearning which visual could not do so’ (Somaaya et. al. 2012: 11).

Between Seduction and Moralism

In the Muslim courtesan films, courtesans are represented as a sexualised object to be displayed in contrast to the other women in those films. The courtesan characters are most frequently represented as women who acquire different social and economic status than the other female protagonists in the films. The Muslim courtesan films are guided by the middle-class patriarchal values about seduction and respectability. Though men like the nawab or the gentry could have a relationship with a courtesan and even love her, but they could not marry her. Thus, nawab Sultan rejects Umrao Jaan and marries another woman to please his family in the film Umrao Jaan (1981, 2006). In Pakeezah (1972), Shahibjaan, being a twaif, could not marry Salim Ahmed Khan. She leaves him to avoid societal pressure and to allow her beloved to live a respectable life. At the end of the film, it is revealed that she belongs to the same family and she gets married to Salim Ahmed Khan. Thus, sex and respectability have an inter-linked relationship in our society. In those films, even the relatives of a courtesan could not marry into a respectable family due to their degraded social status. In the film, Mere Mehboob (1963), the central protagonist Anwar Hossain who is brother of a courtesan and accepted as a prospective groom of Husna (heroine of the film) only after showcasing his ethics and moral to her brother.

Women in courtesan films always aspire to be with a man from an esteemed family. She could not achieve a respectable identity unless she found shelter as the wife of a respectable man. Though Shahibjaan and Umrao Jaan are successful in their field of singing and dancing, they could not achieve a noble identity for themselves. In Pakeezah, Shahibjaan always wanted to leave her twaif’s life and pined to be with her beloved, who incidentally leaves a note, admiring her feet. Her cousin made her understand that the note is not for a twaif like her. Here, cousin
acts as a moral agent of the society. John Berger in his essay ‘Ways of Seeing’, mentions that social presence of a man is different from that of a woman. He points out, ‘While men act, women appear, while men survey, women are surveyed. Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. Thus a woman becomes an object, an object of vision, a sight to be seen’ (1985: 112). Later, towards the end of the film, when Shahibjaan is betrayed by the whole world and was compelled to leave her beloved, she comes back to the kotha, which is the only option left for a courtesan. She metaphorically compares her body to a corpse. She tells her female cousin sister who is also twaif:

> My vagabond dead body has returned to be buried in this colourful tomb…every courtesan is a dead body. I am a dead body and you too. And this marketplace is a graveyard of women whose souls are dead but bodies remain alive. These mansions are our tombs in which the living coffins of we dead women are kept after being decorated. Our coffins are left open…I am a restless dead body of one such open coffin which is lured by life again again.\(^{10}\)

Courtesan characters in all the films are self-dependent and economically independent, which leads to the defeminised identity of women in popular culture. According to Indian tradition, men are in a position to empower women providing them economic and social security. But, courtesan’s economic autonomy leads to identifying them as demoralised persons. Sumita S. Chakravarty mentions, ‘In this way Indian mass culture links the taint of money with the taint of women’ (1993: 276). There is a dichotomy between the real courtesan’s life and the represented one. Oldenburg mentions,

> Most women told their stories with enthusiasm. They had wanted to escape “hell” (the word jahannum, the Islamic hell, was frequently used to describe their earlier homes) at any cost. Learning professional skills and earning their own money helped them develop self-esteem and value the relative independence they encountered in Rahat Jan’s kotha (1990: 267).

Most of the courtesan films represented the tragic end of courtesans. Being expert in their field and economically independent, they always try to fit into the regular woman character; but once refused by the society, she sacrifices her life instead of counter attacking, the whole system. Najma in Mere Mehboob (1963) and famous courtesan character Zohra in Muqaddar ka Sikaddar (1978) had to

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\(^{10}\) The dialogue is extracted from courtesan film Pakeezah and translated by me.
sacrifice their life at the end of the film and the films were well accepted by the mass audience.

MUSLIMS AS MARGINAL CHARACTERS

In the earlier sections, we have discussed the romanticised representation of the Nawabi culture of Muslims until the 1970s. There was also another interesting development in representing Muslims during this period. In the early history of Hindi cinema, Muslims had played as character actors in non-Muslim social genre, albeit they played ‘side roles’. But, in this period, those characters became most notable. They were pushed to ten to fifteen-minute slots of a three-hour length film. Those characters were represented as hero’s most loyal friend or an honest person. Those side characters like Imam Saheb/Rahim Chacha (Sholey 1975), Zohra Bai (Muqaddar Ka Shikandar 1978), Rahim chacha (Khud Daar 1982), Bighu Chacha (Dacait 1987), etc., were most visible in the mainstream cinema as the makers of those films tried to reach to the lowest common denominator. Though the side characters were used as stock repertoire, their identities were always projected as Muslims who were the ‘Other’. ‘We thought of Rahim Chachas and Ruksana behens as Muslim and not much else... we thought of these north-Indian upper-caste Hindu heroes and heroines as Indian’ (Cine Blitz 2012). This was done purely for a commercial reason, according to Rauf Ahmed:

I don’t think there is some serious representation of Muslims in Hindi films. Filmmakers use the word ‘chacha’ frequently with some name attached to it such as Rahim Chacha. The side character does not play an important role in the whole film. He is just there to give Islamicate flavour in the film. Sometimes Muslim audiences find some identification with those Muslim characters as well. Rahim chacha becomes a father figure to them. And he [A. K. Hangal] himself told me once, ‘in five films, I am Rahim chacha’ (Personal interview, 28 August 2013).

Film journalist and film critic Nandini Ramnath thinks much like that of Rauf Ahmed. Filmmakers’ ‘production and film-goers’ consumption are the two key factors in film business and these two are controlled by the Hindu majority. Putting a Muslim side character, they do not offend the minority community, also. She tells with a lot of hesitation,
The film business is run by majority and the majority happens to be Hindu in India. As it is a business, it is always a mixture of philosophy, art and commerce. So filmmakers do not offend Muslim viewers beyond a point. But because of their minority identity, filmmakers do not make entire movies about them as it is common belief that public doesn’t want to watch them [minority] (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt echoed that, if a Muslim character takes the centre stage of a film, the film does not find takers. To substantiate the statement, he cited a research conducted by one of his friends:

Recently a very responsible person, who works for one of the major television networks, came and said to me in private about a research, which was conducted on audience consumption and reception all over India. The research indicates that majority of the viewers don’t want to see the serials which have overtly Islamic even in remote villages. Muslim stories and Muslim characters do not find viewers. He also said to me that once they changed the story to Hindu names, they found the response was stunningly high. It is sad but it is true. Despite being all the talk of secular fabric, there is deep divide inside. People’s choice becomes clear from the pattern of audience consumption because they try to follow similar thing what they watch in the entertainment world in their real life (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).

Filmmaker Shyam Benegal advanced a political reason apart from business for the presence of noticeable Muslim side characters in Hindi films, particularly in this period, albeit his explanation carries strong indirect business aspects with it.

Nadira: Why are Muslim side characters visible mostly in the 1970s and 1980s?
Benegal: That’s because there was a fear in the film industry, if you have dominant Muslim characters in a film, it may not run because of the war between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Also, there was always little fear particularly because of Partition (Personal Interview, 29 June 2013).

Film writer Shibani Bhatija has a completely different opinion regarding Muslim side characters. She says,

Films are the reflections of a society. So we are not living in ghettos, a Rahim chacha can be present in a village or a family doctor can be a Muslim. Audiences are from so many religions. When you have a character who speaks like them or look like them, you are creating identification. That’s what it is (Personal interview, 11 April 2013).

As already mentioned in this section, Muslims are portrayed as honest and loyal. Activist Irfan Engineer mentions how Muslim characters transformed from being honest and loyal friends to gangsters and terrorists, because we see a new trend from the late 1980s of representing Muslims in these terms. Engineer points out,
Much like Rahim Chacha’s character in Sholay, you will find a series of Muslim characters who are sort of side character, marginal characters but portrayed as very honest. But I remember that Bal Thackeray some decades ago issued a threat to Bollywood. He said, ‘You portray Muslims as all honest people and Hindus as goons and villains whereas we have Dawood Ibrahim here in our society. Why Dawood Ibrahim is not reflected on the screen?’ And then suddenly, the trend changed. Films on terrorism, bad characters and underworld started getting produced (Personal interview, 14 September 2012).

Muslim characters are not always an important part of a film. They have only a token presence, thinks film critic Nandini Ramnath. She mentions,

*When movies were about sweet and simple things like families that are separated or love stories or dramas, they used to be Muslim characters, but if you had a dacoit movie, for instance, there would be one Muslim, the right hand guy would be some Pathan or some Rakaa or some name which is sort of slightly ambiguous* (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

At the end of 1970s, there was emergence of new wave Muslim Social films. In the next section, I will elaborate on the same.

**NEW WAVE: MUSLIM SOCIAL**

In the earlier sections, we have discussed that Muslim Socials focused more on *nawabi* and *tehzeeb* (high) culture and ignored the ‘economic struggles and social discrimination of common folk’ (Bhaskar and Alen 2009: 91). In contrast, the New Wave Muslim Socials represented Muslims as common man/woman and their day-to-day regular problems in a real setting. These films represented ordinary working-class or middle-class Muslims and the hardship of their day-to-day life. They addressed ‘social discrimination, the economic deprivation and communal violence that ordinary Muslims faced on an everyday level’ (ibid.).

‘New Wave Muslim Social’ is an umbrella term that signifies different filmmaking practices such as cinematic realism, elimination of melodramatic style of storytelling, real setting, and new set of filmmakers. The New Wave movement was started in France in the early 1950s and 1960s, but in India the emergence of New Wave movement started only around the 1960s and 1970s. In India, there was, no doubt, a trend in realist filmmaking influenced by Italian neo-realist films long before new wave movement by critically acclaimed filmmakers such as
Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak and Mrinal Sen in the 1950s and early 1960s. But, in those parallel films, Muslims were never represented as central characters. Even though there were so many Muslim directors, producers, and writers in the Hindi film industry, realistic portrayal was always kept aside, thinks noted documentary filmmaker and film critic Nasreen Musnni Kabir. She opined,

There were not many films on partition. Somehow, Hindi cinema is really side away from realistic portrayal of Muslims. Although many of the filmmakers were Muslims, and many of the shayars, lyricist, writers were the Muslims. Even a film like Mother India (produced, written, directed by Mehboob Khan) which is a symbol of Indian cinema but there is no Muslim character (Personal interview, 11 February 2013).

Shyam Benegal (2007) argues that there are basically two reasons behind making new wave films in that period. Firstly, after independence, studio culture struggled for its existence and new entrepreneur class started emerging to finance the film production. So, in this period, mostly formula films were made because filmmaking was a high-risk business. At that time, popular cinema represented religious and ethnic communities, including Muslims as a token. Muslims as central characters were represented only in classic Muslim Socials.

Secondly, filmmakers who graduated from the film institutes such as Film and Television Institute in India and National School of Drama and started making films which were funded by the Film Finance Corporation. Because of the state sponsorship, the films were not made only to make profit, but they attempted ‘to provide a more realistic depiction of contemporary Indian life’ (Needham and Rajan 2007: 234). In this genre, one of the most significant films was M.S. Sathu’s Garam Hawa (1973). As there was not much business risk in film portraying Muslims due to the state finance, filmmakers started making off-beat films such as Salim Langde pe Mat Ro (directed by Saeed Akhtar Mirza, 1986), and Naseem (directed by Saeed Akhtar Mirza, 1995) which were produced by National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC). Benegal argues that, ‘...until Garam Hawa was made, Muslim characters in popular Hindi films were routinely depicted in token roles, and often without blemish. In the way they were separated from the community, effectively making them the Other’ (2007: 234). In a personal interview, he echoed the same and said,

If you ask my opinion, they are not representative at all because those movies dealt with the subject like nawab, sarab, kabab. Muslim Social means it’s a nawab.
One of the very important films in early 1970s, after the war between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the film called Garam Hawa which broke away from this stereotype, say, Rahim chacha's stereotype (Personal interview, 29 June 2013).

In the same article ‘Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema’, Shyam Benegal has pointed out that Garam Hawa was made after the partition between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1971. Before that, there was at least a little hope of migration for Indian Muslims to go back to Pakistan, but after the creation of Bangladesh, people realised language also can cause anxiety. The option of migration for Indian Muslims became irrelevant and Muslim nationalism was no longer an important question. So Benegal says, ‘A film of this kind would have been impossible to make before 1971’ (ibid.: 235).

Madhav Prasad (1998) has argued that New Wave films led to different dimensions in Hindi cinema. Directors such as Sagar Sarhadi, Hrisikesh Mukherjee, Basu Chatterjee, and Baladev Raj Chopra made films, which had realistic themes that glamorised stars (for example, Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, Supriya Pathak, Farooq Sheikh, etc.) but had song sequences like the mainstream cinema. The combination became very popular and Madhav Prasad terms it as ‘middle class’ cinema (ibid.). This ‘middle cinema’ or ‘middle class cinema’ impacted on Muslim representation as well. Films such as Bazaar (1982) by Sagar Sarhadi and Nikah (1982) by Baladev Raj Chopra dealt with Muslim community and portrayed various themes, which were attached to the community such as patriarchal system, economic hardship, and status of women. These films had Muslim central characters. Bazaar (1982), set in Hyderababd, portrayed parents who were forced to sell their daughters to the affluent Sheiks from the Gulf countries due to financial circumstances. The film also points out the custom of multiple marriages as the biggest problem of the Muslim community. The film has on its cast parallel film stars like Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, Supriya Pathak, and Farooq Sheikh. While talking with Asgar Ali Engineer about the film, he lamented,

Even today just two years ago, a 70-year-old Arab came and married two girls at a time; one after the other Nikah was performed. Both were about 19-20 years old and obtained a fatwa that such nikah is valid. And later they ran away. The Quran does not allow that. That is not the intention of The Quran. The Quran does not encourage marrying any women you like. You can marry a woman who is widow and orphan and that also to take care of their properties (Personal interview, 8 December 2012).
Another film, *Nikaah* (1982) also stood out in the decade and carried a patriarchal message and women’s status in the institution of marriage within the Muslim community. Though the film tried to portray the problem of triple *talaq* within the community, it represented the issue in a superficial way. Rauf Ahmed says,

*Nikaah was made by B. R. Chopra, one of the biggest filmmakers at that time and again, it was based on talaq-talaq-talaq. How easily you can free yourself from a marriage. It’s not actual representation* (Personal interview, 28 August 2013).

By the mid-1980s, Muslim social genre started losing its attraction and gradually disappeared from the Indian film history apart from the sporadic appearance of such films.

**THE EXTINCTION OF THE MUSLIM SOCIAL GENRE**

This section will examine the possible reasons behind the waning of the Muslim Social genre: it started losing its charm from the late 1980s and mid-1990s; it completely lost its colour afterwards. Shvetal Vyas (2001) observes, if Muslim Social is made today, it would seem anachronistic, not because Muslim culture has disappeared from India, but it exists in a different way that needs new cinematic interpretation. He mentions two reasons. First, in cinema, Indian identity has become conflated with north Indian and west Indian identity. Secondly, ‘religious identity in a non-issue based film seems anachronistic because what we understand and see as “natural” or “real” is a depoliticised, non-religious space’ (ibid.: 2). Rauf Ahmed recounts the first failure of Muslim Social:

*By the time they came to Deedar-E-Yaar (1982), it collapsed badly. Nobody went to the theatre because one of the biggest failures in spite of a huge star cast — Rishi Kapoor, Jeetendra, Rekha, all big-time actors at that time — it flopped because by then, the glamorization of Muslim lifestyle and parde-ke-peche (behind the veil) kind of a thing was nostalgia which they used in Mere Mehboob (1963) (Personal interview, 28 August 2013).*

Film critic Nanadini Ramnath thinks that the idea of Lucknowi culture went away because of large number young audience who were more interested in travel, global culture, and global locations.
...we have a very large number of young populations watching the movies, it will be interesting to see movies which fulfil their desires. It’s about consumerism. The movies are about travel such as Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara (2011) that drives them. Who wants to go back to some Lucknowi era, we are already in 2013. So nobody wants to go back in that (Personal interview 5 February 2013).

Along with the disappearance of Muslim Social genre, we saw the emergence of the new genre called The Muslim Political from the beginning of 1990s. I will elaborate this genre in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis presented in this chapter, above observation, it is clear that Muslim Socials always depicted ‘idealised Muslim world where Nawabs lived with all their grandeur and idiosyncrasies’ (Chada and Kavoori 2008:136); plots were based in Lucknow with grand architectures of tomb and minarets which are often associated with Islam. Protagonists lived in havelis. Women in this genre are basically burqa clad and a glimpse of their unveiled face help to build the romantic story and sometime create misunderstanding, which leads to tragedy. Moreover, tawaif (courtesans) lived in ill-reputed kothas. They are mostly seen in elaborate cloths and dazzling jewellery, which present them as a subject of ‘male gaze’. Men who were the visitors of those kothas generally spoke in flowery stylised Urdu language and suffered disappointment in love. The genre articulates the conflict between modern (reform, education, progress) and tradition (honour, dignity, devotion). There are critiques of the genre but we should acknowledge that the genre, upheld Muslim culture and identity at the time when Muslims were reduced in numbers after independence.

Apart from nawab, tawaif, elaborate costumes, poetic Urdu, and grand architecture in the Muslim Socials, there were Muslims who belonged to lower class. The first film, which portrayed that aspect, is Coolie. The narratives and systematic film reading show that Coolie was not the trendsetter, rather the film followed the same path of earlier films of that category. The film had added an economic reason, that is, it helped to generate more revenue. On the other hand, there was a set of films (Garam Hawa, Naseem, Salim Pangde Pe Mat Ro, etc.),
which dealt with real problems of Muslims such as Partition and related insecurity among minorities, economic deprivation, etc. But, these films were basically financed by the state, so they did not have much fear of audience acceptance. As there was no business risk, filmmakers were able to deal with the subject independently. Those films were called as ‘Parallel Cinema’. Moreover, there were films (Nikah, Bazzar, Mammo, etc.) based on community problems such as triple talaq, polygamy, etc. That is why these films were the combination of art house and mainstream cinema because of the existence of songs as well as based on real issues. These films are usually termed as ‘middle cinema’ or ‘middle class cinema’. Again, commerce is an important factor for a film subject.

Now-a-days, classic Muslim Social is completely absent from the industry; the last social film on Muslims was Fiza (2000). There are socio-political factors behind the dying of the Muslim Social genre. Among many other reasons, the primary reason is the audience consumption. A large section of the audience are young who do not have any idea of Lucknowi culture. At the end of 1980s and early 1990s, because of globalisation and liberalisation and the existence of different political scenario at the time, we see a new bunch of filmmakers who are dealing with different topics. There is the emergence of the new genre, ‘The Muslim Political’. In the next chapter, we shall discuss elaborately what Muslim Political genre is.