

THE PERCEPTION OF MUSLIM AUDIENCE ON THE PORTRAYAL OF ISLAM IN TAMIL CINEMA

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Abstract

Media representation of minorities and minority group issues - or indeed the lack of representation - is a key factor in determining how majority audiences think about minorities in their societies. These ideas can be directly applied to media coverage of Muslim minorities. Cinema is the primary source of image construction among the community members than the other entire medium. In the post-Babri Masjid demolition chaos, India has tried to relive its traditional image of a secular nation with the media playing a sensitive role to disseminate various views both political and religious with a vehemence to create a new face of Islam in India. Stereotypes are "cognitive structures that contain the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about human groups" (Hurwitz et al., 1997, p31). This study examines the stereotyped representation of Muslims in Tamil Films in Last Five years (2008-2013). The current study is aimed to analyze Muslim youth audience perception on the portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema. For this study, the researcher used to apply the cultivation research. Cultivation research is cultivation analysis: "a comparison between light television viewers and heavy television viewers. If heavy television viewers tended to provide answers that were more in line with the television response, researchers would have support for the cultivation hypothesis" (Miller, 2005, p. 283). In this scenario, the present study is aimed to find out how the Muslims were portrayed and to examine how they are stereotyped in Tamil films. And the study will analyze perception of Muslim audiences on the portrayal of Islam in Tamil films. Methodology planned to adopt is Quantitative survey. 100 Muslims samples were chosen from 2 districts (Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli), using purposive sampling technique and analyzed by using a structured questionnaire. The study will reveal the portrayal Muslim community in Tamil Movie and the perception of Muslims on the portrayal as a terrorist will be analyzed.

Keywords: *Stereotype, negative representation, audience research, Muslims*

Introduction

India is second largest populous country in the world. Unity in diversity is the biggest advantage of our country. India has much diversity through language, religion, culture, tradition and so on. It's also the birthplace of four main religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. According to the 2001 census, the Hinduism (80.5%) is the largest religion of our country and the second largest religion is Islam (13.4%). Then

Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%), Janis (0.4%). Behind of this diverse, India is a legislative Secular Country. On the other hand, after the independence much religious communal conflicts were created between Hindus and Muslims communities. After the partition of India, India has faced large-scale violence attacks and communal tension between the Hindus and Muslim communities such as 1969 Gujarat riots, 1970 Bhiwandi Riots, 1983 Nellie massacre, and the 1989 Bhagalpur violence. In 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, these conflicts get the major direction, it affects the secularism of our country. For these violence affects both religion innocent people and their life. This communal clash makes the issue more political. The extreme level of violent attack was happening in New York City in 9/11 by Al-Qaeda group. This incident would change the view of the entire world about the total Muslim community. Aftermath the incident 9/11, the word "terrorists" was glued to Muslims (Khan and Bokhari, 2011). Non-Muslim people had little or no familiarity with Islam or Muslims prior to 9/11 but the news coverage of the event brought Islam and its adherents into sharp focus for them (Rane&Ewart 2013).

After this issue, the media focused on a religious point of presentation on all issues. The media are the key influencers of public opinion of Muslims, and have portrayed negative representations and stereotypes of these people with political and media agenda in mind (*Christine Barton, 2010*). Especially the cinema can play in a major role of presenting Islam in negative character. Many movies are released with Islamic based content in India after 1990's and more over it increased high-level after the 9/11 incident. In the past decades, the cinema shows stereotypically Muslims are bad people and they do against humanity. Stereotypes of Islam as fanatical, intolerant, militant, fundamentalist, misogynist and foreign have previously led to the opposition of Mosque developments, and lie behind arson attacks and racist violence (*Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007, p. 569*).

Cinema is a popular medium which will see by all categories of the people. Cinema is the way to transfer the message or stories to the mass level audience. It is an entertainment medium and exposes reality. It is the world's most complex, collaborative, and costly artistic expression. Films not only make the opinion, but also reshape the opinions. Films reshape old trends, customs and traditions. If one idea prevails strongly in a society, then it can be transmitted from one society to another (Khan and Bokhari). Since the early 1990s - coinciding with the Kashmir rebellion, the destruction of the Babri Masjid and its fallout - a transition has taken place in the portrayal of the Muslims. In the cinema and television of the 1990s, the Muslim 'terrorist' has increasingly appeared as a threat to India in keeping with the changing political climate and discourse of the country, *Roja* being the most accepted film of this genre (*Purba Banerjee*). The cinema had the responsibility to see how these representations have shaped public opinion of Islam. Bollywood is also playing an ample role to fuel the fire with regard to portraying the Muslim

image as terrorists. This current study aims to analyze how Tamil cinema portrays the Muslim people and that portrayal how can create the impact on the Muslim in the real world.

Review of Literature

Shahzad Ali, Sidra Chaudhry, Rooh-e-Aslam and A.B. Faridi (Pakistan) says in their research (2012) under the topic "*Portrayal of Muslims Characters in the Indian Movies*", The alternation of Muslims from philanthropists to terrorists is the reflection of changing perception about Muslims in the Indian society. They conclude their research that the Indian movies represent the Muslim as negative and reprobate increased during 1990-2005. Faiza Hirji (Canada) in her article entitled "*Change of Pace? Islam and Tradition in Popular Indian Cinema*" According to her, Islam is a mandatory organ of Bollywood is always portrayed in a heinous and obnoxious way.

Jessop (2000) says India has a big minority of Muslims who are living in India since thousands of years. But now the Hindus are not tolerating the Muslim presence in their homeland, and they look at Muslims as terrorists, traitors, and militants etc. even women and children are also included. Plenty of movies are made in which Muslims are shown as bad people who are not faithful to their motherland and involved in fostering violence in Indian areas. The Hindu-Muslim hatred was increased after such films. Khan and Bokhari (Multan) says in their article, Indian cinema is portraying Muslims as terrorists and bad people. While analyzing the Indian movies qualitatively, the researchers found that Muslims are, more or less, shown as terrorists, traitors, disloyal, cruel and barbarian type of people. They are also shown as underworld people. Muslims are portrayed negatively who had connections and support from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Miss Nafisa H Kattarwala (India) expressed in her article, Let the media continue to explore the functional facet of Islam, whose religious representation is perhaps more practical than its ideological interpretation. This is assuring, as India will have to live with its many faiths co-existing together and the media will play a very crucial role in interpreting Islam as a binding force rather than a divisive one. The Indian mass-media will have to cross this mirage of fragmentation to create a country of cultural confluence through its sensitive representation of Islam every time and this alone will help secularism survive the long battle against communal schism. Kevin Dunn (2004: 292) claims, "Social constructions of identity are given life through their articulation." This means that recurring language used to describe Islam and Muslims (such as 'Islamic terrorism,' 'Muslim fanatics') can come to be representative of all Muslims and Islam as a religion. It is also important to note that these representations are gendered. Dominant stereotypes portray men as foreign (and more recently local) terrorists or extremists, where as women are

constructed as repressed hijab wearers who need to be liberated from patriarchal oppression and violence. These Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims further suggest that Muslims are intolerant of other religions and Western cultures. Mirza (Croatia) expressed her words under the topic of The Perception of Islam and Muslims in the Media and the Responsibility of European Muslims towards the Media. The Author says that how the media portrayed Islam and the Muslims perception about the responsibility of the media towards the Muslims. Mirza said most western media are using the September 11th event to capitalize its political gain. These media depict Islam as "fundamentalism", "extremism" and "radicalism". Of course, in the modern world where the role of media is central, the image of reality can be manipulated to misrepresent the actual facts. The media have tried to represent Muslims as "terrorists" posing a threat to the western security.

By the words of Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, demonstrates that Hollywood films portraying Arabs and Muslims frequently allude to or are based upon actual events or issues, giving fictional films a factual or authoritative character. In his analysis of over 900 films portraying Arabs and Muslims, Shaheen found them to repeatedly dehumanize Arabs and Muslims, and portray them as heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics, who are violent, and terrorists. He argues that the repetitious nature of such portrayals has a negative impact on public discourse and policy. Films that offered audiences a human and humanist understanding of Islam and Muslims were very few. Dr Mohamad Abdalla and Halim Rane(2007) says in his study, they conclude that the media not affected the real value of the interrelationship of Muslim and non-Muslim communities Contrary to common understandings, and of significance to interrelations between Australian Muslims and non-Muslims, the findings of this research demonstrate that about 78% of Queenslanders are comfortable with Muslims as part of the Australian society, while 67% did not regard Muslims as a threat to Australia. This is a departure from what is commonly portrayed in some media outlets and political rhetoric. This research also demonstrates that the greater the knowledge about Islam, and the more interactions with Muslims, leads to a reduction and overcoming of the 'fear' of the 'other' and associated misconceptions. In the case of Australian Muslims, this allows for the shattering of the dehumanized and demonized image that has become the preferred paradigm of the media.

Theoretical Background

The researcher adopts **Cultivation theory** for this study. The cultivation theory emphasis the heavy viewer of television gets more impact by the violence appearance. The researcher applies this theory for the stereotypical presentation of Islam in Tamil films. The **Structuralism film theory** emphasizes how films convey meaning through the use of codes

and conventions not dissimilar to the way languages are used to construct meaning in communication. This theory is used to analyze the portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema.

Methodology

The methodology plays a vital role in determining the success of the study. The researcher has adopted Quantitative methods. Survey technique was used to collect the Muslim audience perception on the portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema. 100 Muslims samples were chosen from 2 districts (Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli), using purposive sampling technique.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the perception of muslims on the portrayal of Islam and muslims recent Tamil cinemas.
- To analyze the impact of Islamic based films on the real life of Muslims.
- To determine the perception of a Muslim audience on the portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema.

Samples

The Researcher had chosen 100 Muslim respondents from 2 districts (Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli) in Tamilnadu, using purposive sampling technique to know about the Muslim audience perception on the portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema and to find the details about the impact of Islam portrayal in the real world.

Discussion of the Study

Level of Interest in Watching the Islamic based Tamil Movies

Based on the analysis, the interest level towards watching the Islamic based Tamil films showed a majority of 62.8% respondents who like to watch these type of films. 37.2% respondents don't like to watch the Islamic based movies. Most of Muslim audience don't seeks to spend their free time with watching movies. But this last decade, this trend will be changed. The minorities had getting good place in our society.

Level of Stereotype Presentation of the Islamic based Tamil Movies

Based on this study, the analysis examine how the Islam is portrayed stereotypically. The Muslim audiences give their own perception among the stereotypical portrayal of Islam in Tamil cinema. The Anwar movie revealing the real incident of the Coimbatore Bomb Blast. In this movie makes skepticism on the Islam community. The Muslim people are misinterpreted the Muslim protagonists/characters in a negative way -

as terrorists, anti-nationals, anti-socials and non-modern. The Local area Muslims are also misinterpreted as a terrorist and they included in bomb blasting and such manner.

Most of the respondents said that the Portrayal of Minorities in Movies is mostly in the manner of terrorism (46.2%). In viswaroopam the super hit movie of 2013 fully focused on the Muslims and Islam in negative angle. In this Film hero was getting the training by Al-Qaeda group. The hero also act in a muslim character. The word jihadi is used often by many of the people in this movie. The strict rule followed against women to cover their face and they are restricted to speak to any others. They give the practice jihadi from the childhood in their villages. Taliban and only terrorism practice by islam people against America from Afghanistan. The suicide attack also practices for their religion. They are ready to die for their group. The children also practice to play shooting game. The women partha systems are fully followed in this movie. Inshah allah the word used most of time. These type of terrorism activities are fully focused on the muslim people. The portrayal of Religion/Beliefs is mostly in Low level, religious aspects, Terrorist (33.3%) and The Portrayal of Islam in Movies is mostly in a religious way of presentation (48.7%). Many of the respondents say that Portrayal of Muslims characters in Tamil cinema were mostly on the basis of the terrorism (67.9%) and the background location of the Muslim characters depends on the socially excluded, Family background, and also minorities. The Muslim womens are always shows in understated. From these Findings shows the most of the Tamil cinema portray the Minorities, especially Muslims in mostly negative by the opinion of the respondents.

Level of Impact Creates by the Negative Presentation of Islamic based Tamil Movies on the Real Life of the Muslims of the Society

The analysis of the study shows the level of reaction given by the Muslim audience when seeing the Muslim character in Tamil films. The negative portrayal of Muslim character makes them worry It also irritates some of the respondents (35.9%). Their behaviors were portrayed as violent, selfish and immoral. The Vaanam, Payanam, anwar, Viswaroopam and the like movies are expressed Muslims with terror machineries. Payanam movie shows the hijacking activity of the terrorist.

Based on the findings, the Muslim respondents most of them getting angry with the Tamil film director/ producer whom they portray Muslims in negative character. The negative portrayal affects more to the Muslim audience, especially youth and children. They easily believe the content of the movie and they easily observe the negative content. The negative portrayal is affecting our nation's secularism. Most respondents said many directors/ producer reflects in their films their own view about the Islam (71.8). 87.2% respondents told that this type of negative presentation affected high level of the Islamic

culture and its tradition. It also affects the secularism of our country (80.8%). The Table-5 shows the impact of influence of film producer/director's own opinion that reflect on the real life.

And the above tables said that the perception of 100 Muslim audience from the area of KanyaKumari and Tirunelveli.

Conclusion

According to the opinion of the respondents, Most of the Muslim people don't like to see the Islamic based especially negative portrayal Tamil movies. Most of the Muslim audience thinks that the film production team doesn't understand the real nature of Islamic tradition. Islam expressed peace and love, but the filmmaker doesn't portray the positive and the real Islamic trend. And most of the samples refers that the cinema is the main reason for the misunderstanding of Islam religion before the other religion and it makes the negative opinion and it creates to treat them like a terrorist. Based on the analyze, Many of them said that these types of negative presentation make the good one to the bad people especially the Muslim children and Youth are affected high-level. The real life is so different from the cinema in this manner. In Tamilnadu, Muslims and other religion people have a good relationship with each other. But the negative portrayal makes the chance to create the community conflict. Viswaroopam, Anwar, Bombay and the like Tamil movies are the extreme level of films that focused Muslims on negative character. And the most of the audience said that the negative portrayal was affecting our secularism of our country. They are also the citizen of our India.

Besides that, The Muslims audience seeks to the positive presentation and they want to portray the real way of Islam. The real life Islam is not based on the violence. The Islam also one of the way peace, love and brotherhood and the violence down by anyone at anytime, for this reason the audience told their own opinion that the violence done by anyone not only by Muslims. So, they need to suggest the cinema industry don't mention the particular religion and any belief of the people to use their own success. The success comes to give a good cinema to everyone in the world, if they want to take the violent movie, not mention and irritating anyone's belief and tradition.

To concludes with the message that the negative portrayal was affected the Muslims in the real world. The stereotype negative portrayal is getting the chance to change the good one to motivate to do the violence. In India, the cinema is one of the major entertainment media. The cinema is the only source, it affect the entire change of the trend. In this scenario, these types of stereotyped negative portrayal they give the chances for an negative impact to be society. The film industry must be very careful,

responsible, and conscious our secularism principles. All minority communities are to be treated equal by the media and in order to maintain the secularism of the country.

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List of Tables

Table:1-Level of Stereotypical Presentation of the Islamic based Tamil Movies

The Portrayal of Minorities in Movies	Under level people	12.8%
	Common man	24.4%
	Terrorist	46.2%
	Religious aspects	16.7%
The Portrayal of Religion/Beliefs	Low level	10.3%
	Religious aspects	25.6%
	Terrorist	30.8%
	All the above	33.3%
The Portrayal of Islam in Movies	Traditional	7.7%
	Religious way	48.7%
	Normal	5.1%
	All the above	38.5%
Portrayal of Muslims characters in Tamil cinema	Gentlemen	7.7%
	Religious way	17.9%
	Terrorism basis	67.9%
	Patriotism basis	6.4%
The background of Muslims in Tamil cinema	Socially excluded	16.7%
	Family background	15.4%
	Minorities	25.6%
	All the above	42.3%

Table: 2- The Reactions of the Respondents

	Irritated	Worried	Never Mind	No Reaction
When seeing the negative portrayal Of Muslims in Movies	35.9%	55.1%	5.1%	3.8%
The Muslim audience when seeing the wrong portrayal (dressing style, behavior) of Muslim character	39.7%	55.1%	2.6%	2.6%
When seeing in weapons bearing situation by Muslim character	29.5%	60.3%	5.1%	5.1%

Table: 3-The Reflection of the Film In Real Life

Variables	Yes	No
Getting angry with Director/producer	87.2%	12.8%
The reflection of Producer/director own view	71.8%	28.2%
It affects Islamic culture	87.2%	12.8%
It affects the secularism our nation	80.8%	19.2%