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Topic of Research: Religious Fundamentalism in South Asia and its Representation in Cinema

Findings

In this thesis I have focused on the theme of religious fundamentalism in South Asia in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Every country has diverse cultures and traditions; Muslims are in majority in Pakistan and Bangladesh and a minority in India and Sri Lanka. Hindus are in majority in India and a minority in Sri Lanka while Buddhist population is a majority in Sri Lanka.

Pakistan and Bangladesh have Muslim majority population. India has Hindu majority. Sri Lanka has a Buddhist majority population. Seven films reflecting different kinds of fundamentalisms from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been analysed.

In this dissertation I have examined the histories of the cinemas of four South Asian countries – India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan in detail and focused on some important films that focus on religion or have themes of religion in their narratives: *Khamosh Paani* (Pakistan); *Runway* (Bangladesh); *Death on a Full Moon Night* (Sri Lanka); *Jai Santoshi Maa*, *Dhoka*, *Hijack* (India) to name a few.

The films from Pakistan focus on the border: while *Ramchand Pakistani* is about a son and father who cross the Indian border by mistake, the terrorist coming from India, in *Waar* crosses the Pakistani border with the intent of creating havoc and chaos. While *Ramchand Pakistani* is a special narrative of a Hindu family living near the Pakistan-India border in Pakistan, *Waar* is an action film that is mounted on a grand scale and meant to reach an international audience. While the former traces the specific history, the troubles faced and the trauma gone through by this family on both sides of the border, *Waar* is a genre film, dealing with terrorism. It is a film that depicts the point of view of the State and its apparatus (the police, military, intelligence and counter-intelligence) in action through the genre of the thriller. It clearly states that the country must be protected from enemies and from terrorism. All the other films analysed are about the people caught up with various levels of manifestations of religiosity at the societal level in the main, although the state is a looming presence in many of them. In *Clay Bird*, it is rural Bangladesh and a family that is portrayed in which each member of the family has his or her own relationship with religion. The

syncretic traditions in the countryside are also shown. The three Indian films, *Hey Ram*, *Bombay* and *Maachis*, though produced by the mainstream Bombay industry, do not follow the genre format. Each one depicts a different aspect of fundamentalism and/or extremism and terrorism: the rise of fundamentalisms, both Hindu and Muslim and its culmination in terrorism in *Hey Ram*; an interreligious love story in which the family gets caught in the larger historical context of communal clashes and violence in *Bombay*; and *Maachis*, in which Sikh terrorism in Punjab is portrayed through the youth who are pulled into the movement for Khalistan for various reasons. *With You, Without You* from Sri Lanka explores yet another aspect, which is that of memory and trauma, with which the lead characters, especially the woman, are not able to come to terms with. The aftermath of the ethnic conflict, in peace time, is tragic, with the woman taking her own life. The consequences of violence and conflict do not end with the proclamation of peace; people continue to suffer its effects for years after. The films from the selected South Asian countries show different aspects of how fundamentalism is framed and portrayed: whether it is seen as terrorism with an enemy 'Other'; or it is (*Waar*); or it is seen in terms of the way in which the underprivileged are treated (*Ramchand Pakistani*); in the context of sticking to tradition against modernization (*Clay Bird*); the possibility of reconciliation in post-Civil War Sri Lanka, in which a Sinhala man is married to a Tamil girl; (*With You, Without You*); violence during the Partition of India that leads to extremism and more violence (*Hey Ram*); young people who are from socio-economically stressed backgrounds who get into the terrorist movement due to various compulsions (*Maachis*); and the tensions between inter religious communities that flare up and affect family relations when there are larger destructions and communal riots happening in the city and country.