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The Cinematic Representation of Communal Holocaust in Mahesh Bhatt Zakhm (1998)

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Abstract

Hindu Muslim conflict in India has been going on for centuries and this become as one of the popular genre of Indian Cinema from many years. The depiction of Hindi Muslim riots always presents disturbing and negative images in front of us. Films like Krantiveer , Black Friday , Fiza , Parzania Zakhm, Bombay few films which represent the Hindu Muslims conflicts in a different cinematic narratives. The present paper shows that how Mahesh Bhatt “Zakhm” deals with the communal harmony in India .Through “Zakhm” Researcher analyse that how Mahesh Bhatt able to expose the real consequences of riots between different communities in the name of religion and how the film actually through a love story of Hindu and Muslim metaphorically represents the most terrible state of entire nation.

Keywords: communal riots, Trauma, Zakhm, holocaust

I- Introduction: Films on Hindu Muslim riots: Before starting my analysis on “ Zakhm” I draw attention on certain films made on Hindu Muslim riots. The communal tensions in India has a long history and Hindi Cinema deals with this sensitive issues almost in every era with the different treatment and cinematic representation From Yash Chopra 1961 “Dharamputra” to “Dharam Sankat Mei”the communal tension and its consequences has been portrayed by many filmmakers boldly and some time they face a trouble with Censor Board as well. (Kant, 2015) State that Films based on communal violence has two purposes as a medium of mass communication; they present a plethora of personal/public tragedies along with an informative, instructive and ethical message of communal harmony to those who have not witnessed it. The other purpose is to suggest anxieties and repercussions relating to partition which could be contextualized in multiple frameworks.

From so many years we understand the violence through cinematic experiences with the different narrative style. The Mahesh Bhatt “Zakhm” based on Hindu Muslim riots and this was the Mahesh Bhatt last film as a Director in which he tried to show the two parallel stories in past and present context which illustrates the ignorance and hatred towards both the communities. (Jain, 2011) state that “The film thus develops as a strong criticism of Hindu fanaticism and tries to heal some of the wounds inflicted upon Muslims during recent

communal riots”. A similar conclusion also be drawn from one of the most widely acclaimed films on Hindu–Muslim riots, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* (2002), made by Aparna Sen, in which Hindu rioters attack the passengers of a bus and kill some Muslims. The heroine’s Hinduness is also problematized through her companionship with a Muslim co-passenger. Both *Firaaq* (2008) of Naseerudin Shah and *Parzania* (2007) are similar in their portrayal of Muslim and Parsi minorities in the wake of the Gujarat riots of 2002. (Jha, 2004) “Both are critical of Hindus and of the BJP state government of Gujarat for their role in this, one of the most ghastly incidents of communal violence in Indian history”. Both show no part played by Muslims in the violence, and portray them simply as the helpless victims of a Hindu majority. Thus instead of an objective exploration of the reasons for communal violence, these films simply show the oppressive aftermaths on non-Hindus something that was also done in regard to Sikhs in *Maachis* 1996, and *Amu* 2005. Thus in this category of film it is the fanatic face of modern Hindus that is being criticized by filmmakers such as Mahesh Bhatt and Aparna Sen. Mani Ratnam’s *Bombay* soon came after *Babri Masjid Demolition* in 1995. He showed the repercussions of the horrific event on the lives of Hindu Muslim couples. Deepa Mehta’s *1947 Earth*, Chandra Prakash Dwedi’s *Pinjar* and Anil Sharma’s *Gadar* aimed to create the spine chilling scenario of Hindu Muslim riots.

Film Synopsis of *Zakhm*: Ajay (Ajay Devgan) argue with his wife, Sonia (Sonali Bendre) over whether to give birth to their child in a foreign country or in India (because of the insecurity caused by the Mumbai riots). The outside condition was worst due to Hindu Muslim riots and soon Ajay was informed that her mother was burnt alive by some Muslim group while she was praying in church. In flashback, the director showed the struggles which his mother had to undergo to raise her children. Pooja Bhatt is portrayed as a simple, mature and God fearing. She was in love with a Hindu film producer Raman Desai (Nagarjuna) but was not allowed to marry her on account of her Muslim faith. Raman’s Mother was completely disagree and forced him to marry with other girl by blackmailing him. He already marries her but does not document or acknowledge their marriage as it was done without any traditional upholding. The fact that she had children with a Hindu man forces her to hide her faith and live her life as a Hindu, even in front of her son. After his father's death, Ajay realises his mother is a Muslim. She makes him promise to bury her according to her faith when she dies, for it is only through a proper burial that she will be able to find herself reunited with her lover in heaven. Sonia know about her mother-in-law's past life and decides not to leave Ajay. She stands by him and supports his decision to bury his mother. However, Ajay's task is hindered by a fundamentalist leader Subodh bhai (Ashutosh Rana) wanted to make this a political issue and encouraged the Hindu youth to kill Muslims. Anand (Akshay Anand) happens to be a youth leader and Ajay's younger brother. But when Anand comes to know about Subodh bhai's political intentions behind, he stands by his brother's side to bury his mother as per Muslim faith. Her body is buried as she wished, and she reunites with Raman in heaven.

II- Critical Analysis: The meaning of Zakhm is “wound”. Every character of the film holds some agony and wounds in their life which Mahesh Bhatt perfectly bring out it with the perfect screen play and Direction. The whole movie comprises of single day only. The film is remembered for three powerpact performances- Ajay Devgn as the protagonist AjayDesai, Pooja Bhatt who played a role of muslim woman, and wonder boy Kunal Khemu who brought Bhatt's tormented childhood to reel life. (**Bhattacharya, 2015**) says that “ Zakhm is dedicated to Bhatt's mother. When she died, he stood up to his family to respect her last wish to be buried, despite keeping her faith private for most of her life. In the film there's a shot of Ajay holding his mother's body in his arms, putting her to rest in riottorn Mumbaia and that marked a closure for Bhatt in real life too”. The film opens in the Babri masjid Demolition riots blood shed all the way where music director Ajay (Ajay Devgan) coversation with his wife Sonia (Sonali Bendre) whether give birth to their child in India or foreign as in India people are killing each other in the name of religion. The film depicted tensions between two religions in contemporary society. Pooja Bhatt who played a character of Muslim women secretly married to a Hindu man who never accepted by society neither by her husband family. Imitating the riots and problems related to division of India on the basis of caste , potrayed by Mahesh Bhatt in such a brilliant and unbiased manner. This movie was released in the year 1998 after 6 years of Babri Mosque demolition leading to massive communal riots all over India. The scene where Muslim mob burnt alive Pooja Bhatt in confusion that she is Hindu and after knowing the truth they regret and the politicians take advantage of the situation and used Anand younger brother of Ajay for their benefits. The strong point of Zakhm is its depiction of human feelings and emotions which are portrayed so beautifully that it really strikes you hard. In this regard is reminiscent of Bhatt's efforts during the 1980s, like Arth, Saaransh and Kaash, some amazing, hard-hitting pictures known for realistically portraying complex relationships and life like struggles. 'Zakhm' is actually a movie depicting the heart-wrenching relationship of a mother and her son. In this film two stories are executed in parallel each depicting the past and present life of the lead actor. In the past life it has been shown how he and his mother face social stigma due to various social, religious and ethical beliefs his mother suffered from the agony given by society as in one scene when she was telling her elder son that “ ***Mere Pehchan tum Dono ki Zindagi me Zakhm Hai***” where the lines justifying the title of Film. As being a muslim woman she faced a trouble by society neither she get any respect nor love because of only muslim identity and she wants her children to be unknown from this as it may spoil their life as well. In the whole film the character of Pooja Bhatt has no name she would be called by name Mrs Desai only. In the film may be Director intentionally hide her identity though she believe in every religion so director thought not to bound her in certain religion. In One dialogue When Pooja Bhat said “ ***majhab ki uchee deewaro ko laangne ke lie ham dono ka kadd bahut chota pad gaya***” metaphorically directors trying to say that there is so much hatred between two communities that they never be unite themselves because of so called society negative thinking and hatred . In a very tender age Ajay got matured and understands the problem which her mother going through. Raju who is also a sufferer at the hands of conservative temperament of the lawmakers of the society. He can't even attend

his friend's birthday party because his family background only . Such situations are enough to fill the heart with agony for the innocent child who is also being maltreated by the society. His emotions perfectly came out at every scene, his anger for his father's family and for father as well when he married with other women . In one scene with the conversation with his mother he said **"Daddy apse islie shadi nahi kar sake kyuki ap musalmaan hai "** in a small age he understands the difference and ask her mother why Hindu and Muslim didn't married ever why.

The other part of the film presently showed both reluctantly become the part of 1992 communal riots because of Babri Mosque demolition. These riots were mostly politically motivated and it has also been shown in this film clearly. (Cossio, 2004) In the eighties and nineties, the Indian scene was taken up by the growth of militant Hinduism, supported by the political forces that were to rule the country from 1998 to 2004. During this period, economic issues (like the implementation of the OBC reservations and dramatic events (the *Ramjanmbhumi* -Babri Masjid case; the Kashmir question with the growing Pakistani involvement leading to the Kargil crisis of 1999, an undeclared war which ended with a clean Indian victory; and the Godhra disaster followed by the Gujarat carnage in 2002) seem to push the re-establishment of communal harmony to the background. The emotional textures of the experience of violence and extreme peril that that are foregrounded these trauma represented in the cinema as bleeding wounds that refused to heal. (Chatterjee, 2002) Ajay younger brother was unaware with the truth that his mother was a muslim woman . When he came to know about the truth he was shocked and become selfish for the moment as this truth might be spoil his political career . Anand work under Subodh bhai (Ashutosh Rana) who only taking advantage of Anand for political goals. In One dialogue Subodh says that **" Agar Anand ki Maa mari to fayda hoga"** this lines depicts that political parties take the advantage of these emotional things for their benefits. This dialogue metaphorically represents the condition of political parties same in the case of Babri Masjid that in the name of religion everyone take the benefits. Ajay, the manifest symbol of the 'national integration', but also by his two friends and neighbours (a Muslim and a Sikh, of course) and by an honest Hindu policeman who stands up for Ajay and Anand against the 'villain' officer, when the latter tries to prevent Ajay from taking his mother's corpse from the hospital and burying her as a Muslim, according to her last will. In one scene when the culprit who bunt his mother crying for apology by saying that **"Maa muje maaf kardo maa, mane apne majhab ko badnaam kar dia"** which reveals that religion is bigger than Humanity he was regretting because he burnt a muslim woman and he made his community ashamed if she could be Hindu than may be he would not said this.

In the end the words used by the policeman to oppose his senior officer are noteworthy. This is not a *dead body*, his mother. And the *permission* to take her away is granted to him by the Constitution of India, by the culture of India and by the civilization of India. **(Yeh 'dead body' nahi, yeh maa hai inki... Aur inko 'permissan' deta hai Hindustan ka samvidhan, Bharat ki sanskriti aur yahan ki sabhyata)".**

Sociologist and Historians have write about this kind of films that represent communal riots it's the experiential quality of the traumatic riots. The depiction of the textures of traumatic experience in films like Bombay ,Zakhm ,Fiza, Hey Ram give space to emotions passions and memories that need to be voiced and raise critical question of history identity and the politics they have place such a premium in these issues (**Bhaskar, 2014**). In the last scene when Ajay finally flow her mother mangalsutra in sea which depicts the cultural representation that according to Hindi rituals mangalsutra is burnt with the body of women though she was muslim so her manglasutra he flow in sea ,he actually does the same thing which his mother usually do metaphorically directors represent the dignity of every culture and religion. The Zakhm pain metaphorically exist in the heart of Ajay for her mother , the humiliation which she has been gone through in her entire life making him always distress.

III- Conclusion: Zakhm Depicts the reality between Hindu and Muslims and their consequences perfectly .Hindi Cinema always proves it's excels in every genre and these sensitive issues also dealt with great concern and with different treatment. Between Dharamputra in 1962 and Dev in 2004, very few filmmakers have attempted to look at the truth about the deteriorating relations between the two communities with any amount of eqanimity. In every era the agony and pain of common people due to this communal riots are perfectly shown by the popular Directors of Hindi Cinema.

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