



Belief Beyond Reason: A Comparative Case Study of Superstition in Bollywood Films — *PK*, *Oh My God*, and *Maharaja*

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Abstract

Cinema serves as a rich source store for researchers in understanding and interpreting unique characteristic components of a society such as language, culture, tradition, religion, etc. Superstitious beliefs have probably been present among us since the beginning of time and have been passed on through the centuries, culturally shared and transmitted from generation to generation. Superstitious beliefs have a negative impact on the social wellbeing of people in society because they are highly associated with financial risk taking and gambling behavior. Cinema makes us aware of the exploitation that takes place in the name of religion and encourages us to think and adhere to any rites using reason and relevant principles. Indian Cinema serves as a vital link between religious modernities and ancient customs and rituals in addition to being a source of amusement. Religion is no longer limited to temples and mosques in this digital age; instead, individuals are using media to share their rituals and stories. People's religious experiences are evolving.

This study shows that superstitions are prevalent in all cultures worldwide but have no scientific foundation. In reality, superstitious beliefs stem from fear, uncertainty, and the emergence of unknown circumstances. As we know, "GOD" and "Religion" are popular themes



in Indian cinema. While miracles were depicted in earlier films, a new trend of "Rational Inquiry of Faith" is being started in films like Oh My God and PK.

Blind faith is depicted in this film as "confusion" and "misunderstanding." We learn from literature that the notion of "Spirituality is something which is" Internal" and "Superstition is controlled by external forces" is repeatedly conveyed through film. The fact that the climaxes of all three films are based on "Internal Realization" .PK focuses on religious identity confusion, while OMG movie highlights the commercial side of religion. Maharaj, a recent film, advances the cause by demonstrating how widespread exploitation can result from ultimate religious power. This has taught me that films are more than just entertainment; they serve as a mirror of society, and for scholars, they are a means of understanding culture, language, and religion in order to learn about any society.

Key Words- Superstition , Hindi Cinema , Spirituality ,Religion , Cultural Belief

Introduction

In India, spirituality, religion, and superstition play a significant role in day-to-day life in Indian society. Spirituality and religion are the foundations of Indian culture.

Indian cinema plays a significant role in depicting what is actually happening in our society and functions as a social mirror. Films are crucial for illustrating reality and challenging the blind faith that people follow based on the name of religion or spirituality.

A journey from the outside to the inside without following any orthodox practices is what spirituality is all about. Religion is an internal to external journey in which we are required to adhere to specific orthodox ways. While spirituality discusses a personal relationship with truth, religion focuses on establishing laws and rituals. When trust is adhered to without justification, it turns into blind faith, which leads to social exploitation. Superstitions are common phenomenon in human society, especially in Indian culture. Superstitious beliefs have probably been present among us since the beginning of time and have been passed on through the centuries, culturally shared and transmitted from generation to generation.

This study's primary goal is to demonstrate how films can be used to illustrate the distinction between superstition and genuine spirituality. While films like PK and Oh My God concentrate on sarcastic takes on contemporary religious rituals, Maharaj depicts the historical battle of the



reformers. This will examine the reasons for people's unquestioning faith on these godmen as well as the ways in which some films are used to illustrate people's blind faith.

Review of Literature

Cinema functions as a rich data store for researchers in understanding and interpreting unique characteristic components of a society such as language, culture, tradition, religion, etc. The subject of this study is to question the realities of a multicultural social life with reference to PK movie. There is a set of problems such as what the basic motivations of religious groups are, whether a person could be independent of cultural/environmental factors, and how the theological and sociological perceptions of religion differentiate, etc. The aim of this paper is to trace the steps of the construction of social and religious reality experienced by an alien's own consciousness. This study combines sociology of religion with cinema through a phenomenological approach. Türkeri, A., & Karsli, B. (2021).

"PK" is one of the movies that brought up those issues about religion diversity that caused lot of controversy because of its contents that considered offensive to some religions, especially the Indian society itself. Nevertheless, the movie also contains the concept of religion pluralism which is a condition of living together by maintaining the existing religious differences. From the result of the research, it can be concluded that the meaning of "PK" the movie in the case of religion diversity is that religion pluralism represented by the existence of religious freedom and the portraits of coexistence, the openness between religions to interact with each other and the beliefs that all religions are true and came from the same source which is God. Citraningtyas, R. (2019).

India has had a history of outrageous responses and intolerant behavior against 'controversial' cinematic projections of religions, of which PK (Peekay), released in December 2014, is the latest case. PK is probably the most discussed movie in such controversies, but it is not the only movie which faced such threats in India in the recent past. There are various other films, mostly Hindi that have faced hostilities from different religious organizations, groups and communities for being 'controversial' and 'hurtful' towards religions, religious symbols, rituals and practices ("Amir Khan's PK," Times of India, 2014). Qadri, M., & Mufti, S. (2016).

The exploitation of women within religious institutions is driven by patriarchy and the manipulation of religion, resulting in sexual violence, discrimination, and systemic gender



injustice. This study discusses the film Maharaj as a medium that reveals the exploitation of women and critiques patriarchal religious institutions. Film Maharaj reveals the exploitation of women in religious institutions through visual symbolism, body gestures, and rituals such as Charan Seva, which reflect patriarchal and spiritual domination legitimized by culture. Artika, S., & Rozi, F. (2025).

From silent films to contemporary blockbusters, religion has always proved a popular theme for the cinema. However, all too often religion and film are discussed from narrowly confessional perspectives, with the result that the field has long been dominated by the question of a film's fidelity to a religious text or worldview, or its value as a tool in ministry and mission. "Religion and Film: An Introduction" seeks to redress this balance, and argues for a new, holistic approach to the subject that draws on work from cultural studies, religious studies and film studies alike. Wright, M. (2006).

While the figure of the 'Indian guru' has established itself as a source of spiritual knowledge in the West, it played a unique role in the construction of the secular image of post-independence India. Historically, gurus, fakirs, or monks were considered neither a threat to the construction of secular India, nor were they given a privileged treatment on the basis of their religious denomination. Such secular 'indifference', however, has been challenged by competing narratives of religious modernities in popular culture, particularly in Hindi Cinema. Drawing from three recent productions – Oh My God (2012), PK (2014). Malreddy, P. (2022). Something held, partially held, or practiced when there seems to be no logical basis. Those that use the word do so in an arrogant manner, suggesting that they have special insight into scientific, philosophical, or theological matters. It's too vague to be useful in any context other than personal opinion. For this reason, we may broadly divide superstitions into three categories: religious, cultural, and individual. An atheist may see all religious acts as superstitious. The topic of superstition's place in religious rituals is at the heart of the current discussion. Gumber, P. (2018).

Superstitions are common phenomenon in human society, especially in Asian cultures. Superstitious beliefs can have a negative impact on the social wellbeing of people in society because they are highly associated with financial risk taking and gambling behavior. Superstitious beliefs have probably been present among us since the beginning of time and



have been passed on through the centuries, culturally shared and transmitted from generation to generation. Easmin, A. (2025).

Objectives

1. To examine how religion and spirituality is portrayed in films.
2. To explain how people follows blind faith and superstition in the name of God, religion and spirituality.

Methodology

This study looks at how movies show religion, superstition, and logical thinking. To do this, it uses a qualitative research method based on **content analysis**, which means systematically looking for patterns, themes, and meanings in media. First, background information was gathered by reading academic articles, journals, and research papers. Second, this information was used to perform a content analysis on two specific movies as case studies: *Maharaj* and *Oh My God*. Instead of just sharing personal opinions, the movies were studied carefully by breaking down their stories, characters, and dialogues to find common themes. Finally, the ideas found in the movies were connected back to the research papers to show how popular cinema shapes the way people think about faith and logic.

Data Collection And Analysis

1. Case Study- MAHARAJ (2024)

Siddharth P. Malhotra is the director of the 2024 Indian Hindi-language historical drama *Maharaj*, which is produced by YRF Entertainment. Alongside Jaideep Ahlawat, Shalini Pandey, and Sharvari, it features Junaid Khan on his feature film debut. The *Maharaj* Libel Case of 1862 and Saurabh Shah's book about it serve as the basis for the movie.

Plot

Karsan and his fiancée, Kishori, belong to the Maharaj "JJ"-led haveli in pre-independence Bombay. Karsan is furious when Kishori is selected to undergo Charan Seva, a purported "ritual" that consists of JJ engaging in sexual actions with girls, even though Kishori believes she did nothing wrong. After ending their engagement, Karsan is banished by his family. Kishori recognizes the fallacy of JJ's views when she witnesses him preying on her younger sister Devi, but she feels as though she has lost Karsan forever. Kishori ends her own life before



Karsan can convince her that he will give her another chance. Devi asks Karsan to reveal JJ's evil to the world in Kishori's parting message.

JJ and his supporters present Karsan with a number of challenges as she attempts to expose JJ's behavior. He does, however, win over Siraj, who assists him in gaining supporters and publishing JJ's transgressions in his own newspaper, which starts to alter supporters' perceptions. JJ becomes enraged and threatens to stop Karsan's father from publishing, but Karsan seems unfazed. JJ eventually brings a defamation lawsuit against Karsan.

Viraaj pushes Karsan to stand up for women like herself who were compelled to conduct Charan Seva and lacked a voice, despite the lack of support he receives. Karsan takes the stand and exposes JJ's misreading of the Bible and his abuse of women and girls, even though JJ discredits Karsan's testimony. Haveli adherents in the courtroom support Karsan and testify against JJ as he discusses the significance of not need a bridge like JJ in order to approach god, demonstrating the veracity of the statements Karsan published. Karsan gets cleared of the defamation accusations. While Karsan is praised by the public, JJ loses his supporters.

Maharaj Libel Case 1862

In 1862, the Supreme Court of Bombay in British India handled the Maharaj libel case. Jadunath Brajratanejee Maharaj brought the lawsuit against Karsandas Mulji and Nanabhai Rustomji Ranina. The Vallabh Acharya and Pushti Marg Sect were accused of various allegedly problematic acts by its leaders in an editorial article they released. Pushti Marg faced attacks in the 19th century from three different directions. Conversion was difficult for Christian missionaries, who denounced the custom's rites as especially archaic. Pushti Marg was denounced by Orientalist Hindu scholars as a relatively new and inauthentic culture. Mulji and other reformist thinkers saw Pushti Marg as a typical "cult" that kept its adherents firmly rooted in superstition and backwardness. In the end, these charges came together to form allegations that the Maharajas in Bombay were mistreating their female adherents while pretending to act out the romance between the youthful Krishna and the milk maidens known as Gopis. Mulji and Jadunath Maharaj, a fervent supporter of Pushti Marg, had well-known public arguments. However, the Maharaj filed a lawsuit against Mulji when he published his harsh essay titled "Hinduo Na Asli Dharam Ane Atyar Na Pakhandi Mato" in the daily Satya Prakash. Specifically, there were allegations that Jadunath had sex with female followers and



that males were supposed to demonstrate their devotion by providing their female relatives to have sex with the religious leaders.

2. Case Study- PK (2014)

The 2014 Indian Hindi-language humorous science fiction comedy-movie PK (translation: Drunk) was co-produced by Vidhu Vinod Chopra and Rajkumar Hirani under the production banners of Vinod Chopra Films and Rajkumar Hirani Films, respectively. Hirani and Abhijat Joshi wrote the screenplay.

Aamir Khan (as the main character), Anushka Sharma, Sushant Singh Rajput, Boman Irani, Saurabh Shukla, and Sanjay Dutt make up the group cast of this religious comedy that tackles superstition and false prophecies. Khan portrays an alien-like humanoid brought to Earth for investigation.

He starts a nationwide movement that challenges organized religion in general when the people of Earth advise him to seek God's assistance after he loses the remote that allows him to communicate with his spaceship. PK was made available on December 19, 2014.

Plot

On a research expedition in Rajasthan, India, a naked humanoid extra-terrestrial land on Earth and becomes stuck when his spaceship's remote control is lost.

On that day, Jagat "Jaggu" Janani Sahni, an Indian woman, meets Sarfaraz Yousuf, a Pakistani guy, in Belgium and develops feelings for him. Citing their disparate religions, her father disagrees to their connection and seeks advice from their family astrologer, godman Tapasvi Maharaj, who believes Sarfaraz would betray Jaggu.

Jaggu wants Sarfaraz to marry her because she is determined to disprove them, but she is devastated to receive an unsigned letter cancelling their wedding and instructing her not to get in touch with him. After returning to India, Jaggu pursues a career in journalism.

After discovering the extra-terrestrial handing out leaflets about a "missing" God, she becomes interested. He opens up to her when she saves him when he tries to grab money from a temple's contribution box as a "refund" for God's unfulfilled promises. He made friends with Bhairon Singh, a bandmaster, and stole clothing and cash from a couple having sex in a vehicle. At a brothel, he learnt Bhojpuri by holding hands and sharing memories with a prostitute. He then began searching Delhi for the thief who had stolen his remote, earning the nickname "PK"



(drunk) because people assumed he was drunk when he mixed several faiths. He started practicing several Indian religions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, and Islam, in an unsuccessful search for "God" after being told that only God could assist him. When he discovered that Tapasvi had his remote, he declined to give it back, saying it was a divine gift. After a moment of uncertainty, Jaggu believes his account and pledges to assist PK.

PK foolishly speculates that Tapasvi and his fellow godmen may be inadvertently calling the "wrong number" in order to contact with God when Jaggu plays a practical joke on an unknown caller in front of him. PK advises the people against participating in pointless rituals for their prayers. Jaggu is intrigued and invites others to upload their recordings to her news station in order to expose dishonest godmen. To Tapasvi's dismay, this "wrong number" campaign gradually develops into a widely recognized public movement.

In the meantime, Bhairon tracks down the burglar in Rajasthan and tells PK that he sold Tapasvi the remote. PK understands that Tapasvi was a charlatan who purposefully misled people. Later, a rail car explodes at the station, killing Bhairon and the robber in a terrorist strike. In an on-air confrontation, Tapasvi asks PK what the "right number" is. PK argues that instead of believing in other fake godmen and their "duplicate" God, people should believe in the "real" God who created them. Tapasvi asserts that he is directly connected to "God" and uses his prophecy of Sarfaraz's treachery as evidence that Muslims are dishonest. After absorbing Jaggu's memories earlier, PK asserts that he can refute his prediction and discloses that Sarfaraz did not write the letter to Jaggu, pointing out that another bride may have received it that day. Startled, Jaggu calls the Pakistani Embassy in Belgium, where Sarfaraz was employed part-time, and discovers that Sarfaraz has been waiting for her call for a considerable amount of time, demonstrating his continued love for her. It is stated that Sarfaraz ceased communicating with Jaggu after seeing the identical letter that day and thinking it was from her. While Jaggu's father discovers Tapasvi's true nature and makes him give the remote back to PK, Jaggu and Sarfaraz emotionally reunite.

PK uses his remote to get back to his planet. He packs two suitcases full of audio cassettes with recordings of Jaggu's voice before departing. Jaggu is informed by PK that the recordings are of earthly noises. Jaggu discovers, nevertheless, that the recordings are genuinely of their discussions. Additionally, she discovers the love letter PK gave her earlier and realizes he loves



her, but she is reluctant to admit it because of her emotions for Sarfaraz. Instead of confronting PK head-on, she watches him approach his spaceship with tears in her eyes. Grateful for her encounter with PK, Jaggu writes a book about him when he leaves.

A year later, PK and other members of his race return to Earth for a fresh investigation into human nature.

3. Case Study- OH MY GOD (2012)

Oh My God! is a 2012 Indian Hindi-language satire comic drama movie that was produced by Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, S Spice Studios, Grazing Goat Pictures, and Playtime Creations.

It was written and directed by Umesh Shukla. The Australian movie *The Man Who Sued God* served as the inspiration for the Gujarati stage drama *Kanji Virudh Kanji*, which serves as the basis for the plot. Akshay Kumar, Paresh Rawal, and Mithun Chakraborty play the main parts in the movie, while Om Puri, Govind Namdev, Poonam Jhaver, Puja Gupta, and Mahesh Manjrekar play supporting parts.

Plot

In Mumbai, Kanji Lalji Mehta, a middle-class Gujarati atheist, runs a store selling Hindu idols and antiquities. When a low-intensity earthquake strikes the city and only Kanji's store is wrecked, he makes fun of religious events surrounding him. His family and friends accuse him of being an atheist.

Kanji finds out at the insurance office that the catastrophe claim does not cover any damage resulting from natural disasters that fall under the category of "Act of God." Out of choices, he chooses to file a lawsuit against God, but he is unable to get an attorney. Kanji chooses to fight alone, but working-class Muslim lawyer Hanif Qureshi assists him in filing the case. Both the insurance company and religious leaders like Siddheshwar Maharaj, Gopi Maiyya, and Leela Dhar Swamy, the founder of their group, get legal notifications that compel them to appear in court on behalf of God.

With his loan provider seizing the property and his family abandoning him, Kanji encounters armed extremists and harassment as the court case gets attention due to its strange nature. Krishna Vasudev Yadav, a real estate agent from Gokul, Uttar Pradesh, who also does supernatural deeds outside of the human sphere, saves him.



The public is outraged by the lawsuit. Kanji goes to the media on Krishna's recommendation and receives extensive attention. He is joined in the case by sympathizers, which causes the number of claims to soar and forces Muslim Maulvis and Catholic dads to become defendants as well.

When the court requests written evidence that the earthquake was an "Act of God," Krishna directs Kanji to sacred texts including the Bible, the Quran, and the Bhagavad Gita. After reading them, Kanji discovers a paragraph in each that asserts that God is the creator of the world and that all events originate solely from God's desire. His argument is strengthened and public support rises as a result.

But Kanji has a stroke in court and is taken to the hospital, where he becomes paralyzed and enters a coma. After a month, when he opens his eyes, he discovers Krishna, who confesses that he is God and demonstrates this by fully healing Kanji. He goes on to say that although He created the entire universe, including people and animals, religion was invented by humans, and he was the one who burned Kanji's store in order to get revenge on the godmen who displayed their fear in front of the public in order to make money. Despite to what the godmen say, he does not enjoy living in temples because he created the entire globe. He also says that he is uninterested in the sacrifices made by followers. Rather, he produced millions of hungry individuals who would be happy to receive such offers. He began to assist him with the lawsuit by disguising himself as a human, making friends with him, and revealing himself in his true form so that Kanji would realize that, despite his existence, he does not reside in temples but rather in every creature he created. He realized that an atheist like Kanji would ultimately expose them if he demolished his shop and thus demolished it by causing the disaster.

Kanji finds out that the lawsuit was decided in his favour and that the court ordered religious groups to compensate all of the claimants. People now see Kanji as a deity as a result of this. Leela Dhar, Gopi Maiyya, and Siddheshwar have capitalized on this by establishing a Kanji temple and raising millions of dollars. Kanji is informed by Krishna that his role as God is to teach mankind right and evil, and that they are free to do as they like. Inspired by Krishna's remarks, Kanji smashes his own statue and warns the audience not to put their confidence in God-men, telling them to look for God in others and in themselves rather than in statues, that



God is everywhere, not only in temples, and that faith should originate from inside. He warns people against believing in fake godmen since their purpose is to commercialize religion.

When he returns to thank Krishna after finishing the task successfully, he discovers that he and his bike have vanished. When Kanji's family shows there, they are reunited. On the ground, Kanji notices Krishna's keychain. He is going to retain it when he hears Krishna's voice instructing him to discard the keychain since he has battled against his fear of God and dependence on religious artefacts. Grinning, Kanji tosses it aside and watches as it flashes away into the sky.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that while Indian(Hindi) cinema serves as a potent tool for social awareness, it struggles to dismantle the thin barrier separating genuine faith from superstition. Films like *PK*, *OMG*, and *Maharaj* successfully expose the commercialization of religion, the dangers of mixing faith with power, and the deeply entrenched patriarchal exploitation of women through rituals like *Charan Seva*. However, their societal impact remains deeply fragmented. While urban audiences critically analyze the content and a younger demographic begins to question blind faith, rural viewers often absorb the generalized spiritual messages, and others view them purely as entertainment.

The research indicates that superstitious beliefs are not rooted in science but are generational cultural behaviors born out of fear and uncertainty. To bridge this gap and elevate audience acceptance, filmmakers must prioritize narrative clarity over outright criticism, approaching sensitive religious customs with genuine tact. By contrasting the simplicity of true faith with the ignorance of blind rituals, cinema can compel viewers to distinguish between the two. Moving forward, Indian cinema must evolve to ensure its critiques lead to true rationality rather than further division, fulfilling its duty to foster a more enlightened, self-reflective society.

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