The representation of Muslims in Hindi cinema has undergone varied shifts in response to the socio-political situation of the times. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the films of the Historical genre (in the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called, Nehruvian era) reflected the “tolerant” secularism of the state and also depicted an idealized Muslim world in which nawabs lived with their grandeur and idiosyncrasies intact. The Muslim Social genre (in the 1970s and 1980s) saw the emergence of an alternative politics of minority representation. During this period, the aristocrats were pushed to hedonistic pursuits. Moreover, the portrayal of Mumbai’s underworld characters mostly as Muslims came into vogue during this era. At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the Hindu right-wing movement began taking shape aggressively in the country. We saw the emergence of the Muslim Political genre, which intertwined religion and politics, was born during this period. This genre explores the construction of communalism and nationalism by studying the position of Muslims in the complex representational scheme in popular Hindi films released in the 1990s and after. Moreover, Muslim political genre shows how Muslims as citizens and Islam as a religion have attracted negative attention in recent decades.

We have noticed through different genres (The Muslim Historical, The Muslim Social and The Muslim Political) that the popular Hindi cinema has dealt with the liminality of the Muslim Other in the nation space by representing Muslims either in stereotypical ways or by trying to appropriate the Muslim Other into the normative Hindu self. The films of the Muslim Contemporary films depart from earlier mainstream films’ stereotypical representation of Muslims to one in which Muslims are depicted as “evil” and alien to the nation. During a conversation with the film critic Nandini Ramnath regarding the Muslim Contemporary films, she interestingly pointed out,

What I like most in Iqbal (Directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, 2005) is that, it doesn’t make any fuss; you won’t realize the guy is Muslim till the end. In fact, it doesn’t even matter; he could have been named anything apart from Iqbal. It’s a silent film that says you are a Muslim hero (Personal Interview, 5 February 2013).
The Muslim contemporary films examine film narratives that represent Muslim characters without any symbol or identification. In these films, indicators such as language, cloth, and etiquette do not mark Muslim identity. Moreover, the Muslim Contemporary films focuses on current issues, which exist in our society irrespective of any religion. For example, Shaym Benegals’ *Well Done Abba* (2009), Shimit Amin’s *Chak De! India* (2007), Raj Kumar Gupta’s *Aamir* (2008), and Nagesh Kukunoor’s *Iqbal* (2005) and *Dor* (2006) focus on ordinary Muslims who face everyday problems such as lack of economic opportunities, corruption, and marginalisation of women. Even films produced after 2004 departed from the earlier stereotypical depiction of Muslims in mainstream films as ‘villains’ or ‘aliens’ to one in which Muslims were increasingly depicted as ‘good’, ‘sensible’ and ‘secular’ human beings. At times, they may sacrifice their lives for others and for the nation.

This chapter has three major sections. The first section deals with the films, which represent modern, secular Muslims who face social and economic hurdles. The second section interprets the representation of patriotic and noble Muslims and the burden of carrying their religious identity. In the last section, I have tried to locate the political economy of the industry to produce those modern representations.

**MODERN MUSLIMS IN CONTEMPORARY FILMS**

Hindi films seldom portray Muslims as modern, ordinary, secular characters albeit, in the recent times, we see this more often. Comedian Mehmood’s slapstick Hyderabadi Muslim character in *Gumnaam* (1965) can be considered the earliest example of this. In the recent times, characters like Farhan Qureshi in *3 Idiots* (2009), Aslam Khan in *Rang de Basanti* (2006) and Ali in *Dhoom* (2004) are some of the characters portrayed as Muslims. But all these above mentioned characters are not the central protagonists, but are portrayed as the side characters. Apart from the side characters, a new development in the recent years is the representation of modern/ordinary Muslims as central protagonists in the films such as *Chak de!*
India (2007), My Name is Khan (2010), Iqbal (2005), Aamir (2008), Shahid (2012), Dor (2006), and Well done Abba (2010).

The above mentioned film narratives are quite different from the earlier genres as none of these films deals with kings/nawabs, terrorism, tawaif, gangsters or veiled beauties. The most striking difference in Muslim Contemporary films is the representation of Muslim women. In the earlier genres, women were mainly characterised as tawaif or behind the veil. In this genre, they are mostly liberal, even in some films, for example, in Dor, Zeenat is portrayed as more self-independent than the character of Meera. In Well Done Abba, Muskaan, the central protagonist, fights along with his father against corruption in bureaucracy. Muskaan neither wears veil nor dwells in a palace like earlier genre. She has a normal middle-class living. In this film, there is another aspect where women are commodified as Muskaan’s friend Shakina gets married with an Arab Sheikh in exchange for money. Similar incidents are prevalent irrespective of religion in our society. As Nandini Ramnath mentioned,

Well Done Abba happens to be a Muslim film but it is basically about the well [a shaft sunk into the ground to obtain water] (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

Apart from the representation of modern women, there are films where Muslims face social and political crisis. For example, Shahid (directed by Hansal Mehta, 2012) represents the biography of lawyer and social activist Shahid Azmi. Azmi himself was also arrested under TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and was forced to admit the crime of terrorism that he did not commit. Later, he becomes a lawyer and the film shows how he fights for the cases of the people charged under POTA. Much like Shahid, Well Done Abba (directed by Shyam Benegal, 2009) is a political satire and won national award as the best film on social issues. It narrates the story of Armaan Ali, who applies for a government grant to build a well which can solve the water crisis of the village community. Though the official paper certifies that the well is constructed, due to corruption in the bureaucracy, the villagers do not get the well. Therefore, Armaan

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21 POTA refers to Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002. It is an act passed by Parliament of India with the objective of tightening the anti-terrorist activities. The act was abused because it arbitrarility used to target particular political party and many innocents. Later, in 2004, the act was repealed by The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.
Ali, along with his daughter, fights back for building the well in their village. Along with criticising the scam in our bureaucratic system, *Well Done Abba* also exposes few other aspects such as the problems of multiple marriages within the community and selling of daughters to Sheikhs of Saudi Arabia. But the crux of the film is to portray corruption in the bureaucracy. Another important film, *Dor* (2006), directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, narrates the story of two women who stay miles apart, but their fate connects them. The film starts with Zeenat Fatima, who desperately wants to save her husband’s life as he is on trial for murder in Saudi jail. The only possibility of his release is to get the signature of victim’s (Shekhar’s) wife (Meera) in the ‘mafi-nama’ (statement of forgiveness). Zeenat starts her journey from Himachal Pradesh to Rajasthan to get Meera’s signature. That attitude of Zeenat also proves herself once again to be self-determining, independent women. She becomes a good friend of Meera and finally she gets the signature in the statement of forgiveness. Later, Zeenat helps Meera to come out of her suffocated and tortured life. All these films do not exaggerate the Islamicate culture. Also, they do not represent Muslims as gangsters and Islamic terrorists; rather the protagonists of these films fight against judicial system, bureaucracy, and prejudices existing in our society. Above all, the characters do not carry the extra baggage of certain stereotypical symbols of Islam to make audience understand about their religious identity.

Now-a-days, audience also like to watch the modern characters and storyline. A particular class of people in a metro belong to a multi-cultural society and they work for MNCs (Multi National Company) where they meet people of different religion, ethnicity, and culture. Thus, once they see a person like him/her on the screen, they immediately identity with the person on the screen. Sayan Kundu, a participant, who is an engineer and works for a MNC said,

*I like to watch films on contemporary theme, so naturally the protagonists of the films are also contemporary. I can relate with them more. I go to office where in my project account; we have three Muslims within the total population of forty. So, no one can point out those three people separately. But, if I find the way Muslims are represented in few old films like Mughal-E-Azam, Pakeezah which I find very absurd in modern context* (Personal interview 7 August 2012).

The above-mentioned films portray Muslims as modern and secular persons who deal with contemporary issues. But, in this genre, there are few films where
Muslims are bound to prove their innocence and loyalty to the nation. In the next section, I will elaborate on that.

**Patriotic and Noble Muslims in Contemporary Films**

Although the Muslim Contemporary films do not carry any extra baggage of religion, there are films in the genre in which Muslims are made to prove their allegiance to the nation repetitively in spite of their liberal, modern and secular images. The film *Iqbal* (2005) uses a sequence where the protagonist Iqbal dreams that he wins a match against Pakistan. Also, a sports fan from the stadium shows a placard, which says, ‘If Zaheer can, Irfan can, Iqbal too’. This shows subtle emphasis on the importance to win the match against Pakistan being a Muslim player in the film. Similar to *Iqbal*, in the film *Aamir* (directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, 2008) Dr. Amir Ali sacrifices his life for the nation. He returns to India for a vacation and gets a cell phone from an unknown person. Later, he receives a call and eventually comes to know that his family has been kidnapped. He is forced to follow the caller’s instructions in order to save his family. He is instructed to plant bomb in a bus. The instructor justifies the work as he thinks that, being a Muslim, Aamir has some responsibilities towards his religion and it is better than staying abroad and doing a good job. Finally, he sacrifices his life to save others in the bus. The film ends with a note that Muslims can also forfeit their life for the sake of others.

In the film, *Chak De! India*, the character of Kabir Khan has to prove his nationalism. He wins back his dignity through coaching the national women’s hockey team. Here, Khan is not marked with any Islamic identifier, but he gets strength from the religion. Regarding the contemporary representation, Mahesh Bhatt opines,

*In Chak De! India, Kabir Khan had to prove his nationalism unless you confound to the idea of the majority says that is patriotism. A Muslim can't criticise this bogus patriotism and be patriotic. A Hindu can, Tagore used to criticise because he says, I love my country, that's why I criticise it. We have got away with it because he was Rabindranath Tagore. I feel there is a need to present a new (long...*
In *My Name is Khan*, the central protagonist Rizwan Khan counters the hegemony of terrorism. *My Name is Khan* is one of the first films where the protagonist believes in Islam and combines the theological understanding of Islam to counter the crisis. I will analyse in detail *My Name is Khan* and *Chak de! India* because protagonists in these films get the courage and inspiration from Islam to prove their innocence in spite of their identity crisis due to their religion. Moreover, these are mainstream films with a superstar like Shahrukh Khan. Both the films are hits. *Chak De! India* was the third highest grossing film of 2007 and *My Name is Khan* broke several earlier records (*Jodha Akbar* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*) in terms of box office collection. That proves that these films are not meant for a particular type of audience rather they are well received by different categories of audience irrespective of their religious, educational and economic status.

*My Name is Khan: A Drama of Identity Crisis*

This film is chosen for detailed analysis mainly because the central character in the film is not a terrorist. Even though the film *Aamir* also conveys a similar message of declaring ‘all Muslims are not terrorists’, the film positions the protagonist out of the Muslim world, whereas in the movie *My Name is Khan* the protagonist solves his problems and refers Quran to nullify all the bad deeds. The film faced many controversies during its exhibition. For example, the Shiv Sena wanted the film banned because of Shahrukh Khan’s remark on the absence of Pakistan’s cricket players in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

In the beginning, director introduces the central protagonist who suffers from Asperger’s syndrome, a form of autism. The film starts with the sound of typing on a keyboard of a desktop computer and a person searching President Bush’s travel itinerary on Google. The sequence captures the desperation of the individual who writes down all possible details of the itinerary. Later the person reaches San Francisco airport with a big backpack and few pebbles in his hand, uttering *Surah Ikhlas* (a Quranic verse). At this juncture, the director clarifies that the protagonist...
has Asperger’s syndrome, whose major characteristic is to repeat activities. Rizwan Khan, the protagonist repetitively chants a Quranic verse and plays with the pebbles in his hand. As the film progresses, Rizwan Khan, due to his unnatural behaviour and brown skin, is detained at the airport and the incident reflects the complex identity crisis. Similar to this sequence, actor Shahrukh Khan, who portrays the character of Rizwan Khan, in reality, had been interrogated at an U.S. airport even while coming back from shooting for My Name is Khan. While interacting with officers at the airport, Rizwan Khan reveals the film’s message, ‘My Name is Khan, and I am not a terrorist’. This statement became very popular among the audience, even a participant, an engineer said,

*It is one of my favourite movies because the main protagonist in the film tried to propagate that all Muslims are not terrorist* (Personal interview, 13 August 2012).

When the writer Shibani Bhatija was asked to share her thought on writing the film, she replied:

*It was Karan's idea. He wanted to break up all the stereotypes associated with Muslim identity in the post-'9/11'...[long pause and stammering]. He got mixed response, some people liked it, and some did not* (Personal Interview, 11 April 2013).

Rizwan Khan finally misses the flight because of the long interrogation. Through detention, director portrays marginalised identity of Muslims and their pain of being part of the community. During my fieldwork, one of the participants experienced similar situation and shared his thought. Film critic, Rauf Ahmed said,

*I was coming from San Francisco. There was a Negro chap in security, in those days, the moment they see any Muslim name, they get alert. I don’t blame them for that. He made me sit, and he chatted with me for 25 minutes. I was wondering what he is doing. I don’t know why he did, but he didn’t trouble me at all. He got me my jacket and everything. He didn’t do anything. But that was enough for me to have reacted* (Personal Interview, 28 August 2013).

Rizwan Khan cannot verbally express his words but can write his feelings. Also, a sequence in the film ascertains his fear of loud noise. A flashback shows his childhood and upbringing was in a lower middle-class background. His father used to work in State Transpotation (S.T.) Borivali workshop and he used to take Rizwan with him, leaving him to play in the garage. From then on he can repair almost anything. But, he loses his father at an early age. After that, his mother, Raziya Khan, embroidered clothes for living. The director creates a scene of
Hindu-Muslim riots in 1983 to convey the crux of the film. Rizwan hears few men with skull cap and Islamicate cloths conspiring and expressing their anger towards Hindus. Without telling any religious identity of that group of people, director begins the scene with a flag, which had Macca and Madina’s picture, and moreover their attires essentialised their identity. When Rizwan internalized their bad words, his mom made him understand the message of the film, ‘there are only two kinds of people in this world: ‘Good people who do good deeds and bad people who do bad deeds’.

Rizwan Khan due to his Asperger’s syndrome behaves like a child, and this is reflected in many scenes of the movie. For example, he tells the truth to a lady about the delivery of the product: ‘they [company] say your [customer] product will be delivered in seven days; we are lying, it will reach you in ten days’. Moreover, when Mandira asks him to give six products each, because of his honesty, he advises her to take four of each product as they will expire after three months. There is a dichotomy in his character as, on the one hand, he is childish but, on the other hand, he is very mature person. He understands the basic philosophies of life to become a good human being. Therefore, he suggests Mandira that beauty products can only brighten up the skin but not the mind of a person. It is through these small incidents, Karan Johar establishes Khan as a simple and less complicated person from the beginning of the film.

Through Rizwan Khan’s journey, the director tries to portray the traumatic experiences of people with brown skin post 9/11 period. Rizwan Khan reaches Kentucky where he goes to a motel to rent a room for one night. The motel owner answers in the negative, as all the rooms are occupied due to Saturday night with the honeymooning couples. Without understanding the sarcasm, Rizwan Khan asks, ‘do they marry only on Saturday?’ The hotel owner explains that there is practice of one nightstand in western culture. This sequence interprets the common belief and notion of the east towards the west. The sarcasm in the motel owner’s tone also glorifies Indian culture. When these conversations are taking place between the motel owner and Rizwan Khan, unexpectedly, some white men attack the motel with guns because of the owner’s Indian ethnicity. Infuriated Jitesh (motel owner) responds to the attack saying, ‘all this is because of brutal Muslims. They blew up the World Trade Centre six years ago, we are bearing the consequences even today…can’t you make the difference between a Gandhian
Indian and a violent Muslim like that of Osama Bin Laden? I am going to put a board written no Muslims are allowed’. He blames Muslims and the ideology of *jihad* for his current helpless situation and the trauma, which he faces in recent days. Through the scene, it becomes apparent that Muslims are trivialized and isolated not only by the white men but by any non-Muslim community and that heightened the identity crisis of Muslims. He relates his non-violence attitude with Mahatma Gandhi as he originally also belongs to the same place, Gujarat where Mahatma Gandhi lived. A sense of belongingness associates him with Mahatma Gandhi’s ideology of non-violence. Ironically, while associating himself with the ideology of non-violence, he has rifle in his hand and fires aiming at the white men. Karan Johar leads the audience to understand that everyone reacts violently if she/he is attacked.

In the flashback, when Mandira and Rizwan Khan decide to get married, Zakir (Rizwan’s brother) objects and says, ‘*you cannot marry her. It is blasphemy. If you do that, I will sever all the ties with you. You will not have any place in my house. She (Zakir refers Mandira) is a Hindu and there are a lot of difference between them and us.*’ Rizwan Khan replies ‘There is no difference between Hindus and Muslims except good people and bad people’. It shows being his own brother, he cannot understand the simple philosophy of life that there are only two kinds of people—good and bad which does not depend on religion. It may be because of his Asperger’s syndrome, Rizwan internalizes his mother’s words (philosophy of good and bad) and follows it throughout his life like a child. The scene portrays Zakir as a representative of Muslims, whereas Rizwan as the ‘Other’ who is constantly shown as gentle, liberal, sympathetic, and helpful throughout the film. Probably, the director intentionally represents Rizwan with Asperger's syndrome to show him as more than an ordinary human being and at times behaving like a saint. Thus, a person like Rizwan Kahn cannot be a representative of the whole community.

The attack on the World Trade Centre is first disclosed to Rizwan Khan and Mandira on television news. Karan Johar associates religion with atrocities of 9/11 as he demonstrates Quran in the other corner of the room immediately after publishing the news on the television set. The consecutive narratives may be interpreted in both ways: either the ideology of Quran is defeated by such an act of violence or because of the religion of Islam, people engage in hostility. In the next sequence, their neighbour Reese and Mrs. Garrick collect money for fire fighters
who lost their lives to save life of others during 9/11; Rizwan Khan donates the highest amount (3,500 dollars) compared to their neighbour Johnson who gives 1,000 dollars. With a traditional dress (Kurta and Pajama) and skull cap, he explains that it is annual zakat money (religious tax). Johar incorporates Islam’s concept of donating 2.5 per cent of the total saving to philanthropy. Through this, the director points out the various angles of Islam. The fear and trauma in common psyche is reflected when people start freaking out after listening to the Islamic prayer enchanted by Rizwan Khan. Immediately, he becomes a subject of trauma and terror. Though he donates the maximum amount of money, he is looked at suspiciously because of his identity. The traumatic effect of post-9/11 is pointed out as Rizwan Khan says, ‘history of world war was marked by BC and AD, but there is a third distinction after 9/11’.

The rest of the film focuses on the Muslim identity crisis, what the community is going through after 9/11 terrorist attack. In different parts of America (Michigan, New York, and California) Muslims are targeted and attacked, and their stores are destroyed. As a result, their livelihoods as well as their existence in the country become difficult. Along with Muslims, Sikhs also suffer similar issue of identity crisis because they too belong to similar ethnicity. The sense of ‘Otherness’ is delineated not only through religion but also through ethnicity as an identity signifier. Muslims start changing their names to escape the new burden of identity. Islam becomes the most contested religion worldwide. There is a scene in the film where a teacher introduces Islam as the most violent and aggressive religion because [according to the teacher] Muslims encourage killing in the name of jihad to the student. Rizwan Khan, Mandira and her son Sameer become part of larger political trauma, pain and anguish, as Johar vividly portrays the harassment of Sameer (Mandira’s son) by his friends in school; Mandira’s beauty salon is closed down for not getting customers; Hasina (Zakir’s wife) is being harassed in her university and her scarf is ripped off forcefully. The pain of trauma is heightened by the racial attack and murder of Sameer by his friends. Johar incorporates these scenes to make the audience personalise the pain, anguish, hurt by presenting an innocent boy as the victim of radical/religious prejudice. While hitting Sameer, the boys abuse by saying, ‘Is Osama, your lover?’, ‘Osama’s son’, ‘bloody Paki’ etc. Muslims are reduced to a single identity, that is, Pakistani. This essentialist homogenous identity is formed since post-9/11. Once George W. Bush announces
the ‘War on terror’ on 20 September, 2001, western media and Bush administration use the rhetoric with a particular focus on Muslim countries associated with Islamic terrorist organisations. The campaign of ‘war on terror’ indirectly implies the war against them (Islam) versus us (West). Edward Said (1978) argues that the lack of understanding of the basic differences, the West always considered the East as an exotic single identity and that led them to think the East as ‘Other’. That is why after 9/11, the whole South Asian identity is referred to as a single identity. Eventually, Islam becomes the most contested religion, and that is reaffirmed once more when Inspector Garcia mentions to Mandira that her son was killed because he was a Muslim. Through the background voice of Rizwan Khan, Johar tries to establish the fact that it is not bad to be Muslims. But, in the next sequence, Mandira also leaves him because of her extreme guilt feeling as she feels that her son was killed because of her marrying a Muslim and adopting the surname ‘Khan’. Johar shows in earlier scenes that the couple is allowed to follow the rituals and prayer of their own respective religions, therefore, Mandira does not have to take Rizwan Khan’s surname but she adopts it. Director establishes that ‘Khan’ is the only reason for alienation and marginalisation of Muslims. The complex identity of Muslims and the insecurity attached to the name, ‘Khan’ becomes the strength of the film. An NGO worker said,

I liked the Film My Name is Khan because name matters for a person, and an individual may face particular problems only because of his surname, Khan (Personal interview 10 August 2012).

While departing from Khan, Mandira asks him to prove that he is innocent and not a terrorist. At this moment, Mandira is following the pulse of the nation and reaffirming its dominant discourse as she blames Rizwan Khan for the loss of her son and not the radicalising boys. Dr. Asma Syed, researcher and academician, mentions that ‘When majoritarianism wins, ironically, minorities are pitched against minorities, and minorities do not understand when they become the tools in the hands of the majority’ (2011: 145).

Rizwan Khan sets out to meet the U.S. President to declare that he is not a terrorist. Here, he becomes the representative of the whole community. He reaches Los Angeles where he goes to say prayer in a mosque where he meets Dr Faizal Rehman. Rehman who is misleading a group of young people saying Prophet
Muhammad wanted to sacrifice his own son without questioning God, and it is now our turn to sacrifice our life to save our religion. Rizwan Khan clarifies to the young crowd the misinterpretation of Quran and says that, God saved Ismail’s (Muhammad’s son) life; thus ‘the path of Allah is that of love, not of hatred and war’. Here, Johar metaphorically uses Dr Faizal Rehman to present as a villain, much like Satan, who instigated Muhammad against Allah. In the next scene, Rizwan Khan proves himself loyal to the country when he informs Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) about the activity of Dr Rehman, thus becoming a ‘good Muslim’. Because of his good image and dissent towards terrorism, some among the audience think that the film carries good messages. A research student, Ketoki Majumder, said,

*The film has tried to nullify the effect of the negative impact of Muslim identity. There were quite a few scenes where the protagonist contributing money to the 9/11 victims’ families; he also informs F.B.I regarding the activities of the terrorist group* (Personal Interview 4 September 2013).

Rizwan Khan reaches Los Angels where President is scheduled to visit a college. Seeing the President from a distance, Rizwan Khan screams to declare that he is not a terrorist. He is arrested just because of the word ‘terrorist’ and his brown skin. During the time of trial, President orders to put him in jail. Later, judge also gives similar verdict. Muslims were alienated not only from the whites but also by the all the non-Muslims around the world. The word, ‘Khan’ creates terror among the non-Muslims. That is why, Indian student and television reporters — Komal and Bobby Ahuja are not willing to cover the story of Rizwan Khan. But Raj Patel takes the challenge to do his project on Rizwan Khan may be because of a sense of belongingness. After the news on illegal detention, which is done without any proof and legal representation, is broadcasted, media creates a public space for discussion on the identity crisis. Finally, Rizwan Khan is released for being loyal to the country, as there is proof of his helping FBI to catch terrorists like Dr. Rehman.

After coming out from the detention centre, Rizwan Khan goes to help the hurricane affected people of Wilhemina, Georgia. Johar portrays him as a model for humanity, benevolence. Even film critic Rajiv Masand thought similarly and pointed out,
I like the intentions of making the film. What I feel absurd about the film is that the moment he went to Georgia town, which was destroyed because of Hurricane Katrina, and he helped them to rebuild the whole town. Don’t make him an adventurous hero what he is not. That became completely unbelievable. The film was about over enthusiasm and tried to make him all rounded hero in a very filmy way which was hard to believe, but I like the idea... (Personal Interview, 5 February 2013).

While Khan is helping the hurricane-affected people, the reporter Raj’s voice over is heard in the background in a news channel. Raj says, ‘Hadith says that, the Almighty does not judge by colour and creed but by action and deeds, if this the truth, then Rizwan Khan by his sheer force of his actions has elevated the entire humanity in the eyes of God’. So, he becomes a hero of humanity, not of any particular community. It becomes most prominent in the comments through various news channels which include Bobby Ahuja who says: ‘Just recently this man was arrested and tortured for being enemy combatant of this country …he selflessly tries to save the remaining lives in Wilhemina’. Following his example, many Americans come forward to help the people of Wilhemina. Immediately, national and international news channels start broadcasting with a lot of praise for the contribution of Rizwan Khan.

After rebuilding the city, at the time of leaving Wilhemina, Rizwan Khan is attacked by a terrorist belonging to Rehman’s terrorist group. While attacking, the attacker tells him, ‘You are an infidel (kaffir), this is your punishment, Khan!...You have to die, and your reward is death’. The sequence reinforces the stereotyped image of the Muslims. In the film, Rizwan Khan and his mother (Razia Khan) are the only Muslims who are nice, broad-minded, liberal, benevolent, and kind-hearted. Even his own brother is represented as a very conservative person who breaks his relation with his brother because of his marriage to a Hindu woman. Again, he meets the terrorist group in USA also are Muslims. Thus, most of the Muslims are represented as extremist, rioters, conservative and fanatic people.

At the end, Rizwan Khan manages to meet the U.S. President, who says, ‘I am honoured to share time with Rizwan Khan’. Rizwan conveys his message that he is not a terrorist though his last name is Khan. In the background through Mandira’s voice, the audience hear the main message of the film that love and humanity is a greater solution to win a war than violence. This statement of Mandira also may be
indirectly propagating the message to stop the war of terrorism relatively asking Muslims to win their demand with love and compassion.

**Chak De! India: A Declaration of Patriotism**

*Chak De! India* is directed by Shimit Amin and was released in 2007. The plot is roughly based on the real life story of Mir Ranjan Negi, who was the goalkeeper of Indian men’s hockey team in Asian Games final of 1982. India was defeated by Pakistan by whopping 7-1 in that match. Negi was blamed for the defeat. Because of the humiliation, he went into oblivion and returned after many years to become the coach of Indian women’s hockey team. He coached them and led them to achieve the victory in the Commonwealth Games of 2002.

*Chak De! India* explores the religious, ethnic, linguistic prejudice; the legacy of partition in India; team building; and gender bigotry in contemporary India. As the film represents religious, gender and regional stereotypes in contemporary India, it can be analysed at multiple levels. I will focus on the representation of coach Kabir Khan and his constant effort to establish himself as innocent and not a traitor. His constant assertions of his patriotism more than his individuality interpret the burden of carrying Muslim identity in the contemporary time.

The first scene of the film is a scoreboard projecting the scores of India and Pakistan in World men’s hockey championship and India is one goal behind Pakistan. Indian captain Kabir Khan, Asia’s best center forward player is pushing his team. The suspense among audience metaphorically represents the pulse of the country and its citizens. Any match between India and Pakistan means a lot more than just the game itself for both the countries. Finally, one penalty stroke is left for India to win the match and captain (Kabir Khan) decides to take the stroke himself and he misses the goal. Thus, India loses the match and at the end of the match he shakes hand and hugs a player (Zamir) from the Pakistan team. A journalist photographer captures this moment in his camera. Later, Kabir Khan is asked by the journalists, ‘Are the Pakistani players good friends of yours? You are the only one to have congratulated them after the match’. Afterwards, they also directly ask him, ‘Do you think we lost because someone sold out’. Hearing this comment, Kabir pushes the journalist and tries to hurt him to express his distress.
In the news bites, the journalist terms his frustration and anguish as an outburst of betrayal and says, ‘Now Kabir has played dirty with the country or not, you will have to decide’. In the next scene, print media (newspaper’s in various language) declares Kabir Khan through headlines as ‘traitor captain’. Later, the issue of betrayal becomes clear once Aaj Tak (news channel) journalist discloses that the chairman of the Hockey Association denounces Kabir Khan as he has done something wrong to his country. Moreover, different news clippings show the outrage of the citizens burning the effigies and photographs of Kabir Khan. On the other hand, Kabir Khan leaves his ancestral home with much sorrow and insult. He is brought up in a lower middle class Muslim locality and even his neighbours consider him a traitor. While leaving home with his mother on a scooty, the crowd (neighbours) gathers in front of his house to get a sight of the traitor rather than to sympathise with them. The fact becomes clear when a person writes ‘traitor’ on Kabir Khan’s wall and a child tells his father, ‘Papa, I also want to see the traitor’. The status of middle-class is also attached with a lot of values, ethics. As Khan’s neighbourhood acquires a middle class position, they follow the rhetoric of the nation at large. Above all, their behaviour also allow them to place themselves in a safer position because they also have the burden of their own identity. An anonymous voice from the crowd says, ‘aise logon ko to partition ke time hi Pakistan chale jana chahtye’ (These people should have moved to Pakistan during partition). The unstable social security and the identity crisis of Muslims in India also become clear when a lady empathises the sorrow of Kabir Khan and his mother and wishes to give them homemade parathas (Indian bread) for the journey but her husband stops her, as he has the constant fear of being thrown out of the neighbourhood and the nation.

After seven years, Kabir Khan returns from oblivion to take charge of national women’s hockey as a coach. The next part of the film emphasises on showing the status of women in a hockey team. Mr. Tripathi, head of the Indian Hokey, has very low esteem for the women’s team and he believes that women’s hockey team exists just as a formality. He expresses the general perception about women when he tells hockey advocate Uttamji, that, ‘Indian women are born to cook and clean’. As there is no hope for the team, so he apprehends that, no one would be willing to coach the team. Uttamji mentions that Kabir Khan wants to be the coach of the women’s hockey team. Mr. Tripathi hesitantly agrees to recruit him as the coach.
After the meeting between Mr. Tripathi and Kabir Khan, during his conversation with Uttamji, Khan once again asserts his patriotism as he reminisces his loss. Uttamji emphasizes that India did not lose the match because of Khan. In reply, Khan says, ‘But they scored against me, my team, my country and my family.’ In multiple situations, he constantly asserts his patriotism more than his individuality as a sportsperson. Khan thinks and informs Uttamji that being a representative of minority, he can’t afford to make a mistake like that as he carries the burden of identity.

From this sequence onwards, the rest of the film revolves around the female protagonists who continuously struggle to establish their rights and existence in different contexts. The captain of the team, Vidya Sharma is forced to choose between hockey and the family by her in-laws; Komal Chautala fights with her parents to play hockey. Moreover, the subordinate status of women is reflected in the film through complex relationships that are portrayed between cricket and hockey as Abhinanyu Singh, the vice-captain of Indian cricket team and fiancé of Preeti Sabarwal, asks Preeti to quit hockey. He believes that, there is no future for hockey and being a woman she should accompany him wherever he goes. There is an insecurity of continuing professional life for women as well.

Much like gender, regional discrimination is also shown elaborately through various situations in the film. Each Indian state carries specific regional and individual identity. In the film, two girls from Jharkhand are forced to sleep on the floor by the other players who belong to economically empowered state like Punjab. Above all, Punjabi player Balbir Kaur makes fun of the language of Jharkhand and the issue of language superiority becomes most prominent as she comments, ‘Punjabi nahi ati toh sikke ani thi’ (If you do not know Punjabi, then you should have learnt it). Even she cannot recognize Jharkhand as a state as she believes Jharkhand is ‘junglee’. Punjab is the most empowered state with highest per capita income of the nation, being a representative of that state, Balbir Kaur has such high esteem and hesitates to recognize others.

Though Kabir Khan is always loyal and devoted to his team as a captain as well as coach, he is being doubted multiple times by others. During his tenure as a coach, Khan has become an object of doubt for his earlier controversy. Bindya Naik who is very unhappy of the strict nature of coach (Khan), instigates other players as she remarks ‘He was Pakistani captain in an Indian uniform’. Kabir
Khan once again reaffirms his innocence and nationalism when Bindya Naik criticizes him mentioning that he sold out India during the time of world cup. Disgusted, heartbroken Khan asserts his nationalism saying, ‘I regret that I have lost to my country which even after taking my blood, sweat, my love, my life, does not believe that I played for it once. And I will play for it all my life’. Director Shahid Amin establishes Khan as a nationalist hero through many dialogues and visuals. For example, on the previous day of Women’s hockey world cup final, Kabir Khan is shown getting fascinated and admiring the scene where a foreigner raises the Indian flag. Captain Vidya Sharma does not realise the scene and with much surprise, she asks Khan, what is he looking at? Probably, director tries to portray Khan more nationalist than Vidya Sharma, a representative of majority.

The burden of Muslim identity and the trauma of Khan’s controversy haunt him throughout the film. Whenever he is being doubted about his credibility and identity, he listens to the dialogues, which are made heard through the background voice such as ‘these people should have moved to Pakistan during partition’; ‘Papa, I also want to see what a traitor look like’. The question of Khan’s loyalty becomes an issue for his identity crisis.

There are many dramatic sport scenes that portray the hurdles and challenges of Indian Hockey players and finally with the help of the coach, India wins the Hockey world cup. Everybody is thrilled with victory and the man of the moment is Kabir Khan. The country redeems and accepts him. As he proves himself innocent, he becomes the hero of the nation. In a background voice, an ex-player utters the voice of the nation as he (an unknown ex-player) says, ‘the man who gave India this victory is none other than Kabir Khan. Brother Khan has proved that there is no grater motivation than playing for your flag…As long as players like Kabir Khan exist, Indian hockey can hold its head high’. After proving himself, Kabir Khan returns home and he gets a warm welcome by his neighbours who once banished him. The acceptance becomes more prominent when a child erases ‘gaddar’ (traitor) which was written seven years back on his wall. The scene is metaphorically used to wipe out the word traitor from his character and term him innocent.
The Burden of Carrying Muslim Identity

From the above analysis, we can delineate that Muslims do not wear religion on their sleeves. The above-mentioned films represent Muslims as people who do not offer namaz five times a day; like other citizens, they also face day-to-day economic and social hurdles. In most of the films, the word ‘Muslim’ even is not pronounced once. In this genre, Muslims are not the nation’s enemy like the Muslim Political genre, but in most of the cases, they are bound to prove that they are nationalist, patriotic and innocent. The films — My Name Is Khan, Chak De! India, Amir — where Muslims play the role of central protagonists, they are bound to prove their allegiance to the nation. These films reiterate the social rhetoric by which Muslims are guilty until proven innocent. In My Name is Khan, Rizwan Khan had to establish his mother’s childhood teaching of being a good human being and he does not run terrorist cell. Moreover, in My Name Is Khan, Rizwan Khan proves himself a loyal and responsible citizen, giving FBI the information about a terrorist like Dr. Faisal Rehaman. Moreover, being a superhero and sane, it is difficult for audience to consider Rizwan Khan as the representative of the Muslims though the film intended to do so. Khan’s ultra heroism is criticised by a participant who is a Ph.D. candidate said,

*I did not like the film. Because I felt, it was utopian kind of movie and even the characters were so unreal. After watching, I wondered, was it worth watching?* (Personal Interview, 4 October 2012).

Similarly, in Aamir, Aamir sacrifices his own life to save the people of his nation. In doing so, he proves himself to be a good human being and his patriotism. Moreover, in Chak De! India, Kabir Khan returns after seven years to prove his patriotism and loyalty to the country by coaching the Indian women’s hockey team. Though Iqbal carries the message of a deaf and mute boy who wants to become a successful cricket player, but at the end of the film, he defeats Pakistan. Being a Muslim, he plays and wins a match against Pakistan and that demonstrates his nationalism for the country. As all the protagonists are supposed to prove themselves as good human beings through constant assertion of their patriotism and innocence, they are stereotyped somewhere.

There are films where Muslims play character actors but they do not bear the burden of proving their allegiance and innocence. Few of those characters are Ali
Akbar Fateh Khan in *Dhoom* (2004), Farhan Qureshi in *3 idiots* (2009), and Aslam Khan in *Rang de Basanti* (2006). Ali in *Dhoom* assists Jai (the central protagonist) and also he is a part of motorbike gang. In the case of Farhan Qureshi, only the attire of his parents and his name tell the audience that he is Muslim. In the film *Rang de Basanti*, Aslam Khan is very liberal and patriotic towards his country. He has a motto in life to abolish corruption from the country. Though he does not have any prejudice and wear clothes like his other friends, but his family is very conservative. During a personal conversation with *Rang De Basanti’s* writer Kamlesh Pandey, I asked him why did he characterise Aslam’s family members as orthodox? An irate writer replied,

*That was my choice. Why should I represent them modern yaar? As a writer, I have the right to choose. I am not an idealist. I cannot make everybody happy. I choose my own story, I choose my own characters. I wanted to use a very typical Muslim family which gives Ashraf a dilemma between family and friends. So, it was a contemporary Muslim’s dilemma to choose between family and country. And he went to work for the country. An educated Muslim would have been weak and meaningless in my story. I had to have the lowest common denominator possible as a Muslim family. So he goes against his family. And not only that..he goes against his family and follow his own heart, he dies for the country* (Personal interview, 29 March 2013).

His opinion raises two questions: If Aslam has a dilemma of choosing between family and country, does it depend on any specific religion? Is it actually a contemporary subject to choose nation over family? The specific dilemma prevailed more at the time of independence movement and did not depend on any specific religion. Moreover, nationalism of Muslims is not a contemporary incident. Even history says, there were many Muslim freedom fighters — Khan Bahadur Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abul Kalam Azad, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai etc. The other characters in *Rang De Basanti* belong to modern, liberal Hindu family and they also have dilemmas. For example, the protagonist Karan Singhania goes through a lot of trauma and dilemma to kill his own father because of his crime of corruption.

Within these few limited representation of modern Muslims, there is a trend to portray characters with some disabilities as well. For example, in the film *Iqbal*, Iqbal is portrayed as deaf and mute. Though the film primarily focuses on his hurdles to achieve his dream of becoming a successful cricket player. Similarly, *My name is Khan* tells the story of a person who is having Asperger’s syndrome
having a message (My Name is Khan but I am not a terrorist) to convey to the U.S. President. Probably, they are represented with some disabilities to gain audience sympathy. So, double marginalisation makes the character more acceptable by the audience. Even Shahrukh Khan himself mentions about My Name is Khan, ‘It’s not about a disabled man fight against disability. It’s a disabled man’s fight against disability that exists in the world terrorism, hatred, wars’ (Shah Rukh Khan, The Telegraph News, 13 February, 2010).

THE REPRESENTATION OF MODERN MUSLIMS AND THE NEW GENERATION FILMMAKERS

Though the films like My Name is Khan and Chak De! India along with other films such as Aamir, Dor, Iqbal, Well done Abba, and A Wednesday, represent Muslims in as modern and liberal human beings though they had to prove their allegiance in some films, it is too early to term it as a trend. While conducting the interviews, I asked the filmmakers and film critics to point out possible reasons of this change. They were not able to give any definite answer. Almost all of them thought that the change is due to the new generation filmmakers who do not indulge themselves in making stereotype representations. These independent filmmakers do not have any filmmaking background, so they did not fall into the trap of making formula films. The most prominent directors in recent times – Anurag Kashyap (Gangs of Wasseypur), Nagesh Kukunoor (Dor, Iqbal), Shimit Aanad (Well done Abba), Neeraj Pandey (A Wednesday), Raj Kumar Gupta (Aamir) – ventured to make small budget films without big stars of the industry. Nagesh Kukunoor invested money that he made from his engineering career to make his first film Hyderabad Blues. Being a producer himself, he could make the film independently, and he did not have the burden to make a film of producer’s choice. Film writer Kamlesh Pandey sketched out,

Somewhere perhaps, educated filmmakers and writers came into the industry. For example, Jaideep Sahni, who wrote Chak De! India is a very intelligent and educated writer. I think, more educated and enlightened writers and filmmakers came into the business and when they started writing and making films, the quality of films began changing (Personal Interview 2 March 2013).
Film scholars Tejaswini Ganti (2005) and Sangita Gopal (2012) point out that as the liberalization of Indian economy led to introduction of satellite television and multiplex theatres and the growing middle-class pushed the filmmakers to make new form of Hindi films (Ganti 2005). Because of the arrival of multiplex theatres, filmmakers can easily distribute and market their products. Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, director of Rang De Basanti thinks on similar lines and mentions that ‘the distribution platforms have changed in the country and that has helped new age story lines to develop and deliver’ (Charles Acland cited in Gopal 2012: 126). Teesta Shetalvad mentioned, 

*I must say things are changing now. I think the fact that because of multiplexes or whatever. Now cinema is going in many directions. We have very positive examples. People are trying to show things of complex identity, complex realities* (Personal Interview 4 September 2012).

When I asked Shyam Benegal about his initiative of representing Muslims in an ordinary way in many of his films such as Mammo, Sardari Begum, Well Done Abba, Jubeida and how he could manage to do that, he replied,

*In my case, there was a conscious effort on my part. See you have to look beyond the self-definition we might have because there is a common humanity, so you are concerned about that common humanity. There is innately secular character among the Indians. So Sardari Begum was successful for it. So was Mammo, so was Zubeida. What’s the problem with it?* (Personal Interview, 29 June 2013).

Though, according to Benegal, there is no problem of representing Muslims in a secular image, whenever we see a film with a big star under a big banner, there is a tendency to make the characters either stereotyped with certain markers.

**CONCLUSION**

The Muslim Contemporary films represent the central protagonists as Muslims, but they are not stamped with an Islamicate ethos. They are sometimes ordinary with mundane aspirations or everyday problems in their lives. But one of most common factors prevalent in almost all the movies is that all the protagonists have to prove their allegiance to the country or their innocence. In some films, they prove that they are not terrorists and in some other films, they prove their nationalism.
Though Muslim representations are liberated from being associated with Islamicate costumes, Urdu language, their villainous images like terrorists, underworld dons, and smugglers who were wearing Arab robes, smoking cigar and carrying briefcases.

Communalism and nationalism are the integral part of postcolonial Indian political scenario which continues to exist even today. As in the earlier genre (The Muslim Political), I have discussed that there were political interventions in making or promoting some film, the scenario is not different now and the reality is same. Even, there are many cases of Islamic terrorism until recently. On the other hand there are some right-wing political party initiatives such as ‘banning cow meat in Maharashtra’ and ‘ghar wapsi’. As reality remaining the same, is it the case that, market for the ‘Muslim political’ genre has reached saturation?