Male Chauvinism, Cultural Hybridity and Racism in the Society of Indian Sub-Continent: A Study of Bollywood's Film *Pinjar* Semiotically

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ABSTRACT

The words racism, cultural hegemony, and male chauvinism are frequently used in Indo-Pak literature and film. The Indian Subcontinent is known for having a male-dominated culture, a fusion of several ethnic and racial groups, and a society in that men dominate. The movie Pinjar, based on a novel, depicts various cultures, conventions, beliefs, and traditions from the time before and after the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent while showcasing numerous literary and critical facets. This research on the movie Pinjar focuses on racism, cultural hegemony, and male chauvinism. This particular video has used the semiotics framework—the study of signs, colors, and language—as the main framework to follow all the relevant elements.

Keywords: Cultural Hybridity, Domestic Violence, Film Studies, Semiotics, Male Chauvinism, Partition of Indian Sub-continent, Racism, South Asian Society, Pierce's Model.

1.Introduction

The idea that men are superior to women is known as male chauvinism. Female chauvinism is prevalent in the Indian subcontinent's multi-racial society due to the widespread belief that women are inferior to men. Depending on the society and location, it may take on different shapes that change from person to person. It can take various shapes and differ from home to office or lower to a higher class. It is frequently used in conjunction with "sexism", and is intimately linked to misogyny, the belief that women are less intelligent than males, and other forms of misogyny. Domestic abuse and different types of violence against women are also covered by this heading(Mansbridge & Flaster, 2005). The society of the Indian Sub-continent is also termed as a male chauvinist society; therefore, all genres have its elements, whether literature or film. Along with chauvinism, the society of the Indian sub-continent is also a hybrid society due to multiple cultures and varied ethnic groups.

Cultural hybridity is termed as the concoction among different cultures. It emerged from biology and was later included in linguistics in the 19th century. This term is spread through academic disciplines and subjects. The rhetoric of hybridity is primarily linked to the appearance of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism as well. It studies the effects of the mixture upon identity and culture. Homi K Bhabha, Nestor Garcia Canclini,

Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak and Paul Gilroy are the leading scholars of this discipline. As the Indian sub-continent also remained as a British colony, so the elements of cultural hybridity can be found in the society of the Indian sub-continent. Though the society is having the hybrid cultures at the same time, along with the hybrid cultures, racism is also the part of the society, trying to create a split among these different hybrid cultures.

Racism is defined as the superiority of one race over another among different ethnic, cultural or religious groups. It can also be defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism against others on the basis of the difference between their race and ethnicity; therefore this term is mainly associated with negative notions. It may potentially have multiple, conflicting definitions. Racial groups can vary in culture, religion, and caste structure within any given society. A view that race is the main factor influencing human characteristics and abilities, and that racial distinctions result in an inherent superiority of a specific race, according to Merriam-Webster online(Gail Steinberg, 2012). The society of the Indian sub-continent was also divided among different racial castes and religious groups therefore racism is found in the society. For studying this racism, male chauvinism and cultural hybridity in the society of Indian sub-continent, the framework of semiotics has been used.

According to Saussure, semiotics, also known as semiology, is the study of signs and the Semiotic Process. This study focuses on signs, titles, comparisons, analogies, metaphors, and symbols. Additionally, this study deals with signification and communication. Every type of film has a language medium full of signs because language is one of the systems of signs (Eco, 1986). According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the father of modern linguistics as quoted in Semioticians and their work: "there is a dualistic notion of signs, relating the signifier as the form of the word or phrase uttered, and to the signified as the mental concept. It is important to note that, according to Saussure, the sign is completely arbitrary, and i.e. there is no necessary connection between it and its meaning. This sets him apart from previous philosophers who thought there must be some connection between a signifier and the object it signifies (Culler, 1986)."

The main character in the book/movie *Pinjar,* Puro, is a little Hindu girl, and the plot of the book/movie revolves around Puro's existence in the Indian subcontinent in 1947. While her parents chose to travel to their ancestral village, her family lived in Amritsar. There, a young, gorgeous boy named Ramchand had already proposed to her. She and her companions happened to stop by the pastures. The young Muslim guy Rashid became drawn to her
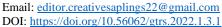
throughout these trips. Rashid's grandaunt had been abducted by Puro's granduncle a few years prior, and their family was seeking retribution. Rashid kidnapped Puro one day not just for revenge but also out of affection for him and with the help of his family. Being helpless in Rashid's presence had left her broken. Even when she had a chance to flee one evening, her parents refused to let her inside since they lived in a Muslim-majority region and were afraid of being attacked. After experiencing great disappointment, she rushed toward the neighboring well to kill herself. However, Rashid was waiting for her and saved her by bringing her back to his house. He honored her as his cherished wife and regarded her as his treasured wife. He later gave birth to a son named Javaid. The British administration declared the division of the Indian subcontinent in the days that followed. Puro and the family of Ramchand were left on the Pakistani side of the border, and the family of Ramchand had little choice but to go as the rioting had extended throughout Amritsar, which India had now annexed. While traveling, their caravan was assaulted; Ramchand and his mother escaped unharmed, but his sister Lajjo, the wife of Trilok, Puro's brother, was taken captive. Puro and her husband Rashid were still residing in the same Pakistani village. A caravan passing by Puro's village was brought to her attention. She went there with the expectation of saying goodbye to Ramchand and his family. There, she witnessed Ramchand in a distressed situation and learned the full tale of their families. After learning that Lajjo, her brother's wife, had been abducted, she was left speechless. She vowed to do whatever it took to be found by Ramchand. She roamed the entire village while pretending to be a local salesperson. She finally found Lajjo at a house dressed as a kidnapped girl after a weary few days of effort. She greeted her and explained the whole scheme. Her husband Rashid escaped Lajjo from the village that same evening. Lajjo and Puro afterward joined each other after Puro and Rashid left the area in the evening. They talked about their pasts with each other all night. Ramchand and Trilok were waiting for Lajjo at the Wagha border when Puro and Rashid brought him there the other day.

2. Literature Review

The word "semiotics," which comes from the Greek word "smeion," which implies a mark or a symbol, is also known as the "observant of signs" (Liddell & Scott, 2007). In 1670, Henry Stubbes became the first person to utilize this expression in English. Concerning the study of symptoms in the medical sciences, he applied it with accurate cognition. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure examined the most important aspect of semiotics as a social science field. According to him, "It is possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part
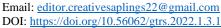
of social life. It would form part of social psychology and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeîon, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them (Chandler, p.132)." The two elements of a sign are the signifier and the signified. The signified is the meaning of a sign, whereas the signifier is a set of speaking sounds in a language. The notion put out by Saussure, which strongly influenced the structuralists, suggests that the human mind creates meaning through language. Peter Berry claims that language labels our environment and shapes it. It is also important to remember that Saussure believed there was no required connection between the sign's appearance and intended meaning. While semiotics, as defined by the philosopher Charles Peirce, is the correct principle of signs and is closely related to logic, semiology, as defined by the linguist Saussure, is a discipline that studies the role of signs as a component of social life. For him, a sign is anything given to someone in exchange for something of a certain caliber or regard. Every thought, according to him, is a sign. A renowned theorist named Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914) is credited with creating philosophical pragmatism in the 19th century. Semiosis, according to his definition, is the process by which an item rationally influences a sign to confirm its status as an interpretation or interpretant (Bergman & Paavola, 2003). This research article also follows the Pierce's Model of semiotics to withdraw the elements of male chauvinism from the society of the Indian Sub-continent as portrayed in the film Pinjar.

From the very dawn of history, the Indian Subcontinent's society has consistently been dominated by men. Women were never treated with respect or considered full members of society. Similar to how women in the Indo-Pak subcontinent were nothing more than enslaved person or maid, women in the Arabic region gained recognition after the emergence of Islam. Women were maintained in palaces during the reign of kings only to serve the monarch. In both legal and illegitimate ways, they were required to serve monarchs and princes. In the Mughal era, women were not given any respect other than as dancers or singers for the king's courtships in the palace, a blatant manifestation of male chauvinism in the culture. In addition, Jean Baudrillard says, "At male strip shows, it is still the women that we watch, the audience of women and their eager faces. They are more obscene than if they were dancing naked themselves (Kendall, 2006)." The society of the Indian sub-continent was a male chauvinist society though being a hybrid cultural society.

As the society of Indian Sub-Continent is enriched with cultures, it is the reason that the society is also having the hybrid cultures and cultural hybridity is one of the main elements in the

society of Indian Sub-Continent. "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities," writes Homi K. Bhabha in his article Signs taken for Wonders (1985). "It is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (i.e., the creation of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority). By repeating the discriminatory identities of all places of discrimination and dominance, hybridity revalue the presumption of colonial identity(Bhabha, p. 159). Though being a hybrid cultured society, sometimes these hybrid cultures were also indicating racism. Therefore, the society of Indian Sub-Continent is also having different racist groups till today.

According to Polly E. McLean in his article, Mass Communication, Popular Culture and Racism, "For most of the 20th century, stereotypes in U.S. popular culture have perpetuated a false sense of white superiority and a false sense of African American inferiority (McLean, 1995)." In the book, The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951) by Hannah Arendt, he says that the racist ideology which developed at the end of the 19th century helped to legitimize the imperialist conquests of foreign territories and the atrocities that sometimes accompanied them (Arendt, 1973). The White Man's Burden (1899) by Rudyard Kipling and Heart of Darkness (1899) by Joseph Conrad are regarded as the notable work with the theme of racism.

The film *Pinjar*, directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi based on the novel *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam, is the story about the partition of Indian sub-continent with multiple themes of racism, male chauvinism, post colonialism, multiculturalism, cultural hybridity and other many elements of religious differences. Anupama Chopra introduces the film: "Pinjar is an ambitious film. Based on Amrita Pritam's Partition novel, it has scale and sweep. There are scenes of gut-wrenching drama; the art direction by Muneesh Sappel is painstakingly authentic; and the cinematography by Santosh Thundiyal bathes the bloody saga in warm tones underlining the pathos (Chopra, 2003)." Rohit Murari reviews the film: "The film has not blamed any country or any community for what happened. It does not use patriotic innuendos. It tells you what happened without connoting any meaning to it. It set out to tell you Puro's story, a story that many women at the time could identify with, and it does just that - without deviating from the plot (Murari, 2009)." Tanya Jha reviews the film with a woman aspect, "The deep desire for bearing a son and considering daughters as burdens is revealed through Puro's fifty-year-old pregnant mother who is constantly shown to be praying to beget a son. The father, on the other hand, keeps calling their daughters burdensome and wants to get rid of them as soon as possible

(Jha, 2018)." Ratnakar S says about the plight of women during the partition of the Indian sub-continent, "Pinjar is not just about Partition, it is also about the state of women during that period in India. It was about a period when women had no voice of their own, and they were victims of patriarchy and society (S, 2010)." According to Taran Adarsh, "Besides conveying the anguish and trauma of a young girl, with utmost precision Dwivedi unfolds a saga without bowing down to commercial dictates. Besides exploring the era with a flourish, Dwivedi also successfully creates the right atmosphere for the actors to slip into their roles (Adarsh, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

This is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data (Babbie, 2014). This type of research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things and not to their counts or measures; therefore this research answers why and how a particular phenomenon may occur rather than how often (Berg & Lune, 2012). This research will apply the theory of male chauvinism, racism, and cultural hybridity. Moreover, semiotics as the study of signs, symbols, and colors has been adopted for the analysis of data, and for this purpose, Pierce's model of semiotics has been selected to get the targeted results.

4. Discussion and Results

As the society of Indian Sub-continent is regarded as the male dominant society so in the film *Pinjar*, we came across many examples of male chauvinism and the movie is full of prevailing male society. In first half of the film, the hero Rashid shows male chauvinism by kidnapping Puro from her village and putting her on the back of his horse.

Figure I

Figure II

Figure III

In the figures (I, II, III), we see different attitudes toward male chauvinism. After the kidnapping, Rashid is ashamed of his actions because he had true feelings for Puro; on the other side, he is proud to utilize his male chauvinism rights. He wanted to see her as his wife and never wanted to let her go. He wanted to win her to make her assured about his love and true feelings, regardless of her love and feelings. As a male, he wanted to assure her that as he loved her, he had all rights over her. He was never mild or supportive of Puro's choice, but all his decisions were final in every case.

Figure IV

One night Puro got a chance to get back her home, she was greeted by her mother sobbingly, her father was melancholic too but her parents rejected her. Her father ordered her to go back because her honor was blackened. Moreover, they were leading life in a Muslim majority area and had no courage to face any sort of resistance. The order of the father compelled her to leave their home for the sake of their safety and honour. Though the father was gloomy, his order was an exemplar of male chauvinism because he also considered her a black-honoured girl (Figure: IV).

Figure V

Later on, after the marriage, though Puro had accepted him willy-nilly Rashid was pleased. He always called him by her original name of Puro, but in a Muslim majority area, it was considered as a sort of prohibited name. On sayings of his aunt, Rashid stamps his identity on the personality of Puro when he brings in a man to write her name on her arm. As the man asks

the name, Rashid tells him 'Hameeda' instead of 'Puro' without asking or listening to her (Figure: V).

Figure VI

The behavior of Trilok also remained an example of male chauvinism. Though he was disturbed because of the kidnapping of his sister Puro but his behavior was much irritating with Lajjo. Most of his rage was always expressed with her, and he always rejected her love and joy by a rude and rough attitude (Figure: VI).
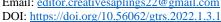
Not only male chauvinism but the film Pinjar is also representing the theme of the hybrid culture and in many scenes of the film, two cultures are getting hybrid. As the society of the Indian Sub-Continent is regarded as the society of multiple cultures and various ethnicities, the elements of cultural hybridity are apparent in the film Pinjar.

Figure VII

In the Figure: VII, there is a clear depiction of cultural hybridity. The protagonist of the film, Rashid, is attending a shrine of a holy saint. He is praying there to get rid of his troubles and

find a cure for his pains. He is too troubled because of his family life therefore, he seeks calmness and serenity. While he is praying on the holy shrine, in his background, Sikhs are singing a religious hymn as one of the Sikh temples is in front of the sacred shrine. This scene of the film indicates that two different religions are merging up and this amalgamation of two other religions is a clear representation of cultural hybridity in the society of the Indian Sub-Continent.

Figure VIII

In Figure: VIII, there is a scene of an old van. Several passengers are traveling on it. Though the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent came into being on the basis of cultural hybridity and religious contrasts, in the society, they were living together without any distinction and difference. In this picture of the van, many people are riding on it, and those different people belong to other ethnic groups, religions, and castes. There is not much difference in their dressing though their caps and turbans differentiate them. No one can discriminate against them based on their ethnicity, caste, and religious group, which is a clear example of cultural hybridity.

Figure IX

Along with the cultural hybridity and male chauvinism, traces of racism are apparent in many scenes of the film Pinjar. The film represents all three major religions of the Indian sub-continent therefore, abhorrence among these different ethnic and religious groups is clearly depicted. Such hatred always led to the racism against each other. In the beginning scenes of the film, when Rashid abducted Puro, then soon after her kidnapping, relatives of Rashid threatened the father of Puro, never to take her name or register a police case and he should forget her daughter. In Figure IX, the Hindus are oppressing the Muslims as it's the Muslims majority area therefore the Hindus are powerless. It is a clear example of racism.

Figure X

In the middle of the film, we again encounter the elements of racism. Rashid and Puro adopted the son of the Pagli as she died after giving birth to the child. Pagli was recognized as a Hindu in the whole area but as Rashid was Muslim, therefore the Hindus of the area were never ready to handle the son of a Hindu woman to a Muslim family. All the Hindus of the area gathered, and they compelled Rashid to leave the son of Pagli because as a Muslim, he had no right over the son of a Hindu.

Figure XI

In the film, along with the Muslims and the Hindus, Sikhs can also be seen as the third most significant ethnic group. Even the film opens with the scene of the Sikhs, chanting religious hymns in the area's streets. Later, when the riots started, there were many scenes of fighting between Sikhs and Muslims. In Figure XI, we see a scene in which the Sikhs and Muslims thrust each other with swords.

There are several examples of racism in the text of the novel. In the beginning pages of the novel, a ceremony is in progress at the home of Puro. Her mother is pregnant, and they have this ceremony for the sake of the newborn baby's safety.

After celebrating all the customs for the safety of new born boy after the alternate birth of three daughters, they were assured that the boy would be saved." (Zaman, p. 790)

Such festivities serve as a symbol of one ethnic group's bigotry. The character Kamoo, who is absent from the movie, is also mentioned in the book. She and Puro were really close. People in the neighborhood regarded Puro as a Muslim because she was Rashid's wife. Because of the

differences in their respective beliefs, Kamoo, who was a feeble girl and unable to hold her pot, nevertheless tried to prevent Puro from touching it.

Everyone knows that her name is Hameeda… The wife of Rashid… while Kamoo was a Hindu girl… "My pot will be impure if you touched it." Kamoo said without hesitation. (Zaman, p. 813)

The ethnic issues between Kamoo and Puro can be traced throughout the text. Puro was sympathetic towards her. Puro was always eager to help in her social and domestic problems of life but every times, she rejected her tries of help and never became obliged to her due to the difference of the faith and creed.

Kamoo was a Hindu while Puro… was a Muslim (Zaman, p. 814).

As Pagli died after giving birth to her child, Puro and Rashid adopted her child and nourished him. The brought-up of a child by a Muslim family was the most controversial topic of the whole society. The Hindus of the area wanted the baby back, and they never wanted that the Muslims might bring up a Hindu baby and it was only spoiling her creed and religion. The discussion about the child was part of daily life;

Pagli was a Hindu, her baby is taken away by the Muslims, and they have converted a Hindu baby into a Muslim in front of the whole village" (Zaman, p. 828).

All the Hindus of the area gathered at the meeting place in the village. They wanted to get back the child of Pagli from Rashid. They called in Rashid in the meeting and ordered him to leave the baby because Pagli was a Hindu while he is a Muslim, capturing a Hindu baby. They pressurized Rashid to leave the baby and it's an example of racism.

So, what is your will? Do you have to return back the baby or not?" A loud voice said to him, turning the pipe of hubble-bubble aside (Zaman, p. 830).

Though Rashid requested them that the age of the baby is significantly less, and it can be dangerous for the life of the baby to be separated from the mother and his wife Puro is performing a good duty for the nourishment of the baby. The below dialogue from the text is another example of racism.

The kid's life can only be ended by God, thus it's all right. However, you should be aware that the baby's mother is Hindu, and it is unbearable for you to take a Hindu infant with you(Zaman, p. 831).

5. Conclusion

This research article focused on the aspects of male chauvinism, cultural hybridity, and racism in the Indo-Pak society as portrayed in the film *Pinjar*, discussing the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent. During the partition, the millions of migrated people suffered a lot in case of racist violence; therefore, this research article discusses all these aspects in detail. Future researchers can apply any other theory on this particular film to bring new elements or choose another movie for research with another theory or framework.

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