Name : Sabina Kidwai

Supervisor: Prof Rashmi Doraiswamy

Dept : MMAJ Academy of International Studies

Title : Images of Muslims in the Indian Visual Media: A study of the Post 9/11 scenario

ABSTRACT

The thesis 'Images of Muslims in the Indian visual media : a study of the post 9/11 scenario' was commenced with the objective of understanding the representation of Muslims through the image of the 'terrorist' and its effect on two other principal representations, the Muslim liberal and Muslim woman. Post 9/11 terrorism has gradually come to dominate and reside in the subcontinent making terrorist attacks not only a part of our everyday life but also the most reported events. The Indian Media in its almost voyeuristic fascination with terrorism and its desire to understand the man or woman behind it, has created a multiplicity of images. The thesis using the methodology of Cultural Studies engages in textual analysis of content to understand the prejudices and biases which dominate the representation of the Muslim community. The focus of the study is the period between 2002-2012(April) but within this specific years have been chosen for the purpose of analysis of television news on Indian channels and the Hindi feature film industry.

The first part of the thesis looks at television news by private Indian news channels in the period 2007-2011. In depth content analyses is done of coverages on Indian Mujahedeen, Mumbai Attack, the rise of the Taliban, the attack on the Sri Lankan players and the killing of Osama bin Laden. The power of the television image is undeniable but the constant generation has allowed singular representations to emerge with very limited questioning of them. Globalization has allowed a free flow of information across borders allowing us to import views and images which suit our own prejudices and beliefs. The hysteria and paranoia which gripped the American channels in 9/11 found its followers among the Indian channels post 9/11. As terrorists were profiled, their identity as Muslims, their religious beliefs on Islam and jihad became a major focus. All attacks were eventually converted into montages of the dead and dying and were framed into the channel's own advertising tag lines. The fear of the unknown enemy, or 'the unknown stranger amidst us' got embedded in the news reports. The sketches released after every attack, and arrests of young educated men allowed the channels to move from speculations to openly profile the terrorist as educated, Muslim, male and young. Police reports often became the major source of information and

also the main providers of incriminating evidence. They thus 'helped' in condemning a person by media trial before the outcomes of a judicial trial. Each attack was like a spectacle being played out in front of camera screens. More importantly the timelines, and histories of previous attacks were interwoven to create stories of the future which were largely speculations but reinforced fear and prejudice.

The second part of the thesis deals with the representation of the terrorist in the Indian Hindi feature film industry. In many films of this decade the enemy is within us, a part of our world. He is the stranger, the undecidable element in the Indian cinematic imagery, who can appear as either friend or enemy, or just an unrecognizable shadow which threatens the nation. Locating this stranger as he comes in many disguises has become part of many stories post 9/11. He appears as Avantika's husband in *Kurbaan*, Zooni's lover in *Fanaa*, as Omar's friend in *New York*, as Tariq Ali's nephew in *Shoot at Sight*. The terrorist enters the lives of these protagonists, gains their confidence and then uses them to further his mission, a hidden jihadi agenda. The desire to locate the stranger is important in this age of terrorism and the growth of separatist movements. This fear is reflected by the protagonists of many films, ACP Arun Kumar in *Khakee* and ACP Dev Pratap Singh in *Dev*, Commissioner Rathore in *A Wednesday*. In many films it is the Muslim liberal who fights the terrorist and his death either emotional or physical is inevitable in his mission to save the nation.

However cinema being a far more complex medium has the ability to question and this is reflected in the profiling of the liberal who questions prejudice, in the Muslim women who fight injustice and fundamentalism. Alternate portrayals in cinema, and debates on the internet/new media provide a voice to views not reflected in the mainstream media. The thesis in its last section explores these alternate voices which though limited give a more complex portrayal of conflicts in areas like Kashmir.

The thesis has thus been able to give a holistic picture of the representation of Muslims through the representation of the 'terrorist'. It has brought forward the hidden biases which considerably add to the legitimizing of prejudices especially in the television news media. The research work justifies the importance of questioning the images we see and the need to study forms of media like Television and cinema in the context of political social systems we live in.