

PK: A Saga of Intolerance

Sethulekshmi R.S

Kerala University (India)

ABSTRACT

Every year the Indian Film Industry contributes the maximum number of films in the world but that does not make the society completely humane of how different issues are mirrored in films. This is the question which PK(2014), the biggest Bollywood grosser of all time, raised. This satirical or biting comedy is based on challenging the superstitious beliefs and activities penetrating in Indian society under the label of religious practises. India, being an umbrella holding numerous religions and varied culture and tradition, supports many layers of understanding about faith, religions, rituals and beliefs which form sensitive issues. The film probes into the clash of different beliefs in India and takes a direct aim at the 'godmen' or the guru figures who direct the followers towards following various symbols of religion. There have been protests and attacks. A 'boycott-PK' movement as well as a parallel 'Support PK' trend have been seen in the real as well as in the virtual world. These array of events with respect to the religion in the Indian society contributes a meaning to the examination of this film as a meditated phenomenon of the Indian society.

Keywords: *India, Bollywood, PK film, portrayal of religion*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Film Industry contributes the maximum number of films in the world and has for many years been the largest film producing country, with an output in different languages. 'Bombay Cinema', popularly known as Bollywood is considered to be the largest in India which is followed by Tamil and Telugu cinemas. Films are constantly woven over love and romance and is mostly set in an ambience of social, political, religious and economic crisis. Religion is an indispensable condition of narrative in films as the characters, plot, social norms, rituals etc represent religious codes and themes, on which they are generally based. The portrayal of religion plays such an overriding role in today's society that it is not an extraordinary or shocking situation that paves its way into films.

Though India is considered as an umbrella holding multiple religions, we are able to witness or hold on to the fact that it is Hinduism that is being practiced by the majority and obviously the main religion of most of the early films depicted Hinduism. The plots used in these films were mostly religious and mythological. Religion forms a very emotional and sensitive issue in India as there is a low brink for ‘religious sensibilities’ being hurt and ‘intolerance’ as been witnessed in the form of communal hostilities leading to deaths of hundreds of thousands during various physical realities and happenings. Thereupon media portrayals about religion and religious identities are often guardedly carried out whether that is in any genre, news, advertising or cinema. India has had a history of outrageous responses and intolerant behaviour against the so called ‘controversial’. Cinematic projections of religions of which PK, released in December, 2014 is one among the latest.

PK is doubtless the most reviewed and debated movie in such controversies, but it cannot be considered as the only movie which have dealt with such threats in India in the recent past. The film which is directed by RajKumarHirani, a National Award and Filmfare Award winning Indian Filmmaker, screenwriter and producer of Hindi films and stars Amir Khan is accused of “hurting Hindu sentiments” by various religious outfits who sought to ban the movie. But the Supreme Court over ruled them, because the film was cleared by the Country’s Censor Board. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) wanted it banned, and its members took to tearing up the film’s poster’s and halting screenings. The members of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board also demanded that the Censor Board removed some scenes in the interest of maintaining “communal harmony”. Many people have written about this film and about the reasons for controversy surrounding it. The film generated strong reactions due to its simple narrative. It doesn’t reach any conclusion on the existence of religion, but simply questions superstitions in a country where religion is deeply rooted in the social consciousness of the people. Hirani is seen using a narration-based treatment for PK and it often goes to flashbacks and anecdotes. His films have an emblematic approach to satire through humour.

2. ANALYSING PK AS A SAGA OF INTOLERANCE

PK picturises the story of an alien (Amir Khan) who reaches India and gets lost after his remote is stolen, thereby ending up questioning the religious norms and attitudes of the people. He is helpless that he cant speak any of the earth’s languages, but he can effortlessly learn languages after holding anybody’s hand. He has two personalities- one is that of an alien, who does not understand the codes, languages and norms of this planet and second one who picks up the Bhojpuri language by a transfer mechanism through holding the hand of a prostitute. The overall personality of PK becomes a stereotypical character, who chews pan ending up with a coloured mouth,

wears colourful clothes, has a peculiar body language with eyes wide open, and gets an understanding of social codes, symbols, tricks and practices by getting into situations. PK wears a yellow helmet and the logic is to appear prominent for God to spot him easily, as he feels he would be visible to him from a distance. He always carries a tape recorder, which fell off from the thief who stole his remote control device, listens to Bhajans, and keeps recording sounds, which in the end come out to be of Jaggu only as he loves her.

The entry of Jaggu's character (Anushka Sharma) who is the female lead, is presented not as a typical religious girl as it is clear from her characterization and mannerisms, and she is studying in Belgium. She falls in love with a Muslim boy from Pakistan and when she decides to marry him, she goes to a church for solemnising it. She has short hair and wears skirts, jeans and trousers only. Her profession is non-stereotypical as she is a TV reporter and her curious nature fits well with her profession. Jaggu is fond of poetry and that attracts her towards Sarfaraz, who is a Pakistani studying architecture and is a responsible guy as well as he works part time in the Pakistani embassy. Sarfaraz is a boy next door character, who is a cheerful person and loves Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan. He is a talented poet himself and sings very well, and his charm wins the heart of Jaggu.

Jaggu's mother's reaction towards her mention of her lover being a Muslim from Pakistan is a stereotypical one as she exclaims, "Will you wear a veil? Will you offer Namaz?" The film creates Jaggu's father Jayprakash Sahni as a diehard follower of Tapaswi Maharaj, who holds him in high esteem and calls him 'Bhagwan' meaning God. Jayprakash keeps Tapaswi Baba's photographs everywhere in his house for blessings of walls, bathrooms, bed sheets, school bags of his kids and so on and does not do a thing without having an opinion from him. Tapaswi Baba even decides timings for performing any sort of tasks. This clearly depicts Jayprakash's reverence towards Baba. He has also been given a 'godbox' by Baba, which has various Hindu deities, for different issues- financial, health, etc. Boman Irani, who plays Cherry Bajwa, the news director of the channel that Jaggu works for, is a practical man who believes in showing news that appeals to the masses and winning as much TRP (Television Rating Point) without any controversy. He and his channel opposes any religious news as once after showing a negative story on Tapaswi Maharaj, his followers had manhandled him. In reply to Jaggu's request regarding showing PK on TV after she finds him on roads distributing pamphlets that read 'God Missing' he tells her looking for God meant religion and that was no news, but if he found him, that would be worth showing. Towards the end, the antagonist or Godman Tapaswi Baba followed by thousands of people including Jaggu's father who claims being able to speak to God, is exposed as having lied about PK's remote control device as his own. It happens during a live show, where the truth of Baba and others like him serves as an eye-opener for people like Jaggu's father.

3. CONCLUSION

Religion in India is characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Religion is practised in different ways and there is an increase in belief apart from the personal lives into the social order also. An elemental component of this religious mindset or attitude is the presence of a deep rooted faith in ‘godmen’ by the Indian society, which girdles various faith and cultural practices. Indian film has been depicting sages and saints from its very beginning, and often in a stereotypical or cliched manner that conforms to religious conservatism. This film became another example of how intolerance and lack of accommodation in such matters which are called ‘sensitive’ still exists to a visible extent. PK created different levels of protest and negative response which ranged from physical vandalisation of cinema halls and the use of traditional media as well as new media like social media to hurl abuses at the film, filmmaker, and actors. A hashtag called #boycott PK started trending almost immediately after the movie was released, paralleled with a rival hashtag called #I support PK .

There has been a prolonged debate or argument regarding freedom of expression in India and this film only takes it further, exposing various dimensions or range of constraining freedom of expression and the general approach towards religion and its practices or portrayals. The conventional conservatism version of Hinduism with its representatives approve is the only ‘genuine’ version which gets engrossed or fascinated easily, and films contrasting with this shall continue to face protests. The issues of subjectivity and myopia have been and continue to plague a society like India, which takes pride and dignity in upholding or advocating the rhetoric of calling itself a ‘secular,’ ‘diverse’ and ‘democratic’ nation.

REFERENCES

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