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Publication Date

2023-06-16

THE POWER OF MEDIA: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF INDIAN MEDIA BIAS ON

MUSLIM DISCRIMINATION

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

May 11, 2023

University Honors

University of California, Riverside

NOT APPROVED YET

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze how biased media in India affects the relationship between the Hindu and Muslim population and reviews the intersection of political and social issues with the media. The historical relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India is complex, contrary to the popular notion of constantly being in conflict, as they coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years. The idea of a separate Hindu and Muslim identity emerged during the colonial era from the "divide and conquer" strategy employed by the British. It is important to acknowledge this historical context and not push the Hindu nationalist view that Hindus and Muslims have always clashed due to inherent differences. Through research, trends can be observed displaying the disproportionate discrimination that Muslims receive in Indian media. The Kashmir Files is just one example of a larger genre of films that propagate a one-sided view of the issue. This paper will acknowledge such films' impact on public perception and policy-making. These films, along with other forms of media, contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of Islamophobia and justify disproportionate violence against Muslims. Furthermore, it is important to note the influence of Bollywood and other forms of art in shaping political discourse. The policy towards Kashmir under the Modi administration has been in dialogue with Bollywood, and films and other forms of media have been used to further the government's agenda. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the political, societal, and ethical concerns involved in Indian media coverage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many acknowledgements that I would like to make with respect to those who have provided me with guidance and aid throughout this project. I found passion with the project as I was able to learn more about my country, its culture and atmosphere.

I would like to first and foremost thank my faculty mentor, Dr. Amanda Lucia of UC Riverside's Religious Studies department for advising me through this project. Unfortunately, time and circumstances did not permit us to collaborate effectively on the final result. As such, I take full responsibility for all content and errors located herein. I still appreciate her for supporting me through thick and thin, and for her kindness and understanding when I was going through turbulent times.

In addition to my faculty mentor, I would also like to thank the Honors faculty for all the help they provided as well throughout this process, as well as for the efforts they have placed to ensure a positive Honors experience. Most notably, I would like to give a special thanks to Professor Richard Cardullo, Mayra Jones, and Latoya Ambrose. Professor Cardullo has always served as a source of guidance and support with the project. I am thankful for his courteousness and accommodating nature.

I would like to thank Mrs. Mayra Jones for her counseling and advice from the very beginning of my tenure with University Honors. It is primarily due to her that I committed to staying in Honors and completing the project. I also greatly appreciate Miss. Latoya Ambrose' affability and hospitality as well. She had provided me guidance during the final stages of the project.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to examine the impact of media coverage on the relationship between Hindu and Muslim populations in India. Despite being a minority in the country, Muslims are often portrayed negatively in the media and unfairly blamed for conflicts between the two groups. This has led to an atmosphere of Islamophobia and disproportionate discrimination against Muslims. (N. Singh, Ramnath) Simultaneously, there have been instances of members of the Hindu population who have either called for more accurate coverage or insisted that bias is being held against them. (S. Pandey)

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and perceptions. It has the power to influence how people view different communities and contribute to the construction of stereotypes and biases. In the case of Hindu-Muslim relations in India, media coverage has often perpetuated negative narratives about Muslims, leading to social divisions and hostility. (Maizland) Muslims are frequently depicted as being responsible for terrorism, communal tensions, and other forms of social unrest. Such portrayal not only reinforces existing prejudices but also fuels animosity and discrimination against the Muslim community.

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir serves as one specific example of media distortion and propaganda. The region has been a contentious issue between India and Pakistan, with both countries claiming sovereignty over it. The media coverage of this conflict has often been one-sided, focusing primarily on acts of violence and terrorism attributed to Muslim militants. This skewed representation not only overlooks the complex historical and political dimensions of the issue but also perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslims as inherently violent or extremist. (N. Singh, Khalid Raja, Ayyub, Jalil)

"The Kashmir Files," a recent film, serves as an example of such propaganda that misrepresents the Kashmir conflict. The film presents a biased narrative that demonizes the Muslim community and portrays them as the sole instigators of violence in the region. By selectively presenting incidents and excluding crucial historical context, the film reinforces existing prejudices and further divides Hindu and Muslim communities. (Paradkar)

Moreover, the negative portrayal of Muslims in films extends beyond the issue of Kashmir. In many Bollywood movies, Muslims are often typecast in villainous roles, perpetuating stereotypes and creating a narrative that associates Islam with violence and fanaticism. Such representation not only distorts the reality but also reinforces prejudices among the audience, further deepening the Hindu-Muslim divide. (Altaf, V. Singh, Ramnath)

To truly understand the dynamics between Hindus and Muslims in India, it is essential to acknowledge the historical context and the significant contributions of Muslims to Indian history and culture. India has a rich Islamic heritage that has greatly influenced its art, architecture, literature, and social fabric. However, these contributions are often downplayed or recast, erasing the Muslim influence and distorting the historical narrative. This omission perpetuates an incomplete understanding of Indian history and contributes to the marginalization of Muslims in the collective memory of the nation. (Howarth, Ali, Ramnath, Maizland, Sadaqat)

Media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between Hindu and Muslim populations in India. The negative portrayal of Muslims in the media contributes to an atmosphere of Islamophobia, discrimination, and social divisions. (Sadaqat) The distortion of the Kashmir conflict and the typecasting of Muslims in films as villains exacerbate existing prejudices and deepen the Hindu-Muslim divide. (Ayyub, Jalil) To address these issues, it is crucial for media organizations to promote unbiased and accurate reporting, giving voice to

diverse perspectives and fostering understanding and harmony between different religious communities. Additionally, society as a whole must recognize and celebrate the contributions of Muslims to Indian history and culture, fostering a more inclusive and cohesive national identity.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Hindu-Muslim divide in India has been a significant issue for centuries throughout India's long and complex history. A sense of mistrust and animosity was established between the two communities that has persisted to this day.

Historical Context for the Hindu-Muslim Conflict

Diving deep into the country's historical background, this conflict can be traced to as far back as the ruling period of the Mughal Empire, who ruled India for over three centuries and were predominantly Muslim. (Howarth) Of course, the portrayal of Mughal history in relation to Hindu-Muslim dynamics and the influence of Hindutva ideology on modern narratives are a subject of intense debate and controversy in contemporary India.

Some modern Hindus argue that Muslims, particularly the Mughals, are perceived as "colonizers" who ruled over India and, as a result, the country needs to be reclaimed from their influence. This perspective is influenced by a historical narrative that portrays the Mughals as foreign invaders who imposed their culture and religion upon the native Hindu population. In certain Hindu nationalist ideologies, the demonization of Muslims is employed as a means to strengthen the vision of the Hindu nation. Hindutva, an ideology associated with Hindu nationalism, emphasizes a homogenous Hindu identity and seeks to establish a Hindu Rashtra or nation. Often, this demonization of Muslims is utilized to justify a narrative of victimhood and to rally support for policies that promote the interests of the Hindu majority.

Emerging in the early 16th century under the leadership of Babur, the Mughals established a vast and powerful empire and were known for their political prowess, military might, and artistic patronage. The Mughals left a major mark on the region's culture, architecture, and governance, though this impact is often not acknowledged or reduced. With a rich and complex history, debates and discussions on the empire's legacy, religious dynamics, and socio-political impact have been sparked. In this regard, it is crucial to analyze the Mughal Empire and its leaders to better understand the historical origins and perspectives of the Hindu and Muslim community.

Zahir al-Din Muhammad, known as Babur, served as the first emperor and was a descendant of Timur. Born in 1483, Babur's early years were focused on capturing and retaining Samarkand, the former capital of the Timurid empire. Despite initial successes and setbacks, Babur eventually shifted his attention to India after occupying Kabul in 1504. Through military campaigns, he defeated the Lodi Sultanate at the Battle of Panipat in 1526 and established his rule over northern India. Babur's death in 1530 marked the foundation of the Mughal Empire, though administrative structures were yet to be fully developed. Humayun, the son of Babur and the successor to the Mughal Empire, faced a rebellion led by Afghan Sher Shah of Sur, which resulted in him losing control of the empire. Though Humayun seized the opportunity to recapture Lahore, Delhi, and Agra after fifteen years, his reign was limited by his tragic death in 1556. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "6 Important Mughal Emperors")

Akbar, the third Mughal emperor and successor to Humayan, notably advocated for Hindu-Muslim unity. He is widely regarded as one of the early pioneers of state-sponsored inter-faith dialogue, demonstrating his progressive stance by actively promoting discussions among scholars representing various religions. This inclusive approach welcomed diverse

participants including Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Parsees, Jains, and even atheists, which was unprecedented for its time.

Through his engagement, critical examination, and occasional questioning of Hindu priests and beliefs, Akbar, the Mughal Emperor, not only established the legitimacy of Hinduism within his court but also deepened the connections between his administration and the Hindu faith. Embracing a similar broad-minded approach, Akbar's influential advisor, Abu'l Fazal, took this engagement even further by proposing justifications for idol-worship and dismissing conservative Muslims who criticized Hindus for their different understanding of monotheism.

By focusing on the dynamic relationship between Akbar and Abu'l Fazal, one can gain insight into the prevailing ideas, practices, and dialogues that shaped the Mughal court. These interactions, which extended beyond theological matters, profoundly influenced the political and cultural climate of the time, fostering a rich and vibrant exchange between Islam and Hinduism. In a politically diverse environment, Akbar's court comprised a blend of Muslim and Hindu elites. (Mehrotra)

Jahangir, born Mirza Nur-ud-Din Muhammad Salim, the son of Akbar, eagerly sought power, staging a revolt in 1599 while his father was still ruling and even arranging the assassination of Abu'l Fazal. Despite these troubling events, Jahangir was designated as Akbar's successor due to the limited pool of successors. He inherited a stable and prosperous empire upon his father's death in 1605. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "6 Important Mughal Emperors)

Shah Jahan, Jahangir's son born Mirza Shahab-ud-Din Baig Muhammad Khan Khurram, also inherited a stable empire and achieved some success in expanding the Mughal Empire into the Deccan states. He is most renowned for commissioning the iconic Taj Mahal in memory of

his late wife. The construction of this grand mausoleum complex took over 20 years to complete. During Shah Jahan's reign, Mughal family politics remained complicated, leading to a war of succession among his sons when he fell ill in 1657. His son Aurangzeb, born Muhi al-Din Muhammad, emerged victorious, declaring himself emperor in 1658. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "6 Important Mughal Emperors)

Aurangzeb, the sixth and final Mughal emperor of India, had a significant and controversial reign, marked by contradictions and interpretations that shape contemporary discussions about India's Islamic past. The emperor's reign endured for forty-nine years, making it one of the longest in Mughal history. The grandson of Akbar, he followed in his footsteps and expanded the Mughal empire to its greatest extent, effectively bringing most of the Indian subcontinent under a single imperial power for the first time. (Ballhatchet) This achievement solidified his position as one of the most powerful rulers of his time. Additionally, Aurangzeb was known for his contributions to legal codes and his reputation for justice, leaving a lasting impact on the interpretation and exercise of law. His wealth was legendary, possibly considered the richest man of his era as his treasury was filled with gems, pearls, and gold. However, despite his material successes, Aurangzeb's final days were marked by angst and a sense of political deficiency. A devout Muslim with a complex religious identity, he believed that he had "chosen isolation from God" in both this life and the next, grappling with the burdens of his role as a Mughal king. (Khalid, Truschke, 12)

But maintaining the empire was not without its share of challenges. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the Mughal kingdom's population surpassed that of Europe, and its wealth was unparalleled. European traders sought agreements with the Mughals, but from the latter empire's perspective, they were considered minor players . Like his predecessors, Aurangzeb

faced the immense challenge of governing one of the largest empires in history, encompassing vast territories, incredible riches, and a diverse religious and cultural landscape. (Truschke, 14)

The Rajputs, members of a Hindu military caste claiming Kshatriya descent, meanwhile, had a long history of serving the Mughal Empire, but rebellions became a common occurrence once they were incorporated into the state under Akbar. (Truschke, 55) Hindus initially fared well in Aurangzeb's bureaucracy and held high-ranking positions as he would incorporate Hindus into the Mughal administration, primarily based on their administrative skills rather than religious identity. (Truschke, 53) The Marathas had a complex relationship with Mughal rule as well, alternating between acceptance and opposition. (Truschke, 55)

Shivaji Bhonsle, a self-made king and Maratha warrior, opposed Aurangzeb's expansionist ambitions, launching destructive attacks on Mughal strongholds that proved challenging for the emperor to suppress/ (Truschke, 55) Shivaji, who earned his position as a Rajput, had already established his own state in the western Deccan region before Aurangzeb's reign, resisting the prince's involvement in Shah Jahan's campaigns. (Truschke, 55) Exploiting Aurangzeb's absence during his pursuit of the Mughal throne, Shivaji expanded his territory and demonstrated his agility and prowess in guerrilla warfare and raids. (Truschke, 56) However, Aurangzeb, unable to tolerate the constant security breaches, ordered Mirza Raja Jai Singh to pursue Shivaji, leading to the latter's surrender and acceptance of becoming a vassal to the Mughal state. (Truschke, 56)

Even in the twenty-first century, the legacy of the emperor remains a subject of intense debate in India and Pakistan. In India, his reign is often condemned, with accusations of being a vile oppressor of Hindus, responsible for intolerant and inhumane acts in India. Recent attempts to erase his name from public spaces, such as the renaming of Aurangzeb Road in Delhi in 2015,

have reignited discussions about his rule and India's Islamic past. (Truschke,13) The debate

raged for much of the year and the reason for this change, as given by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara

Management Committee that raised the idea, was that Aurangzeb was a tyrant and perpetrator of

barbaric crimes in India. However, Aurangzeb's violence was considered a standard political

tactic of his time, although subsequent generations have condemned him for it. Political parties,

like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have taken opportunities to support calls to erase

Aurangzeb's name from public spaces. (Truschke, 15)

In October 2015, a Shiv Sena MP was caught on tape hurling invectives at a civic

official, including "Aurangzeb ki aulad," which means Aurangzeb's progeny or descendant. This

mirrors another "Babur ki aulad," which translates to Babur's progeny. It is a term of abuse

hurled at Indian Muslims used during the late 1980s and early 1990s leading up to when a

right-wing Hindutva mob demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. From a polarizing Hindu

nationalist viewpoint, Babur and Aurangzeb can be considered somewhat interchangeable as

oppressive Muslim conquerors. From this perspective, Aurangzeb represents a broader group of

"orthodox Muslims" who are believed to be involved in unfavorable aspects of India's history

and, as a result, are unwelcome in India's present due to their perceived religiosity despite the

existence of other religious groups. (Truschke, 16)

In Pakistan, opinions on Aurangzeb vary, with some viewing him as a righteous Muslim

ruler, while others align with the Indian narrative of him being a bigot. Aurangzeb is widely

revered as an ideal Muslim ruler, renowned for prioritizing his devotion to Islam, which has

earned him a place of honor among those who admire his steadfastness and commitment to

upholding Islamic principles. (Truschke, 13)

Though Akbar is similarly hailed for his accomplishments as a conqueror and administrator, he also faces criticism, particularly regarding his religious policies. According to Pakistani historian Mubarak Ali, who explored the portrayal of Akbar in Pakistani textbooks in his 1992 paper titled "Akbar in Pakistani Textbooks," there is a prevalent critique of Akbar's efforts to foster unity between Muslims and Hindus, which is seen as endangering the distinct Muslim identity. This criticism of Akbar's policies can be observed not only in educational materials but also in academic works, reflecting a broader sentiment within Pakistani society. The emphasis on the potential dilution of Muslim identity caused by Akbar's initiatives underscores the complexities and tensions surrounding his historical portrayal. (Ali, Patel)

These divergent perspectives highlight the contrasting images of Aurangzeb and Akbar within the context of Muslim rulers in South Asia. While Aurangzeb is exalted for his piety and commitment to Islamic principles, Akbar's legacy is celebrated for his administrative achievements but disparaged for his violence and religious tolerance, which are perceived by some as undermining the distinct Muslim identity. These interpretations and debates reflect the complex interplay of religion, politics, and historical narratives in shaping the perceptions of these two influential figures in the region's history. (Patel)

In 1679, Aurangzeb reinstituted the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims in his empire alongside performing executions and demolishing Hindu temples, ultimately leading to much resentment. The jizya tax was criticized by nobles, including Muslims and Hindus, and was seen as a poor administrative decision and contrary to the principle of sulh-i kull or "peace for all." The collection of jizya was also marred by abuses and theft by tax collectors, diminishing Aurangzeb's control over the ulama. (Khalid, Truschke, 63)

In the decades following Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the Mughal Empire fragmented. The Mughal Empire started to decline in the 18th century due to a combination of factors such as weak rulers, political instability, and economic decline. The Hindu Marathas conquered Mughal territory across India, and constantly retaliated against local Muslim populations. (Verghese) The British East India Company took advantage of this decline and gradually established control over India by the mid-19th century, officially ending the Mughal Empire's existence following the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. (Howarth)

During this period, Hinduism became the dominant religion in India, and the British East India Company was mainly staffed by Hindus. The Company was perceived as a Hindu institution by Muslims, who were alienated from the ruling elite. This severance was further exacerbated by the British East India Company having a more favorable attitude and treatment towards Hindus than Muslims. (Asif, 4)

The British policy of "divide and rule" also played a role in exacerbating the Hindu-Muslim divide in India. They encouraged communalism and sectarianism, which eventually led to the partition of India in 1947, which created Pakistan as a separate nation for Muslims. (Tharoor) Though India adopted a secular constitution after independence, the Hindu-Muslim divide continued to be an increasingly prevalent issue within Indian society and politics. The issue of communal violence between the two populations continues to pose a significant challenge to its social fabric. (Pillalamarri)

Truschke also sheds light on the origins of today's Hindutva revisionist history, attributing it to the British historians of the colonial era. She argues that these British historians purposefully distorted the history of Indian Muslim rule to demonize Muslim rulers, as it served the British policy of dividing and conquering India. These historical misrepresentations, which were

propagated during the British Raj, have not only been embraced as truth by conservative Hindu nationalists but have also influenced some secular Hindus in India and Muslim intellectuals in present-day Pakistan. (Haq, Truschke, 17)

Due to the historical rule of Muslim emperors and Sultans in India for more than a thousand years, the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) sought to rejuvenate Hindu heritage and culture by portraying Islam and Muslims as a "foreign other." In this narrative, they are depicted as hostile and antagonistic to the Hindu essence or Hindutva of India. Consequently, there is an ongoing struggle within India to determine the country's identity, whether it will continue as a secular, democratic, and pluralistic nation or transform into a Hindu-majority autocracy. (Khan) The Sachar Committee Report (2006), published by the Ministry of Minority Affairs of India, effectively dispelled the notion that Muslims were a privileged minority group. Instead, the report shed light on the significant economic and educational disadvantages faced by Indian Muslims. (Jodhka, Rahman)

To understand the issue better, it is essential to provide contextualization of the current conflict in India and the discrimination that Muslim communities have faced with respect to India's origins and the role of nationalism and colonialism in sidelining Muslim foundational moments. India's founding is often traced back to the Indian National Congress and the Indian independence movement, which primarily involved Hindu elites. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Indian National Congress) The Muslim community's role in India's founding is often sidelined or ignored altogether, despite the fact that Muslims have been an integral part of India's history and culture for centuries.

The historical concept of Hindustan, the Persian-language name for India, is notably discussed in Historian Manan Ahmed Asif's book, "The Loss of Hindustan," It traces the term's

usage back to colonization by European powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French, who identified native holdings of the Mughal Empire on maps. Kings in these parts were referred to as Shahanshah-i Hindustan, which translated to emperors of Hindustan. (Asif, 1)

The term Hindustan or Indostan came into use in the early 19th century but began to fade from colonial archives as British India took over. (Asif, 1) However, people continued to call themselves Hindustani beyond the Mughal polity during British rule. The Hindustan Socialist Republican Association was created by anti-colonial revolutionaries Chandrasekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh in 1928, with a slogan of "Jai Hindustan ki" or Victory to Hindustan. (Asif, 2) However, with time, the ideas of Hindustan were lost, and pre-colonial conceptions were erased.

The idea of Hindustan, its origins, and what made it powerful enough to persist for nearly a thousand years are explored along with the role it played in organizing ideas of place, history, and community. Muhammad Iqbal's poem "Hamara Desh," explored Hindustan and expressed how the term reflected the rich history, geography, and cultural significance of a country defined by its mountains and rivers. (Asif, 7) The replacement of the term Hindustan with India is often cited as an example of universalism, where the writing of World History takes precedence over that of the country's. (Asif, 6)

In addition, the term has been largely phased out due to colonization and political forgetting. (Asif, 5) Colonization created a barrier for the colonized to access their own past and to represent it in categories other than those given to them in a European language. This resulted in the loss of pre-colonial conceptions and the erasure of ideas of Hindustan. For example, Hindustan is not mentioned as one of the names of India in the country's constitution despite its significance. (Asif, 32) Political forgetting also contributes to the challenge of understanding Hindustan's history and cultural significance as Europeans worked to erase Hindustan through

their practices of historical writing. The ultimate significance of Asif's writing, in the context of this paper, is the demonstration of the challenges in preserving and valuing cultural identities and histories in the face of hegemonic or majoritarian truth.

During the first decades of the 20th century, there were significant shifts in the perception of Hindustan. Some advocated for a Muslim India, emphasizing the importance of the cultural influence of Islam in the country that heavily relied on this centralization in a specific territory. The vitality of Islam as a cultural force relied heavily on its concentration within a designated area. The Muslim population, particularly those serving in the military and police forces, played a crucial role in sustaining British dominion over India, despite enduring inequitable treatment under British rule. This concentration was seen as a potential solution not only for India's problems but also for those of Asia as a whole. Supporters of a Muslim India saw it as an opportunity for Islam to break free from the imprint of Arabian imperialism. (Asif, 8) The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 resulted in the creation of two separate nations: the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of India, however with tensions high, this immediately led to a war between the two nations. (Asif, 9)

While Iqbal's perspective demonstrated a gradual evolution of the idea of Hindustan, envisioning it as an inclusive space and a multi-political federation, in contrast, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, widely recognized as a philosopher for Hindu supremacy, presented a more distinct and rigid conceptualization, viewing the subcontinent solely as a place meant for Hindus. (Asif, 9) He proclaimed that the Hindus of Hindustan would resist any conquerors, citing the example of the mleccha Greeks who were defeated by Vikramaditya in the first century CE. The term "mleccha," referring to impure outsiders, would be just as often associated with Muslim invaders. (Asif, 10) The arrival of Muslims in India served as a new element that the indigenous

population struggled to assimilate to, resulting in a partition between Hindus and Muslims, and later between Hindus and Christians, who coexisted in the same land without true integration. It was through the production and assimilation of knowledge about Hindustan that led to the creation of India. (Asif, 12)

The establishment of British India over Hindustan was founded by the same principles Savarkar voiced nearly 200 years later. These principles include the notion that Muslims in India were foreigners and the narrative of a 5,000-year history that played a critical role in the colonial project, which aimed to depict India as a geographically and socially stagnant entity frozen in time. Muslim despotism, forced conversions, and the destruction of temples were seen as markers of Muslim foreignness to Hindustan, reinforcing the perceived differences between the two communities. (Asif, 14)

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Dow played a significant role in solidifying the displacement of Hindustan and reshaping the perception of India as a historical and political subject. In his dedicated work, he focused on two distinct aspects: comprehending the political history of Hindustan in the context of British acquisition of the subcontinent and the necessity for a separate study on the population of the subcontinent, which Dow assumed to be solely Hindus. He emphasized the inherent differences between Muslims and Hindus, particularly highlighting the question of language and the historical dominance of Muslims over Hindus. His writings and those of other soldier-scribes, Lieutenant Anderson, Captain Scott, and Lieutenant Colonel Briggs', delved into extensive essays on topics such as the origins of Muslim fanaticism, temple destruction, the character of the Hindu people, forced conversions, and the oppressive Mughal rule in British India. They considered Firishtha's text as the most comprehensive history

of what they perceived to be Hindustan, which consists of the history of Muslim arrival and their dominance over the Hindus. (Asif, 14)

Firishtha's Tarikh-i Firishta, a significant historical work during the 18th and 19th centuries in Hindustan, had a profound impact on European historical thought and influenced colonial knowledge projects. It presented a comprehensive history of Hindustan, encompassing both time and geography, realigning the major axis of the historical tradition. Firishtha's Tarikh became the most comprehensive and substantive portrayal of Hindustan, described to portray the concept in full effect, influencing the emergence of British India and European historical thought in the 19th century. (Asif, 25) However despite this, classrooms and research institutes often rely on the histories authored by colonizers, which serves as the sole forms of recognition for the colonized. Within the colonial episteme, medieval Muslim invaders are demonized, ignored, and depicted as a Dark Age between the Golden Age of ancient India and the modern liberal era under British rule. (Asif, 29)

Recent scholarship has critically examined the construction of India's medieval and ancient past under colonial epistemes. The biased, limited, and deficient insights found in colonial texts are far removed from the lived realities of the subcontinent. The term "Hindustan" originated from the Persian word "Hindu," derived from "Sindhu," and its usage in the Indian Constitution is absent, underscoring again the importance of understanding India as a semantic label. (Nehru, 124) The concept of South Asia as a metonymic space is subject to change based on state boundaries and the politics of those speaking. (Asif, 32) The British East India Company portrayed the Mughal kings unfavorably, creating a negative image of them in English discourse despite being the chief interlocutor for the English Crown and trading company. (Asif, 33) Early

works by Jones translated "Hindu" as black, reflecting European conceptions of race as a hierarchy influenced by Atlantic slavery. (Asif, 34)

"Hindustan," a term bestowed by the Persians upon the subcontinent, was a foreign designation. (Asif, 34) The establishment of a chronology by Jones differentiated Hindu India from Muslim-ruled Hindustan. In 1783, while Jones was making revisions, he also incorporated a selected Persian excerpt from Emperor Jahangir's memoirs that was penned by the emperor himself. The purpose of this inclusion was to provide students with a practice exercise for translating the passage into English. This excerpt specifically contains a description of Agra, considered the oldest city in all of Hindustan. Though a minor detail to the reader, Jones had left Jahangir's passage untranslated in his book, meaning that traditional colonial students would read Hindustan in Farsi and write India in English. This instance precisely depicts the process of omitting the concept of "Hindustan." Jones was more than aware of the term's existence and usage but for him, the terms India and Hindustan represented separate cosmologies, the former Hindu, the latter Muslim. In addition, Jones is credited with the chronology that India was a civilization that is 5,000 years old. (Asif, 35)

Jones also emphasized the confinement of women as the primary distinction, depicting Muslim men as carrying a harem of enslaved women, while Hindustani women were portrayed as nymph-like, enslaved, enraged, and lustful. (Asif, 37) Jones believed that 5,000 years ago, India represented a realm of primitive natural sexuality intertwined with the epic battles of the Mahabharata. (Asif, 38)

Colonial historians, philologists, and archaeologists further accentuated the divide between the timeless, history-less Hindus and the foreign Muslims. James Mill, in his book "The History of British India," solidified this division, labeling Hindus as Aboriginal and Native and

Muslims as foreign and barbaric. Unlike Jones, Mill had no patience for Sanskrit mythologies or poems and denoted his ignorance for "The blind mythology of the Barbarians." (Mill)

The chronologies established by scholars like Jones and Mill influenced the historical accounts of others during the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. These accounts juxtaposed the natural chronology of the ancient Hindu king Ashoka with a chronology of foreign invaders, which defined the perceived "degradation" of the subcontinent. (Asif, 43) The European viewpoint associated the invading Muslims with pre-existing theories of kingship and their own chronologies, tracing their origins from the Prophet and the political state in Medina to the establishment of the Caliphate in Damascus and Baghdad, and the subsequent Muslim polities such as the Abbasid, Buyid, Seljuq, Ghaznavid, Gurid, and Mughal dynasties. They positioned themselves as foreign rulers with titles like sultan, shah, and shahanshah in the subcontinent. Therefore, in the European imagination, Muslim political history was often associated with the Arab world rather than India itself. (Asif, 44) The concept of Muslim conquest perpetuated the myth of a rift between India and Hindustan within the 5,000-year paradigm. (Asif, 45)

Accounts from Arab travelers and merchants during the 9th and 10th centuries shed light on the past's mercantile geography, emphasizing connections and relationships. (Asif, 48) Recognizing political sovereignty, comprehending meaningful relationships, and distinguishing between political and spiritual conversion were vital for understanding the historical context. The coexistence of diverse communities in close proximity revealed the interconnectedness of the Indian Ocean world and the complex understanding of political subjectivity. (Asif, 51) Translations of texts from Coronas into Hindustani script and from Hind into Arabic exemplified exchanges at the regional level. The people of Hindustan encompassed a wide array of faiths, political allegiances, and social hierarchies.

European histories intersected and diverged from Firishtha's account, driven by imperial ambitions. While Firishta was composing his account, European observers, specifically Portuguese and English, were also documenting their encounters with the subcontinent. (Asif, 144) The Europeans perceived the territorial subcontinent as the Mughal dominion, later referred to as the Estado da Índia and British India and made significant alterations to existing histories to suit their imperial interests . The European imagination approached the population of Hindustan differently. Firishta depicted a dynamic and diverse populace that required a just ruler, but the European perspective contrasted sharply. While Firishta portrayed Hindustan as a hospitable space with favorable weather, climate, accessible waterways, and inclusive political structures, the earliest European texts, particularly Portuguese accounts, depicted an inhospitable, impoverished subcontinent characterized by rampant and unpredictable Muslim violence, despotic rule, an unchanging Hindu population trapped in their customs, and also antagonized Christians and other minority groups. It focused on extensive ethnographic descriptions emphasizing the "inherent oppression" of Hindus by Muslims in the subcontinent. (Asif, 145)

To examine the inhabitants of the "discovered" Indias, we can turn to Fernão Castanheda's Portuguese history of the "discovery and conquest" of the Indias, written in 1552 and translated into English by Nicholas Lichefeld in 1582 . Muslims were consistently depicted in Castanheda's accounts as an enduring and perpetual threat to the Portuguese, labeled as untrustworthy heretics who could only be confronted with violence despite inhabiting the East African shores and possess knowledge of sailing across the Indian Ocean, serving as the Portuguese's only guides to the subcontinent. (Asif, 146) The Portuguese historians' account of the peoples of the Indias depicts a subcontinent where the native inhabitants were perceived to have been under the dominance of the foreign Muslims for a significant period.

The region of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the northernmost part of India and is bordering both India and Pakistan, as well as China to the north. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Kashmir") The Jammu and Kashmir conflict follows similar circumstances to the general Hindu-Muslim divide in India and stems from a deep-rooted territorial dispute that has been ongoing since the partition of India in 1947, and has ultimately resulted in widespread violence and loss of life, particularly among the Muslim population.

The region of Jammu and Kashmir holds immense strategic significance due to its geographical location, as it shares borders with Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan. This positioning grants India a crucial vantage point for monitoring and defending its national security interests. The security concerns surrounding Jammu and Kashmir are substantial, with frequent cross-border conflicts and insurgencies adding to India's worries. Maintaining control over the region is viewed as imperative in addressing these security challenges and ensuring stability within its borders.

India, through Kashmir, would also have direct access to the same land routes that Pakistan has. Considering the region possesses valuable economic resources, including minerals, hydroelectric power, and fertile agricultural land, India maintains a firm interest in harnessing these resources and promoting the economic development of the region which significantly influences its approach towards Jammu and Kashmir. Despite India's significant size advantage over its northern neighbor, it finds itself in a less advantageous geographical position considering land transport infrastructure. Meanwhile, Pakistan's economy is deeply intertwined with global trade, not only with the European Union but also with Asia. As such, it maintains a better

strategic position as it lies along the major maritime and land transport routes that traverse from Central Asia and the Middle East to the heart of South and East Asia.

Furthermore, India has consistently asserted its claims over the entire region, considering it an integral part of its territory. Historical narratives, including the signing of the Instrument of Accession in 1947, have deeply influenced India's perception of the region's rightful belonging. (Imširović)

Tourism occupies a pivotal position in the economy of Jammu and Kashmir, offering significant economic advantages such as employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development, and the growth of local industries have consistently allowed the region to attain national and international spotlight Given the limited scope for industrial development in the hilly terrains, tourism is especially vital to the region's economy. (Malik and Prakash) India's interest in the promotion and development of tourism can be considered a factor that influences its engagement with the area.

The conflict in the region had begun when the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, refused to join either India or Pakistan after India gained independence from the British Empire. Pakistan believed that the Muslim-majority region should have joined them, while India argued that the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, had acceded to India. (BBC News, "Kashmir") Pakistan responded by sending in armed forces, and India retaliated by sending in their army to protect the region. This resulted in a full-scale war being sparked between the two countries during 1947-1948, which ended with the region being divided into two parts: one governed by India and the other governed by Pakistan.

After the 1947-1948 war, the United Nations passed a resolution, named the UN Security Council Resolution 47, calling for a plebiscite or referendum to be held in Jammu and Kashmir

to determine the wishes of the people regarding the future of the region. (United Nations) However, the UN Commission declared the resolution unsuccessful in 1949 and the vote was never held due to disagreements between India and Pakistan over the terms of the vote and demilitarization. India requested that Pakistan withdraw its troops from the region. (Korbel)

In the years following the war, the conflict has continued to simmer as both India and Pakistan continued to vie for control of the region, with each country asserting its claim to the entire territory. This led to further military conflicts, including the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War and the Kargil War in 1999. (Center for Preventative Action)

The 1965 Indo-Pakistani War marked the second instance of armed conflict between the two nations concerning the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. While the clash did not bring about a resolution to this ongoing dispute, it did draw international attention and involvement of the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to significant implications for subsequent engagement in the region. Tensions escalated in August, 1965 when the Pakistani Army launched an unsuccessful military campaign to capture Kashmir by force. As a result, the second India-Pakistan War reached a stalemate. (Office of the Historian)

The Kargil War of 1999 had a significant impact on the Jammu and Kashmir region, both in terms of its historical and cultural implications. The conflict arose when infiltrators from Pakistan occupied strategic positions in the Kargil sector, leading to intense fighting between Indian and Pakistani forces. (Tellis, Fair, et al., ix, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Kargil War") The significance of the conflict is different for the two nations.

For Pakistan, while it appeared that they had acknowledged that operations similar to Kargil are not considered legitimate in the current international context, the use of violence in the form of low-intensity conflict continued to be viewed as a justifiable means to achieve political

objectives. Kargil serves as yet another illustration of Pakistan's failed grand strategy where Pakistan was unable to grasp that the international community would not support its position. Consequently, Pakistan did not anticipate or plan for the subsequent international condemnation and isolation. The magnitude of Pakistan's covert operation during Kargil and the swiftness and intensity of India's counter-response were unparalleled in the history of the ongoing "violent peace" in Kashmir. The Kargil crisis even raised genuine concerns among many regarding the potential escalation of the conflict to a conventional war and the subsequent risk of nuclear utilization. (Tellis, Fair, et al., 5-6)

For India, perceptions that were held of Pakistan were now India's perception of Pakistan has been solidified as reckless and untrustworthy. Additionally, they saw the Pakistani military as a major contributor to the issues in India-Pakistan relations. The Kargil conflict prompted India to reevaluate diplomatic engagement with Pakistan regarding the Kashmir issue. The inclination to seek a resolution acknowledging Pakistan's involvement had been undermined. In addition, the conflict further highlighted the prevailing belief that India's intelligence infrastructure suffers from inherent deficiencies. As a result, India is committed to enhancing its forward defense capabilities, improving logistics, and strengthening intelligence resources to prevent future incursions from Pakistan. (Tellis, Fair, et al., 6)

India acknowledged that international attention on the Kashmir issue can be advantageous, particularly when it sheds light on Pakistani misdeeds. However, India remained resistant to external involvement in determining the ultimate fate of Kashmir, especially if it involved redrawing borders in the disputed region. Kargil also marked India's first televised war, during which India skillfully utilized media channels to shape favorable domestic and international responses. (Tellis, Fair, et al., 6)

Military presence fostered the rise of separatist movements in the region, particularly among the Muslim population, reflecting calls for greater autonomy or independence for Jammu and Kashmir. The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front or JKLF was one of the first militant groups to emerge in the region. Founded in 1989, the group was committed to creating an independent and unified Kashmir. The JKLF was a secular organization that drew support from various communities and regions of Kashmir. They carried out a number of attacks on Indian security forces in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (SATP, "Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front)

Initially, Pakistan supported the JKLF financially and logistically, providing them with weapons and military training. Pakistan saw the JKLF as a means of putting pressure on India and highlighting the Kashmir issue on the international stage. However, as more militant groups emerged in the region, Pakistan's support shifted towards groups that advocated for a merger with Pakistan. (SATP, "Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front) The JKLF with its pro-independence ideology had been replaced by a network of Islamist extremist outfits controlled by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. (SATP, "All Parties Hurriyat Conference")

An example of these outfits was Hizbul Mujahideen, which emerged in 1989. Unlike the JKLF, the Hizbul Mujahideen was an Islamist militant group that sought a merger with Pakistan. The group drew its support primarily from the local population, and its members were often Kashmiri themselves. Today, Hizbul Mujahideen remains one of the longest-surviving militant groups in the region. It continues to carry out attacks on Indian security forces and has been designated a terrorist organization by India, the United States, and the European Union. (International Crisis Group)

One of the most prominent separatist groups in the region is the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, founded in 1993, which sought to establish an independent state of Kashmir. However, more chaos has ensued with these movements engaging in acts of organized violence and terrorism in pursuit of their goals. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has been accused of receiving support from Pakistan. The Indian government has accused Pakistan of supporting the APHC and using terrorist groups to destabilize the region and support the separatist movements. Pakistan denies these accusations. (SATP, "Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front)

The Indian government has responded to these movements with a heavy-handed approach, including the use of large military force and harsh crackdowns on dissent, further complicating the situation. In particular, the widespread chaos has often been downplayed even though the Indian government has been accused of human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings, excessive force against civilians, torture, and enforced disappearances among the Muslim population in the region. The Indian government has defended its actions in the region as necessary to maintain law and order and protect the sovereignty of the country. Yet, the ongoing conflict has had a devastating impact on the people of Jammu and Kashmir and many people have been forced to flee their homes due to the fighting. The displacement has had a profound impact on the affected communities, with many people struggling to find shelter, food, and basic necessities. (Amin and Khan)

The region remains one of the most heavily militarized areas in the world, with thousands of troops stationed in the area and both sides engaged in a vicious cycle of attacks and counterattacks. The military presence has created a climate of fear and suspicion, making it difficult for people to go about their daily lives without fear of violence or harassment. (BBC News, "Kashmir")

The ongoing conflict has also taken a significant toll on the mental and physical health of the people in the region and had a profound impact on the economy. The constant threat of violence and insecurity has resulted in a rise in mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other stress-related illnesses and lack of access to lack of healthcare facilities, medicines, medical staff, and other basic needs has led to a rise in preventable diseases such as malnutrition, malaria, and other infectious diseases. (Rafiq, Rashid, EFSAS) The region's healthcare system is in a dire state, with inadequate resources and facilities to meet the needs of the affected population. (Médecins Sans Frontières) Many businesses were forced to shut down or relocate due to the violence and instability. The lack of economic opportunities has further exacerbated the suffering of the affected communities. Job losses, financial insecurity, and reduced access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and housing make it difficult for Kashmiris to provide for their families and rebuild their lives. The presence of large numbers of troops has also led to restrictions on movement and commerce, and has made it difficult for people to access healthcare and education. (Housen and Shah. et al.)

The suffering of the affected communities has been further exacerbated by the lack of support and resources from the government of India. The government's response to the conflict has been inadequate, with a lack of support for the affected population and limited efforts towards promoting reconciliation and peace-building. Much of this is attributed to the limited media coverage in the region.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage of Jammu and Kashmir in the News

Media coverage of Jammu and Kashmir displays the troubling impact that media perceptions have on the relationship between Hindu and Muslim populations in India, with many people raising questions about journalistic ethics and the role of the media in shaping public opinion. The Kashmir conflict has been ongoing since the 1940s and has been a subject of intense media coverage. News outlets around the world have reported on the highly sensitive conflict to varying degrees of coverage and have spread awareness on the complexities of the conflict in the region.

In recent years, there has been growing concern about bias and propaganda in Indian media coverage of the Kashmir conflict. One of the most significant issues with the media coverage of the Kashmir conflict is the lack of balanced and nuanced reporting. Many journalists and media outlets tend to favor India or Pakistan, and this can result in a one-sided, biased, and distorted understanding of the situation, which further polarizes the opinions of people on both sides of the conflict.

Another issue with the media coverage of the Kashmir conflict is the tendency to focus on the most violent and sensational aspects of the conflict, while ignoring the underlying political, social, and economic issues that contribute to the conflict. Moreover, the media coverage of the Kashmir conflict often ignores the experiences of ordinary civilians who are caught up in the violence and insecurity of the region creating divisions between different communities, based on religion or ethnic origin.

The coverage of the Kashmir conflict by *The New York Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera,* and *South China Morning Post* has been instrumental in drawing attention to the alleged human rights abuses in the region. Given the constraints placed on foreign correspondents, these news organizations have relied on local Kashmiri stringers, who are freelance journalists or reporters, to provide them with firsthand information about the situation on the ground. Stringers are often assigned to areas deemed peripheral to an organization's coverage area, including countries like Kashmir where no bureau or full-time reporters are present. These reports have brought worldwide attention to the suffering of Kashmiri civilians and the impact of the ongoing conflict on their lives. By highlighting the human rights violations in Kashmir, these news outlets have played a significant role in pressuring the Indian government to address these concerns. (N. Singh) Furthermore, they have underscored the importance of an independent and free media in conflict zones, which can provide essential information to the global community and hold those in power accountable for their actions.

A journal study "Media Propaganda and the Kashmir Dispute: A Case Study of the Kashmir Floods" written by Srinagar freelance journalist Wasim Khalid Raja, examines the coverage of the devastating floods that hit the Kashmir region in September 2014 and compares the reporting done by India's national media and international media to examine if any bias was present towards the Indian government and armed forces.

Reports published in the Times of India newspaper and broadcast on New Delhi TV or NDTV in the week immediately after the floods were analyzed and the research found that the coverage by New Delhi-based media was overwhelmingly in favor of the Indian government and armed forces. The Times of India gave 57% of its coverage specifically to the army's relief efforts, and NDTV focused almost 97% of their time on the role played by the army and the

government in the crisis. Both outlets appeared to have ignored the contribution made by local Kashmiri volunteer rescuers. This suggests that Indian media coverage was notably security-centric to garner sympathy for the Indian army who occupy the region. The report claims that the army's relief efforts and the Indian government's response to the crisis may have been a deliberate attempt to downplay the issue of Kashmir's autonomy and take the populace's attention away from the conflict in the region. In contrast, international media coverage was more balanced and focused on the human impact of the floods and highlighted the contribution made by local Kashmiri volunteer rescuers, The study concludes that international coverage was less influenced by the geopolitical context of the Kashmir dispute, allowing for more impartial reporting. (Khalid Raja)

NDTV is especially notable in the context of media bias with consideration of its ties to the government. Gautam Adani, an Indian billionaire, acquired a majority stake of 64.71% in New Delhi Television Ltd as the company's founders sold a significant portion of their shares. This development comes four months after Adani initiated a takeover of the news network. (Thomas) Adani, who shares a close association with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is the founder of the Adani Group, a prominent conglomerate based in Ahmedabad that serves as India's largest port operator and the largest trader of coal. However, following a recent report by Hindenburg Research alleging stock manipulation and accounting fraud spanning several decades within Adani Group companies, Prime Minister Modi has sought to distance himself from the controversies surrounding the business magnate. (Yadav)

Though Adani claims that NDTV will remain independent under his ownership, critics like Somdeep Sen, a political scientist at Roskilde University in Denmark, have their doubts. "Much of Adani's wealth has been a direct result of this problematic relationship [with the prime

minister]. So, it's only expected that an Adani-owned channel would work to keep up the Modi-Adani ties." (Yadav)

Bias has also been claimed from the other side of the Hindu-Muslim conflict. A protest against the Washington Post's coverage of the situation in Kashmir was held mainly by Kashmiri Pandits who accused the Washington Post of biased reporting that ignored their voices and their stories. The protesters claimed that they were victims of genocide and ethnic cleansing argued that corruption, separatism, and Islamic terrorism had flourished in the valley, leading to an ethnic cleansing of the native Kashmiri Pandit community. They pointed out that the revocation of Article 370 and 35A, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, had denied democratic rights to minorities, women, and weaker sections of society while also damaging the Kashmiri economy. They argued that corruption, separatism, and Islamic terrorism had flourished in the valley, resulting in severe human rights violations, including the ethnic cleansing of the native Kashmiri Pandit community. This would serve as the basis for the film, "The Kashmir Files." The protest aimed to highlight the alleged bias in the Washington Post's coverage and demanded that the newspaper hear the voices and experiences of the people who have been affected by it. (S. Pandey)

Media bias as a whole can stem from various factors, including ownership structures of media outlets, political affiliations, financial interests, and pressures from external forces. It is crucial to analyze these factors to understand the potential influences on media content. Funding sources for media outlets can have an impact on their independence and objectivity. If media outlets are heavily dependent on specific individuals, corporations, or interest groups for financial support, there is potential for their reporting to be influenced or compromised.

Furthermore, as government ties and involvement increases with the news media, so come the consequences of reduced freedom of the press and targeting of news organizations.

According to a study by Amnesty International, there is a growing trend of Indian authorities imposing illegal and politically motivated limitations on freedom of expression and assembly. (Amnesty International, "Human Rights in India.") Notably, Amnesty International itself faced targeting by the government under Prime Minister Modi's administration and was compelled to cease its operations in India on September 30, 2020. (Amnesty International. "Protect Our Human Rights Work in India") The rights organization has consistently highlighted instances of authorities targeting journalists and a wider suppression of dissent, which has resulted in Hindu nationalists feeling empowered to intimidate, harass, and verbally abuse journalists who critique the Indian government. (Amnesty International. "India: Authorities Should Stop Targeting") Irfan Mehraj, a journalist from Jammu and Kashmir, serves as an example of this notion as he was arrested on March 20, 2023 in connection with an "NGO Terror funding case," that was registered in October 2020. (NIA) Amnesty International characterized Mehraj's arrest as another example of the ongoing suppression of human rights and a prime example of how Kashmiri journalists have consistently been subjected to targeting by the Indian government, underscoring the enduring pattern of repression to news media in the region. (Dhawan) In 2021, the government released a new set of digital media guidelines and ethics codes, some of which would lead to content being banned if the government deems it to be "fake or false." (MEITY) Given the government's history of media manipulation, it can only be expected that the government may abuse these new guidelines to further limit freedom of the press.

Most recently, tax authorities in India conducted raids on the BBC's offices in Delhi and Mumbai, accusing the British broadcaster of tax evasion after three days of searching. Notably, this raid occurred less than a month after the release of a critical documentary alleging Prime Minister Modi's involvement in the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim violence. Despite being cleared of responsibility by the Indian Supreme Court, the government banned the BBC documentary within India and employed emergency laws to compel Twitter and YouTube to remove related content. (Ellis-Petersen, "India Invokes Emergency Laws) Pro-government media outlets cast doubt on the credibility of the BBC, with a spokesperson from the BJP, Gaurav Bhatia, branding the organization as "the most corrupt" and accusing it of disregarding India's constitution. Other officials like Kanchan Gupta described the documentary as "hostile propaganda" and "anti-India garbage." Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's foreign minister, raised suspicions about the timing of the documentary's release, which coincided with the upcoming national elections, suggesting an attempt to portray an extremist image of India and its prime minister. A government advisor denied any connection between the tax search and the documentary. (Yadav)

The raid was deemed by the Press Club of India as a clear act of targeting. (GK Web Desk) Delhi-based media critic Jyoti Malhotra explains that in India, the implications of a tax search are well understood, implying a warning to "fall in line." Malhotra elaborated, "This is not the first time that a media organization has been raided. What's surprising is that they went after a foreign organization, BBC, which is a household name in India and has a reputation for fairness and objectivity." (Yadav)

Since Modi assumed office as prime minister in 2014, India has experienced a decline in its position on the World Press Freedom Index, dropping from 140 to 150 out of 180 countries. (Reporters without Borders) This downward trend in press freedom has not stirred significant

public concern, according to Sen, who attributes it to Modi's dominating and almost cult-like presence in everyday Indian life. In turn, Sen expressed how he's not surprised by Modi's active suppression of dissent as a means to maintain this personality cult. (Yadav)

To address these threats to democracy, it is crucial to promote and protect press freedom, ensure transparency in media ownership and funding sources, strengthen independent media regulation, and support investigative journalism. Diverse media ownership, robust editorial independence, professional ethical standards, and media literacy among citizens are essential for a healthy and vibrant media landscape. Efforts to diversify media ownership, promote media literacy, support independent investigative journalism, and create an environment where journalists can operate freely and without fear are important steps towards safeguarding democracy and countering the influence of special interests on media content.

Media coverage of Jammu and Kashmir in film

This bias against the Muslim community has also been reflected in popular culture, with films like "The Kashmir Files" being criticized for their clear propaganda. The film, which was released in 2021 and directed by Vivek Agnihotri who is notorious for his politically charged movies, has been accused of presenting a one-sided and biased view of the conflict. It focuses primarily on the experiences of Hindu Kashmiri-Pandit refugees who were displaced as a result of the conflict and claims that the Kashmiri-Pandit's were ethnically cleansed from the region by Muslim separatist groups. This focus ignores the experiences of the Muslim population, many of whom have also been displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict. Large levels of violence and cruelty are showcased, which can contribute to desensitizing viewers to violence and perpetuating negative stereotypes. (Paradkar)

Criticism notably came from Nadav Lapid, the chair of the 2022 panel of the International film festival of India (IFFI), where he publicly voiced his opposition to the inclusion of The Kashmir Files in the event's lineup. Lapid labeled the film as propaganda and a "vulgar movie, inappropriate for an artistic competitive section of such a prestigious film festival." However, backlash resulted in the Israeli ambassador issuing an apology. Naor Gilon, Israel's ambassador to India, admonished Lapid for his remarks. He emphasized that it was insensitive and presumptuous to speak about a topic that holds political and religious significance in India. Amit Malviya, a prominent BJP leader, drew a parallel between Lapid's comments and Holocaust denial, stating, "For the longest time, people even denied the Holocaust and called Schindler's List propaganda, just like some are doing to Kashmir Files." (Ellis-Petersen, "The Kashmir Files")

The film has also been criticized for its portrayal of the Indian security forces, who are shown as heroic figures fighting against Muslim extremists. Critics argue that this portrayal is simplistic and ignores the many allegations of human rights abuses committed by the security forces. (Masood) The film blames the exodus on the Congress, liberals, human rights wallahs, and Muslims groups, common targets of the government. (Bhatia)

As stated previously, numerous cases of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence committed by the Indian security forces in Kashmir have been documented by humans rights organizations and journalists. Critics argue that films like "The Kashmir Files" ignore these allegations and instead present a sanitized view of the security forces for partisan reasons.

Most notably about the film, however, was the explicit support that was given to the film by prominent figures in the Indian community as well as the government. Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and key ministers in his BJP government have praised the film urging the Indian

populace directly to watch the film via Twitter. (Sebastian, Mishra, Al Jazeera, "Kashmir Files")

Modi had expressed praise for the film for "the guts to portray the truth." (Ellis-Petersen, "The

Kashmir Files")

Several BJP-ruled states, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Tripura,

Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have even waived taxes on the film, and police in the Madhya

Pradesh state were offered a day of leave to watch it. (Express News Service) The chief ministers

of Tripura and Uttarakhand were reported to have personally called Vivek Agnihotri, the film

director and writer, to congratulate him for making the film. (Poddar) Concerns arise as it is

evident that the government is using the media to advance its own political agenda and may be

complicit in promoting hate speech and violence against a particular group.

Understanding the director's political affiliation and the film's funding can provide

insights into the underlying motivations and biases that shape the portrayal of Muslims in the

movie. Agnihotri expressed in an interview "But in all honesty and fairness, I would say that a

lot of people don't like me in Bollywood because they say, 'You support Modi.' they say I make

political films. I want to ask at what point were Bollywood stars not close to politicians?" He

further elaborated, "Who has been promoting this film? Congress. Why is there a problem if 'The

Kashmir Files' is being supported by the BJP whose agenda has been to do something for

Kashmiri Pandits."

Aamir Khan, considered to be one of the most well-known actors in Bollywood and

worldwide stated in an interview that films like 'The Kashmir Files' should be watched by the

populace. Khan is quoted as saying that, "Every Indian should watch the film made on this

subject and should recall how it feels when one goes through such trauma." (Outlook Web Desk,

"Aamir Khan on 'The Kashmir Files'") Other prominent bollywood figures including Akshay Kumar and Manoj Bajpayee have voiced their support of the film as well. (Sen) The promotion of the film by famous actors and other notable individuals further adds to its popularity and influence, and it has led to significant audience numbers. This can make it even more difficult to counter the negative effects of the film's message and can lead to a wider dissemination of harmful ideas. The film's promotion and the dangerous rhetoric it promotes are a reflection of larger issues such as religious and ethnic divisions, economic inequality, and political polarization.

The film served as a means to garner support for these policy interventions and the underlying relationship between the film and Modi's initiatives. emerged in close proximity to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeal of Article 370 in 2020 and the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2019. One of the most effective ways in which "The Kashmir Files" garnered support for Modi's policy interventions was through emotional appeals, skillfully tapping into the collective memory of historical events and tragedies associated with the Kashmir conflict.

By highlighting the suffering of individuals affected by the conflict, the film creates empathy among the viewers and reinforces the government's narrative of the need for decisive action. Moreover, "The Kashmir Files" employed a sense of nationalism and patriotism, aligning with the ruling party's ideology. The film projects the government's policies as necessary steps towards restoring justice, protecting national security, and ensuring territorial integrity. By linking the emotional and nationalistic chords, the film effectively mobilized support for Modi's policy interventions.

In August 2019, the Indian government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, took the unprecedented step of repealing Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which granted

special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir. The move was seen by many as a radical policy intervention, aimed at integrating the region more closely with the rest of India. "The Kashmir Files" can be viewed as a cinematic tool that worked in concert with the repeal of Article 370. The film's release created a narrative that portrayed the historical and political justifications for the government's decision, thereby influencing public sentiment. By presenting a cinematic interpretation of the Kashmir conflict, the film aimed to garner support for the policy change by framing it as a necessary step towards resolving the long-standing issues in the region.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill, also passed in 2019, granted expedited Indian citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, with the notable exclusion of Muslims. The bill faced criticism for its religious bias and potential erosion of secular principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

"The Kashmir Files," in its portrayal of the Kashmir conflict, underscores the significance of preserving India's demographic fabric and cultural heritage. The film emphasizes the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, a minority community forced to flee the region due to violence and persecution. By aligning with the government's policy stance on the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the film indirectly reinforces the idea of safeguarding the interests of vulnerable communities and advocating for a more inclusive vision of Indian nationalism. The film functioned as more than just a cinematic work. It played a significant role in bolstering support for Prime Minister Modi's repeal of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Bill. The embellished narrative of the Kashmir conflict in the film served as a means to garner public support for these policy interventions. While the relationship between the film and Modi's initiatives may be complex, it is evident that "The Kashmir Files" served as a tool to shape public opinion and legitimize the government's actions in the eyes of the public.

Even films like "Haider" (2014), which dared to shed light on the difficulties faced by Kashmiris due to Indian policies, ultimately placed the blame on the personal decisions of the Kashmiri people for their ongoing suffering. Unfortunately, this vision of Kashmir has not improved over time. Shortly after the revocation of Article 370, Bollywood filmmakers rushed to register over 50 film titles, such as "Article 370 Abolished" and "Kashmir Hamara Hai" which translates to Kashmir is Ours. (Yazqan)

"Shikara," released in 2020, focuses on the so-called exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990s and has faced criticism for its vilifying portrayal of Muslims, even from the Hindu supremacist RSS, who claim the film is too sympathetic toward Muslims. Filmmakers already biased against Muslims are facing pressure to escalate their Islamophobic narratives.

Many Bollywood films are set in Kashmir, presenting it as a picturesque escape without acknowledging the dire conditions faced by the local population. However, most films set in Kashmir fall into the genre of "war drama," depicting Indian-occupied Kashmir as a battleground rather than an occupied territory with appalling human rights violations. Characters in these movies are often clearly defined as patriots or traitors, "good Muslims" or "bad Muslims." The situation in Kashmir is portrayed as chaotic and hopeless, often implying that the Kashmiri people themselves are responsible for their plight rather than the nuanced issue that it truly is.

"Fanaa," a Bollywood romantic thriller released in 2006, takes on the challenge of exploring the complexities of this conflict through a fictional narrative. It is especially notable for directly addressing and discussing the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, raising questions about the legitimacy of violence and elaborating on the historical background of the issue. The film presents both perspectives of the conflict, which not only gives the viewer insight on the protagonist's, unfortunately realistic motives but also humanizes the conflict as a whole. The

conflict serves as the primary motivation of the protagonist Rehan Qadri and the organization he represents, the Independent Kashmir Front (IKF), a fictional organization similar to the real-life JKLF. Portrayed by Aamir Khan, Qadri embodies a ruthless terrorist dedicated to fighting for the independence of Kashmir. (V. Singh) Meanwhile his love interest is portrayed through the romanticization of Hindu characters as subservient and oppressed. (Masood)

Viewers of the film are provided with a glimpse into Rehan's life, a character who exemplifies the extreme end of the spectrum when it comes to the struggle for Kashmir independence. Rehan is depicted as a highly committed and ideologically driven individual, willing to employ any means necessary to achieve his goals. The movie emphasizes the depth of his loyalty to his cause, exploring the internal conflict he faces as his personal feelings for a Kashmiri woman named Zooni collide with his unwavering dedication to the IKF and the pursuit of Kashmir's independence. The motivations behind Rehan's actions are rooted in a profound belief in the righteousness of his cause. In his eyes, violence becomes a necessary tool in the fight for freedom. This portrayal reflects the commonly held mindset of freedom fighters and terrorists alike, who view armed resistance as a justifiable means to attain self-determination and liberation from perceived oppression.

Rehan's character serves as a representation of those who perceive themselves as soldiers fighting for a noble and just cause, despite their reliance on terror. He is depicted as a charismatic leader who transforms the IKF from an impoverished gang into a formidable organization responsible for multiple attacks. The IKF's primary objective is to secure the withdrawal of both India and Pakistan from Kashmir, paving the way for the region to become an independent country. The movie highlights the absence of a promised referendum, in which the people of Kashmir were to decide their political future.

In the film, a bombing at a palace kills multiple 8 security officers and injures 15 others. A reporter covers the attack and elaborates that the IKF have claimed responsibility and demand that India and Pakistan would leave Kashmir and allow for it to be an independent country. (1:08:54) Rehan is revealed as the terrorist and uses the attack as a guise to fake his own death. Intelligence Agencies describe as having changed the IKF from an impoverished insurgency to a professional organization on par with the most deadly in the world, having been responsible for multiple attacks. Fixated on attaining independence for Kashmir and refers to himself as a soldier fighting for freedom. The IKF is then revealed to have stolen parts of a nuclear missile with Rehan holding the trigger. Intelligence officers describe the potential act of terror

Susheel Rawat of the Anti Terrorist Special Force, played by actor Sharat Saxena, questions why the IKF is committing acts of terror and wanting India out when Kashmir's ruler, Hari Singh decided to join India in 1947. Dr. Malini Tyagi, played by actress Tabu, explains that the Kashmiris were promised a vote, a referendum to decide whether they wanted to stay a part of INdia or Pakistan or to be independent. Yet no referendum has come for years. Saxena asks how it is possible when Pakistan occupies half of Kashmir. Tyagi responds that IKF wants both India and Pakistan out and that this is not an India-Pakistan issue.

A significant scene occurs when Zooni's father discovers the trigger and confronts Rehan. In their dialogue, he voices that the IKF will lose whether Rehan, who is disguised as a member of the Indian army. is on the mission or not as "Terrorists never win." However, Rehan retorts his belief that the IKF are not terrorists but rather freedom fighters for Kashmir's independence. (2:26:00) Zooni's father asks if the IKF are capable of running the country to which Rehan explains that fair elections will be held for the people of Kashmir to decide upon

their own leaders. It is a commonality however for insurgent, militant groups that fight for a functioning independent state under the guise of bringing democracy.

"Fanaa" provides a fictional portrayal of the complex and enduring Jammu and Kashmir conflict. Through the character of Rehan Qadri and the IKF, the movie explores the motivations and actions of those involved in the struggle for Kashmiri independence. It presents a perspective that encompasses the belief in armed resistance as a justifiable means to attain freedom, while also acknowledging the importance of democratic processes in the governance of an independent Kashmir. Ultimately, "Fanaa" prompts viewers to consider the multifaceted nature of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict and the various perspectives that surround it.

Media bias and misrepresentation of Hindu-Muslim conflict in other films/media

The impact of Bollywood, considered the largest film industry in the world, in shaping India's national identity and influencing global perceptions of the country cannot be overstated. However, with a lack of media literacy and critical evaluation amongst the population allows for Bollywood to become a potent propaganda machine, spreading misinformation and reinforcing false narratives. The portrayal of Muslims solely as villainous characters in these films is an example of how the media can play a role in shaping public perception of a particular group. This kind of biased representation is not only harmful to the targeted community but also contributes to the polarization of society and can lead to a further escalation of tensions.

"Padmaavat" is another example of negative stereotypes portrayed in a Bollywood movie. Released in 2018 and directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, the movie is based on the epic poem "Padmavat" by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, which narrates the story of a Rajput queen, Padmavati, played in the film by Deepika Padukone, who commits self-immolation to protect her honor

from the invading Muslim king, Alauddin Khilji, played by Ranveer Singh who is infatuated with her and attacks her kingdom. (Altaf)

In conjunction with criticisms of the storyline, which was considered too slow-paced and convoluted, controversy arose over the portrayal of Alauddin Khilji as a stereotypical evil Muslim king and Ratan Singh as a righteous Hindu king. Muslim rulers, as represented primarily by Khilji, are characterized as two-faced, morally corrupt, bloodthirsty, lacking principles, and opportunistic in nature, while the Rajputs were characterized as honorable and immersed in vibrant culture. Khilji engages in an extramarital encounter with a woman shortly before his marriage ceremony with Mehrunnisa, and his treatment of his wife on their wedding night reflects a lack of respect, as he treats her as a subordinate or servant. Khilji is portrayed devouring meat in a monstrous manner, a rising theme in Bollywood films where Muslims are often depicted as meat lovers. Critics argued that this simplistic portrayal reinforced regressive patriarchal mores and stereotypes.

A prince with heavily lined eyes, he is presented as a debauched character with little morals or ethics that he follows. Bhansali even admitted to providing Ranveer Singh with books on the "psyche of dark rulers in history," including Adolf Hitler. Violence emerges in most, all scenes where Khilji appears. Every instance of Khilji's betrayal or aggression towards the Rajputs is laden with symbolic significance that should not go unnoticed. These actions take place against the backdrop of a prominently displayed green flag with a star and crescent, symbolizing the assault on Indian sovereignty by Muslim rulers. Prior to Khilji's act of killing his own nephew, his slave and trusted companion can be observed reciting verses from the Quran. In the background, the echoes of namaz can be heard as Padmavati enters Khilji's kingdom, unaware of his plans to betray her. (Ayyub)

The portrayal of Khilji as a villain also led to protests by religious communities who claimed that the movie misrepresented Muslim rulers and their treatment of Hindu women. "Padmaavat" does not present a faithful account of historical events or even claim to be a direct adaptation of the poem it purports to be inspired by. Rather, this Sufi love poem is recast into a film that alienates and offends. (Jalil)

While "Padmaavat," was a commercial success, it sparked controversy and debate around issues of historical accuracy, artistic freedom, and portrayal of religious and cultural identities, a notion shared with "The Kashmir Files." Director Sanjay Leela Bhansali published a page-long advert to pacify the Rajput community and convince them that the film was of praise to Rajput valor. However, it must be inquired whether this portrayal of praise towards the Rajputs, in turn, leads to the disparaging representation of Muslims. If anything, Muslims should be the ones offended by the demonization of their community. (Jalil) The film's grandiosity and cinematics act as a veil for a political machine that pushes dangerous stereotypes and rhetoric and establishes a divide between Hindus and Muslims as Native and Foreign or Defender and Invader. In a climate of heightened communal sensitivity in the country, where religiously motivated violence is all too common, Bhansali's work has reinforced the stereotype of the malevolent, villainous, and violent Muslim. This portrayal serves as a foundation for the prejudice and animosity towards minority groups brought about by right-wing ideologies. (Ayyub, Jalil)

Similarly, controversy has risen over the notion of promoting violent rhetoric and selling dangerous stereotypes. In a climate of heightened communal sensitivities, where incidents of violence and killings in the name of religion are distressingly prevalent, Bhansali's portrayal further reinforces the stereotype of the malevolent, diabolical, lustful, and murderous Muslim.

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This depiction perpetuates a trope that not only fuels the hate propagated by certain factions of the Indian right-wing, but also exacerbates the marginalization and discrimination faced by religious and ethnic minorities.

The portrayal of the Mughals in "Padmaavat" deviates from historical facts and presents them in a negative light, fueling a biased narrative that aligns with the ideology of Hindu nationalism. This deliberate distortion of history aims to paint the Mughals as tyrannical and oppressive rulers, disregarding their contributions and the nuanced complexities of their reign. In addition, prominent figures such as Amir Khusrau, who bears significance as a historian, poet, and one of the pillars of Sufi Islam, are reduced to being court jesters and yes-men. (Ayyub)

The film's narrative, combined with sensationalized visuals and dramatic interpretations, creates a fictionalized account that resonates with the Hindu nationalist movement's agenda. The impact of such distorted portrayals is significant as it influences public perception and understanding of history. It reinforces preconceived notions and prejudices, hindering genuine dialogue and objective analysis of historical events, despite the quite nuanced nature of Mughal history and beyond. This deliberate manipulation of history through popular culture like films further perpetuates misconceptions and pushes a divisive agenda. By recognizing the influence of films like "Padmaavat" in shaping public opinion, it becomes crucial to promote accurate portrayals to counter the distortions propagated by the Hindu nationalist movement. (Ayyub, Haq)

The notion of Muslims as solely villainous characters is a reflection of the larger issue of Islamophobia that exists in India and the world, with the most common stereotype being the association of Islam with terrorism. The movies "Kurbaan," and "Sarfarosh," fall under this notion and its impact on Muslims individuals and their community.

In "Kurbaan", a Bollywood movie that was released in 2009, Saif Ali Khan plays the character of a terrorist named Ehsan Khan, who is part of a group planning to carry out an attack in the United States. (Altaf) The film portrays how the ideology of the group affects Ehsan's personal life and relationships and highlights a need to address the root causes of terrorism and the impact it has on the lives of people. Ehsan, who is initially shown as a calm and caring professor, gets radicalized and turns to terrorism due to his disillusionment with the current state of affairs.

Released in 1999, "Sarfarosh," explores the issue of cross-border terrorism and its societal impact. The film revolves around an Indian police officer, played by Aamir Khan, who sets out to uncover and thwart a terrorist plot masterminded by a Pakistani vocalist, Gulfam Hasan, played by Naseeruddin Shah. (V. Singh) The movie delves into the complexities of the Indo-Pakistani relations and how terrorism affects civilians on both sides of the border. The film highlights the role of government agencies, politicians, and the media in shaping public opinion and dealing with the issue of terrorism. However, controversy stems from how the movie explicitly names Pakistan as the enemy in the two-sided conflict. (Ramnath)

Similarly "Phantom" (2015) promotes anti-Pakistan sentiments by contributing to the perception of Muslims as dangerous extremists and reinforcing Islamophobic attitudes. The film revolves around a plot to assassinate a known terrorist hiding in Pakistan and in turn promotes anti-Pakistan sentiments and portrays Muslims as dangerous. It contributes to the argument that Bollywood frequently portrays Muslims in villainous roles and supports India's anti-Pakistani propaganda.

Much of the controversy surrounding these films is due to how they perpetuate the stereotype of Islamic terrorism and depict Muslims as backward and regressive which only

reinforces marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society. Religious practices of Muslims are often misrepresented and misused by Bollywood leading to their community being represented as outsiders in films. (Ramnath) These films portray hyperbolized stereotypes and push harmful rhetoric such as the notion that Islamic terrorism exists as the only form of terrorism within the Muslim community. They are portrayed as being complicit in acts of violence, even though the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful and do not engage in acts of terrorism.

Additional films that suffer from bias against the Muslim community include "Gadar: Ek Prem Katha" (2001), which portrays Muslims as violent and evil during the partition of India and Pakistan. Criticism arose for the portrayal of Muslims as violent and evil, with the protagonist fighting against them to save his family. Scenes portraying Muslims as uniformly vicious contribute to the negative stereotype of Muslims as a monolithic threatening group. While the film provides much historical context, the portrayal perpetuates negative stereotypes and contributes to Islamophobia.

Other recent films like "Panipat" (2019), "Tanhaji" (2020), and "Takht" (2020) follow similar patterns of Islamophobia, reinforcing the outsider narrative with Muslims cast as villains and brave "native" Indians fighting them off or suffering under their rule. Actor Saif Ali Khan, one of the lead actors in "Tanhaji," has admitted, "I don't think this is history." In the movie "Mulk," (2018) which supposedly aims to highlight rising Islamophobia in India, the film opens with scenes of a Muslim family celebrating a birthday party, with their identity reaffirmed through extensive depictions of cooking, smelling, and eating meat. Bollywood also perpetuates the stereotype of Muslims as driven by lust and sexual promiscuity, often showcasing women

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dancing to suggestive lyrics. Many of the films discussed suffer from these issues and numerous other examples could be cited to illustrate this trend. (Yazqan)

Films like "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil" (2016) and "Zero" (2018) perpetuate harmful stereotypes about Muslim men. "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil" portrays a Muslim character as a womanizer and cheater, reinforcing negative perceptions of Muslim morality. Likewise, "Zero" features a Muslim character as a dwarf who is portrayed as immoral and unethical. These depictions contribute to the marginalization of Muslim communities and reinforce prejudiced narratives.

Other conflicts include the emergence of the hashtag #Urduwood, representing a Hindu nationalist backlash against what some perceive as the over-representation of Urdu-speaking Muslims in Bollywood. This battle highlights the high stakes involved in shaping India's future and the ongoing struggle for representation within the film industry. Exploring these dynamics sheds light on the high stakes involved in shaping India's future and the diverse perspectives within the industry.

While the ruling establishment in India has long recognized Bollywood as a potent propaganda machine, it is the Modi regime that has truly seized control over this machine. A clear example comes from a recent biopic about Modi himself, "PM Narendra Modi." It traces Modi's journey from being a Chaiwala or roadside tea seller to his spiritual retreats in the Himalayas, and his rise within the BJP. This is the first time in a Bollywood film that a sitting prime minister is glorified, despite having completed only one term in office at the time of production. The movie itself was only released on May 24, 2019, only a day after Modi's successful re-election result was announced on May 23, 2019. Six days later, on May 30, 2019, Modi was sworn in for his second term. (Saxena, Yazqan)

Critics have pointed out that the film shamelessly manipulates the narrative, showcasing heroic moments in Modi's life that never actually happened such as his arrest during the Emergency of 1975-77, denying actual events such as his marriage and subsequent abandonment of his wife, and clearly delineating his enemies as Pakistan, the news media, and a dark-skinned Indian from the south. The film squarely blames the 2002 Gujarat massacres not on Modi's own hatefulness and incompetence but on his opposition, positioning him as the hero. The film's release was strategically scheduled a few weeks before the 2019 elections but was postponed when the Election Commission of India deemed it propaganda, an assessment that Modi's BJP deemed unfair. (Chakrabartty, Yazqan)

The negative portrayal of Muslims by the Bollywood propaganda machine has significant implications for Indian society as these films perpetuate harmful stereotypes, reinforce Islamophobic attitudes, and contribute to communal tensions. While some films aim to provide a nuanced perspective, others amplify regressive narratives and foster divisions.

The increasing prevalence of such content in Bollywood can be attributed to the political and financial incentives associated with Islamophobic content. In regards to the latter notion, these films serve the monetary interests of their creators and supporters extensively. The entertainment industry caters to the preferences of the audience and produces content that aligns with their interests. In the present India, hatred has become more lucrative, and animosity is being actively promoted and consumed on a large scale by politicians, businessmen, media organizations, and the general public. Bollywood has failed to recognize the potential consequences of promoting harmful rhetoric. Neither the censor board nor any other governing authority has taken any measures to curb this dissemination, raising suspicions about their intentions and exemplifying a deliberate disregard for the politically sensitive state of the country

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by one of the most influential and impactful entertainment industries in the nation. The film industry, which has benefited greatly from the contributions of numerous Muslims both in front of and behind the camera, bears a greater responsibility to refrain from exacerbating an already volatile situation. (Sadaqat)

In turn, it is crucial for the Bollywood industry to take responsibility for the impact of their movies and ensure that they do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes about any community. Through critical examination of these films and analysis of their influence on the populace, we can foster a more inclusive and empathetic film culture that promotes understanding and unity among diverse communities in India.

Effect on Populace and Incitement of Violence

The dangerous rhetoric and violence against Muslims that have been caused by these films and news coverage cannot be ignored. Hate speech and rhetoric have been used to justify violence against the Muslim population, which presents a serious concern to people's lives and safety. The normalization of such rhetoric can lead to a sense of justification for violence against Muslims and this serves as a reflection of the larger issue of communal tensions that have been brewing in India for decades, which have been fueled by factors such as religious and ethnic divisions, economic inequality, and political polarization. There have been several incidents of mob violence and hate crimes against Muslims in recent years, which can be attributed to the normalization of hateful rhetoric. (Nair, Kakvi)

An incident in 2021 saw video footage that emerged showing the gruesome attack on a 45-year-old Muslim rickshaw driver in the streets of Kanpur, located in the northern state of

Uttar Pradesh, India. A violent mob was beating him mercilessly, and his young daughter was crying and begging for them to stop. The assailants demanded that the man chant phrases commonly spoken by the Hindu populace including "Hindustan Zindabad," or "Long Live India," and "Jai Shri Ram," or "Victory to Lord Ram." Though traditionally used as patriotic greetings, these phrases have been co-opted by Hindu extremist groups in hate speech and violent anti-muslim rhetoric. (G. Pandey)

This incident is another example of the rising tide of violence and religious extremism that has been sweeping through India in recent years. Often religious persecution is the root justification for violence and hatred, yet the usage of Hindustan Zindabad is historically ironic given that "Hindustan" was used during a time period when the entire subcontinent represented a diverse community. This trend should be countered by strong action from the government and society at large, yet it seems that these incidents are often downplayed.

Other instances have occurred including in March of the same year, when a 14-year-old Muslim boy who had entered a Hindu temple to drink water was violently assaulted and in June, a vendor was beaten up in Delhi for trying to sell fruit in a Hindu locality. Anti-Muslim violence has risen since 2014 under the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Even the film, "The Kashmir Files," has been said to have led to instances of Hindu-Muslim violence, motivated by the messaging and controversy of the film. It was reported in March of 2022 that three young Hindus were seriously wounded in a knife assault as they left the cinema hall following a screening of the movie in Fazilnagar of the Kushinagar district. The trio had attended the last showing of the film and, while exiting the cinema hall, chanted nationalist slogans. This led to an altercation with some local Muslim men where the verbal confrontation turned physical with weapons. (IANS)

However, media sensationalism can easily skew the issue at hand, leading to instances of pure bias or false narratives. Multiple media sources reported on an incident where a Muslim teenager was reportedly assaulted in Tergaon village located in Haliyal in the Uttar Kannad District of Karnataka. According to the story, 18-year-old Amanulla Irfan was attacked with a sword by a 30-year-old man named Honappa due to his religious identity while he was returning after watching 'The Kashmir Files'. The news gained widespread attention on social media, with numerous media outlets attributing the attack to the "Hindutva" and the film, however, fact checking by news sources confirmed that this story was indeed fabricated. The real origin of the conflict stemmed from an argument that broke out between the two. The victim was described to be constantly abusing the mother of the accused and in turn, Honappa assaulted Irfan in front of his house with a pocket knife. (OpIndia Staff)

Another similar story of sensationalism involves CCTV footage of two men attacking a group of Muslims inside a shop. Though it was claimed that Hindu goons attacked a Muslim shopkeeper after watching The Kashmir Files, both the attackers and victims belong to the Muslim community and there is no relation to the film. (Thete, Hassan)

These instances not only lead to questions of the validity and authenticity of any of these instances of violence, including that of the three youths being attacked, but also shows the danger of misinformation and its ability to easily incite communal violence through hateful rhetoric. Narratives like these often take the form of rumors or fake news that are easily spread through social media to exploit people's fears and prejudices to create a sense of mistrust between communities. If people start believing that the attack was carried out by the Muslim community, it leads to retaliation and violence against innocent people from that community.

This violence is systemic in nature as exemplified through numerous These incidents cannot be dismissed as isolated attacks; rather, they represent a deliberate institutionalization of violence against Muslims. Furthermore, the government exercises control over the police force, leading to systematically controlled violence, as they have proven to turn a blind eye to Hindu-led assaults on Muslim communities, evident in the Bombay (Mumbai) riots of 1992-1993, Ayodhya in 1992, Gujarat in 2002, and Uttar Pradesh in 2019-2020.

The Bombay riots of 1992-1993, triggered by the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, saw widespread violence and targeted attacks against Muslims, resulting in numerous loss of life and damage to property. The incident in Ayodhya itself, where the mosque was demolished, was a significant event that fueled communal tensions and triggered further violence against Muslims.

The Babri Masjid was built in 1528 in Ayodhya by Mir Baqi, upon the instructions of the Emperor Babur. Early instances of clashes between Muslims and Hindus have been recorded. Examples include in 1855 when a dispute arose between Sunni Muslims claiming that the temple of Hanumangarhi in Ayodhya was constructed on the site of a previously demolished mosque leading to tensions escalating between them and Bairais as well as in 1859 when the British administration addressed Hindu's growing belief that the Babri Masjid was the birthplace of Lord Ram, which furthered tensions and later led to the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' which translates Rama's Birthplace, movement . They erected a fence around the mosque, allowing Hindus to worship in the outer court while restricting access to the inner areas, in hopes of managing and maintaining a delicate balance between the two communities. In March of 1934, the mosque and its dome were damaged as violence occurred between Hindus and Muslims. On December 22, 1949, District Magistrate K.K. Nayar declined to remove idols of Ram that were placed inside

the mosque by the Hindu Mahasabha, justifying his decision by citing the potential risk of riots .

Forty years later, in 1984, as the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' movement gained momentum, L.K.

Advani, who was a prominent figure in the BJP, emerged as its de facto leader. (The Wire Staff)

On November 9, 1989, Rajiv Gandhi's government permitted the Vishva Hindu Parishad

(VHP), a right wing Hindu organization founded in 1964, to conduct the shilanyas ceremony,

which involved laying the foundation stone for the Ram temple on the contentious land. The

VHP played a major role in the demolition of the mosque. (The Wire Staff)

.On December 6, 1992, a gathering of nearly 150,000 individuals assembled at the Babri

Masjid in Ayodhya, where speeches were delivered by leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which includes L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar

Joshi. The crowd subsequently breached the mosque, demolishing it within a few hours. This act

of demolition took place despite assurances given by the state government to the Supreme Court

that the mosque would remain unharmed.

Indian photojournalist Praveen Jain captured the demolition of the 16th century Babri

Mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalists and explained, through his perspective, the moments

that led to the destruction and in turn, the violent clash between the two religious communities.

Jain had been actively reporting on the Ayodhya movement, which aimed to construct a

temple for Lord Ram on the site where Babri Masjid, a 16th-century mosque, once stood. Prior

to the events of December 6, 1992, he had visited Ayodhya several times to cover the

developments. On December 4, Jain arrived in Ayodhya on assignment by editor Vinod Mehta.

By December 5, he had a strong intuition that the demolition was imminent due to a press

conference that occurred. Jain had inquired about the plans of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

to its leader Ashok Singhal and the leader responded, "Just wait and watch," with what Jain described as "a knowing smile." (Vats)

A rehearsal of the demolition took place and no media were allowed. Jain was the only journalist there due to his long-time acquaintanceship with BL Sharma, another leader of the VHP. Sharma had told him to meet that morning, promising to show "something interesting," and advised Jain to pose as a VHP photographer with a VHP identity card. Through this, Jain was able to capture a photo of the rehearsal, thus acquiring evidence of the imminent demolition. However, none of the journalists he informed, including Mehta, believed his claim.

During the attack, journalists were attacked by VHP workers for their photography of the demolition, including notable names such as Raghu Rai and Pablo Bartholomew. Jain was able to escape after being subject to a few blows. (Vats)

Jain expressed how he begged BJP leaders, Advani and Joshi, to intervene against the assault on photographers but was met with no response, which he felt indicated a premeditated plan to attack photographers. He also remarked how the photos he took of the rehearsal were only published after the demolition took place. These photographs led to courts summoning Jain to provide testimony where he encountered numerous threats while attending these depositions. Defense attorneys, aiming to psychologically break him down, subjected Jain to verbal abuse within the courtroom and despite lodging a complaint about the mistreatment to the judge, it was disregarded. He would go on to provide depositions for nearly a decade as defense lawyers would purposefully prolonged their cross-examination, stretching it over two or three days. Their intention was to coerce Jain into retracting their statements and denying their presence. However, the existence of Jain's photograph served as undeniable proof that the demolition of Babri Masjid was not a result of spontaneous anger but rather a premeditated conspiracy. (Vats)

Following the demolition, a wave of violence erupted in Ayodhya, with kar sevaks or Hindu volunteers, targeting Muslim residents. Their homes were ransacked and demolished, resulting in the deaths of eighteen Muslims. Numerous houses, shops, and 23 local mosques were set ablaze and destroyed. This incident also triggered riots across different parts of the country, including Mumbai, leading to the loss of approximately 2,000 lives. (The Wire Staff)

On December 8, 1992, in a retaliatory response, Muslims in Pakistan attacked over 30 Hindu temples. The Pakistani government expressed its condemnation by shutting down offices and schools for a day as a symbolic protest against the destruction of the mosque in India. (The Wire Staff)

The Gujarat violence of 2002 was another grim chapter in which organized mobs targeted Muslim neighborhoods, resulting in a large number of deaths, displacement, and destruction. The response of the state machinery during this period raised concerns, as reports indicated the failure of law enforcement agencies to intervene effectively, allowing the violence to continue unabated.

Between February 28 and March 2, 2002, the most systematic and widespread acts of mob violence against Muslims unfolded, encompassing sixteen out of Gujarat's twenty-four districts. These targeted attacks were highly organized and concentrated within this timeframe, with mobs often consisting of as many as 5,000 to 10,000 people. The similarities in weaponry and methods of attack indicated the presence of coordination and premeditation amongst the mobs during the 72 hour period before Chief Minister Modi was able to restore normalcy. (Outlook Web Desk, "Mapping the Violence")

On February 27, 2002, the unrest in Gujarat began with an attack on a Sabarmati express train carrying Hindu pilgrims, resulting in the tragic death of 59 individuals due to a fire. This

incident sparked a retaliatory wave of violence by Hindu mobs, leading to the brutal killing of

hundreds of Muslims, the displacement of tens of thousands, and the widespread destruction of

numerous Muslim residences. Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch

(HRW) expressed that, "The 2002 violence against Muslims in Gujarat persists as a dark blot on

India's reputation for religious equality," She especially noted, "Instead of prosecuting senior

state and police officials implicated in the atrocities, the Gujarat authorities have engaged in

denial and obstruction of justice." (Human Rights Watch, "India: A Decade on")

Studies by the HRW discovered that attempts to investigate and prosecute cases within

Gujarat were hindered, leading to harassment and intimidation of activists and lawyers involved.

In response to appeals from activists and victims' families, the Supreme Court had to intervene

multiple times to order reinvestigations, oversee independent inquiries in certain instances, and

transfer trials out of Gujarat. These interventions were necessary to ensure advancements

towards justice in the affected cases. (Human Rights Watch, India: A Decade on") Over the past

decade, a growing body of evidence has revealed the involvement of Gujarat state authorities in

the acts of violence against Muslims. In its report on the riots of 2002, HRW cited a police

officer who stated that there were no instructions to protect Muslims. The organization further

documented instances where activists advocating for justice were threatened and intimidated by

the government's political allies. (Human Rights Watch, "We Have No Orders")

Furthermore, the HRW has also reported that while investigations into the Godhra train

attack proceeded swiftly, the investigations into the subsequent anti-Muslim riots were

deliberately delayed or ignored. The officials of the Gujarat state government, headed by Chief

Minister Modi failed to conduct thorough investigations and impeded the course of justice. Many

cases were dismissed by state courts due to a lack of evidence, where prosecutors acted as

defense counsel and witnesses turned hostile through threats. (Human Rights Watch, India: A Decade on")

Despite telephone records proving the presence of senior BJP leaders at the scenes of the riots in Naroda Patia and Naroda Gaam, the state police failed to investigate them. Witness testimonies also indicated that these senior leaders provided weapons to the mobs and incited attacks on Muslims. It wasn't until March 2009, when a Special Investigation Team appointed by the Supreme Court took over the inquiry, that two leaders, Mayaben Surendrabhai Kodnani, a state cabinet minister, and Jaideep Patel, a leader of the VHP, were arrested for their involvement in aiding and abetting a mob that resulted in the death of 105 people, numerous injuries, and destruction of property. (Human Rights Watch, India: A Decade on")

Many incidents of discriminatory violence took place in Uttar Pradesh in 2019-2020, including attacks on mosques, homes, and individuals. Reports suggest that the police in some cases either turned a blind eye or actively supported the perpetrators. Homes of Muslims, suspected to be "key conspirators" behind the violence during the protests, were unlawfully demolished by authorities. (Kakvi, Human Rights Watch, "India: Surge")

Biased media coverage can also lead to other forms of systemic discrimination against Muslim communities. Examples include difficulties Muslims may face in obtaining jobs, housing, and other essential services due to the negative perceptions created by biased media coverage. This discrimination can exacerbate the socio-economic disparities that already exist within Muslim communities.

Media has a powerful influence on shaping public opinion and promoting social change. It is crucial that the media provide a balanced and accurate portrayal of complex issues, and avoid perpetuating stereotypes or promoting hate speech and violence. The promotion of biased

media by governments or powerful individuals is a concerning trend that needs to be addressed, and efforts must be made to counter the negative effects of such media representations. When the media perpetuates negative stereotypes and biases against a particular community, especially minority groups, it can fuel existing prejudices and exacerbate discrimination against them. Only by promoting accurate and fair reporting can discrimination in this regard be combatted.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Discrimination against Muslim communities in India is a complex issue with deep historical roots that require understanding and attention. By acknowledging the role of biased media coverage and the impact of colonial policies, we can work towards combating discrimination and promoting social justice. Creating a more equitable and inclusive society that values diversity and respects the rights of all citizens is possible through addressing the underlying causes of discrimination. The history of partition and violence that affected Muslim communities during the British colonial era further highlights the need for addressing this issue with respect to historical context and the need to understand how deeply-rooted the Hindu-Muslim conflict is within South Asian society.

The historical, political, and religious dimensions of the conflict have resulted in widespread violence and loss of life, particularly among the Muslim population in the region. The ongoing dispute between India and Pakistan over the region, coupled with the rise of separatist movements, has made the turbulence in the region exponentially increase over time. The heavy-handed response of the Indian government, including allegations of human rights violations, has further complicated the situation. The ongoing conflict has resulted in the displacement of many people, creating a climate of fear and instability in the region. Finding a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict is crucial to ensuring the safety and well-being of all communities living in the region. The international community must continue to engage in diplomatic efforts to encourage dialogue and constructive engagement between India and Pakistan, prioritizing the needs and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir has had a negative impact on the economy and social harmony of the region, further exacerbating tensions between India and Pakistan and hindering the search for a peaceful solution to the issue. Significant harm has occurred to the people of the region, with long-lasting impacts on their physical and mental health, as well as their social and economic well-being. It is essential to prioritize the needs of the affected population, provide access to healthcare facilities and basic necessities, and promote economic opportunities and social cohesion to alleviate their suffering. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir serves as a reminder of the devastating impact that conflict and violence can have on ordinary people and underscores the importance of seeking peaceful solutions to complex issues.

Biased media coverage and historical prejudices are key contributing factors to this discrimination, which has far-reaching consequences for the Muslim community in India. The portrayal of Muslims in the media perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces prejudices, creating a climate of fear and mistrust. The Jammu and Kashmir conflict is a prime example of this, with news outlets and the film industry perpetuating false narratives and stereotypes. It is important to acknowledge and address these biases in media coverage, and to promote fair and accurate reporting that addresses the complexities of the issues at hand. The normalization of hateful rhetoric can lead to communal tensions and violence, as seen in various incidents of mob violence and hate crimes against Muslims in recent years.

Similarly, the film industry has played a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes and stigmatizing Muslim communities. Films often depict Muslims as backward and regressive, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that fuel discrimination and prejudice. One example is the one-sided and misleading portrayal of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict in "The Kashmir Files."

By portraying Muslims as solely villainous characters, the film perpetuates negative stereotypes and fuels existing prejudices against the Muslim community.

Overall, the media coverage of the conflict in Kashmir is a complex issue that raises many questions about journalistic ethics and the role of the media in shaping public opinion. It is clear that there is a need for more balanced and nuanced reporting that takes into account the experiences of all the people affected by the conflict, through open and honest coverage. Additionally, efforts should be made to promote dialogue, understanding, and empathy among different religious communities, fostering a society where diversity is celebrated and discrimination is actively challenged.

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