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Representation of Muslims in Bollywood Cinema: A Study of ‘Padmaavat’ and ‘Bajirao Mastani’

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of Hindutva in India, Muslim representation has become a serious concern. “Muslims” have often been dubbed as foreigners, bigoted, militant and terrorists. Medieval period has been depicted as a period of persecution of Hindus by the Muslims rulers. In India, film (Bollywood) is recognised as a powerful medium with a large local audience. Following the emergence of Hindutva, there was a significant increase in what we referred to as anti-Muslim films. These films often perpetuate negative stereotypes and fuel religious tensions in the country. This paper will examine the portrayal of mediaeval Muslim rulers in the Bollywood period drama films Padmaavat and Bajirao Mastani.

Bollywood began in the 1930s and has since evolved into an enormous film empire. It produces movies primarily in the Hindi language and has a global audience. Bollywood produces a wide variety of films, including romantic dramas, action thrillers, comedies musicals and historical epics. Bollywood cinema has indeed portrayed medieval society in various films, often romanticizing or stereotyping certain aspects. In this paper two Bollywood movies-Padmaavat and Bajirao Mastani-are selected for detailed analysis of their stories and particularly their representation of the Muslims. Padmaavat movie is based on the Urdu epic poem by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 13th century. Padmaavati was a Rajput Queen and Sultan Alauddin Khilji hearing of her beauty invaded her kingdom to claim her as his prize. Second movie is Bajirao Mastani which highlights the story of Maratha Peshwa, Bajirao and his relationship with his second wife, daughter of Rajput King Chhatrasal and Ruhani Bai. By examining the ways in which Bollywood cinema negotiates the complexities of the medieval past, particularly Hindu-Muslim relations, this research highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of India’s rich cultural history and its ongoing representation in popular culture. It will examine the representation of Muslims in these two movies and by comparative analysis, explore the ways and means by which the present concerns influence our representation of the past.

Keywords: Hindu-Muslim, Representation, Bollywood Cinema, Padmaavat, Bajirao Mastani

Introduction

The Bollywood film industry is one of the largest industries globally. When characterizing Bollywood, “film industry has a major effect on societies. Films

both shape and change ideas. If one thought dominates a civilization, it has the potential to spread to other societies. Bollywood is one of the world's most well-known and thriving film industries. Bollywood's influence and effect have grown to nearly hegemonic proportions. Bollywood has a tremendous audience worldwide particularly in Pakistan. Their films convey messages about Muslims from the subcontinent to the public, demonstrating their domination. Bollywood cinema is influencing and redefining Muslim culture and identity through movies. After the independence, Indian entertainment industry, notably materialistic Hindi films often made in Mumbai or Bombay, called by Bollywood cinema, emerged as key medium for newly established nation's national identity. (Chakravarty, 1993)

Films produced during the Nehruvian era (1947-1964), named after Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first Prime Minister), depicted India's past as pluralistic, with Hindus and Muslims equally included into the Indian polity. Despite the fact that films from this era aimed to promote Hindu-Muslim harmony, popular misconceptions about the mediaeval period persisted. Historical movie categorization practically vanishes from sight from the Indian cinematic database from some decade ago, presumably due to the post-colonial era's focus on the contemporary reality.

India, a powerful state with a prevailing Hindu philosophy assisting via nation's amalgamating basis was desired by many Indians during the 1980s as a result of the rise of Hindutva, with objective to transform India from ethnic diversity to a conscientiously homogenous state. This decade also saw the resurgence of ethnic revolutionary demanding separation from the Indian union through conflict in different regions of the country, including Kashmir and the Northeast. (Mubarki, 2014)

It appears such as the politics of Hindutva accurately presented a dominant ideology that united people. During 16th Century, in December 1992, a Hindu nationalist destroyed mosque on the north Indian town of Ayodha, this particular kind of politics achieved its pinnacle. After the mosque was destroyed, Hindu-Muslim riots broke out throughout several regions of India, strengthening local identities. Many felt that the Nehruvian era's emphasis on secularism and tolerance was wholly unable to handle the unstable political climate. In parallel, once India's economy was liberalized in 1991, the Nehruvian disclose divulge to unrestrained acquisitiveness. This resulted into rise of a wealthy middle class in India, via the ideas of Hindu nationalism struck a chord.

The Indian cinema projected a form of ethnic socialism on televisual through stunning films that associated Hindu project in response to market demands brought about by changes in political and economic The Using the lens of medieval history, Ashutosh Gowariker's 2008 film *Jodha Akbar* was the first notable film of the twenty-first century to address these modern issues.

This article explores the use of exaggerated pasts in historical fiction in two films *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Padmaavat* (2018) directed by Sanjay Leela Bansali to talk about Indian politics today. This article introduces a historical

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stance with the reference of Indian culture to address the subjects presented. It will approach memories as an aspect of cultural history, with a focus on social memories associated with particular tales. The paper aims to explore the representation of past incidents that legitimate a present order of society and portray Hindi movies associated with two particular narratives have created community recognitions which incorporate some socio-religious groups while excluding others. The research also discusses the local communities that are constructed under myths, which is a cultural historical component.

Statement of Problem

Bollywood, the Hindi-language entertainment situated in Mumbai, India, is one of the biggest and most persuasive entertainment in the world. It essentially affects public insight and social standards inside India and among the Indian diaspora worldwide. This impact stretches out to the portrayal of different strict and ethnic networks, including Muslims, who comprise a significant minority in India. Moreover, the depiction of Muslims in Bollywood film has been a subject of contention and scholastic interest for a long time. Muslims are much of the time portrayed in stereotypical roles that either laud or deride them, adding to the molding of public discernments and supporting cultural predispositions. This study aimed two eminent movies by director Sanjay Leela Bhansali: “Padmaavat” (2018) and “Bajirao Mastani” (2015). The two movies are shows that depict verifiable struggles including Hindu and Muslim characters.

Literature Review

(Dwyer, R., 2014) Bollywood films have for quite some time been known for their vivid routine numbers and skill for consolidating show, satire, activity experience, and music. Yet, these astonishing and frequently entertaining movies seldom mirror the truth of Indian. Investigating idea of standard Indian film, outlined India cinema looks at nonrealistic portrayals its existence and what it uncovers about its society. India idealism and diversion capability in Bollywood films, Rachel Dwyer contends that Indian cinema throughout the course of recent many years is a solid manual for grasping the country’s changing expectations and dreams. She takes a gander at the manners in which Hindu films has envisioned or depicted the solidarity and variety of the nation — what it accepts and feels, as well as life at home and out in the open. Utilizing Dwyer’s twenty years enjoyed working with producers and talking about films with pundits and moviegoers, Bollywood’s India is an enlightening gander at film.(Viridi, J., 2003) The depiction of Muslims in Bollywood has gone through tremendous changes throughout the long term. Early Bollywood films frequently portrayed Muslims in a positive light, featuring their social wealth and commitments to Indian culture. Notwithstanding, the stories started to move post-freedom and especially after the Parcel of India in 1947. This shift has been affected by socio-political variables, prompting more cliché and

frequently regrettable depictions of Muslims. Researchers like Rachel Dwyer and Jyotika Viridi have reported this progress, taking note of a rising propensity to connect Muslims with psychological warfare and fundamentalism in contemporary movies.

Bhargava (2013) highlights how the portrayal of Muslims shifted post-Partition, with many films of the 1950s and 1960s depicting Muslims in a nostalgic light, reflecting a sense of loss and longing for pre-Partition unity. (Bhargava, 2013) According to Jha (2017), contemporary films have started to move away from simplistic portrayals, though problematic stereotypes still persist. The representation of Muslims has become more complex, reflecting the community's diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

(Kabir, 2019) *Padmaavat*,” in light of the amazing sonnet by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, portrays the narrative of Rani Padmavati and her contention with Ruler Alauddin Khilji. The film's depiction of Khilji as a boorish and obscene intruder has been censured for supporting negative stereotypes about Muslims. Researchers like Ananya Kabir and Shohini Ghosh contend that the film propagates the “othering” of Muslims, depicting them as dangers to Hindu Civilization.

The portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood films like “*Padmaavat*” and “*Bajirao Mastani*” isn't just an impression of verifiable stories yet additionally reverberates with contemporary socio-political settings. The ascent of Hindu patriotism and the rising polarization of Hindu-Muslim relations in India impact and are affected by these depictions in mainstream society. Researchers like Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1996) and Ashis Nandy (Nandy, 1988) play talked about the part of film in molding aggregate personalities and political talks, underscoring the requirement for adjusted and nuanced portrayals.

‘*Bajirao Mastani*,’ directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, has been analyzed by various scholars for its historical and cultural portrayal. Taneja (2016) discusses how the film blends historical facts with creative liberties, impacting the representation of Mastani, who is of Muslim descent. Sinha (2018) highlights Bhansali's use of opulent visuals and elaborate set designs to portray the era, noting how these elements contribute to the representation of Muslim characters and culture. (Sinha, 2018)

(Basu, A., 2023) The author contends that Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2018 Bollywood verifiable film *Padmaavat* is important for a more extensive media-educational atmospherics of contemporary Hindu pride and Islamophobia, drawing on publicized energies of irritation and ethnological generalizing around the figure of the Muslim. Simultaneously, it develops a “double shift” Orientalist crystal of race discernment to see a marvelous “Aryan” Hindu past as well as a dim time frame rule in India set apart by a Semitic, Turko-Arabic pathology. The film is important for a general Hindu patriot task of building an ethical memory (contra history) in the period of the computerized picture that can reevaluate the past, yet

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in addition re-surface and yet again material it, making implied photos of a great Hindu past showing up as tactile and exotic. (Basu, 2023)

Significant of Study

The study of Muslim representation in Bollywood cinema, particularly through the analysis of films such as “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani”. Bollywood has cultural power in India and among the worldwide Indian diaspora. The narratives, characters, and subjects introduced in Bollywood films frequently shape cultural mentalities and social standards. Understanding how Muslims are addressed in such compelling media can reveal insight into more extensive social elements and social discernments. The portrayal of Muslims in film can challenge stereotypes. By analyzing “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani,” this study means to uncover whether these movies sustain generalizations or deal more nuanced depictions. This is crucial for resolving issues of predisposition, segregation, and social cohesion in a different society. Both “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” are authentic dramatizations that portray history of conflict and association among Hindu and Muslim people group. Examining these movies gives overview into how authentic accounts are built and the ramifications these developments have for contemporary intercultural relations. Understanding media portrayal can illuminate public strategy and drives pointed toward advancing variety and consideration. By featuring how Muslims are portrayed in famous movies, this study can uphold endeavors to cultivate more impartial and precise portrayals in media, which is fundamental for an amicable multicultural society.

Research Questions

- To what extent do “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” adhere to or distort historical facts regarding the interactions between Hindu and Muslim characters?
- What are the central themes of “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani,” and how do these themes relate to the representation of Muslims?

Research Objectives

- To analyses the “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” adhere to or distort historical facts regarding the interactions between Hindu and Muslim characters.
- To address the central themes of “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani,” and how do these themes relate to the representation of Muslims.

Research Methodology

This research employs historical context in way to understand the historical events depicted in “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” to assess the accuracy and interpretation of these events in the films. Comparative analysis of the films’ is used for historical representations with scholarly accounts to identify distortions or biases. Comparative study of character types, narratives, and themes across different films to situate “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” within broader industry practices. By employing the comprehensive methodology, the study aims to provide a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the representation of Muslims in “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani,” contributing to the discourse on media representation and cultural diversity in cinema.

Secondary sources are used such as analysis of film reviews, critiques, and audience reactions in media outlets, social media platforms, and online forums. Furthermore, identification of common themes and sentiments expressed by reviewers and audiences regarding the representation of Muslims in the films are also observed. This study explores the representation of Muslims in Bollywood cinema, particularly in the films “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani,” by employ a multi-faceted qualitative research methodology. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the films’ content, context, and impact on audiences. By using content analysis, key scenes that featuring Muslim characters in “Padmaavat” and “Bajirao Mastani” is identified for detailed analysis. Detailed examination of the portrayal of Muslim characters, focusing on their traits, actions, dialogues, and interactions with other characters. This study also used thematic analysis via identification and analysis of recurring themes related to Muslim characters, such as power dynamics, morality, and cultural representation.

Critical Analysis

Padmaavat

In 2018, Padmaavat, an Indian historical drama film in Hindi, was directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s, leading Deepika Padukone as Rajput princess Rani Padmavati, who was brought into the world in Sinhalese and wedded to Shahid Kapoor's personality Maharawal Ratan Singh, the film depends on the legendary sonnet of a similar name by Malik Muhammad Jayasi. After learning about her beauty, Ranveer Singh’s character, Sultan Alauddin Khilji, sets out to conquer her nation. The most costly Indian movie ever produced is Padmaavat.

Jalal-ud-din Khilji, the Khilji monarch of the 13th century, aim to attain the throne in Delhi. Alauddin Khilji, asks Mehrunisa, Jalaluddin’s daughter, for marriage. Although the marriage ceremony is scheduled, Alauddin had an affair with a different woman the night of the event. Shareef Pasha, a well-known courtier who observes the incident, is killed by Alauddin. When Mehrunisa finds out about this at the wedding, she is appalled. Alauddin gets married and becomes Jalaluddin’s army’s chief commander.

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Myth as History

The Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote a poem of the same name sometime about 1540, and this is allegedly where Padmaavat got its inspiration. Alauddin Khilji, the Muslim ruler, besieged Chittor, the capital of Mewar, in honor of queen Padmavati of Mewar, Rajasthan, whose great beauty is one of the primary leads in the story. In 1303, an important historical figure named Alauddin Khilji overthrew Chittor. Although Padmavati is not mentioned in any historical records, Indian culture, especially Rajput cultural memory, assumes that she is a historical character.

In Padmaavat by Jayasi, Ratansen, the prince of Chittor, realizes Padmavati, the princess of Sinhala, is extraordinarily beautiful through his parrot, HIRAMAN. He travels to the farthest island aiming to win her. After a number of encounters, he weds her and takes her to Chittor. The enraged pundit contacts Sultan Alauddin and begs him to apprehend the queen when Ratansen exiles a clever Brahmin, Raghav Chetan, from his court. Alauddin declares a truce during a protracted siege of Chittor. The Sultan is able to catch a peek of the stunning queen when Ratansen extends an invitation to Alauddin to visit his palace. Through being betrayed, Alauddin imprisons Ratansen with the intention of possessing her. Two noblemen from Chittor named Badal and Gora then come to the king's assistance. Devpal, the Rajput, in the meantime.

Based on Jayasi, his Padmaavat is a figurative Sufi story wherein the parrot HIRAMAN represents a profound master and Padmavati portrays timeless insight that must be gained by means of affection, not force, as Alauddin looked for to no end. The poem, which was composed in honor of the reigning ruler Sher Shah, most likely additionally expressed Rajput concerns with Sher Shah's plans of conquest. Many versions of the Padmaavat mythology were written and distributed throughout India throughout the late 16th and early 18th century. The mythology held special significance in Rajasthan during the Middle Ages, when the Rajput kings perceived a danger from the Delhi Mughal emperors' expanding empire. The Rajput stories centered on the struggle between the Rajput king and the Muslim monarch, in contrast to Jayasi's Padmaavat, which was more concerned with Ratansen's travels before to his marriage to Padmavati. Alauddin Khilji was portrayed in these tales as an impoverished, immoral Muslim invader who stood in stark contrast to the courageous and pious Hindu Rajput nobility. King Devpal disappeared completely as the focus switched to a Muslim vs Hindu dichotomy. The Rajput story that developed under the Sisodia clan's patronage—which governed Mewar—became especially significant. That was most likely due to the Sisodia allegation that Padmavati was their forefather in an attempt at defending their political ambitions by finding a heroic history.

Alauddin Khilji was also criticized by Bengali nationalist writers as a seductive and evil Muslim invader, as comparison to the strong and noble Rajput's who were believed to represent the whole Indian-Hindu nation. British colonists

and the Rajput's themselves both promoted these attributes of their people, which eventually found their way into nationalist political discourse.

While claiming to be inspired by Jayasi's poem, Bhansali's film stays true to Tod and the nationalists' ideas. A disclaimer about historical veracity and collective sentiments is also included in the opening of this film.

Film Overview

The movie presented Ranveer Singh's character Alauddin Khalji as a violent, voracious savage who embodies the stereotype of the "barbaric Muslim invader" and appears disheveled and untamed. Alauddin Khalji's Afghan origin is emphasized by Bhansali's, who places him in an imposing position on a mountainside with stunningly dark and gloomy decor that evoke a terrible mood. Similar to this, the Khalji imperial palace in Delhi exudes a sense of malevolence. However, old Sri Lanka was neither only Buddhist nor totally quiet, the staggering tropical wilderness in Sinhala, where the leader of Mewar, Rana Ratan Singh (Shahid Kapoor), meets Padmavati (Deepika Padukone), presents the island as a residence of Buddhist nirvana. (Gier, 2016)

This is narrative of classified glamour between Alauddin and Padmavati, two people who are enmeshed in a connection of want and rebuff. They never actually meet. The two parallel lives depicted on screen are a reflection of the ways in which inclusion and exclusion are used to create the perfect Hindu nation. While Padmavati, the princess from a far-off island, soon wins the Rajput's over to her ways, Alauddin is presented as a Muslim invader who stays outside of the country. The movie gives her the chance to adapt while denying him the chance, since historians assert that Khalji established the first true Indian empire following the Mauryas, achieving political unification.

As opposed to Muslim evilness, Rajput brightness radiates through the extravagant, sufficiently bright insides of Chittoor's post. Alauddin is depicted as a savage and inconsiderate animal, glutting on piles of tissue. Eminently, eating meat is related with cynicism in the social legislative issues of Hindutva, which dishonestly affirms that vegetarianism is an only Hindu practice. The Rajput ruler is depicted as a refined, potentially vegan café benefactor. Aladdin's homo-suggestive relationship with his verifiable slave Malik Kafur is introduced as one more proof of the ruler's evil. There were bits of gossip that Malik Kafur and Alauddin had a sexual relationship. Pre-pioneer India didn't deny or put connections of this nature down. (Kugle, 2002)

Bajirao Mastani

The Marathi novel Rau by N.S. Imandar (1972) filled in as the motivation for Bajirao Mastani. This story rotates around a notable romantic tale between two verifiable characters: Mastani, who is believed to be the girl of Hindu ruler

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Chhatrasal and his Iranian sweetheart, and Bajirao I (1700-1740), general and Peshwa (head of the state) to Lord Shahu of Maharashtra.

The film portrays the Peshwa's security with Mastani against obstruction from the two his customary Brahmin family and the nearby Brahmin people group. On account of her blended family, Mastani is viewed as undeserving of the Brahmin Peshwa. Eventually, while he is out on a conflict crusade, she is monitored by Peshwa's loved ones. The film closes with Bajirao's sickness and passing during this mission and Mastani's synchronous, incomprehensible demise while being held hostage.

After the unbelievable ruler Shivaji (1627-1680), that hailed the Indian patriots with Hindu patriot image beginning in the nineteenth 100 years, Bajirao is viewed by quite a few people as the best Maratha pioneer. The mid-nineteenth century saw the start of the glorification of Bajirao as the protector of Hindu pride.

In these depictions, Mastani was blessed with numerous attributes, including beauty, mixed ancestry, and devotion to the compatible Parnami sect that did not differentiate between castes or religions, which served to compensate for the lack of historical knowledge about her. She came to fame in popular culture as an exotic Iranian beauty, a seductress with equal skill at dancing and horseback riding, as well as a devoted wife and valiant mother.

Imandar's novel *Rau*, set in the political context of the 1970 Bhiwandi riots, is influenced by the Hindu antiliberal, Shiv Sena, which created electoral alliance with the BJP in Maharashtra. The political situation, which was temporarily broken in 2014, seems to have influenced Bhansali's 2015 film.

Film Overview

Bajirao Mastani, the film that doesn't actually be irrefutable and that it doesn't mean to hurt the opinions of any networks. The Maratha Chhatrapati Shahu court need a new Peshwa, or prime minister, in 1720. A youthful Bajirao is nominated by Ambaji Pant Purandare. Bajirao is given the task of using an arrow to split a feather from a peacock as a test. As a result of his success, he is named Peshwa. A decade later, his wife Kashibai receives a visit from her widow friend Bhanu, whose husband was sentenced to death by Bajirao on suspicion of spying. She predicts that Kashibai will have a desire for Bajirao in the same way as she does for her husband.

As they go to Sironja, a diplomat from Bundelkhand asks Bajirao for help with battling off trespassers. Mastani, the girl of Hindu Rajput ruler Chhatrasal and his Persian Shia mistress Ruhani Begum, is uncovered to be what her identity is. Bajirao, dazzled with her battling ability, loans his soldiers to her guide and drives out the trespassers. Feeling happy, Chhatrasal requests that Bajirao enjoys Holi with them. During this period, Mastani and Bajirao experience passionate feelings for, and he offers her his blade without understanding that it addresses marriage among the Rajput's. Subsequent to getting back to Pune, Kashibai provides Bajirao

with a visit through their as of late developed Shaniwar Wada and the Aaina Mahal (Corridor of Mirrors), which lets her view him from her room.

Mastani, who is unyielding about leaning on her instinct, goes to Pune, where she is met with extreme treatment by Bajirao's mom Radhabai and is housed in the artist's castle since Radhabai won't perceive her as a girl in-regulation. Mastani tolerates this and announces her undying should accompany Bajirao; he chides her for her diligence, telling her that he is now hitched and won't ever really be hers, and that his court won't ever respect her. At the point when Mastani acknowledges these terms, Bajirao names her his subsequent spouse. The Muslim king of Hyderabad, Nizam, must be convinced not to attack the Marathas before they launch their assault on Delhi, the capital of the Mughal Empire. After confronting Qamar ud-Din Khan, the Nizam, Bajirao returns victorious. Pregnant Kashibai witnesses Bajirao embracing an expectant Mastani via her Aaina Mahal. She returns to her mother's house months after giving birth to her baby, Raghunath, after leaving with shattered hearts. Krishna Rao is the son that Mastani also bears. Upon concluding that Krishna Rao is not legal, the Brahmin priest declines to perform the Hindu naming ritual. Bajirao therefore renames his kid Shamsher Bahadur, indicating he will be brought up as a Muslim. A few years later, Balaji Baji, the eldest son of Kashibai and Bajirao.

Kashibai saves Mastani and her son from a murder plot during Ganesh Chaturthi festival. Bajirao, unaware of the plan, rescues them and builds a palace for Mastani. Bajirao leaves to defeat Nasir Jung, but Kashibai reveals Bajirao broke her heart and compared their love to Krishna and Rukmini. Bajirao, injured and imprisoned, defeats Nasir Jung's army. Kashibai pleads with his mother for Mastani's release, but Nana Saheb burns the letter. Bajirao dies, and Mastani dies in captivity, leaving the lovers together.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to conduct a thorough analysis of how Muslims are portrayed in the films 'Padmaavat' and 'Bajirao Mastani' and to examine the potential effects of these portrayals on Bollywood cinema. This analysis emphasises the extent to which these films exemplify larger patterns in the depiction of Muslims and adds to the continuing discussion on cultural representation in Indian cinema. This article examines two Indian films that depict fictional historical periods in line with the narrative promoted by Hindu nationalist ideology. The text emphasises the hazards associated with such depictions, as they can sustain biases and fuel acts of violence against marginalised communities. Its objective is to enhance consciousness and understanding. Indian mainstream commercial films have a long-standing habit of portraying Muslims as the "other," often focusing on the historical representation of Muslim elites. Both films present historical narratives with significant Muslim characters. '*Padmaavat*' portrays Alauddin Khilji, a historical figure, in a highly dramatized and often vilified

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manner. Conversely, '*Bajirao Mastani*' depicts Mastani, a Muslim warrior-princess, in a more nuanced light, highlighting her love story with the Hindu Maratha Peshwa, Bajirao. During the 1970s and 1980s, Muslim characters were frequently marginalised, often portrayed in a manner that reinforced stereotypes. In the early 2000s, Hindu nationalism led to the production of ultra-nationalistic films that portrayed Muslim protagonists as unpatriotic. The films highlight the cultural and religious dynamics between Hindu and Muslim communities in historical contexts. '*Padmaavat*' emphasizes conflict and conquest, while '*Bajirao Mastani*' focuses on love and cultural fusion. These narratives influence audience perceptions of inter-religious relationships and cultural exchanges. Both films faced controversies, reflecting the sensitivity of religious and cultural representation in India. '*Padmaavat*' faced protests and accusations of distorting history, while '*Bajirao Mastani*' sparked debates about historical accuracy and cultural appropriation. These reactions highlight the contentious nature of portraying historical Muslim figures in Bollywood. The study of '*Padmaavat*' and '*Bajirao Mastani*' reveals a dichotomy in the representation of Muslims in Bollywood. While '*Padmaavat*' reinforces negative stereotypes, '*Bajirao Mastani*' provides a more balanced and sympathetic portrayal. This analysis underscores the need for more nuanced and diverse representations of Muslims in Indian cinema to foster a more inclusive and understanding society. Future filmmakers should strive for historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and to contribute positively to social cohesion.

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