

Representation of India Pakistan tensions in Bollywood (2015-2020): Case study of *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai* films

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Abstract

Tensions between India and Pakistan is one of the important issues in South Asia. The tensions between these two countries have affected many political, security, military and cultural issues in this part of Asia. These tensions can be seen in many governmental and private institutions in these countries including mass media. One of these institutions is cinema, which is one of the powerful tools for representing the tensions. Many efforts have been made to investigate the representation of political tensions in cinema. In this paper, by explaining some of the articles in this regard, an attempt has been made to examine two Indian films, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai* in representing India-Pakistan tensions. Since the components of religion and identity are among the factors identified in these films, constructivism theory has been used to elaborate the components. Based on the results, these films have tried to bold the common norms between India and Pakistan by relying on religious and identity pluralism.

Keywords: Representation; India; Pakistan; Identity; constructivism; religion; cinema



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Representation of India Pakistan tensions in Bollywood (2015-2020): Case study of *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai* films¹

Mohammad Mohammadzadeh

Introduction

Many South Asian issues, including military, social, economic and cultural, have been affected by India-Pakistan tensions. These tensions are alive and more serious even by passing more than seventy years of the separation (Kao, 2020). According to many scholars the conflict between India and Pakistan is rooted in ideological conflicts between Hindus and Muslims (Ganguly, 2002). In addition, territorial issues like Kashmir have increased the intensity of the conflict and made it too complex to be resolved (Ganguly, Smetana, Abdullah and Karmazin, 2019). The spread of Cold War ideological rivalries to South Asia also amplified the tensions between India and Pakistan (Kumar, 2012). The occurrence of numerous and costly wars between the two countries pushed the political and military authorities to the construction of nuclear weapons. Since the early 1960s, India and Pakistan have been pursuing nuclear weapons development with the aim of getting the higher military and political position in the region. For India, maintaining strategic superiority and military supremacy over its most important regional rival, Pakistan, has been cited as the main reason for its nuclearization. In contrast, the most important reason behind Pakistan's attempts to gain the nuclear power was the balance of power against India (Köktaş, 2021). India and Pakistan have resumed peace negotiations since the early 1990s but this movement entered them to a new era of conflict (Misra, 2007).

Despite the differences between the countries of India and Pakistan, there are many cultural commonalities between them. Food customs, women's clothing, dance and music, the structure of cities, similarities between Urdu and Hindu languages, celebrations and religion are some of these

commonalities that sometimes make it difficult to distinguish between Indian and Pakistani from the perspective of a foreigner (Akhter, 2016). These similarities are powerful tools in the hands of filmmakers to use to achieve India's national goals. These cultural commonalities sometimes make the people of the two countries face the question of “what is the main reason for the enmity and why should India and Pakistan face each other on the international stage?”. Before 2015, Indian cinema had adopted the policy of destroying Islam and Muslims to pretend that the reason for the confrontation is religious ideology. Since 2015, Bollywood has adopted new approach as the collective identity to attract more Pakistanis. This difference in performance shows that Bollywood, along with destroying other religions, especially Islam, tries to secure India's national interests by emphasizing on existing cultural commonalities.

In this regard, there are institutions within India that are dealing with the tensions between the two countries. One of these institutions is cinema. Cinema as a communicational tool can play an important role in various social, political, cultural and economic fields. Cinema is one of the important art forms of expression and also is considered as an influential means of communication in the world. The growing role of cinema in the contemporary world proves that it is impossible to deny it and underestimate its effects on political issues (Getino, 2011). Film is considered a tool for conveying social, cultural and political messages and also can play an important role in the political arena (Prasad, 1999). As the film was viewed as a low-key mass entertainment at the time, the initial forms of the film were entirely commercial in nature. As cinema grew into a more cultured and sophisticated medium, its political roles became clearer, and films were used to inject political ideologies into artistic perspectives (Lee, 2019). Cinema has a double responsibility for the bearers of this art, because it is an effective tool for expressing sympathetic criticism, and vice versa, for humiliation and revenge. Cinema becomes important in the political arena when it can have a profound effect on the relations between countries (Fein, 1996).

Indian cinema, particularly after independence, has been grown significantly in quality and the number of films. Undoubtedly this industry has a significant impact on India's relations with other countries, especially Pakistan. Indian cinema is very powerful in terms of software (ideas and human capital) and can generate big leaps in a suitable platform by meeting the infrastructural needs (Gooptu, 2011). Today, due to the special political situation between India and Pakistan, the restoration of friendly relations between the two countries is one of the important goals in this regard.

The present article seeks to examine the way of representation of tensions between India and Pakistan by examining two examples of Indian movies entitled *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Tiger Zinda Hai*. In other words, this article seeks to answer the following question: How do the tensions between India and Pakistan are portrayed in these films? These films were chosen for three main reasons:

- These films showed the interests of the Indian government in the direction of national unity and in the form of nationalism. In these films, the style of clothing, type of food, and language are among the most important components of national identity.
- Unlike other Bollywood films that have tried to negate non-Hindu religions (especially Muslims) and destroy their image, the selected films have tried to reduce the difference between the countries of India and Pakistan by diminishing the religious identity. In fact, in these films, Pakistan is not presented as a Muslim country, but as a separated part of India.
- The common history before 1947 has been emphasized a lot in these films and is introduced as the most important factor in bringing the people of India and Pakistan

together. These films encourage the people of Pakistan to unite with India. In other words, by relying on the common history, the filmmakers have tried to create a collective identity that includes the people of both countries.

This article also tries to identify and analyze the stressful components and the way of dealing with them in these films. As these films try to manage tensions between India and Pakistan, they emphasize more on the common norms and values between the two countries. In this regard it was necessary to use an applicable and authoritative theory like constructivism which deals with the role of identities and social norms in international relations. In the framework of constructivism, international relations cannot be reduced to a series of rational interactions and behaviors, because interstate interactions are based on the identities and knowledge of actors about each other.

This article first provides the background of the tensions between India and Pakistan and also the way of representing political tensions in cinema. Then two films as the case studies have been chosen in order to identify the main components through the content analysis. Finally, the article will discuss the main results and concludes with some remarks on the representation of the Indo-Pak tensions in Indian cinema.

Research Background

Reviewing previous studies shows that there is a body of literature on political and social conflict in cinema in general and portraying of India-Pakistan conflict, in particular.

In an article titled “Performing Terror, Mediating Religion: Indian Cinema and the Politics of National Belonging”, the author points out the characteristic of Indian cinema as a tool to meet the commercial and political interests of Indian government. According to the author, cinema uses fears and anxieties to impress the public opinion. This article deals with the relationship between religion and cinema and explains that Indian cinema is a tool to strengthen national identity by

denying religious differences. In this article, the conflict between national identity and religious identity is pointed out, and cinema, as a platform for representing this conflict, has been able to largely move in the direction of the interests of the ruling party of India. In the following, the author deals with the acts of violence by the Indian government against Muslims and states that this behavior is aimed at strengthening the Hindu identity (Thobani, 2014).

In another article entitled “Cinematic Presentation of Pakistan-India Relations: A Comparative Study of Lollywood and Bollywood Movies (2000-2013)”, the role of cinema in the relations between India and Pakistan is discussed. According to the authors of cinema, it is a tool for inducing political ideologies and strengthening national interests. According to this article, the cinemas of India and Pakistan are clearly following government policies in a cultural battle. In this article, the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* has been introduced as a positive work to bring the people of the two countries closer (Khan, Khan and Raza, 2021).

As mentioned in the introduction, Bollywood does not consider the religion of Islam and the country of Pakistan separately, and this type of view has a significant impact on the way it deals with the issue of tensions. In an article entitled “Analysis of Indian Films Propaganda against Muslims and Pakistan”, the authors do not consider Indian cinema as an independent structure from the Indian government and believe that cinema is the cultural arm of the government. This article states that the main purpose of anti-Islamic Bollywood films is to diminish the presence of Muslims in Indian society. This article analyzes the top five films in this regard, which generally try to destroy the Islamic-Pakistani image (Bajwa, Sarwar and Akhtar, 2018).

In a research titled “Pakistan India Conflict from the lens of Bollywood movies 2019: Critical Study”, the researcher examines the representation of nationalism, religion and political relations

between India and Pakistan in Indian cinema. The author has concluded that Indian films can have a significant impact on Pakistani people and shape their feelings towards India. According to the author, Indian cinema has adopted a double attitude towards Pakistan, on the one hand, it tries to introduce Islam as a danger, and on the other hand, it tries to strengthen the collective identity by relying on the commonalities between the people of the two countries (Mubeen, 2022).

In another article, “Metonymies of Fear: Islam-phobia and the Making of Muslim Identity in Hindi Cinema”, the author refers to the efforts of Indian filmmakers to portray Hindus as the superior citizens and the Muslim minority as a dangerous subculture in the films. According to the article, this kind of narcissism in Indian films tries to introduce Islam as an exotic and aggressive culture. Such films depict the constant rivalry between indigenous Hindus and foreign Muslims. According to the author, in modern India, cinema, arguably one of the dominant forms of popular culture, has proven to be the ideal platform for portraying this Hindu-Muslim dichotomy which designed by the ideology of the Hindu majority. This duality in Bollywood cinema, by placing the categories of Hindu culture and Muslim culture in a kind of competition, tries to show the Hindu culture as a good one on one hand and on the other hand portrays Muslim culture as a second-rate and cheap one (Kumar, 2016).

In another article entitled "The Role of Cinema Representations in American Foreign Policy", the authors refer to the functions of cinema in cultural fields .In this article, the importance of cinema in the field of politics in general and foreign policy in particular is discussed. It is stated that cinema can be used to influence public opinion in order to facilitate the exertion of American foreign policy. Examining this issue can help researchers in the field of media functions in representing political and geopolitical events, public diplomacy and influencing factors on public

opinion. This article seeks to specifically examine the relationship between cinema representation and media coverage of US foreign policy (Amini and Ramezani, 2021).

In another article, entitled “The Representation of September 11th and American Islam-phobia in non-Western cinema”, the author claims that Hollywood offers a perspective on Islam-phobia under the shadow of 9/11 attacks. According to the article, in these films, unfortunately, most of the characters are treated as sinners and have to pay the price of being Muslims, so they reflect a social reality. In fact, in the aftermath of 9/11, many Muslim Americans have repeatedly been forced to apologize for the acts they did not commit and openly declare their loyalty to American government. The author claims that in these films, all the main characters of terrorism are condemned in the name of Islam (Al-Rawi, 2014).

Since the separation of India and Pakistan the political and economic nature of the region has been changed. The new order of international relations in this part of Asia had its own consequences in which many tensions had been created. The tensions are divided into two parts: the tensions between India and Pakistan and the results of them on the relations between other countries in the region. Scholars have identified different kinds of factors in this field that are recognized as the main reasons of tensions between India and Pakistan.

The Hindu Muslim duality has been considered as the ideological difference between these two countries. Pakistan as a Muslim country and India as the owner of collective Hindu religions have two different ideological worldview that makes it difficult for them to have a friendly relationship. According to history there was not serious conflict between Muslims and Hindus before the separation as it is today. But religion in the hands of politician brought the conflict among the ordinary people (Shankar and Gerstein, 2007).

Alongside with ideological differences there are some other factors that territorial disputes over Kashmir is the most important of them. This dispute is alive even by passing more than seventy years and also is considered as an international dispute. Kashmir is the important geopolitical issue of south Asia since 1947. Until today India and Pakistan did not find a successful resolution in this regard (Indurthy and Haque, 2010).

According to articles in this field, the position of cinema in representing the events based on ideological interests becomes clearer. In this article, an attempt has been made to identify the important components of two Indian films and analyze them based on the constructivism theory.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism Theory

In this article, an attempt has been made to study and explain the points and issues raised in the two mentioned films by using constructivism theory. It is first necessary to explain the role of this theory in international relations.

A wide range of constructivist theories, from the conventional to the radical, have made it difficult to put this theory into practice. However, the thinkers of this approach have accepted three general cases as the main propositions of constructivism. These three items include the following:

- Normative and intellectual structures are as important as material structures.
- Identities and norms play a decisive role in the formation of interests and actions.
- The structure and the agent form each other.

Social constructivism provides a model of international interaction in which it seeks to examine the role of identity on institutional structures and the interests of states in international relations (Bodner, 1986). Because the identity of governments depends on political, cultural and social contexts, they are in a changing situation. To ensure a predictable level of order in international

politics as well as domestic society, identity is essential. The focus of thinkers in this field is human consciousness and the role that this consciousness plays in international relations. In this approach, governments are institutions whose existence and characteristics depend on the reproduction of certain types of concepts. The government is not merely a legal entity or a formal organization, but a set of normative procedures (Zehfuss, 2001).

Among the existing semantic approaches, the constructivist approach seems to have a higher explanatory power in terms of semantic elements. Based on constructivist ideas, there is no inherent and external reality. Facts are created by the interaction of individuals, groups, and governments, so rules and norms are subconscious and relative concepts. In this regard, constructivist thought is accused of relativism (Niiniluoto, 1991). This means that reality is not fixed and it is not possible to choose a norm for all times and places, and also that there is no difference between reality and truth, and at last belief in an inherent truth is denied. On this basis, no one can be blamed for his ideas and imaginations, because there is no definite reality. But in religious beliefs, there is always a definite truth that is necessary to discover and recognize, and it is not possible to present an image of religion based on interactions and intersubjective thoughts that has a new form in each period of time (Guthrie, 1996). In this way, the relativism in the theory of constructivism is also opposed to absolutism of religion. Despite these shortcomings, among the existing semantic approaches in international relations, constructivism seems to provide more opportunity to pay attention to religious elements in its context. Religion has important role in the societies of India and Pakistan. On one hand the focus of constructivism is on the social relation and interaction in the context of norms and identities. Based on this theory it is the culture that determines the quality and aims of the relations. On the other hand, religion is a cultural issue which affects the culture and also changes under the social norms of it. In other word religion is a

part of culture and culture is affected by religion, and because of that constructivism is applicable in this regard.

In the constructivist approach of international relations, normative and semantic elements along with material components are important in the formation of actions and behaviors. This importance is so great that material elements are meaningful and interpreted in the context of cultural elements (Burton, 2010). The role and influence of normative and semantic ideas in shaping the structures of international relations, as well as the effect of norms on the formation of actors' identities are among the explanatory capacities of constructivist theory in international relations. An actor, as a distinct physical being, depends on creating and maintaining boundaries between himself and the other. In this range, even personal and collective identities require differences. In this article, collective identity is considered as a kind of identity that has been considered in the analysis of these films. Collective identity is created by multiple interacting individuals who care about the direction of their actions (Lustick, 2000). The state is the modern form of collective political identity and the organized form of nationalism, which is considered in this article as the main concept of identity.

In a general look at the performance of Indian cinema towards the tensions from the beginning of the 21st century until now, it seems that Bollywood is stuck in the crossroads of cultural commonality and religious differences. Before 2015, Bollywood tried to present Pakistani people as dangerous Muslims for the Indian society, but after that, with a tangible strain, it has put the commonalities as the basis for the production of its films. Since this article considers the period from 2015 to 2020, it focuses on the recent behavior of Indian cinema. Emphasizing on commonalities and avoiding differences is the spirit of constructivist theory which is applied by Bollywood. Therefore, this theory can significantly justify the behavior of Indian cinema.

Constructivism introduces identity as the basis of relations between countries and considers it the most important behavioral indicator. The elements of identity that Indian cinema emphasizes include food, clothes, celebrations and most importantly, the shared history between India and Pakistan. Since identity can be measured in comparison with “other”, Indian cinema makes religious differences the basis of “other” identity, and linguistic and cultural commonalities as the basis of collective identity. The “other” identity from the point of view of Bollywood is those who believe in religions that engage in jihad and create problems for the Indian government. But the “collective” identity includes the communities that are in the circle of cultural commonality and have common customs and languages.

Methodology

In these films many factors such as nationalism, territorial disputes and linguistic commonalities have been identified as the main spheres of tensions between India and Pakistan. These components are rooted in two more important concepts as religion and identity. In this regard it is needed to categorize the expressed factors in the appropriate concept. In these two films nationalism is a double edge concept in which we can see both identity and religion. As major population in India is Hindu and in Pakistan is Muslim, nationalism refers to geography or political territory as the same as the religious ideas and principles. In other word religion is limited to borders in which creates the nationality. There is another issue which has been identified as the battle field between India and Pakistan, and it is Kashmir. Kashmir is the symbol of political, territorial and religious tensions between two Asian countries which affects all aspects of relations between them. Kashmir (territorial disputes) at the same time also is under the shadow of religion and identity. Religion and identity as a whole are not far from cultural commonalities between

these two countries. Then all of the issues and components in this regard can be interpreted in the context of religion and identity.

The films mentioned in this article have been reviewed as research case studies. In this research, an analytical method has been used to analyze the content of the films based on constructivism theory. This theory has three questions:

How do Indian films deal with the tensions between India and Pakistan?

How are Indians and Pakistanis portrayed in these films?

Based on what components the films have showed the possibility of closeness of the two nations?

The films that have been analyzed in this article are important because while introducing the collective identity that includes the people of India and Pakistan, they also introduce the “other” identity. “Other” identity in these films includes those who categorize people by relying on religious differences. Another important factor in this regard is Indian nationalism, which is clearly shown in both films. Because cultural, ethnic and linguistic commonalities are taken into consideration in the films, Indian nationalism is not in conflict with Pakistani nationalism. In other words, these films consider the people of India and Pakistan as one nation and claim that both nations are real Indians.

Case Study One: Bajrangi Bhaijaan

Bajrangi Bhaijaan meaning Brother Bajrangi is an Indian film in Hindi and Urdu languages. This film has been written by Vijayendra Prasad, Kabir Khan and Parveez Sheikh. Bajrangi Bhaijaan is a film released by Aanna Films, directed by Kabir Khan, starring Salman Khan, Kareena Kapoor, and Harshaali Malhotra.

Short plot

In the Kashmir region, parents of a Pakistani girl (Shaheda), who is unable to speak, are advised to go to India to seek healing in a religious place. Shaheda's father refuses to accompany his family on this trip due to a problem related to his passport, then Shaheda leaves for the trip with her mother. On the return way to Pakistan her mother falls asleep on the train and Shaheda gets off the train. She gets on another train and goes to the last station, where the Hindus have a big religious ceremony. She sees Pawan (Salman Khan) who is the dance leader of this celebration and after the end of it, she stares at Pawan and follows him. He takes Shaheda with himself and because he does not know her name, he calls the little girl "Moni".

After a while, Pawan realizes that the child is a Muslim and also a Pakistani. At first Pawan goes to the Pakistani embassy, but on the same day the embassy is attacked and closed due to protests. After the closure of the Pakistani embassy in India, Pawan is forced to trust a smuggler to take Shaheda to his family, but after pursuing the smuggler, Pawan realizes that he wants to sell the girl. As the result he decides to take Shaheda to Pakistan himself. Because the embassy is closed, he has to travel illegally. Pawan goes to Pakistan with Shaheda, but the Pakistani police suspect him of being an Indian spy who entered to Pakistan illegally. He escapes and meets a journalist named Nawab. With Nawab's help, Pawan realizes that the child belongs to the Kashmir region.

Finally, on the day of Eid al-Ghadir ¹, in one of the religious places of Pakistan, Shaheda find her mother, but Pawan is arrested at the same time. People who heard the story put pressure on the

¹Eid al-Ghadir is a significant Islamic ceremony of Shia Muslims.

police and government to release Pawan. In the end, when Pawan crosses the border, Shaheda calls out his name and acquires the ability to speak.

Film Analysis

The film starts with a cricket match between India and Pakistan. Cricket is shown in these scenes as an example of the confrontation between India and Pakistan. The importance of this game in the relations between these two countries is so great that the players are considered as fighters and protectors of the prestige of their countries (Shahid, 2015). The first sign of India-Pakistan tensions in the film is when Shaheda's father stated that he cannot travel to India since he had served in the Pakistani army. According to the film, those who have served in the army cannot obtain visas from the other country.

When Shaheda and her mother arrive in India, an Indian soldier smiles at them. This smile shows that India is kind to Pakistan and interested in peace, but what is recorded in the history of relations between the two countries shows something different.

When Shaheda and her mother return, they are accompanied on the train by an old Hindu woman. The old woman wishes Shaheda healthy and uses the word Insha'Allah, which is specific to Muslims. Her use of the term is the film's first attempt to equate religions and not prioritize one over the other. According to the film it is important to have belief, and the subject of belief has less importance.

When Shaheda sees herself among the people of India, the people are moving towards a glorious religious celebration with red flags on their hands. The first verse of the poem recited at this festival

is a salutation to Lord Hanuman² (holy Bajarangi) who destroys the house of the enemy (Lutgendorf, 1997). In a simple analogy, the difference between the representation of Islam in Pakistan and the Hindu religion in India is apparent. Islam as the religion of the majority of Pakistanis has been portrayed as a restricted religion in remote villages with mostly illiterate supporters. Hinduism, on the other hand, is richly colored and glazed, accompanied by dancing and music. According to the film, religiosity is nothing more than being good and respecting others, and if someone wants something more than that, it is harmful to human society.

When Pawan enters the mosque looks for Shaheda and he is very worried and upset. The film clearly introduces Islam as one of the most important differences between India and Pakistan. Pawan considers Shaheda a traitor when he finds out that she is a Muslim, and this is very surprising. This statement is in fact a sign of the extremist Hindu mentality towards the Pakistani Muslim people. Rasika, on the other hand, shows another aspect of Hinduism. When she realizes that Shaheda is a Muslim, she considers religious differences to be absurd. In fact, the film tries to ask the question and answer it itself. In this section, the film implicitly states that India can see Pakistan regardless of its ruling religion.

Cricket is shown for the second time in the film. This time Pawan is watching it with Rasika's family and neighbors. In this part, Shaheda, becomes happy when the Pakistani team get score. The penetration of nationalism in the six-year-old child shows that the Indian people know the Pakistani in such a way that they are very bigoted about their nationality (Nalapat and Parker, 2005). When Rasika's father finds out that Shaheda is from Pakistan, he says that this girl can no longer stay in this house because the people of Pakistan are brutally killing the people of India.

² Hanuman is a Hindu God and looks like a monkey.

The film portrays Rasika's father as a fanatic, but in this case gives him the right not to tolerate the presence of a Pakistani in his house.

In the scene where Pawan and Shaheda are at the Pakistani police station, one of the police officers does not believe that Shaheda cannot speak and pushes pressure on her. Meanwhile, Pawan gets angry and beats the officer. This section implicitly shows that India can even defend Pakistan against Pakistan.

When Nawab asks Pawan how he is going to find Shaheda's family, he replies that holy Bajarangi will help. Nawab asks if this god works in Pakistan as well. Here, the film tries to limit religions to borders and raises the question in the audience's mind whether the problems of the two countries' relations can be solved by relying on religious issues. By relying on the common concepts of religions in the relations between the two countries, the film tries to minimize religious tensions. In fact, from the film's point of view, religion is valuable when it helps to improve India-Pakistan relations.

The Pakistani police are showed in the film as a ruthless and obedient. In one part of the film, Nawab says that the police will not try as hard as Pawan to find the family of Shaheda. For the umpteenth time in this part of the film, the characteristic of India as a savior for the people of Pakistan is emphasized. Despite all the evidence are in Pawan's favor, Pakistani security officials have portrayed him as a spy to substantiate their false claims (Suresh, 2015).

At last, Pawan with Nawab and Shaheda goes to a holy place to resort to it. This place belongs to the Shiite Muslims. When they arrive, there is a religious festival, but it is very similar to the Wahhabi and Salafi festivals.

In this film, a child from Kashmir is separated from his family and after a long time, she returns to her family in Kashmir after all. Does it seem normal that Shaheda is from Kashmir in which

India claims that Kashmir belongs to her? Doesn't it mean that India is emphasizing on its claim on Kashmir in this film?

Towards the end of the film, Nawab reports that hatred and enmity between India and Pakistan have affected all their relations. In the report, he invites the people of India and Pakistan to the borders between the two countries to accompany Pawan and return him to his homeland. This part of the film shows that peace will be established only by the will of the people of these two countries.

The film concludes with a moment that Pakistanis rush to the border gates and break them to make way for Pawan. If one looks closely at this scene, can see the desire of the Pakistani people for India. The film claims that the Pakistani people are eager to join India, but their government is blocking it.

Case Study Two: Tiger Zinda Hai

Tiger Zinda Hai meaning Tiger is alive is a 2017 Indian Hindi-language action film directed by Ali Abbas Zafar and co-written with Neelesh Misra. The film stars Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif.

Short plot

Mosul one of the Iraqi cities has been occupied by the ISIS terrorist group, and a number of Indian and Pakistani nurses have been taken hostage. Now, many years after the first episode, the Indian intelligence service is turning to Tiger for getting help. Tiger (Salman Khan), a member of the Indian intelligence service, and his wife Zoya (Katrina Kaif) have lived together over the years.

But now Tiger has to save the nurses in a short time. He goes to Iraq, but when he is caught in an operation and in a scene, Zoya (an officer of the Pakistani spy agency) arrives and rescues him.

Zoya, tells Tiger that in addition to Indian nurses, a group of Pakistani nurses have also been captured, so she has come on a mission to save the lives of Pakistani nurses. Now the two offer their team members to unite for a common goal, and their members are forced to accept an alliance with the old enemy.

Film Analysis

When Indian and Pakistani nurses are taken hostage by ISIS³, one of the Indian nurses secretly contacts the Indian embassy and asks for help. The Indian ambassador asks her how many there are, the nurse replies that there are twenty-five Indians and fifteen Pakistanis. The Indian ambassador goes on to say that there are twenty-five of you. This statement tries to emphasize that only Indians are important. In fact, the film begins with a kind of denial by India toward Pakistani nurses.

In the film, Tiger is very sensitive about Indian food, customs and names. While living outside of India, he eats only Indian food. This shows his national prejudice. He tries to maintain his national identity even outside of India. In a scene from the film, Tiger's former colleagues came to his house to invite him to participate in a hostage rescue operation. In his house, the two flags of India and Pakistan were placed next to each other on a shelf. An Indian intelligence officer flies the Indian flag away from Pakistan. This means that they are not even willing to see the two flags next to each other.

³ A terrorist group (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).

Despite the fact that the Indian intelligence service has invited Tiger to cooperate, it is concerned that being with a Pakistani intelligence agent, Zoya, may have changed him and eroded his national identity. This proves the extent of India's distrust of the Pakistani government.

The cooperation between Tiger and Zoya as officers of the Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies is presented as a kind of perfect cooperation. In the film, it is claimed that if the goals of India and Pakistan become the same, they are good partners. Tiger offers Zoya and other Pakistani officers to work together to save the nurses' lives. A member of Indian team says that these (Pakistanis) are the enemy, how can we cooperate with the enemy? "If we work together, we have a better chance of winning," Tiger said. He went on to point out the unresolved problems between India and Pakistan and said that the operation is about humanity. With these sentences, the film tries to give a correct view of the tensions between Pakistan and India. According to the film, the problems are not so big that they cannot be worked together, nor are they small enough to be ignored. In fact, the film tries to manage the tensions while acknowledging them. In another conversation between Pakistani and Indian officers, a member of the Indian team said that he was born at the time of the separation of India and Pakistan and wished there was no separation. According to him, if India and Pakistan were not separated, they could have the best cricket players together.

When Shenvy (the high-level officer of Indian intelligence service) talks to his superior about the abducted nurses, his superior says that "although there are many political problems between Pakistan and India, but we cannot allow politics to get in the way of humanity". This shows that film tries to reduce tensions towards a larger goal. In one scene, Ferdows, who has been working as a spy in Iraq for 25 years, tells an American officer that India and Pakistan are the children of

the same mother. In fact, with this dialogue, the film tries to introduce the solution by relying on the era before the separation.

In the final scenes of the film, Abu Othman, who captured Tiger and Zoya, tells Tiger that he did something that the governments of India and Pakistan could not do for a long time, and that is the cooperation of the two countries in a mission. In fact, India introduces itself as who can manage the situation between India and Pakistan. At the end of the film, a Pakistani officer raises the Indian flag. In fact, in this film, the victory of India is described as a joint victory of two countries.

Discussion

In the following, according to the analyzed films in this article, the important identified issues are religion and identity.

Religion

In the film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, religion is repeatedly mentioned in several scenes as one of the important differences between India and Pakistan. When Pawan finds out that Shaheda is a Muslim, he accuses her of treason. But by thinking about it, he realizes his mistake. The film clearly shows that religion has not played a positive role in the relations between India and Pakistan, because the accusation of other religions has penetrated into the subconscious of the people of these two countries and these religious beliefs do not have the capacity to form a basis in India-Pakistan relations.

According to constructivist theory, the norms established by Islam in Pakistan and Hinduism in India are in stark contrast, and reliance on religion to improve relations between the two countries will fail. To solve this problem, the film reduces the concepts presented by these religions to respect for others and the importance of humanity in order to create a common norm between the

people of India and Pakistan (Mustafa and Sohi, 2017). In *Tiger Zinda Hai*, the religion of Pakistani nurses (Islam) is portrayed as a completely individual behavior and has no role in the relationship and friendship between Indian and Pakistani nurses.

In general, religion is introduced in these two films as a factor that refers only to the good. Therefore, the norms that religion has created in the relations between India and Pakistan are useful when they include common norms between the people of these two countries (Sathar, Callum and Jejeebhoy, 2001). Differences in the type of food, worship, celebration and clothing are among the issues that have religious roots in this film. But the film tries to overcome this problem by highlighting religious pluralism and using religion as a tool to improve relations between countries.

Collective Identity

In *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, Pawan is frequently mentioned as the representative of the Indian nation. By showing the societal contradictions in Indian society, the film tries to introduce all Indian citizens with their religious, linguistic and cultural differences in the form of a specific national identity (Kumar, 2011). In fact, another type of pluralism is used in the film. The film seeks to establish more general norms based on cultural and social commonalities in order to increase the possibility of interaction and cooperation between different strata. The film also applies this view to the relationship between the people of India and Pakistan. To the extent that the film tries to show the people of the two countries with the same identity, by relying on the common language and history between them. Since the film cannot deal with the consensus of the identities of the people of the two countries without showing the identity of “other”, it introduces the Pakistani government as “other” identity. In many scenes of the film, Pakistani police and security forces are portrayed as the most important barrier to communication between the two countries.

Tiger Zinda Hai shows the historical identity of the people of India and Pakistan in the form of a vital operation. Officers from Indian and Pakistani intelligence agencies rescue nurses in joint operation. In the conversations between these officers, they see the separation of Pakistan and India as merely a geographical demarcation. In other words, by introducing a common enemy as ISIS, the film tries to arouse the common feelings of the nations of India and Pakistan and introduce them as a nation. In one part of the film, an officer of the Indian intelligence service describes the two countries as the brothers (Patridge, 2012). Therefore, in addition to relying on linguistic and historical commonalities, common enemies are also mentioned in order to introduce the possible cooperation between the two countries as a great victory.

In general, these films have tried to bring the people of India and Pakistan closer by using religious and identity pluralism. Of course, points like Kashmir are among the sensitive issues that have been mentioned in these films. India is portrayed as the savior of its people and even the people of Pakistan in these films. In fact, the films try to gain the trust of Pakistani viewers by relying on a common culture and identity, and introduces India as a pioneer in resolving conflicts (Rathbun, 2009). The truth of these claims is beyond the scope of this article, but how can India present itself as the savior of the Muslim people? Showing India as a leader in these films has gone so far that in the film Tiger Zinda Hai, the cooperation of the officers of the Pakistani spy agency is useful when it is in the direction of the goals and intentions of the Indian officers. In other words, Tiger has been introduced as the leader of the joint operation of India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

This article has tried to examine the representation of tensions between India and Pakistan by analyzing the important factors of Bajrangi Bhaijaan and Tiger Zinda Hai films. These films have tried to manage the tensions between the two countries and somehow pave the way for the

closeness of the two nations. In these films, components such as religion, identity, nationalism, territorial disputes and linguistic commonalities were identified. Because the two components of identity and religion were more important, they were explored by constructivism theory.

These two films have tried to introduce the people of India and Pakistan as a nation by using religious and identity pluralism. From the perspective of constructivism theory, identity is not a preconceived concept, but is formed through interaction. In other words, cultures can create common norms in order to have better cooperation and interaction. As a result, these films, by relying on the commonalities between India and Pakistan, tried to create a common identity dialogue and pave the way for closer rapprochement between the people of the two countries. Regardless of religious differences, the people of these two countries are portrayed as sympathetic human beings with common goals. The films firstly tried to highlight the tensions between India and Pakistan and then offered a solution to these tensions by emphasizing the normative commonalities between them.

There are two types of actions in this regard that Bollywood has executed in filmmaking. At the first one Indian cinema tried to introduce Muslims as the main reason behind Indo-Paki tensions. In another word, ideological differences between Muslims and Hindus have gotten bold by Bollywood as the birthplace of conflict. In this approach Indian cinema aimed to introduce Islamic-Pakistani identity as the “other” identity or enemy with the aim of shaping the collective identity as the Hindi community. At the second approach Bollywood has focused on the cultural commonalities between India and Pakistan with the aim of creating an understandable context for interaction. Identity is important in this approach too, but the way of shaping collective identity has changed from knowing the enemy to the knowing the friend. In this regard who has the same

language or other cultural similarities are friends. In another word the second approach implicitly introduces the Pakistani people as the friend and the government of Pakistan as the enemy.

Constructivism in this regard has the ability to explain and unveil these two different approaches. Based on constructivism interaction in international arena is based on the identity and it is shaped based on the cultural commonalities and social norms. At the first approach the “other” identity or enemy is introduced very clear but at the second one the emphasis is on the people who have similar norms and habits. This is the gap that this paper has tried to fill by using the constructivism theory.

Most of the people of India and Pakistan reacted positively to these films, but the government of Pakistan considered them untrue and also banned their showing inside the country. The fact that the people of Pakistan had a positive view of these two films shows how influential Indian films could be. The relative acceptance of the films by the Pakistani people will definitely give the motivation to the Indian filmmakers to take a new style of representation of the tensions between India and Pakistan by integrating these two approaches in the future works.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ [Editor's note]: *CINEJ* published multiple articles on cinemas of India and some other perspectives can be found in articles by Shailo (2016) and Imran (2021) as well as other recent publications like Kumar and Raghuvanshi (2023).