Chapter 3

THE MUSLIM HISTORICAL

This chapter analyses the Muslim Historical, which is one of the most important genres in terms of the representation of Muslims in Hindi cinema. The genre is often contested in the film studies as there is no specific iconography, narrative, setting, and plot, as is visible in the genres like thriller, romance, horror, and comedy. Jonathan Stubbs says, ‘simply being “in the past” cannot be regarded as a coherent textual characteristic in brief’ (2013: 31). The historical films stand out as a genre mainly because of their stories of grandeur of past legends, famous personalities and myths. This genre, in India, is often nationalist in nature. In the early history of Indian cinema, among many other historical stories, Mauryan Empire and Maratha Empire were the most popular themes. Even Marathi films glorified Shivaji Maharaj (king) by projecting him as a hero who fought against the Mughals. The film Poona Raided (1924) projected Marathas fight against the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb for attacking Poona (Dwyer 2006). Later, the Muslim Historical became the most popular in Historical genre with the box office success of Sohrab Modi’s Pukar (1939). In Muslim Historical genre, Anarkali and her love for Prince Salim became most admired recurrent story in Hindi cinema. Even, Jalal-Ud-Din Mohammad Akbar was represented repetitively as a secular king and an outstanding ruler.

The instant chapter is based on the narratives drawn from in-depth interviews with the filmmakers, film critics and audience. Also, I will analyse the film text which deals with the history and the characterisation of those films based on Muslims. The theme derived from research participants’ narratives are presented in three parts: the first part deals with the Islamicate culture and its representation in films; the second part deals with the commercial and political aspects of making those films; and, the third part reflects on the shift from the Muslim Historical to the Muslim Social genre.
**REPRESENTATION OF ‘ISLAMICATE CULTURE’ IN HISTORICAL FILMS**

The films of 1940s represented the Muslim ethos, which is basically north Indian culture and termed as ‘Islamicate culture’. The term ‘Islamicate culture’ was articulated (in 1974) by Marshall Hodgson and Mukul Kesavan. According to them, the term ‘Islamicate’ does not refer to Islamic religion per se, ‘but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims’ (Hodgson and Kesavan cited in Bhaskar 2009: 3). The predominant cultural elements like language, dress, and music were basically influenced by Islamicate culture and they were followed by Hindus and Sikhs in North India as well. To elaborate on this theme, it is imperative to include discussion on related sub-themes like Mughal rulers, Muslim ethos, The association of Sufism and Urdu language in historical films, Oriental influence in historical films, and the Ganga – Jamuna Tehzeeb.

**Mughal Rulers**

Primary inspiration for story lines and characterisation of the Muslim Historical genre is ‘Islamic Empires’, specifically the Mughal rulers. The historical genre is a generalised imagination of Islamic culture, architecture, etc. Above all, most of the historical films represent imagined love affairs. Actor, and also the writer of the epic film, *Jodha Akbar* (2008), Haider Ali shared his own experience of writing plot and script of *Jodha Akbar*,

*Akhbar's love story is completely fiction and the fact is that he [Akbar] married a princess called Jodha from Jaipur; she was Bharmal's daughter. This is the history. Akbar married hundred queens, one of them was Jodha, but I wrote as if Jodha was his only wife. Actually, Jodha according to history was his third wife* (Personal interview 5 April 2014).

Though the Muslim Historical is comprised of fantasised loved stories of kings and *nawabs*, and they were not intentionally represented as Muslims, they happened to be Muslims. Continuing the point, noted scholar and social activist, Irfan Engineer said,
Historical films mix history with imagined love affair. Whether it happened that way, whether it happened at all or not, these are different things. But they were not actually portraying Muslims per se... they were portraying rulers... Indian rulers. Historical figures who happened to be Muslims (Personal interview, 14 September 2012).

The Muslim Historical generally represents the Mughal emperors as rulers who were known to be cultured, secular and popular for their good governance. Ira Bhaskar and Rechard Alan says, ‘...in the post-independence Nehruvian period, this rhetoric had a special significance in upholding the Mughal era and as a valuation of Muslim culture that marked the secular credentials of the new nation-state’ (2009: 26). But, the intention of Muslim Historical filmmaking is contested many times. Famous film scholar and noted UK based television producer Nasreen Munni Kabir says,

Mughal-e-Azam had a historical set of 16th century. The historical films impels Muslims of past were fine. But, in present, how many of them appeared? There was culture, they were learned people and the nawabs and shayers or somebody who were able speak so beautifully. They were charming people. They were integrated in this country. They were positively stereotyped. Because of their love stories of repression and grandeur, they were hugely appreciated by audience (Personal interview, 11 February 2013).

Even noted film critic Nandini Ramnath thinks in a similar way. She thinks they were represented from one perspective and the characterisation was also highly romanticised. As a result, Muslims were represented in a stereotyped way. She observes,

So, Islamicate culture, I think those movies gave space to a certain kind of Muslim expression. It is highly romanticized and poetic. My reading of it is - you are also trying to create an ideal Muslim citizen, the culture of Muslim, the one who is beautiful looking; who loves beauty; who loves beautiful houses and jewellery and clothes, all of which forms the image of Awadhi Muslims. But there are other kinds of Muslims in the country and I think very few movies are actually reflective of those other cultures (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

These other cultures are the important elements of Muslim ethos and the next sub-section will elaborate the same.

Muslim Ethos

The concept of Muslim ethos dates back to the 1930s and is relevant even today. Muslim ethos is a mix of Arabic, Persian and Turkish cultures. Noted film critic,
Iqbal Masud, says, ‘Classical or high culture—a mix of Arabic-Perso-Turkish elements in Historical work, fiction, music, and painting such as in the work of poets and novelists like Ghalib (or today Mr. Qurratulain Hyder), artists like Abdur Rehman Chaudhtai, or ustad in the field of music’ (http 2014). Muslim ethos has enormous influence in Indian cinema in terms of language, dress, music, and architecture.

As mentioned earlier Urdu language is an important aspect of Muslim ethos. Before independence, the primary language of North India was Hindustani, which is a mixture of Hindi and Urdu. Urdu was widely spoken language among Uttar Pradesh Muslims, Gujrati Muslims as well as few other non-Muslim groups such as Parsis, Panjabis, and Jews. In the 1930s, when talkies came to the Hindi film industry, the communicative language was Urdu, because filmmakers tried to reach to the maximum people (Dwyer 2006). Haider Ali traces back the History of Urdu and how it became an Indian language:

Because Urdu was maximum spoken language from North India to central India; right from Gowanior, Indore, Bhopal and Lakhnow. All the Nawabs and Mughals were ruling in Delhi, so the language got mixed with Sanskrit and Persian and became Urdu. It became the national language and that spread till Calcutta. So gradually from Babar to Akbar, they all spoke in Turkish, Persian and Arabic. They developed a mixed language because the army was from India and also from Persia, Arab, they had to communicate and to communicate they had to use each other' words. That's how Persian and Sanskrit got exchanged and Urdu was found. It took hundred years to develop the language. Then because of Hindi and Urdu mixing, Hindustani was found. Hindi has purely come out from Sanskrit (Personal interview 5 April 2014).

Iqbal Masud says, ‘In this matrix of music and dialogue, ‘high’ and ‘popular’ Muslim cultures come together. As late as the 1960s, in a film ‘Villain’ traps a heroine by using a disguise and quoting Ghalib: Badal kar faqiron ka hum bhes Ghalib/Tamashai-I-ahl-I-Karam dekhte hain [We put on the grab of a beggar to test the generosity of the rich] (http 2014). Masud emphasises that the Urdu lagague had great dominance on popular culture at that time, even villains of the film used to trap heroines, uttering Ghalib’s urdu poetry. Urdu lagague became so popular that the audience understood and applauded the quote. There were a lot of Urdu writers as well in the film industry. In the 1930s and 1940s, many prominent Urdu writers like Saadat Hosan Manto, Krishan Chandar, Ismat Chughtai and Shahid Latif shifted to Bombay from different parts of North India and became a part of Bombay film industry (Bose 2009: 62).
When Haider Ali was asked the reason for involvement of too many Muslims in Hindi cinema, he said that this was due to their command over the Urdu language, the primary communicative language at the time. He said,

There was silent era. After the introduction of Talkies, industry needed the people who had good command on Urdu language. Generally, Muslims from Lucknow and North Indian belt had expertise on the language and they joined in the film industry (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).

Amit Khanna, a National Award winning lyricist, and also producer and director, tracing back the influence of Urdu in historical films, says,

Earlier entire Lucknowi culture influence was there. So when historical started, people like Kamal Amhori, Asgar Wajahat, all came from Lucknow and north India. So, started with the theatre and the theatre tradition goes back to Parshi theatre which had Urdu writers like Aga Kashmiri or other progressive writers. These writers wrote in Urdu which is a flowery language and Hindi writer could not write that, similarly in film songs, Urdu influence was much stronger than Hindi (Personal interview, 24 March 2014).

During the conversation, Amit Khanna further gave example of one of his good friends—India’s most noted lyricist, Javed Aktar—and explained how Urdu writers are strict about not mixing Urdu with any other language.

Most of the Urdu poets still follow the grammar of Urdu and they look down upon anyone who does not know grammar of the language. They still do that. Javed still says to me that, ‘yeah grammar wrong ha’ [The grammar is wrong]. I say, ‘aarey tera, Urdu ke hisab se wrong ha but Hindi ke hisab se wrong nahi ha’ [This is wrong according to Urdu language grammar but right on the basis of Hindi language]. So, dominance of Urdu became so prominent that they started Mughal-e-Azam perciianised (Personal interview, 24 March 2014).

The Urdu language gradually lost its charm in Hindi cinema from the 1970s onwards, though still many Urdu words and idioms are still used in film songs and dialogues. Noted scholar on secularism and social activist the late Asgar Ali Engineer says,

Urdu is now disappearing. Even today in dialogue and songs have more Urdu words than Hindi words. But earlier it was hundred percent dominated by Urdu language (Personal interview, 8 December 2012).

In the early history of Hindi cinema, though Urdu was the most commonly used language, the separation between Urdu and Hindi started long before that. After Partition, Urdu was the national language of Pakistan and Urdu was considered ‘as a “Muslim language” due to its association with Muslim courts and
its close ties with Persian language and literature’ (Dwyer 2006: 103). Because of political reasons, Hindi came to be considered as the national language of India. Gradually, Hindi became the language of Hindi cinema. Of course, there were few genres such as the Muslim Historical, the Muslim Social and Muslim-centric films which used Urdu. National Award Winning filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt claims that the demise of Urdu in films was due to the confusion of Urdu as Muslim language. He points out,

*One thing is sure, the demise of Urdu, which for some reason was confused as the language of Muslims and not the language of India. Urdu was language of India and not the language of only Muslims. After that a particular slogan saying, "Urdu, Muslim, Pakistan; Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" began popular and that was a kind of divide. A slow strangulation of the Urdu language resulted in the demise of the language. So I would say that Urdu language is frozen. The depiction of Indian Muslims on the silver screen is far from being accurate in fact almost disappeared like how a villager has disappeared from the Indian screen. It’s a slow strangulation, over the period (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).*

When he was asked about his own initiative of restoring the language in his own film, Mahesh Bhatt said,

*When I attempted to bring back Urdu in my films, everybody said that look this is unnecessary ornamental, self-indulgent exercise, which nobody wants. I found myself in an absolute minority crusading for something from which the majority stays away from. Moreover, Urdu was primarily attached with Muslims and Pakistan being a Muslim country, so anybody who was the vehicle of the culture and the language of your neighbour were looked upon as other and the enemy. People started developing an animosity towards Urdu and the tehzeeb (Culture) because of the number of wars we fought with Pakistan. Then the people who did not want to be seen as the extension of that external enemy started assimilating with other filmmakers. I think India has become poorer because we have lost that colour. I can understand something dying unnatural death politically; the congress govt was supposed to protect secular ethos as it was a party of Nehru and Gandhi who were the protector of India’s this cultural heritage (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).*

Though Mahesh Bhatt and also film scholars like Ira Bhaskar and Rachel Dwyer argue that there is a political reason behind the disappearance of Urdu in the Hindi film industry, Amit Khanna (lyricist and producer) thinks it is purely because of commercial reason and there is less politics involved. Amit Khanna argues that a filmmaker tries to reach as many people as possible and thus they use Hindustani language or Bombaiya language. He sketched out,

*The audience and filmmakers of younger generation did not know Urdu. If you see the present generation, they are all using mixed language because they know only that language. Political motivation is much few what anthropologists and*
sociologists interpret because these filmmakers do not have critical thinking power. They have a commercial mind. You know, Ashutosh Gowarikar does not have any clue about history although he is making Jodha Akbar (2008). Neither he knows Urdu language, nor he knows the history of Mughals. Now he is making a film of Mahenjadaro. Now there are very few people exist in the industry like Javed, Gulzar who understand the language (Personal interview, 24 March 2014).

Whereas Hindi film scholar Mukul Kesavan (1994) thinks that Urdu is the foundation language of Hindi cinema, Harish Trivedi argues that it is Hindi. But it is interesting to observe that Bombay film industry uses a mix language of Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani. Dwyer points out, ‘While historically the roots of Hindi cinema uses both Hindi and Urdu, as well as other forms of this lingua franca and a mixture of other Indian languages (Punjabi and English in particular), it is interested in creating a language that is suitable for its purposes, which can reach as wide an audience as possible’ (2006: 105). Much like Dwyer, Haider Ali says,

*To make the language understood by larger audience, they [script writer and lyricist] started writing dialogues in a mixed language of Urdu, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Persian. That fusion of languages was known as Hindustani. Still Hindustani is the communicative language in Hindi cinema unless they are making a mythology. Pure Sanskrit is used for mythological films. Even historical films like Jodha Akbar, whenever Jodha's family spoke, they spoke in Thet, Kathiyabadi Hindi (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).*

Till today there is a strong demarcation in using language in Bollywood. Different languages are used to express different feelings, class and culture. Urdu is always used to relate to a Muslim character or to express romance through songs; English is used to show a polished sophisticated class; and tapori Bommaiya language is used to represent lower-class characters. For making a mythological film, filmmakers use purely Sanskrit. For the representation of epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, B.R. Chopra (Director) used Sanskritised Hindi. So, there is no standard language in Bollywood films. For the film *Veer Zaara* (2004), Yash chopra used Urdu for the Pakistani characters and the hero from India spoke in Hindi. The script writer of the epic film, *Jodha Akbar* (2008), Haider Ali says,

*Akbar's family spoke in Urdu. They had to speak in Urdu because they came from Mongol and adapted a hybrid language of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit to communicate with local people. Gradually, that mixed language was known as Urdu (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).*

In India, there is no specific Muslim music genre, but Sufi music is commonly associated with Islamicate culture. Qawwali is a form of Sufi music widely used in
Bollywood. Qawwal Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, acquired a phenomenal popularity in the field of world music and made important contribution to the music of Bollywood. In the early history of Hindi cinema, there were notable singers who are inspired by his qawwalis such as Mahammad Rafi, Talat Mehmood, Suraiya and Ghulam Haider. Haider Ali, actor and story writer of Ashutosh Gowrikar’s epic film *Jodha Akbar* (2008), has a long association with Hindi film industry because of his parents, Pramila and Kumar who also acquired an important position of the industry, explained the relation between Islam and Sufism and how Sufism became a part of Hindu ethos in India. He says,

> From different parts of the world people have migrated to India—such as Persian, Turks, Mughals. Lodhi and Mughals came and became part of India. Sufism arrived in India with them and became very much part of the Hindu ethos.... Qawwali form is basically devotional. It was not only love; it was a love for the god, for the supreme. It’s more like aban, bhajan, kirtan (spiritual prayers) (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).

Later, Hyder Ali elucidates his idea of putting the song *Khwaja Mere Khwaja* (Noble Khwaja, Khwaja) in the film *Jodha Akbar* (2008) on the Akhbar’s wedding night. He describes,

> I have the dilemma of Jodha on cultural differences throughout the films. Whenever Akbar had to take decision, he used to go to Ajmer and use to do a lot of meditation. He was also yogic, very spiritual. He was not getting a comfort of making a decision. He went against the decision and came back to Agra. In every mazar, Sufi saints come and prey. At that time, a Turkish qawwali group came to mazar and they came to know of Akbar’s dilemma. So to help the King to make a decision, they sang the song Khawja Mere Khawja (Personal interview, 5 May 2014).

**Islamic Costume and Hindi Cinema**

Islamicate culture has contributed mainly to costumes in Hindi cinema. There is no particular dress code for Islam, rather it is dependent on regions. The different genres of Islamicate films portray a variety of clothing which are attached to Mughal court (historical films). We often see most of the Muslim men wear *kurtapyjamas* (a kind of frock coat with loose or tight trousers) with skull cap in the Historical and Muslim social films. Muslim women too do not have any standardised costume. *Salwar Khameez* (Panjabi Suit) is the most common dress code in India which is associated with Muslim women. Later on, the dress became
popular in north-west India. Muslim women also use veil with the help of scarf. *Burqa* is a dress which is mostly associated with Islam. But, in the Muslim Social genre, both Muslims and Hindus both use *burqa* depending on the circumstances to hide their identity and that sometimes leads to tragedy such as the one depicted in *Choudhvian ka Chand* (1960). Sometimes, men cover themselves with the help of a *burqa* to hide their offenses. In the film, *Well Done Abba* (2009), the petty thief wore a *burqa* to escape from police. The director of the film, Shyam Benegal said,

> In my opinion, I think the custom of wearing burqa, which I find is not very interesting. That’s why I have used the dress sometimes to create a comedy scene (Personal interview, 29 June 2013).

**Ganga – Jamuna Tehzeeb**

After independence, films promoted the ideology of shared culture, which endorses a sense of common belief and culture among Hindus and Muslims. In Urdu, this shared culture is known as *Ganga – Jamuna Tehzeeb*. Awadh region in Uttar Pradesh was the main hub of this culture because of the composite culture of the Mughal Persians and the already existing culture of Varanasi. Asgar Ali Engineer sketches out,

> Immediately after independence till right up to 1980s, films were mainly based on North Indian Muslim culture: nawab, jagirdar etc. Cultural ethos, secular ethos, Ganga-Jamuna Tehzeeb or composite culture: two religions developed a new culture to which both the communities contributed equally. Urdu was also the product of Ganga – Jamuna Tehzeeb (Personal interview, 8 December 2012).

National Award winning lyricist and producer Amit Khanna strongly criticises the idea of shared culture. He thinks that because of shared culture there is homogenised representation of different religious and ethnic groups in Hindi cinema. India is culturally diverse and every state and even regional small place has its own culture. People do not follow culture on the basis of their religion in India because most of the minorities in India are converted from the Hindu religion. So, they continue to follow same cultural elements and rituals which they used to follow before their conversion. Amit Khanna thinks that shared culture is
very much responsible for the homogenised representation of the different identities. He says,

What I disagree with most observers is that they give too much emphasis on Ganga–Jamuna Tahjeeb. This is an Uttar Pradesh phenomenon and Uttar Pradesh dominated our thought and created a process especially in Hindi cinema. Thus, there was a constant harping about a shared culture. It has actually backlashed because shared culture is a whitewash of an entire nation. I am not talking of community of Hindu and Muslim, the issue is not about minority and majority, the issue is you are taking away the identity of people, there is no such thing because a Muslim from Kerala has nothing to do with that. He lives a life completely like any other Hindu: he eats the same food, speaks the same language as Hindu or for that matter a Muslim in Assam. There was never a shared culture. It was always an elitist culture. I belong to a family, which had shared culture, but we were a minority. When we are discussing world at large, in India, we have to understand the ground reality. Hyderabad had a shared culture, but not in Telangana because that was not an issue (Personal interview 24 March 2014).

Oriental influence

In the Muslim Historical genre, Arabian fantasy is an important theme. In the silent era and before independence, there were many films based on The Arabian Nights and many of them dealt with legendary stories such as Alibaba and the Forty Thieves (1927), Hatim Tai (1927), Bulbul-e-Paristan (1926), Shirin—Farhad (1931), Laila—Majnu (1922 and 1927). Even India’s first talkie, Alam Ara (1931) was based on Arabian fantasy. Though these films were based on the Muslim world, there was nothing Islamic about them. Mahesh Bhat remembers and says,

My father Nanabhai Bhat made more than hundred films and he used to make so many Arabian Night Fantasies. Muslims in those movies were dressed in very exotic attire (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).

Although a lot of Islamicate culture is attached to Muslim historical films such as Mughal rulers, Muslim ethos, and Islamicate costumes, the influence of oriental stories, there are some commercial and political aspects of those representations as well along with entertainment. In the next section, I discuss the mechanics of those portrayals.
THE COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

This section focuses on the perception of the commerce and politics behind making the Muslim Historical films. As most of the historical films were made immediately after independence, I have examined the political and commercial aspects of filmmaking of that time. It is important to understand the general mindset of the filmmakers and how state ideology influenced them. I have interviewed filmmakers who belonged to that era and also those of the young generation filmmakers and film critics who have interacted with the earlier generation. Three major themes emerged from interviews with these individuals: (i) progressive movement and left-leaning filmmakers; (ii) Partition of India and its effect on filmmaking; and (iii) Identity crisis of Muslim actors of the time.

Nehruvian Policy and the Secular Filmmaker

Screen-writer Kamlesh Pandey expressed his opinion on historical films during a conversation. He thinks that state policy is not responsible for any kind of filmmaking and basically its filmmaker’s decision to propagate an ideology. He says,

In Nehruvian era, Muslim characters were portrayed as sane because of the secular mindset of the common man. Aboveall, there were progressive movements which included writers, artists, and employers who influenced filmmaking. There was a progressive thought at that time was more left leaning. That era was associated with progressive writers like Shahir, Akhtar, Kafi Azmi, Majroo Sultanpuri, Aga Jani Kasmiri, Mojahed Moza, Ali Raza, Akhtar Ul Rehman, Aftak Mirza who were engaged in popular cinema. Thus, in popular cinema Muslim character was portrayed as good. Their stories dealt with human emotion. They were not coloured to any religion bias (Personal interview, 29 March 2013).

Social activist and scholar, Ram Puniyani has similar opinion. He thinks filmmakers were rooted in secular values:

In some films, the depiction of Muslims was really beautiful. In the earlier era, the scriptwriters were themselves deeply rooted in secular values. Films were trying to uphold the secular ethos and positive image of the communities (Personal interview, 16 August 2012).

Film critic Shihadiya Sen also thinks similarly,
After independence, our country was considered as secular, democratic... In 1950s and 1960s, secularism was the main concern in most films and they have shown the unity of Hindus and Muslims (Personal interview, 13 March 2013).

Nehruvian era was a period when nation-building and promoting secularism were the main ideology of filmmakers. Many filmmakers were also leftist and secular minded. But there are filmmakers and film critics who raised the question of fair representation of Muslims though the Muslim Historical. Film director of New York (2009), Ek Tha Tiger (2012) and Kabul Express (2006), Kabir Khan thinks that mainstream cinema always stereotype characters though the filmmakers of Muslim historical tried to represent Muslim as sane. He points out,

Mainstream cinema is always being stereotypical, cupboard character and the Muslim Historical is no exception. There are various reasons if you sort of analyse and do some academic research and you will realise that in the post independence era, there was a conscious effort by filmmakers...the social fabric of the country was torn apart by Partition and they attempted to show benevolent Muslims, the good Muslim (Personal interview, 2 April 2013).

National Award winning director of God Mother, Vinay Shukla resonated similar ideas and said:

...Muslim were stereotyped in a sympathetic way, for example, Dhool Ka Phool, somebody who is very kind, very good at heart, as if we wanted like politicians wants their votes the film producers wanted their audience to think...this is our film where we have shown as such good people. So, we wanted to watch them and were ready to buy tickets. That is why there was stereotypical representation (Personal interview, 26 April 2013).

On the one side, some of them think that the Muslim Historical was made because of some ideological reasons. But, on the other side are those who think that there were purely commercial reasons behind making those films. Filmmakers made those films because Muslim historical films were more saleable than films of other genres of the era. Noted film critic and former editor of magazines like Filmfare, Zee Premiere, and Screen, Rauf Ahmed said,

All Anarkalis (films which portrayed Anarkali as an important protagonist) are big hits. Anarkali (1953) was a hit, later Taj Mahal (1963) was a hit, and most importantly Mughal-e-Azam was a blockbluster (Personal interview, 28 August 2013).

United Kingdom based documentary filmmaker and television producer Nasreen Munni Kabir emphasised the earlier opinion:
You can't say that in the Nehruvian era, filmmakers wanted to represent Muslims as good and sensible person. If a filmmakes money, Indian filmmakers copy the theme of the film anytime and they will make four identical films. Anarkali (1953) did so well, so filmmakers stared putting Ananrkali character in many subsequent films like Anarkali (1953) and Taj Mahal (1963). I don't think it is wilful to represent Muslims as good in Muslim stories (Personal Interview, 11 February 2013).

Film critic Shiladitya Sen has compared Umrao Jaan (1981) and 36 Chowrangee Lane (1981) and he tells how Umrao Jaan was well appreciated by audience than Aparna Sen’s 36 Chowrangee Lane:

The films, Umrao Jaan and 36 Chowrangee Lane were released in the year 1981. Although both the directors, Muzaffar Ali and Aparna Sen, were non-mainstream directors, Umrao Jaan did better in the sense that it was more appreciated by the audience. Even actor Rekha got the National award for the best actress. Public appresiated the film more because it was about Umbraco Jaan and she was most beautiful, and said well too. All these romanticisms are important factors to attract audience and specially Hindus. They cherish those images and as a result Muslims are represented as others (Personal interview, 13 April 2013).

Though there are a lot of commercial reasons of stereotyped representations of Muslims in this genre, the analysis of this section will not be complete without including the political aspects of those representations. In the next sub-section, I shall discuss the political impact in the film industry and how politics played an important role to change actor’s identity from the 1940s through the 1960s.

**Partition and Muslim Artists in Hindi Cinema**

The Muslim Historical was seen to be a trend from the 1940s to the mid-1960s. During this period, there were many critical events including Partition of India and communal tension due to various riots. The identity of Muslim artists was critical during the period and their acceptance as a minority in India became an issue. Some of them went to Pakistan. Some of them even migrated back to India to work in the much-established Bombay film industry than one in Lahore. They had to change their names such as Dilip Kumar, Meena Kumari, Madhubala, Jayant, Jonny Walker, etc. by become accepted to the majority Hindu in this country. Renowned filmmaker Shyam Benegal says,

*There was a reason because when you have the whole business of partition particularly, it was problem for them who wanted to be popular in film. That’s why they changed their name from Muslim name to Hindu name because the*
majority audience was Hindu. And it was in the context of India and Pakistan. Before that there was no problem. It became a problem particularly at the time of 40s, and then these people came into the film business like Dilip Kumar (Yusuf khan) came into the film industry in 1944/1945. It was a very crucial time. In that there were riots and the struggle between India and Pakistan and politics. At that time some of them went to Pakistan. Sheikh Mukhtar went to Lahore. He did not stay in India. Now, Dilip kumar and similarly many of them changed their names. Gradually, it became a norm to do this. Everybody knew that the man was Muslim. Later the tradition got disappeared with coming of the generation, the Khans (Personal interview, 29 June 2013).

Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt thinks that people changed their names not only for commercial reasons, but became of the trend of assimilating into the majority group. He accepts that there may be some people who have done so because of business reasons. He says,

_I think Dilip sahib (Sir) did it more out of the need to say, 'look I am one of you'. But people would like to believe that Dilip Kumar was the name to hide his identity. In most of his films, he has played the role of a Hindu and in the Ganga Yamuna film he says ‘Hey Ram’. At the same time he played the role of Salim in Mughal-e-Azam. He represented the secular core of India. He was the product of that glorious time. I don't know much about the others. May be its a reason to conceal or to have a neutral identity. We saw even post-9/11. I went to London and saw a lot of Pakistani men gave themselves English nicknames. So that they would not be discriminated against in the business they ran. May be that was the reason, I do not know. They [film actors] gave Hindu names and neutral names like Jonny walker. Jayant was there before independence and before that also his name was changed. May be he tried to reach out to the maximum not for hiding. But some may have done for pure commercial reasons_ (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).

Hyder Ali thinks that the fact of changing names is very situational. He has given very valid references where people did not change their names.

_See it’s a very complex question and quite situational. Even at that time, the reason I told you, we couldn’t generalise. There were big Muslim stars even before independence like Master Nisar, Al Naseem, S. Nazeem and they started in the silent era but stayed after Partition also. Big stars of the time like Yakoob Khan, Master Nazir, Nasir, Rehman did not change their names. I don't think Dilip Kumar changed his name to hide his [Muslim] identity. Probably, Yusuf Khan was not sounding good; that's why Debika Rani gave three options to him: Mahesh Kumar, Dilip Kumar and something else. In films, changing name is very situational. Dilip Kumar probably felt his name was not attractive. Hamis Ali changed his name to Ajit. Immediately after Partition, he was in film called Aapbiti (1947) and the film was on Hindu-Muslim unity and as a result he had to change his name. The picture was not allowed to be released because Qurshid, and Nurjahan left for Pakistan in 1947. Ajit stayed back, so he had to change his name from Hamid Ali to Ajit. In his second film which was Bekasoor, they changed his name as Ajit_ (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).
Haider Ali shares very interesting experience of his father’s (Popularly known as actor Kumar who appeared in Mughal-e-Azam and Shri 420) life and why his father had to change his name and how the surname Kumar became very common in Indian film industry. He says,

He was my father, Syed Hassan Ali Zaidi, and he was auditioned for a film, Jinda Lash (Shadows of Death) directed by Kumar Debaki Bose in New Theatre, Callcutta in 1932. It belonged to silent era. Debaki Bose liked him and expressed his wish to make a talkie and decided to take him as hero in the film Puran Bhagat (1933). He was playing the role of prince Puran. There was a tension between Hindus-Muslims at that time. Immediately before releasing the picture, suddenly distributors and exhibitors became nervous and they said that it would create a lot of tension and burst out in riots if you put the name Syed Hassan Ali Zaidi as he is playing the role of Puran Bhagat; how can you put Hassan Ali? A Muslim can’t play the role of a Bhagat. Kumar Debaki Bose decided that he is playing the role of a Prince and Prince means Kumar and Kumar Debaki Bose was a Prince from a royal family. Finally, he took out his own name Kumar and put my father’s name as Kumar in the film. In the next day, he saw his name is Kumar and asked Debaki Bose ‘Dada ki holo?’ (What happened to my name brother?). Bose narrated the story and said everybody would recognise you by this name. Later, the film became a box office hit. My father never changed his name again. Before people used Kumar to address prince but now they indicate actor by the word Kumar. Ashok Ganguly became Ashok Kumar. Yusuf khan became Dilip Kumar, Rajendra Kumar, Manoj Kumar (Hari Krishna Gowasmi) right up till Akshay Kumar followed the trend (Rajiv Bhatia) (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).

The Muslim Historical genre achived its popularity during the the time of independence and in the aftermath of independence. I have already discussed the characteristics and mechanics of the genre, but, we should look into the trend of fading away of the genre in the late 1960s. Though until recently, some filmmakers have made Muslim historical films but those numbers are very less. In the next secton, I will discuss the reasons of gradual shift from The Muslim Historical to The Muslim Social genre.

**SHIFT FROM THE MUSLIM HISTORICAL TO THE MUSLIM SOCIAL**

In this section, I discuss the cause of sudden shift from the Muslim Historical to the Muslim Social. It has been already observed that there were various factors behind making of the Muslim Historical as a film genre. It is also necessary to
critically examine the dying of this genre. The Muslim Historical films were the representative of the elite Muslims and *tehzeeb* (high culture) of the Mughal emperors. Mughal Kings were represented as being very respectful to other religions, as being opposed to the oppression and suffering of ordinary people. This ideology fitted well with the Nehruvian secular policy (Bhaskar and Alen 2009). But Jawaharlal Nehru never supported the film industry. Madhav Prasad writes, ‘Nehruvian state did not do for the industry what it was committed to doing for other industry’ (1998: 33). But, like other film historians, Dwyer also thinks that the historical films supported the Congress party’s idea of history, ‘and its heroes were those seen in Nehru’s *Discovery of India* (1946), such as Akbar, rather than the heroes of Muslim community, such as Aurangzeb, Genghis Khan and Mehmud of Ghazni’ (Dwyer 2006:116). Film maker Mahesh Bhatt thinks that this genre faded away due to Nehru’s loosing of power. He points out, 

_Nehru lost his clout post-Chinese debacle in 1962. The fact was Congress had always had this problem of bigots within its own home rather than outside. So, when he was losing his own control, we saw slowly the death of Urdu and that kind of Muslim ethos_ (Personal interview, 31 March 2014).

Actor and writer Haider Ali points out a very important reason for the decline of the Muslim Historical. To him, commerce is one of the most important cause, because any kind of historical film needs a lot of money to complete the production of the film. He gave some examples to explain how some film production companies closed down after failure of even a single film.

_Muslim Historical needs big budget and needs a big canvas. If you are making a historical film, you need to show the wars and all. Historical films require elaborate sets, heavy jewellery to ornament the kings and queens. So, the historical films demands a lot of economic investments to represent everything magnificent. Thus, if you are losing money, it’s a lot of money. Companies began closing down not only because of Muslim Historical, but also because of the whole historical genre. Jhashi ki Rani (1953) flopped; Shorab Modi’s company had to close down. Before that he made many historical and they were big hits, for example Pukar (1939) and Sikandar (1941). For only one film he had to close down his production company. Vinod Kumar made a film called Jahan Ara, it was flopped and company closed. That’s why after Razia Sultan (1983), nobody dares to make the historical film. Ashotosh Gowarikar did make the film not because of its history, rather to represent the unity between Hindu-Muslim. Jodha Akbar (2008) was primarily a love story_ (Personal interview, 5 April 2014).

Filmmaker Kamlesh Pandey ignored the capitalist mode of historical filmmaking and pointed out that lack of talent might be a reason. He says,
It is not easy to make Mughal-e-Azam. It not just the money, it’s the kind of artists and actors. How can you get the same talented actors like Prithviraj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Madhubala? (Personal interview, 29 March 2013).

Film critic, Nandini Ramnath thinks that there is no specific reason or particular motive for the dying of the Muslim Historical genre.

*I don’t think there is a motive just as much as those kinds of movies are not made anymore. They are dying. I mean that genre because film is also divided into genres and certain genres die. Also up till the 1960s, you could still evoke Awadh, Lucknowi culture as an idea because people remembered* (Personal interview, 5 February 2013).

The genre mainly belonged to the post-independence period, but there are some filmmakers who still get fascinated with the historical topic. After being asked the reason behind making historical films most of the time, the director of epic film *Jodha Akbar* (2008), Ashutosh Gowrikar opines,

*I don’t know actually. Somehow, I am very fascinated with history* (Personal interview, 22 August 2013).

**CONCLUSION**

Muslim Historical genre is basically based on the Mughal court scenario and evokes Muslim ethos through flowery Persianised-Urdu language, decorative ornaments and clothes, and of grandeur architecture. Basically, the genre represents a good way of life. Most of the Muslim historical films revolve around imagined love stories and Anarkali is most popular among them. Exoticism is the primary characteristic of the Muslim Historical genre in this period and thus participants also mentioned that Muslims are positively stereotyped. *Ganga – Jamuna Tehzeeb* or shared culture is another important reason for homogenised Muslim representation claimed by filmmakers. Being fusion between Mughal Persian culture of Islam and already existing culture of Varanasi, shared culture is not inclusive of all the cultures of each state and region throughout India. The Muslim Historical always portrays the composite culture of Awadhi region. As a result, the whole genre becomes stereotyped and realism does not exist in the genre.
The Muslim Historical genre supports the secular ethos of India claim by film historians such as Rechel Dwyer and Ira Bhaskar. But the study participants (filmmakers and film critics) think that profit making is the primary concern for any filmmaker and the Muslim Historical films are no exception. They think that the Muslim Historicals were more demanding before independence and it was equally true in the aftermath of independence. That is the primary reason to make the Muslim Historical film rather than promoting the ideology of secular ethos. This agenda becomes clearer when we recognise the fact that because of the communal tension at that time, some actors had to change their name to reach out to the maximum audience and to get accepted by the majority. Discussion on name change also highlights how Hindu mythological films with Muslim actors in the lead had a potential to create tension in the society at the time.

Muslim Historical genre is not commonplace now. The genre started fading away because of many factors as suggested by the study participants. The major reasons are the death of Urdu language, as Urdu was the core of the genre. Moreover, to authenticate historical films, and to represent the grandeur of the past a lot of investment of money is required. But, this justification is naive because, after liberalisation in the early 1990s, a lot of high budget films have been produced. The same films also have big marketing budgets to compete and sell in the international market. International film-producing companies with sound finances like Warner Bros. Pictures, Fox Star Studios, Sony, and Viacom18, etc. have started producing films in India. Thus, the claim of lack talent that emerged during the interviews also provides unclear justification.

The last section of this chapter discusses the phenomenon of fading away of the Muslim Historical genre. The discussion in the next chapter would focus on the Muslim Social genre and the representation of language, culture, region, socio-economic status. Another interesting development in the late 1970s and 1980s was the portrayal of Mumbai’s underworld characters, who were mostly Muslims. The next chapter would analyze the reasons behind the shift of the representation from the Muslim Historical genre to the Muslim Social genre.