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Historical Film and Hindu-Muslim Relations in Post-Hindutva India: The Case of *Jodhaa Akbar*

Abstract: This article critically assesses Ashutosh Gowariker's *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) as a cinematic participant in the recent political and historical debates over historical Hindu-Muslim relationships. The article argues that *Jodhaa Akbar* is set to counter the Hindutva discourse about the Muslims as foreign invaders and to domesticate Islam and India's Muslim population in the post-Hindutva India of the late 2000s. It is suggested that *Jodhaa Akbar* is a post-Hindutva nation-building narrative advocating Hindu-Muslim harmony.

Key words: Historical film, India, Hindu nationalism, the Mughals, Muslims

Historical Film and Hindu-Muslim Relations in Post-Hindutva India: The Case of *Jodhaa Akbar*

Ashutosh Gowariker's Bollywood historical *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) is a story of love and marriage between the great Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1542-1605), one of the most famous and religiously tolerant Mughal rulers, and his Hindu wife Jodhaa Bai, a Rajput princess. It is a lavish film that was made with a big budget, with Bollywood superstars Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in the leading roles. *Jodhaa Akbar* took three years to make and no cost was spared on sets, jewellery, costumes, armour or elephants. The financial risk paid off: of the fifteen big Bollywood releases in the first six months of 2008, *Jodhaa Akbar* was one of the three that succeeded in achieving a 'super hit' status in India.¹ It became a success in the international market as well: in March 2008 the film was showing not only across India but on 1,500 silver screens in 25 countries.² *Jodhaa Akbar* crowned its triumph at the International Indian Film Academy Awards in June 2009, where it won six awards, including best male actor for Hrithik Roshan, best director and best picture.

Though *Jodhaa Akbar* eventually captivated audiences and critics alike, the film was released in India on 15 February 2008 amid some controversy. The main cause for the polemic was the name and identity of the person called Jodhaa in the film, but Rajputs also took issue with the way their relations with the Mughals were depicted. Bollywood Hungama News Network reported in February 2008: "Rajput groups have accused Gowariker of supposedly fiddling with the history of Jodha, the daughter of Udai Singh of Marwar, who apparently was the wife of Akbar's son Salim and not Akbar. The group claims to withdraw their agitation only if a selected group of historians give clean chit to the film after a special screening to be held by Gowariker."³ Rajputs in several states – Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Punjab – saw the film as a misrepresentation of their history and the representation of Jodhaa Bai as Emperor Akbar's wife as "an insult to their community", and therefore demanded a ban on the film. In Gujarat, the demands were accompanied

by protests and arson at theatres.⁴ The film was subsequently banned in several states at first, including Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and the historical Jodhaa Bai's home state Rajasthan.⁵ When Gowariker was asked if the real reason behind the protests could be "religious intolerance – that a Mughal ruler had a Hindu wife", he answered: "Probably yes. I'm not sure, but it could be one of the reasons".⁶ While protests against films in contemporary India are not unusual and while this particular protest did not grow to be exceptional in its reach or duration – the bans on the film were lifted in a few weeks – the reasons behind the protests against this film are noteworthy; I argue that they are indicators of a change in public historical consciousness in India, where history became central to religious national identity in the late 1980s. I draw a connection between Hindu nationalism, public interest in history in India and the reception of Hindi Historicals.

The claims that *Jodhaa Akbar* should be banned on account of its perceived historical inaccuracy and the demand for "clean chit" from historians are a novelty in India. In contrast the reaction elicited by the release of *Jodhaa Akbar* in 2008, Rishi Vohra writes in a major Indian newspaper the *Hindu* that "there was no uproar" five decades earlier, "when K. Asif's 1960 classic, *Mughal-E-Azam* featured "Jodha Bai" (Durga Khote) as the Rajput wife of Akbar (Prithviraj Kapoor). *Mughal-E-Azam* proved to be one of the most successful of films with the film seeing a recent re-release in 2004. Till date, the audiences continue to lap up the film without raising a question about the historical facts. This goes to prove that public intolerance is a recent trend."⁷

Bollywood has traditionally not insisted on historical accuracy. In *Hindi Historicals*, Sumita S. Chakravarty argues, "[n]otions of historical accuracy or attention to detail are subordinated to the larger imaginative sweep of legend and heroic sentiment."⁸ There is an old, esteemed cultural tradition in India that does not distinguish between history, myth, legend and drama but blends them all together. As the cultural critic Ashis Nandy explains: "Traditional India not only lacks the Enlightenment's concept of history; it is doubtful that it finds objective, hard history a reliable, ethical, or reasonable way of constructing the past."⁹ In India myths have traditionally been seen to

be more important and have more explanatory power than history. Historian Vinay Lal suggests that “[h]istory is only one way of accessing the past, and in India it is still a novel way of doing so, since Indians remain more at ease in accessing the past through non-historical modes such as folktales, customary practices, epic literature, proverbs, and myths.”¹⁰

Hindi historical film has followed this tradition: as Chakravarty explains, history in these films has been and still is “an amalgam of mythical tales, legends, and folk knowledge rather than a search for the ‘truth’ of past events and personages,”¹¹ and the audience has known to expect this. As Vir Sanghvi points out in the *Hindustan Times*, Indians have not

insisted on historical accuracy in some of Hindi cinema’s greatest hits. The late Prithviraj Kapoor made a terrific Alexander the Great in *Sikander* but the film had zero historical authenticity. Similarly, K Asif’s *Mughal-e-Azam* was more or less entirely made up ... but this was never an issue. So why are we insisting on historical authenticity now? Why should India be different from the rest of the world? And why should today’s India have different standards from the India of a few decades ago?¹²

In this article, I examine the reasons behind the change of attitudes towards historical authenticity in films in India and the apparent change of ‘historical’ standards in the past few decades. I argue and hope to demonstrate that the reception of *Jodhaa Akbar* is a result of a change in the history culture, public historical consciousness and the use of history in India that has taken place in the past few decades with the rise of Hindu nationalism and chauvinist interpretations of Indian history, and which has a close connection to the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Babur’s mosque) in the state of Uttar Pradesh in north India by a Hindu nationalist mob on 6 December 1992. Since the 1980s and especially during 1998-2004 when the Indian central government was led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political arm of the Hindu Right, ‘History’ as a way of knowing the past gained

increasing currency due to the campaigning of the Hindu Right and their efforts to bring history into play in debates about contemporary Hindu-Muslim relations. It can be argued that a kind of historicisation has taken place. In Hindu nationalist discourse about the past, history and mythology have been mixed for political ends, myth has been replaced by ‘history’, and history has been rewritten from communal perspective/s.

In the 1990s and well into the 2000s, the Hindu Right (especially the BJP-Shiv Sena¹³ Combine in Maharashtra where Bombay/Mumbai is located) strongly influenced Bollywood film-making,¹⁴ as well as history-writing. Furthermore, since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 had set the stage for competition for the film industry with the entry of satellite television and fears of cultural invasion, Bollywood “responded” of its own accord in the 1990s, as Gita Viswanath puts it, “wholeheartedly to the nativist definitions of ‘Indian’ culture offered by proponents of Hindutva”¹⁵ (Hinduness). Shahnaz Khan notes that “[r]e-interpretation of history including through historical film, has allowed some among the dominant groups to define India as a Hindu nation, one which sets itself up against other ethnic and religious groups, including against the largest majority, Muslims.”¹⁶ I argue that *Jodhaa Akbar* is set first to counter some strands of the Hindutva discourse about the Muslims as foreign invaders and second, to domesticate Islam and India’s Muslim population in the post-Hindutva India of the late 2000s. I read *Jodhaa Akbar* as a post-Hindutva nation-building narrative advocating Hindu-Muslim harmony. In my view, the reception of the film testifies to a change in public consciousness of and attitudes toward history (as opposed to myth and legend) that has taken place with the increase in pro-Hindutva politics in India and the Hindu nationalist rewriting of history. This article examines the representation of (historical) Hindu-Muslim relations and conflicts in *Jodhaa Akbar* with reference to this change and the consequent shift in the public perception of historical films in India.

Indian Historical Film and the Syncretic Mughal Court

Historical film is one of the oldest genres in Indian cinema. Even though “common opinion often holds that Indian popular cinema responds more to traditional mythology than to history”, as M.K. Raghavendra writes, and “films using narratives drawn from history seem exceptions,”¹⁷ historical film had established itself as a significant genre by the early 1920s.¹⁸ Historical films were, however, “always far outnumbered by other genres”,¹⁹ though the genre’s popularity grew with the rise of the nationalist movement. In the first two decades of Independence the average number of Historicals per year was roughly three.²⁰ Historicals of the Nehru period (1947-1964) “drew on the Congress Party’s idea of history” and had its heroes lifted from Nehru’s *Discovery of India* (1946), “such as Akbar, rather than heroes of the Muslim community, such as Aurangzeb, Changhis Khan and Mahmud of Ghazni”.²¹ These films took part in nation-building and emphasised the Nehruvian “unity in diversity”. The whole genre of historical film dwindled with the end of the Nehru era in the 1960s and during the following decades there were several years when no Historicals were produced. Hindi cinema saw the new coming of the historical film in the twenty-first century in the aftermath of historians and historiography taking a more prominent place in the Indian public arena.

Hindi Historicals have had a tendency to draw from a limited selection of epochs, events and historical figures. The Mughal period (1526-1757) and especially the Mughal emperors Akbar (r. 1556-1605), Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658) are among the most popular subjects of these films.²² While the historical films of the 1920s and ‘30s often displayed not only nationalism but also religious nationalism, the late colonial period saw a shift “towards films that show a national integration of minorities, notably Muslims, mostly through presenting images of syncretic Mughal culture”.²³ Medieval history provided Hindi cinema with a perfect backdrop for nation-building narratives also during the first two decades of Indian independence. These films were often set in the Mughal court and “presented the ‘Muslim period’ as integral to Indian history, often presenting a composite religious culture as an ideal to be emulated”.²⁴ Especially the reign of Akbar was used for promoting communal harmony and national unity in such films as *Baiju Bawra* (Vijay Bhatt, 1952) and *Anarkali* (Nandlal Jaswantlal, 1953).²⁵ Probably the most famous of these

films – and a predecessor of *Jodhaa Akbar* – is the above-mentioned *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) by K. Asif. *Mughal-e-Azam* depicts a love story between Akbar’s son, Prince Salim (later Emperor Jehangir) and a Hindu dancing girl called Anarkali. Rachel Dwyer argues that though *Mughal-e-Azam* “evades issues of Hindu-Muslim relations”, it does point to religious tolerance with Queen Jodhabai singing a devotional song to Krishna at Akbar’s court.²⁶ Chakravarty notes that “[t]he need to address the issue of Muslim identity within Hindu-dominated India that one perceives in *Mughal-e-Azam* is masked but undoubtedly there”.²⁷ Gowariker, the director (and credited co-writer) of *Jodhaa Akbar*, explained that “Hyder Ali who wrote *Jodhaa Akbar* told me that in *Mughal-E-Azam* the focus was so much on Salim and Anarkali that nobody asked a fundamental question: How did Akbar come to marry Jodhaa in spite of their religious and cultural divide? I saw an interesting story there that needed to be told.”²⁸ I argue that in the post-Hindutva India there was a heightened need to address the issue of Muslim identity, to counter what Arjun Appadurai calls the deployment by the Maharashtra right-wing political organisation Shiv Sena of “the figure of the Muslim as the archetype of the invader, the stranger, and the traitor.”²⁹ Therefore *Jodhaa Akbar*, though it in many ways follows in the footsteps of *Mughal-e-Azam*, tackles the issue of (historical) Hindu-Muslim relations more openly than its predecessor.

Cinematic nationalism in India has reflected – if also questioned – state ideologies through decades, from Nehru’s “unity in diversity” in the 1950s to the “saffronized”³⁰ screen of the 1990s. Although cinema is not state-controlled in India, it “has been an object of government regulation in India since the colonial period through censorship, taxation, allocation of raw materials, and control over exhibition through the licencing of theaters.”³¹ In May 1998, filmmaking was granted the status of an industry by the BJP-led government after years of requests and demands by the film world. Nandana Bose suggests that part of the motivation for granting film the industry status was that the state could then, through state-supported financial institutions, control the financing of films and disfavour films not deemed deserving of state backing. Bose notes that “[t]his came strikingly close to resembling state patronage and signalled unprecedented level of interventions in the creative

process, even at the pre-production stages of film-making.”³² In effect this meant that the BJP-led state could to some measure officially control Hindi film production in Bollywood. The Hindu Right had had a long-standing interest in film (and television) production and “the Shiv Sena’s *Chitrapat Shakha*³³ influenced industry decisions to a great extent” in the 1990s, admitting that “it took full interest and responsibility for all developments that occurred in the film trade.”³⁴ Veteran filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt says that “[w]hen Right wing parties ruled, then the movies articulated their world view in a shrill manner. There was demonising of Muslims under the cover of attacking Pakistan. Actually it reflected on to Muslims of India too who had nothing to do with Pakistan”.³⁵ A whole terrorist film genre emerged in the “saffronized” Bollywood film of the 1990s in which Muslim men took on the role of the terrorist. Gita Viswanath remarks that most characters of the 1990s’ Hindi films were Hindu “and if there are minority community characters, they are the enemies, as in action films, which mostly show terrorism aided by Pakistan.”³⁶ Excluding the characters linked with terrorism, the Muslim community was largely marginalized in Bollywood films. As reported by *The Telegraph* in 2010, Shiv Sena continues to have “a powerful hold over the city’s Bollywood film industry.”³⁷ Especially the leader and later figurehead of Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray (1926-2012), was involved in the film industry in many ways: Bose wrote in 2009 that Thackeray, who had retired from the party leadership in 2004, “continues to be an authorial godfather figure under whose shadow the Bombay film industry lives, many in fear of their lives and livelihood as it is common knowledge that survival and success in the industry is almost impossible without either the tacit or active support of the ubiquitous ‘supremo’”.³⁸ This may explain the filmmakers’ conflicting statements about the historical accuracy of the story of *Jodhaa Akbar*.

Despite marking their film as clearly historical, the makers of *Jodhaa Akbar* have pointed out that they do not claim to be presenting the historical Truth here but merely their version of past events. The film actually begins with a disclaimer that reads:

Historians agree that the 16th century marriage of alliance between the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the daughter of King Bharmal of Amer (Jaipur) was a recorded chapter of history... But there is speculation till today that her name was not Jodhaa... Some historians say her name was Harkha Bai, others call her Hira Kunwar, and yet others say Jiya Rani, Maanmati and Shaahi Bai... But over centuries her name reached the common man as Jodhaa Bai. This is just one version of the historical events. There could be other versions and viewpoints to it.

On the film's DVD edition Gowariker notes: "I was making a film. My intention was merely to entertain, and to tell a story, and to entertain the audience. I'm not writing an account of history."³⁹ It seems that the makers of a film featuring a high-profile inter-religious marriage between a Muslim and a Hindu, advocating Hindu-Muslim amity and recovering the image of the Mughal Emperor Akbar as a religiously tolerant ruler have wanted to avoid taking an official stance in the debate about the interpretation of medieval history and Hindu-Muslim relations in view of the decade-long influence of the Hindu Right on Bollywood.

Commerciality certainly paid a role as well: "too historical" an approach might have meant fewer (young) viewers. Gowariker left out, for instance, all expressions in Urdu he himself did not understand in order to connect with especially young audiences. Furthermore, he did not use Farsi, which would have been historically accurate, in the film because he wanted "Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Bengal to understand the film."⁴⁰ Gowariker also notes the problems involved in making a historical film and especially with making money with a historical film. He points out that "there are very few historical films made in India. [...] Here eight out of ten films are commercial films. Amongst all the historical films made till date there are only two – *Taj Mahal* and *Mughle Azam* [sic] – which are commercially successful. Whether it's historical or commercial, getting success in filmmaking mostly depends on the story of the film. The story of my film is good and I believe it will work better."⁴¹

On the other hand, Gowariker has also wanted to assert the historical accuracy of his film. He explained to the press that he had researched the period and had been granted permission to make the film by “the Jodhpur royal family who are Jodhaa’s descendants”.⁴² He defended his films by referring to the numerous (close to seventy) history books he had read for the film.⁴³ He states that “[t]he love and romance is my imagination, but the other 30 per cent is from history books”.⁴⁴ The DVD also boasts as a special feature a chapter called historical references, which includes the disclaimer and a list of literature references to Jodha Bai.

The disclaimer did not prevent the Rajput groups’ demands for a ban on the film. The “facts” Rajveer Singh Rathore of the Akhil Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha in Gwalior articulated some of the film’s alleged inaccuracies in *The Times of India*:

The film shows a Rajput princess seducing a Muslim emperor as though she is romancing him and has chosen to be with him. That’s not history. When Muslim invaders attacked Rajput kingdoms, our women committed mass sati ... Maharaja Bhar Mal was [surrounded by the Mughal army and therefore] forced to give his daughter in alliance. But Jodha Bai was not the daughter of the queen, she was not the actual princess. She was the daughter of one of the king’s concubines.⁴⁵

These protestations seem to draw on the nationalist historiographies of India, which for their part were often based rather indiscriminately and uncritically on folklore. Tracing the history of nationalist historiography in India, Partha Chatterjee mentions a story described by Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay in his *The History of India (Bhāratbarser itihās*, first ed. 1858) which he describes as “probably the most influential textbook read in Bengali schools in the second half of the nineteenth century”.⁴⁶ The story is about an earlier but otherwise rather similar episode as the ones in *Jodhaa Akbar*, of Rajputs fighting against Muslim invaders in 712 C.E. When Dahir, the king of Sind, was killed in battle against the invaders and the heroic resistance of his wife proved futile,

Dahir's wife instructed the women to immolate themselves on a pyre, after which the men fought until the last of them died. Chatterjee notes that this story of Rajput folklore was picked up by Elphinstone in his *History of India* (1841) from James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India* (first ed. 1829-32). The story, which "entered modern historiography in Elphinstone as the slaughter of a 'Rájput tribe by the Mahometans,' becomes in Tarinicharan an episode in the history of the resistance by 'Indians' to Muslim conquest".⁴⁷ Chatterjee points out the great influence of Elphinstone's *History of India*, "the standard textbook in Indian universities", on nationalist historiography.⁴⁸ These stories have clearly lived on in nationalist histories and have come to be seen as historically verifiable truths against which historical films, such as *Jodhaa Akbar*, can be measured. That the origin of these stories may lie in folklore has been forgotten or erased in the post-Ayodhya atmosphere of the last three decades, when histories of the Hindu-Muslim encounter have been vigorously fought over.

Muslims as Foreigners and Invaders

Jodhaa Akbar begins with a prologue – delivered both as a written text and by a voiceover – that sets up the historical situation and tells the audience that

This is Hindustan! History is witness to many dynasties who have ruled with sword and blood. Since 1011 AD, countless invaders have ravaged and plundered this land. And then came, the Mughals. They made India their home, giving it love and respect. Founded by Babur, the Mughal dynasty passed from Humayun to his son, Akbar. Among all the Mughal Emperors, Akbar achieved the greatest heights – Jalaluddin Mohammad Akbar. The first Mughal Emperor to be born on Indian soil, Akbar was born in a Hindu Rajput home.

This prologue emphasises the difference of the Mughals from earlier invaders who are not verbally identified as Muslims but whose dark, camel-riding silhouettes arriving from West (the Middle East) are superimposed on a map of Hindustan.

It is noted here that India was plundered and ravaged by those countless invaders before the Mughals, who mark a change in this pattern as “[t]hey made India their home, giving it love and respect.” The prologue thus sets the stage for a history of Mughal tolerance and benevolence. Furthermore, the fact that Akbar was actually born on Indian soil and was therefore no foreigner, plunderer or ravager is emphasised. This theme is revisited in a later scene in which the question of Akbar’s foreignness is discussed by local Hindu men at a bazaar. Akbar, unrecognizable as he is dressed as a common man, takes part in the conversation. When the Mughals are referred to as foreigners and outsiders with one of the men saying: “We do not believe that the Emperor is a Hindustani,” the emperor’s companion counters this by replying: “Did you know our Emperor was born in Amarkot in a Hindu Rajput home? And raised here too? So how can you call him a foreigner? He is as much an Indian as you are.” The message about the Indianness of the Mughals conveyed here is significant, for the history of Muslims in India is often equated with the history of the Mughals.⁴⁹

The Muslim history of India began in the early eleventh century with the Ghaznavid conquests under the command of Mahmud of Ghazni – the prologue of *Jodhaa Akbar* refers to this conquest with the date 1011 AD – which were followed by Ghaznavid rule in North India until late twelfth century. In 1206 the Delhi Sultanate was founded. Several Turko-Afghan dynasties of the Sultanate, the Mamluk, the Khalji, the Tughlaq, the Sayyid, and the Lodhi dynasties, ruled large parts of the subcontinent from Delhi between 1211 and 1526, when the Sultanate was conquered by Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. Gyanendra Pandey notes that in colonialist and Hindu historiographies the “Muslim invasion” of India is often dated to 1528 when the Great Mughal Babur allegedly oversaw the destruction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. In Hindu nationalist

historiography Babur is seen as a “foreigner and invader, and with him all Indian Muslims – the progeny of that invader (Babar ki aulad)”.⁵⁰ While ancient (Hindu) India has been glorified, Hindu nationalists have seen the medieval or Muslim period as a period of tyrannical Muslim rule, which brought decline and degeneration.⁵¹ Hindu nationalist historians maintain that Muslim rule in India was oppressive to the local Hindu population. For the proponents of this interpretation, “‘the Muslim’ is congenitally evil, narrow-minded and bigoted, whereas ‘the Hindu’ is tolerant, hospitable, accommodating but also – when pushed to the limit – capable of fighting back all too effectively”.⁵² In historian Romila Thapar’s words, “[a]ccording to the Hindutva version of history, the major activity after the arrival of Islam was that of Muslims conquering the Hindus and the Hindus trying to resist this conquest. This is supposed to have created two antagonistic communities in permanent conflict.”⁵³ In Hindu nationalist discourse Muslims remain foreigners in spite of their settlement and centuries-long presence in India and the fact that many of India’s Muslims were not foreigners or the progeny of foreigners to begin with, but converts from India’s other religions. Furthermore, as Pandey explains, Hindu nationalists argue that India’s Muslims did not participate in the anti-colonial struggle unlike members of every other community but rather obstructed it by making separatist demands and cooperating with the British – a reward for which was Pakistan. Indian Muslims seemed, the argument goes, to have stronger connections to other Muslims homelands, such as Persia, Arabia, Mesopotamia and Turkey, and now to Pakistan, rather than to their fellow Indians and India: “[T]he fact that so many stayed on in India was no reason to think them automatically Indian”.⁵⁴ History has been rewritten from this politically and religiously motivated point of view since the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement⁵⁵ and the demolition of the Babri Masjid have further fuelled these debates.

On 6 December 1992, the Babri Masjid, named after the founder of the Mughal dynasty, Emperor Babur, and constructed in 1528-9, was demolished by a Hindu crowd of thousands. This was followed by break-outs of violence in several cities across India. Nearly 2,000 people were killed, the majority of them Muslims. Hindu nationalists argued that Ayodhya’s Babri Masjid had been

constructed on the site of a Hindu temple dedicated to the Hindu deity Rama. Furthermore, they maintained that the temple had been built on the actual birth site of Lord Rama. The mosque was seen to offend the Hindu religion and needed to be torn down, the argument went, to make way for a new Hindu temple to be built on the spot. The eruption of violence seemed to many to represent the final blow to Nehruvian secularism.

Interestingly, the proponents of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, who argue for the need to build a new Rama temple on the site of the demolished mosque, have turned to history in the pursuit of their cause.⁵⁶ As historian Vinay Lal remarks

Ayodhya marks, for the first time in the history of post-independent India, the ascent of the historian to the proscenium of the nation-state; it signifies the indubitable importance of the historian to the nation-state, and the presumed indispensability of historical thinking and an historical consciousness to a nation-state that seeks recognition as a member of a world community bound together by a commitment to modernity and norms of rationality.⁵⁷

Especially the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya generated heated discussion about the writing of Indian history. Gyanendra Pandey writes that earlier Hindu accounts of the history of Ayodhya and Lord Rama were metaphorical: “Ayodhya was a metaphor, as Ram was a metaphor, that stood for much more than the literal truth of the existence of a particular man/god or the geographical location of his capital.” But since the mid-1980s, the right-wing Hindu movement has pushed for a history of Ayodhya, a history that claims to be the real and true representation of the story of Ayodhya and its connection with Rama.⁵⁸

Indian historian Sumit Sarkar remarks upon “the very numerous efforts of the Sangh Parivar [coalition of Hindu chauvinist organisations, including the BJP, The Hindu nationalist paramilitary organisation RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteer Organization) and VHP

(Vishwa Hindu Parishad)], whenever and wherever they are near or in power, to bring history and historians under their control.”⁵⁹ These efforts have ranged from the takeover of academic institutions, committees and funding bodies, including the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), with Hindutva sympathisers to rewriting history text books used in government-led and state schools.⁶⁰ After the BJP’s defeat in the general election in 2004, and the coming to power of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, the new Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh announced a reversal of the processes instigated by the Sangh Parivar: original history text books were to be brought back and autonomy restored to academic institutions.

After the tidal wave on Hindu nationalism turned and the BJP lost the elections, there was again a need to address Hindu-Muslim relations on screen and the Mughal court once again provided a perfect setting for this in *Jodhaa Akbar*. Ostensibly about medieval history, *Jodhaa Akbar* addresses contemporary concerns through its representation of history and is geared towards presenting Muslims as a non-threatening and domesticated part of the contemporary Indian society. As Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen note,

[i]n the modern, post-Hindutva context of Indian nationalism, an image of the great Mughal Akbar as being in love with and presenting the Hindu Rajput princess Jodhaa as the Empress of India, for whom he demands respect and love from all his subjects and against whom he will brook no rebellion, is a powerful one. It addresses Hindu communal prejudices against Muslim emperors of the past as having been oppressive and tyrannical, and reaffirms the need to bring about a reconciliation of Hindus and Muslims, and a polity that is based on mutual tolerance and respect.⁶¹

In contrast to the Hindu nationalist arguments, *Jodhaa Akbar* makes already in the prologue the claim – rendered credible by the deep voice of the Indian film megastar Amitabh Bachchan in the prologue – that when the Mughals came, they established a benevolent empire in Hindustan. Babur,

Humayun and Akbar are all presented as enlightened rulers and Akbar's tolerance in the film seems foil the allegations that the Mughals had destroyed a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Furthermore, as the Mughals/Muslims settled in India and Akbar himself was born on Indian soil, they are not foreigners and invaders but Indians. *Jodhaa Akbar's* idealised Mughal ruler thus offers a direct response to new Hindu histories that have circulated since the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s.

An Inter-Religious Marriage

After the prologue, a voiceover informs the audience: "And now, the year is 1555". Marking the exact time of the narrative this way is untypical of Indian films which do not usually give exact coordinates of time and space. Jyotika Virdi argues that "[f]orm and style in the films are streamlined to meet the narrative demand of the fictional nation, which requires nonparticularized references to time and place. Thus Hindi films tend to be general in description, scrupulously nonspecific, and parsimonious in detail, providing a deft but sketchy idea of a setting".⁶² *Jodhaa Akbar* has been marked clearly as a historical film and the exact time and place are underlined. The filmmakers seem to be making the point that though the details of the romance may be fictional, the actual story and its broader outlines are based on verifiable and known historical facts. This implies that the film is participating in the debate about the uses of history in India.

In the ensuing battle of Panipat, the Mughals regain the Delhi throne from the defeated King Hemu and the thirteen-year-old Akbar becomes emperor. Akbar's general Bairam Khan strives to consolidate Hindustan during the next six years by sending emissaries to neighbouring kingdoms. The emissaries try to persuade the kings to join the Mughal Empire, to rule under Akbar's sovereignty – the alternative is to face annihilation. Akbar is depicted already at this point as enlightened. His decidedly un-tyrannical conduct is underscored when he wages war only after all

his peace offers have been turned down and declares that no prisoners of war will be enslaved.

Akbar clearly wants to rule with humanity and compassion. The Hindu-Muslim relations become an issue at this point. Rajputana presents the one problem to the expansion of the Mughal Empire as the Rajput kings reject Akbar's offers. King Bharmal of Amer frets over the throne in his own kingdom and therefore decides to accept the Mughal treaty, albeit with a condition of his own. The kingdom of Amer will be included under the sovereignty of the Mughal Empire if Akbar agrees to marry Bharmal's daughter, Princess Jodhaa. The marriage of alliance between Princess Jodhaa and Emperor Akbar is arranged to ensure protection for the kingdom of Amer and better relations with the Rajputs for Akbar.

Here the film follows standard histories of the Mughal period. Historian Satish Chandra notes that Akbar's marriage to Raja Bhara Mal's daughter was "[t]o some extent ... an extension of Akbar's policy of seeking to establish personal relationship with those chiefs whose submission he accepted. We know a number of cases in which marriages between Muslim rulers and Hindu princesses were entered into for sealing a political accord".⁶³ Historian Iqtidar Alam Khan suggests that Akbar established matrimonial relations with the Rajput chiefs to win recruits from among them into Mughal service in the early 1560s.⁶⁴ In the film, Akbar makes his decision to accept the offer of marriage on religious grounds. On his visit to the shrine of the Sufi Saint Moinuddin Chisti, Akbar asks the saint to pray to Allah on his behalf, to help to fulfil his dream of consolidating Hindustan.

While still at the shrine, Akbar receives word that the Rajputs have stopped some Muslim pilgrims from visiting the shrine and that unrest is spreading. His advisor observes that "[s]uch religious riots can cause disaster some day." The Haj pilgrims on their way to the Gujarati ports have also experienced problems – looting and plundering – in Rajputana. Accepting King Bharmal's offer of marriage and alliance now appears as a solution to these inter-communal problems. Akbar thanks Allah for showing him the way to consolidate Hindustan. The following two hours of the film

centre on the evolving relationship of love, respect and religious tolerance between Jodhaa and Akbar, as well as on court intrigue and great battles for power.

The marriage and love – in this order – of the Muslim ruler and the Hindu princess can be read in allegorical terms. In Indian nationalism, as in many other nationalisms, women have been given the task of retaining the essence of the culture. Consequently, the figure of woman has come to signify Indian culture and nation in nation-building narratives and many nationalist discourses. Usha Zacharias points out that as the ancient epic the *Ramayana* has been used as a prime nation-building narrative in India, Rama's wife Sita has signified "the feminine, 'uncolonizable' domain of the nation" in nationalist rhetoric since 1920.⁶⁵ Zacharias argues that "Sita embodied the purity, power of sacrifice, and spiritual authority of the upper-caste Hindu woman who can form the wellspring of sustenance for the Kshatriya-Brahminical male's battle against Ravana-like invaders."⁶⁶ The abductor of Sita in the *Ramayana*, the demon Ravana, has had many faces in the various retellings and appropriations of the *Ramayana* story. In Hindu nationalist discourse, the role of Ravana has been ascribed to Muslims. Vijay Mishra suggests that "any revival of the [*Ramayana*] myth requires the construction of a divine/demonic antithesis. Since Rama occupies the first slot, it becomes necessary to 'rakshasize' the Other. Since this Other has, from the twelfth century onward, been the Muslim invaders of India, the Rama narrative comes with an already coded demonic Other."⁶⁷

Bollywood cinema continues to draw on the *Ramayana* myth, especially in the construction of female characters.⁶⁸ In many ways, also Jodhaa resembles Sita. Before the marriage of alliance with Akbar was arranged, Jodhaa was to be married to a Rajput prince. When the alliance agreement is reached, the reluctant Jodhaa is not abducted but nevertheless sent off to marry a Muslim Other, so often "rakshasized"/demonised in Hindu nationalist narratives. Jodhaa's marriage and move to the Mughal court is presented as a sacrifice committed for her family. Significantly, however, though Akbar is as a Muslim a potential Ravana-like demon, he actually turns out to be more like the ideal ruler Rama himself. The Muslim ruler, the "abductor" or foreign invader of Hindu nationalist

discourse is portrayed in *Jodhaa Akbar* not as a demonic brute but as an honourable and tolerant man and a just ruler not unlike Rama. However, not all the Muslims in Gowariker's film are domesticated and tolerant. While Akbar represents the "good", Indian Muslim, tolerant and non-threatening to the Hindu majority, the *ulama* (Muslim clergy) at the Mughal court represent a more traditional and less tolerant Islamic view. The *ulama* are shown to be unhappy about Akbar's marriage to a Hindu and especially about building a Hindu temple in the palace. In their strict and inflexible religious views the *ulama* are likened to present-day Islamists. It is the Islamist "Other", the other Muslim, not the "good" Indian Muslim, who is the demon of the story.

At an allegorical level, Princess Jodhaa represents Indian culture and nation/Hindustan whose respect and love the Mughal Emperor needs to earn in order to rule wisely. Akbar's admiration and respect for Jodhaa/India is displayed in a show of religious tolerance as Akbar agrees to the two conditions Jodhaa sets for the marriage. Firstly, she will stay a Hindu and follow her traditions and customs; under no circumstances will she be converted. Secondly, she will be allowed to bring an idol of her god with her and have a temple built for him in her chamber. This could be read as a comment on the peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in Akbar's era.

It is noteworthy, however, that even though *Jodhaa Akbar* displays mutual tolerance and respect as the Muslim ruler and Hindu Princess achieve a happy union of hearts, it does not do so on completely equal terms. Hindu religion and culture is depicted as the dominant one in the film, the norm to which the Muslim/Mughal culture needs to adjust. Acceptance and inter-communal harmony are the desired goals – but on Hindu terms, regardless of the fact that the Emperor of the historical period depicted is a Muslim. Thus even if the Mughals/Muslims are not considered foreigners and invaders, they are depicted as late arrivals who need to – or want to, like in *Jodhaa Akbar*, in a show of religious tolerance – adjust to Hindu India.

Religious Tolerance Paves the Way to Greatness

Hindu cultural practice in general, and Jodhaa's Hinduism in particular, is the norm in the film. Most events are constructed around Hindu cultural practices. This in itself is typical of Bollywood films. Rachel Dwyer writes: "Hindu beliefs and practices are dominant in the social, as is true of Indian culture in general where Hindu religious references may pass almost unnoticed, and so it does not need marking as Hindu and this may even lead to the genre being regarded as 'secular' as many of the signs of religion are also those of culture and society. In other words, Hinduism is the invisible norm, the standard default position."⁶⁹ Significantly for a film about a great Muslim ruler, if not unusually for a Bollywood film, Islamic practices or beliefs are to a great extent omitted from *Jodhaa Akbar*. There are instances where the Akbar's mother prays together with Jodhaa but this serves more to emphasise the peaceful co-existence of the two religions rather than display the practice of Islam by Indian Muslims. Even the wedding of the great Muslim Emperor takes place according to the Hindu rites of his bride's religion rather than the Muslim rites of his own faith. When the couple is married, Akbar not only permits Jodhaa to practice her religion and worship Krishna in the Mughal court but he allows his mother-in-law to involve him in a Hindu ritual. Only glimpses are caught of Akbar's own practice of Islam. Included is the scene in which Akbar prays at the Sufi saint's shrine, and at his wedding Akbar joins a group of Sufis performing in honour of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz.

Otherwise the audience does see Akbar thanking Allah and sending people off to Mecca but seldom praying or engaging in any other (Islamic) religious practice. Akbar is depicted as deeply religious but his practice of the Islamic faith is not shown on screen. Rather the film emphasises Akbar's religious tolerance as well as those religious forms and practices of Islam which are shared by the Hindu majority of India. Akbar's interest in Sufism is a case in point. This particular form of Islam is unlikely to offend even conservative Hindus – both Hindus and Muslims visit "the tombs and *dargahs* of Sufi Muslim saints"⁷⁰ – and Sufism's visible role in the film serves to domesticate

Indian Muslims and emphasise the common cultural heritage of Hindus and Muslims. Hinduism is clearly hegemonic here and though Jodhaa has to accept a union with a Muslim, just as India needs to accept it, the emphasis is on the Mughal Emperor's tolerance and broad-mindedness. Together Jodhaa and Akbar, the Hindus and Muslims of India, can achieve great things, divided they are headed for a disaster.

Furthermore, the fact that Akbar is played by a Hindu star, Hrithik Roshan, is likely to make the powerful Muslim ruler more acceptable to mainstream India. Gowariker tends to vary the lead actors in his films and not to hire the same stars. He has in the past cast such Muslim megastars as Aamir Khan and Shahrukh Khan to play the lead roles in *Lagaan* (2001) and *Swades* (2004), respectively, which seems to suggest that the casting of a Hindu actor this time to play Akbar bears some significance, even though it is by no means unusual in Bollywood to have a Muslim actor to play a Hindu character or vice versa. Tejaswini Ganti notes that Bollywood "is perhaps the least segregated place in India today where Hindus and Muslims work together as well as intermarry".⁷¹ Shahrukh Khan, for instance, played the Hindu emperor Ashoka in *Ashoka the Great* (Santosh Sivan, 2001), while Aamir Khan played the Hindu Mangal Pandey (of the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny fame) in *The Rising: Ballad of Mangal Pandey* (Ketan Mehta, 2005). The role played by Akbar's wife is also of importance. If Jodhaa, played by the accomplished actress, former Miss World and current daughter-in-law of the Indian megastar Amitabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, falls in love with the Muslim Akbar, the audience is likely to follow in toe and accept the Muslim man as domesticated and Indian rather than a terrorist threat. Another clear indicator of the film's attempt to address contemporary Hindu-Muslim relations in India is the film's focus on the monogamous, interreligious marriage between Akbar and Jodhaa. As Shahnaz Khan points out, "Jodhaa was Akbar's third wife – the first two wives, who were Muslim, were written out of the film script", as were the rest of the over three hundred wives Akbar married after Jodhaa.⁷² I suggest that this was done – wooing contemporary audience consisting mainly of nuclear families

based on monogamous marriages aside – in order to deal with the Hindu-Muslim question, past and present, also on a more general level.

Jodhaa also counsels Akbar on how to be a good ruler and encourages him to win the trust and love of the people of Hindustan by listening to them:

You know how to wage war and conquer. But you don't know how to rule. You have only conquered me but not won my heart yet. ... But the truth is that you are far removed from reality. You do not know how to win hearts. To do that, you need to look into their minds, discover their little pleasures and sorrows. And win their trust. Be one with their heartbeat. And the day you will succeed in doing that you will rule my heart.

Prompted by Jodhaa's advice, Akbar goes to the Agra Bazaar dressed as a common man to find out about the grievances of the common people. He is angered to find out that the Hindus have to pay a tax to go on pilgrimage and abolishes the tax on his return to the court. Iqtidar Alam Khan suggests that Akbar abolished the pilgrim tax in 1562 and the *jizya* – the non-Muslim poll tax – in 1564 in order to “placate and befriend” the Rajputs. According to Khan, these steps were “dictated principally by the exigencies of state policy rather than consideration of religious tolerance or intellectual influences of any kind”.⁷³ By contrast, Satish Chandra notes that Akbar's remittance of the pilgrim tax and the abolition of *jizya* “do not seem to be directly linked to Akbar's Rajput policies at the time. Nor did they induce any of the Rajput chiefs to change their attitude towards the Mughals.” Chandra sees that Akbar's religious views and his politics were kept separate at this point and converged only later.⁷⁴ **Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi argues that** “the Sunni character of the Mughal administrative framework did not change” until 1579. The abolition of the aforementioned taxes and the matrimonial alliances were political decisions. “The annexation of the Rajput states was reckoned as a triumph of Islam and the Hindu chiefs were regarded as *'kafirs*

obedient to Islam”⁷⁵ Despite having differing opinions about Akbar’s intentions towards the Rajputs, these historians seem to agree that the abolition of the taxes was not a religious measure. Gowariker’s Akbar follows this line. Akbar emphasises that he is not doing anything against Islam and that this decision is administrative, not religious, but he has to go against the *ulama*’s wishes. He points out once again that the Mughals are not like other invaders of Hindustan who loot and plunder. Akbar’s decision is depicted as a genuine response of a just ruler to an unfair practice rather than as a calculated political measure. The film’s Akbar follows the view that Akbar’s policies “clearly tended to put the state as an institution above any particular religion (though not opposed to religion as such). Thus Akbar’s concept of the state was strikingly modern and secularist”.⁷⁶ The film’s Akbar, a truly Indian Muslim, born on the soil of Hindustan, goes against the *ulama*’s wishes in many of his decisions and proves his tolerance and capacity to adjust and blend in. Akbar’s abolition of the tax wins the hearts of the people of Hindustan and they give him the name “Akbar”, great. Both Muslims and Hindus from different regions come to express their joy and respect.

There is a well-known historical basis for the portrayal of “Akbar as a secular force who wants to see ‘Hindustan’s’ great religions coexist side by side”.⁷⁷ As historian M. Athar Ali writes, it is “almost a historical cliché” now that “Akbar formulated a religious policy for the Mughal Empire that can in some ways claim to be a forerunner of the secular aspects of modern Indian polity”.⁷⁸ However, Akbar’s religious policies varied over time, and focusing on this particular tolerant phase delivers a powerful and particular message in contemporary India. It was noted in *India Today* that “[t]his is also an Akbar who is being made more palatable to a Hindu majority, his bloody siege of Chittor in 1568 forgotten and what some historians have called a return to Islamic orthodoxy between 1567 and 1579, which then changed to a policy of tolerance from 1579 onwards.”⁷⁹ As Kaveree Bamzai points out in the quote above, the film conveniently ends before the time a few years later when Akbar’s policy towards the Rajputs changed. Akbar tried to force the Rajputs into submission and

changed his religious policy as well, “shown by efforts at placating orthodox Muslim sentiments.”⁸⁰

In 1568 Akbar proclaimed the fall of Chittor

as the victory of Islam over infidels. A *fathnāma* issued on 9 March, 1568, conveying the news of his victory at Chitor to the officers of the Punjab, is so full of intolerant professions and sentiments and couched in such aggressive language that it could compete favourably with similar documents issued by the most orthodox of Muslim rulers of India. ... The reimposition of jizya in 1575 was the logical culmination of this policy.⁸¹

Athar Ali adds that “Akbar, bolstered by his success against the Rajputs, was looking forward to widespread acclamation as a great conqueror of Islam”.⁸² On the other hand, the film does not

continue to incorporate the syncretic new faith, *Din-i-ilahi*, Akbar advocated later on, either.

Shahnaz Khan argues that this is because Hindu nationalism “seeps into Jodhaa Akbar in interesting ways. Muslim Akbar’s relationship with his Rajput Hindu wife promotes a religious dualism in a period when the king was known for his curiosity about different religions.”⁸³ I suggest that this

focus on “a duality which centralizes Hindu/Muslim tensions”⁸⁴ rather than on the plurality of Akbar’s vision – he was curious about and interested in different religions for a period of time – is

designed precisely to comment on and take part in the ongoing debate about Hindu-Muslim

relations in the past and to counter the view of Moghuls/Muslims as foreigners and invaders. The

inclusion of the syncretic *Din-i-ilahi* would have pointed to Akbar’s personal religious views and

general religious tolerance and curiosity rather than to the Hindu-Muslim unity that is so central to

Indian nation-building.

Conclusion

This article has examined Ashutosh Gowariker’s *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) as a cinematic comment on the recent political and historical debates over historical Hindu-Muslim relationships. The film’s

reception indicates the change in India's relationship with history and testifies to a new kind of history culture. *Jodhaa Akbar* takes part in the contemporary history culture in India in which the relevance of history has been heightened and historical accuracy has come to matter in historical films. The film was made after the defeat of the BJP in the general election in 2004 and the rise to power of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance. In contrast to the Hindu nationalist interpretations of Indian history of the 1990s and early 2000s which presented Muslims as foreign invaders, *Jodhaa Akbar* domesticates Indian Muslims and presents a post-Hindutva nation-building narrative advocating Hindu-Muslim harmony. The film portrays events from the past, with the intent of rehabilitating the Nehruvian idea of "unity in diversity" and showing the Mughals – the alleged destroyers of the Rama temple in Ayodhya in the sixteenth century – in a positive light. The religious tolerance of the film's Mughal ruler effectively counters the alleged demolition of the Hindu temple in Ayodhya at the orders of Emperor Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. The film does, however, uphold Hindu dominance by presenting Hinduism and Hindu religious practice as the norm to which the Muslims adjust. Yet *Jodhaa Akbar* follows in the footsteps of previous Hindi Historicals set in the Mughal court in its promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity. The film uses historical material to comment on current communal concerns and deliver its message in the words of Akbar: "Respect and tolerance of every religion will make the future of Hindustan glorious." The beloved Emperor Akbar sets an example for 21st-century India.

¹ Tejaswini Tirta, "Box Office Bonanza!", *Times of India*, June 28, 2008; Gaurav Malani, "Stats Speak: Box Office 2008", *The Economic Times*, July 2, 2008.

² "'Jodhaa Akbar' Grosses Rs 120 cr", *The Hindu*, March 21, 2008.

³ "Jodhaa Akbar Not Being Screened in Rajasthan", para. 3. <<http://www.bollywood.com/jodhaa-akbar-not-being-screened-rajasthan>>

⁴ “Ashutosh Defends Jodhaa Akbar”, *The Times of India*, February 21, 2008; Rishi Vohra, “Against Street Censorship”, *The Hindu*, March 16, 2008.

⁵ See e.g. “Supreme Court Lifts Ban on Jodhaa Akbar, for Now”, *Reuters*, March 4, 2008, <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-32293320080304> (accessed 1 March 2013); Vohra, “Against Street Censorship”; “‘Jodhaa Akbar’ Makes Exit for Second Time”, *The Hindu*, March 31, 2008; “Jodhaa Akbar Not Being Screened in Rajasthan”.

⁶ Reetu Joshi and Karthik P., “All the Tribulations Were Welcome”, *The Times of India*, March 8, 2008.

⁷ Vohra, “Against street censorship”.

⁸ Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 158.

⁹ Ashis Nandy, “History’s Forgotten Doubles”, *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (1995): 63.

¹⁰ Lal, Vinay. *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 128.

¹¹ Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 160.

¹² Vir Sanghvi, “Age of Intolerance”, *Hindustan Times*, February 16, 2008.

¹³ Shiv Sena (Shiva’s Army) is a Maharashtrian political organisation of the Hindu Right, whose “platform combines language chauvinism (Marathi), regional primordialism (a cult of the regional state of Maharashtra), and a commitment to a Hinduized India (Hindutva, the land of Hinduness).” Arjun Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai”, *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 627-651, here 629.

¹⁴ See Nandana Bose, “Between the Godfather and the Mafia: Situating Right-Wing Interventions in the Bombay Film Industry (1992-2002)”. *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* 1, no. 1 (2009): 23-43.

¹⁵ Gita Viswanath, “Saffronising the Silver Screen: The Right-Winged Nineties Film” in *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*, eds Jasbir Jain and Sudha Rai (Jaipur and Delhi: Rawat

Publications, 2002), 39-51, here 41. See also Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 51.

¹⁶ Shahnaz Khan, "Recovering the Past in *Jodhaa Akbar*: Masculinities, Femininities and Cultural Politics in Bombay Cinema", *Feminist Review* 99 (2011): 131-146, here 134.

¹⁷ M. K. Raghavendra, *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema* (New Delhi, 2008), 39-40.

¹⁸ Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* (New Delhi; Tulika Books, 2009), 24.

¹⁹ Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 157.

²⁰ Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 157.

²¹ Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* (London and New York, 2006), 116.

²² See e.g. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 158; Raghavendra, *Seduced by the Familiar*, 40.

²³ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 8-9; see also Akbar S. Ahmed, "Bombay Films: The Cinema as Metaphor for Indian Society and Politics", *Modern Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1992): 289-320, here 312.

²⁴ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 115.

²⁵ Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 256-7.

²⁶ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 116.

²⁷ Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 166.

²⁸ Subhash K. Jha, "Jodhaa Akbar Is as Relevant Today as Arranged Marriages", *The Times of India*, November 26, 2007. Gowariker has explained further in another interview: "There are many reasons choosing this story for making a film one of which maybe the marriage between a Mughal emperor and a Hindu princess. The marriage took place almost four and half a century back. It's really an amazing story. Though the reason behind the wedding was the expansion of his empire

and for the betterment of the relationship with Raajputs, there were some good social impacts also. Besides all these the most important matter about the story was the reason for which a Rajput father had to hand his daughter to a Mughal emperor. At the same time I wanted to weave the essence of love story in the film, too. In that film I got exactly the same love story that I wanted to make.” (“How Much Do You Know about Akbar’ Ashutosh Gowarikar,” in Filmibeat, para. 3).

²⁹ Appadurai, “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing”, 646.

³⁰ Saffron is the chosen colour of the Sangh Parivar, the collective of Hindu nationalist organisations the BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the RSS, symbolizing Hindu pride and power.

³¹ Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook*, 47.

³² Bose, *Between the Godfather*, 28.

³³ A branch of the Shiv Sena that dealt chiefly with film industry issues.

³⁴ Bose, “Between the Godfather and the Mafia”, 30.

³⁵ Ziya Us Salam, “Beyond Prisms of Prejudice”, *The Hindu*, August 24, 2008.

³⁶ Viswanath, “Saffronising the Silver Screen”, 41.

³⁷ Dean Nelson, “Author Rohinton Mistry Slams Mumbai University after Book Ban”, *The Telegraph*, October 19, 2010.

³⁸ Bose, “Between the Godfather and the Mafia”, 30.

³⁹ Gowarikar said to a newspaper: “I am making a film whose primary concern is to entertain. I have taken care to see that nobody’s pride and dignity is hurt. That is never my intention.” (“Confusion key to protests by Rajputs over Jodhaa Akbar: Gowarikar DNA”) Gowarikar DNA, February 9, 2008.

⁴⁰ Jha, “Jodhaa Akbar Is as Relevant Today as Arranged Marriages”, para 9.

⁴¹ “How Much Do You Know about Akbar’ Ashutosh Gowarikar”, para 12.

⁴² “Ashutosh Defends Jodhaa Akbar”, para 3.

⁴³ “Ashutosh Defends Jodhaa Akbar”; Joshi and Karthik P., *All the Tribulations Were Welcome*”.

⁴⁴ “Ashutosh Defends Jodhaa Akbar”, para 6.

⁴⁵ Suchandana Gupta, “We Only Want to Prevent Violence”, *The Times of India*, February 23, 2008.

⁴⁶ Partha Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, *Social Research* 59, no.1 (1992): 111-149, here 129-30.

⁴⁷ Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, 142 note 59.

⁴⁸ Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, 137.

⁴⁹ Gyanendra Pandey, “Modes of History Writing: New Hindu History of Ayodhya”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 18, 1994, 1523-1528, here 1524.

⁵⁰ Pandey, “Modes of History Writing”, 1527.

⁵¹ See e.g. Romila Thapar, “Interpretations of Ancient Indian History”, *History and Theory* 7, no. 3 (1968): 318-335; Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 383-408, here 389; Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, 140.

⁵² Pandey, “Modes of History Writing”, 1525.

⁵³ Romila Thapar, “Politics and Rewriting of History in India”, *Critical Quarterly* 47, nos. 1-2 (2005): 195-203, here 201.

⁵⁴ Gyanendra Pandey, “Can a Muslim be an Indian?”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, No. 4 (1999): 608-629, here p. 623.

⁵⁵ Ram Janmabhoomi means the birthplace of Lord Rama. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement was launched in the 1980s by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to reclaim the site in Ayodhya for Hindus who wanted to construct a Rama temple on the spot.

⁵⁶ See Lal, *The History of History*, 157.

⁵⁷ Lal, *The History of History*; see also Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 204-213.

⁵⁸ Pandey, “Modes of History Writing”, 1523.

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- ⁵⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 244.
- ⁶⁰ See e.g. Aditya Sinha, “RSS Targets History Textbooks”, *Hindustan Times*, June 17, 1998; Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames*; Latha Menon, “Coming to Terms with the Past: India”, *History Today* 54, no. 8 (August 2004): 28-30; Thapar, “Politics and the Rewriting of History in India”, 195- 203.
- ⁶¹ Bhaskar and Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*, 155.
- ⁶² Jyotika Viridi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 32.
- ⁶³ Satish Chandra, *Essays on Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 374-5.
- ⁶⁴ Iqtidar Alam Khan, “The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of His Religious Policy”, in *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120-132, here 122-3.
- ⁶⁵ Usha Zacharias, “Trial by Fire: Gender, Power, and Citizenship in Narratives of the Nation”, *Social Text* 69, vol. 19, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 29-51, here 32.
- ⁶⁶ Zacharias, “Trial by Fire”, 33.
- ⁶⁷ Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 208-9.
- ⁶⁸ See Diana Dimitrova, “Religion and Gender in Bollywood film”, in *Religion in Literature and Film in South Asia*, ed. Diana Dimitrova (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69-81.
- ⁶⁹ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 136.
- ⁷⁰ Shashi Tharoor, “Rushdie’s ‘Overartist’: Indianness from Midnight to the Millennium”, in *Midnight’s Diaspora: Critical Encounters with Salman Rushdie*, eds. Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008) 122-135, here 131.
- ⁷¹ Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook*, 23.
- ⁷² Khan, “Recovering the Past”, 137.

⁷³ Khan, “The Nobility under Akbar”, 122-3.

⁷⁴ Satish Chandra, “Jizya and the State in India during the Seventeenth Century”, in *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711-1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133-149, here 378.

⁷⁵ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign, with Special Reference to Abu’l Fazl (1556-1605)*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), 193.

⁷⁶ Satish Chandra, “Jizya and the State in India”, 139.

⁷⁷ Vohra, “Against Street Censorship”.

⁷⁸ M. Athar Ali, *Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society, and Culture* (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2006), 158.

⁷⁹ Kaveree Bamzai with Rohit Parihar, “The Jodhaa Akbar Controversy”, *India Today*, March 3, 2008.

⁸⁰ Bamzai with Parihar, “The Jodhaa Akbar controversy”.

⁸¹ Khan, “The Nobility under Akbar”, 123.

⁸² Athar Ali, *Mughal India*, 159.

⁸³ Khan, “Recovering the Past”, 136.

⁸⁴ Khan, “Recovering the Past”, 136.