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## 'POLITICS, LITERATURE AND MEDIA IN INDIA'



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Declaration of Human Rights, and the United States defends these rights vigorously wherever they are threatened. Where speech is insulting or offensive, we do not support restrictions but rather condemnation of and argumentation against the speech in question.

In various parts of the world, governments have misused laws that criminalize offensive expression to persecute political opponents and religious minorities, often exacerbating the very problems they seek to address. The United States, therefore, advocates for other measures to address hateful expression, such as education; interfaith efforts; urging political, religious, and societal leaders to speak out and condemn offensive expression; creating a mechanism to identify areas of tension between communities; training government officials on outreach strategies; and encouraging leaders to discuss causes of discrimination and potential solutions with their communities.

**Conclusion:** The limits of freedom of expression are bound together with public safety and governmental stability. Firstly there is the safety of citizens. Individual's freedoms and rights sometimes conflict so someone's must be limited. By limiting rights society ensures that everyone has access to the same rights. Thus the right to freedom of expression can be limited if that freedom is being used to constrain another's freedom as a result of attacks upon them. Furthermore, governments may place restrictions on their citizens' freedom of expression in times of instability. For instance, during times of rioting or civil unrest the government may place restrictions on freedom of expression in order to constrain that violence. This may be for the safety of the people but it may also be justifiable to limit freedoms of some individuals in order to preserve the political system that is in place. The emergence of new technologies that allow for the expression of us to the world has reshaped the landscape of the wider debate on freedom of expression. While many of the points of this debate have been formulated and reformulated over the course of many years, the rapid rise of information technology now means that new points have emerged in a short space of time and old points must once again be reformulated to take account of the changing world.

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## Controversy over the Depiction of Religion in Cinema: an Assessment of Amir Khan's PK

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*Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?*

*Then he is not omnipotent.*

*Is he able but not willing?*

*Then he is malevolent.*

*Is he both able and willing?*

*Then whence come evil?*

*Is he neither able nor willing?*

*Then why call him God?*

-- Epicurus

Similar to the above quotation by Epicurus, PK asks who the God is after all. He innocuously explains that, "There are two types of God. The first one created the Universe. He is loving, forgiving, omniscient, protective and unprejudiced. There is another God whom people created. He is forgetful, wrathful, prejudiced, and might punish you if you do not believe in Him or do certain things. The first God encourages love, while the other God feeds on fear." (Movie Blog: **What we can learn from Amir Khan's PK**-)

Movie, having an audio-visual effect, is one of the forms of art which appeals more to human senses. Art has either corrective or entertainment motive. To teach and delight is the primary function of art and movie is not an exception to it. Moreover art crosses the boundaries of cast, creed, religion and region. A piece of good art always talks about humanity, love and other human values. This form has been very popular in India and it is one of the powerful means to reach millions of people all over the globe. Film directors always take this opportunity to convert the people to their opinion. India has the world's largest democracy where each citizen is governed by the constitution. Indian constitution offers us the freedom of speech and expression with certain limitations. But to our surprise, our right to speech and expression has been repressed and the creativity of an individual is being challenged very often. In the history of Bollywood, many movies had been controversial for various reasons. The objective of this paper is to analyze the Amir Khan's movie PK in the light of the projection of God, religion and god men in Indian cinema. Religion had been the major themes of various movies. In the country like India, where the people belonging to multi-religion coexist, it is very difficult



to handle the theme in a work of art like cinema. Our constitution offers rights to follow our own religion and nobody can compel us to forcefully convert his religion.

India is world's largest film producing country. Bombay cinema, popularly known as Bollywood is the largest in India, followed by Telugu and Tamil cinema. In fact it is not the cinema only where religion had been controversial. In other forms of art like literature & painting also, it has shown its presence. Hollywood movies are also full with such controversies. Common man is often forced to think whether the Bollywood industry thrives on the various controversies. Our experience is that most controversial movies earn more on box office. Sometimes it is part of the strategy to create controversy about a movie. Controversy can be on the actors, theme, songs, nude scenes, political relevance of the movie, and public statements of actors on the contemporary issues of the country etc.

#### Review of Some Controversial Movies in India

In the history of Indian cinema, there are many movies which have been controversial by either ways. The movie *Aandhi* (1975) was banned when Indira Gandhi was in power because it is supposed that the movie is based on her life. But the ban was lifted when the BJP government came in power. *Bandit Queen* became controversial due to the nude scenes and abusive language in the movie. The movie *Fire* became controversial because of the theme of lesbianism. *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* stirred the controversy over the scenes which were considered as inappropriate to the then audience. *Madras Café* dealt with the assassination of our late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Tamil groups demanded ban on this movie. *Fanna* got banned in Gujarat due to Amir Khan's statements against raising the height of Narmada dam. Due to the depiction of premarital pregnancy and inter-caste marriage in *Julie* (1975) it became controversial. Such types of themes were very new to the then audience. *Aarakshan* was banned because it portrayed the caste based reservation system in India. It was banned in UP, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. *Rang Deer Basanti* created a controversy because it has not taken the permission to use animals in the movie. Maneka Gandhi raised this objection because of which the scenes of Amir Khan on a horse had to be cut from the movie. *Amu* was banned by the sensor board due to its depiction of 1984 riots of India where thousands of Sikhs were massacred.

#### Movies Having Controversy over Religion/God:

The following are some of the movies which deal with the sensitive subject of religion which created controversy by this or that way. *Dharam Sankat Mein* deals with a man's crisis relating to religious identity. Paresh Rawal, a staunch Hindu, hates the Muslims but later on

finds that he was born as a Muslim but adopted by a Hindu family. The plot of the movie being sensitive, the sensor board called Hindu priest and Maulavi to supervise the films certification process. **(Bollywood films that courted controversy over religious topics by The Hit list Team, 11/05/2015).** *My Name Is Khan* (2010) is another movie which created controversy over religion. SRK being Muslim suffers from the discrimination in America. He is mistaken for a terrorist and he undertakes a long journey to prove himself innocent. The movie faced threat due to SRK's comments supporting the inclusion of Pakistani players in IPL. *Oh My God* (2012) is another movie which revolves around an atheist who discloses the commercialization of religion in our country. It attacks the prevalence of superstitions in Hindu religion and challenges to the god men (mediators of religion) who claim to have their relations with God. The screening of the movie was halted at many places and Madhya Pradesh high court asked the sensor board to take action against the objectionable comments against Hinduism. *Baby* (2015) starring with Akshay Kumar deals with the most sensitive subject of terrorism. It concludes that terrorism has no region or religion. But this is being banned in Pakistan criticizing that the movie has shown Muslims and Pakistani in poor light.

#### Why the Movie PK is controversial:

Amir Khan's *PK* (2014) is latest hit movie which is supposed to have hurt the sentiments of several religious groups. The movie force us to believe in the God who created you and not the god created by you. The god men are brutally attacked for their hypocrisies and moneymaking attitude. Since this movie is the topic of my paper, this is being dealt in detail. *PK* questions the superstitions in our country where religion is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people. Superstitions prevail in the society because they are always attached to some Gods. Hence any attempt to ridicule a superstition is being challenged by its followers. It takes the form of boycotting the movie, banning the books etc. In the movie *PK*, Amir Khan is an alien who comes to visit the earth. When he reaches on the earth, his remote control got stolen; this closes the way to go back to his own planet. *PK* decides to search his remote control and he begins his journey to discover the world on this planet. He is being told that only God can help him in finding the device. So he visits Temples, Mosques, Gurudwaras and Churches. He tries to please Gods of every religion but it isn't proved fruitful. Despite of having offered everything to Gods, No God could help him to find his device. Then he comes to the conclusion that Gods are missing. During his journey to find the missing God, he meets to the actor in the attire of lord Shiva who is going to perform the dance of lord Shiva at a public place. *PK* assumes that he is the real God Shiva, who will help him to find his remote and he asks him to return his remote. The actor, in the disguise of Lord



Shiva, couldn't understand what the PK is asking for. He runs to one of the Ashrams where the Godman is delivering his sermon. PK follows him there too and to his surprise he sees that his remote control in the possession of the priest. He was telling to the devotees that this is one of the parts of lord Shiva's Damru which the God has offered him. PK understands that in the name of real God, these fake Gurus or god men are robbing and cheating people. At various points, the movie critically questions the superstitions. In one of the scenes, a priest tells to man to undertake the difficult journey to a temple in Himalayas in order to get well his wife. PK jumps into the conversation and asks the priests if it's true that God considers all humans as his sons and daughters. When priest says "yes", he follows another question saying that, "which father would send an already troubled son on a difficult journey"? This makes the movie a thought provoking drama. (Pandey, 2014)

#### Politics and Controversy over PK

Since the release of the movie, it has been controversial. Many people have criticized the movie for maligning Hinduism and other religions too. We witnessed mixed reactions from the society. A hash tag called #boycott PK was initiated by those who have opposed the movie, but it followed with a rival hash tag called # support PK by those who supported it. It shows mixed reaction on the movie. However the Supreme Court has cleared the way of PK saying that sensor board has permitted the movie and there is no point of having ban over it.

The movie is released at such a time when issues like religious conversion are being debated in parliament and prominent Gurus like Asaram Babu have been arrested on the charge of murder and rape. With the advent of the BJP government in 2014, the organizations like RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal etc have begun many programmes which have led to communal disturbances. The campaigns like Ghar-Wapsi (forced reconversion to Hinduism by Hindu extremist against Muslims and Christians), anti-love Jihad (Muslim boy- Hindu girl marriage) were at peak. The release of the movie, at this juncture, put oil into the burning fire that provided extremists to raise voice against the movie. The anger took various forms to vandalize the movie. (Monisa Quadri and Sabeha Mufti, 2015)

We must remember that this is not the only movie where the wrong practices in the religions have been ridiculed but they have not been so controversial. The question is always asked why the right wing group members remained silent when Paresw Rawal took God to court in *Oh My God*. Is it because he was then a candidate for BJP in general elections in MP? Is it because the main protagonist in PK is Muslim & in *OMG* was Hindu? As compared to PK, *OMG* has not been so controversial. It has not been that much protested, complained and vandalized. The right wing groups accused the movie for disrespecting

Hindu religion. Ramdev Baba also appealed people to ban and boycott the movie. In the cities like Bhopal and Ahmadabad the Bajrang Dal attacked the screenings of the movie. It seems that the politics is involved behind the creating the controversy over PK. The agenda of some political parties is to blackmail people on the ground of caste; religion etc. politicians convert such situations in vote banks. Even the media take this opportunity to increase its TRP by exaggerating the issue instead of cooling down the situation. Many Times it can be a part of marketing strategy to earn more on box office from such controversy. Bajrang Dal is furious on the representation of Lord Shiva in the films demeaning to Hinduism. They "show lord Shiva going to bathroom and he is locked up there. They make fun of Mahadev and say that he does not bathe. Amir Khan wants to make money. He doesn't care about our gods". (Ghoshal, 2015).

#### Conclusion

The movie PK is not against any religion or God. Even it is not against any religious Gurus. The director of the film said, "I'm being asked that if I'm against any religious Gurus, why have I expressed gratitude to shri shri Ravi Shankar in the film titles? My answer is that I'm not against religious Gurus, I'm only against fake gurus". ("PK: why," *Times of India*, January 7, 2015). PK poses questions and doesn't provide answers like *OMG*. PK is not preachy in nature. He questions and questions but leaves it to audience to find solutions for themselves. Rajkuimar Hirani moralizes the audience by using comedy. He firmly believes that in order to reach the real God, it is not necessary to go through the mediators since they mislead us resulting in having wrong numbers with the God. People should not follow the superstitions, instead they must behave rationally. God is kind to all of us and expects only love from devotees instead of money and offerings. Material things can be offered to needy and food to be offered to hungry instead wasting it on idols. No human being comes with having stamp of any religion and hence our religion of humanity and love to all.

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