

Popularity of Indian Cinemas and Music in Afghanistan: A Contributing Aspect of Cultural Relations

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This paper argues the relations between India and Afghanistan crosses their political line and shares a bond of love since antiquity. Their cultural relations are far richer than their geographical proximity and their strategic cooperation. Historically their sharing of religions and knowledge and their cooperation into the fields of philosophy and wisdom are stronger than the collaborations of monarchs and kings or any specific ruler. The emergence of Islam and its sweeping the power from both regions immensely served this cause. Here, in this regard the flow of not only religio-cultural materials remained smooth throughout the Islam era but also the Afghanistan helped in making reach the Indian philosophy and literature to *Bait ul Hikmat* of Baghdad. In the twentieth century they both together fought for independence and remained loyal to each other. While the latter half of the twentieth century saw an active engagement in all fronts, here the popularity of Indian cinemas and music plays a vital role in strengthening ties between these two countries. These cultural relations are my concern here in this short paper. The paper is divided into three parts. First part discusses how these two countries remained engaged historically while the second parts highlights their relation after independence and their cooperation in various fields of economy, trade, politics, and culture. The last and third segment of the paper focuses on the popularity of Indian cinemas, serials and music in Afghanistan. And in this regard the paper argues that the Bollywood serves the cause of good will brings

both the countries closer in an unimaginable manner which ultimately strengthens their relations in all walks of human life.

Historical perspective :

The relations between Indian and Afghanistan dates back to the Indus Valley civilization, as the following Alexander the Great's occupation the emergent state of Seleucid Empire ruled the region. Maurya Empire controlled much of it as a part an alliance treaty in 305 BCE. In 2nd Century BCE Buddhist Influenced Afghanistan and the Zoroastrians along with Hindus formed the core religious beliefs in the region till the coming of Islam. After Islam a large number of them converted to it and people lived peacefully side by side.¹

The region south of Hindu Kush which was controlled by Mauryans from India introduced Buddhism to it. The area of Hindu the Hindu Kush and Khyber Pass was linked by monks, Merchants, and monarchs where the knowledge, culture, religion commerce interacted with each other. Both the nations shared an imprint of arts literature and language where the Buddhist symbols of Bamyán and Aynak of Afghanistan and majestic monuments of Delhi bear the witness. At the time of independence of India same love had been seen where the role of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan who was also known as frontier Gandhi had been documented with the silver line in the history. The words mentioned by king Amanullah to his contemporary of India Maharaja

1. Nancy Dupree (1970): An Historical Guide To Afghanistan, Chapter 3 Sites in Perspective.

Mahender Pratap had its own importance when he said to Maharana “so long as India was not free, Afghanistan was not free in the right sense” this devotional love and attachment forms the basis of these two nations relationship.²

Current relation :

The bond between the two countries remained strong after independence too, as it was witnessed during the freedom struggle they both fought with their common enemy together and this strong tie was strengthened with the passage of time and each coming regime remained committed to the idea of good will. Independent India engaged itself in not only maintaining but also enriching its political and cultural ties with Afghanistan which brought a fruit result for both the nations. Though India remained suspicious towards Taliban regime but post Taliban era has witnessed a vibrant engagement in various fields such as rebuilding infrastructures and developing peace in the region. India’s approach to its neighborhood has swung in recent years. In the mid-1990s a policy of non-reciprocity, the ‘Gujral doctrine’, reflected an understanding that India, as the dominant regional power, had a duty to support and accommodate its neighbors without necessarily expecting to receive reciprocal benefits. This policy stalled from the late-1990s as the government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party prioritized India’s global rather than its regional importance. Since the change to a Congress Party-led government in 2004 India has generally shown renewed commitment towards its regional role, and its Afghan policy is frequently justified in these terms. India frames its active role in Afghanistan on the grounds that social and economic development in Afghanistan is crucial to regional stability.³

The development partnership of India-Afghanistan is based on the principles of mutual sharing and solidarity which is branched into five founding modalities of development cooperation that includes capacity building, trade and investment, technology cooperation and others. The prominent one is the development of Chabahar port project connecting India, Iran and Afghanistan with Central Asian countries. The Chabahar port will promote

connectivity through sea as well as improve the rail, road route bringing in investment and development in the region especially boosting railway, infrastructure and energy projects. In a recent development Afghanistan will be sending its goods to India every two weeks via Chabahar port starting from February creating opportunities for increased trade removing the obstacle of Afghanistan being landlocked. Among India’s support effort is the Air Freight Corridor program with Afghanistan in 2017 which has grown exponentially with Kabul- Delhi, Kabul-Mumbai, Kabul-Kolkata, and Kabul-Amritsar cargo flights exchanged every week. There are more than 166 flights exchanged between India and Afghanistan. Last year Spice Jet has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for connecting Kabul with Indian metro cities. Connectivity via land, sea and air will help seize opportunities with new and emerging markets.⁴

Through trilateral partnership cooperation between US, India and Afghanistan reflects how the two countries support changes the landscape of the war-torn country and building human capacity for sustenance. The real progress will only show the marked improvement and possibilities generated over the course of time for the welfare of the Afghan people. US imply on increase cooperation in Afghanistan, viewing India’s pioneering engagement creating levers for sustenance of human lives.

The recent conversation of President Donald Trump with Prime Minister Narendra Modi for increasing cooperation in Afghanistan spells greater assimilation for inclusive development.

Cultural perspective:

The relation between Indian Cinema and Afghan people is very strong which was seen at the time when Taliban imposed ban on it failed miserably. It cannot erase the image and attachment from the mind of common Afghans, who finds Indian films revolving around fighting the concepts of hatred and injustice. As Sujeet Sarkar in noted in his book “In Search of a New Afghanistan” “Whether it is in the hostile southern provinces or the relatively peaceful Northern provinces, the influence of Bollywood is palpable in the

2. Rajadhyaksha, Abhijit (2August 2009) “*The Mauryas: Chandragupta*”.

3. Nancy Dupree (1970): *An Historical Guide To Afghanistan*, Chapter 3 Sites in Perspective.

4. Barfield, Thomas 2010 “*Afghanistan: a cultural and political history*” Princeton University Press, Princeton & oxford.

Afghan society...Bollywood movies are very popular in Afghanistan due to country's proximity to the Indian subcontinent and the cultural perceptions they share,"⁵

The popularity of Amitabh Bachchan leads a list of Indian actors who rules the minds and hearts of people in the trouble-torn country. Following the line Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, Salman Khan, Amir Khan Ajay Devgan, Kajol and Mithun Chakraborty are the few actors and actresses from India who have millions of followers and fans in Afghanistan. The depiction of orientalism and its ethics that is based on sensuality and romanticism is considered real demonstrations of their feelings and a true representation of their mental landscape. The musical strings manifest their heart beats and they feel compelled to not only follow them but also they dance on the tunes and rhythms of the same music. And even their many singers and vocalists copy the Indian music too. The Bollywoods music is the source of their household entertainments and even their cultural programs are filled with many Bollywood songs. As, it is rightly said "more than the government, Bollywood has been able to establish people to people link".

The films like Kabul and Mazare- Sharif succeeded in doing brisk business in Afghanistan even during the civil war period note its healthy market story as well. Here again notes Sarkar:

"Despite the resurgence of the Taliban, the love for Indian cinema and music goes unabated in Afghanistan. The Indian film and music industry is once again riding high and continues to further the friendship and bring these two countries together."⁶

Sarkar says it is time now for Bollywood to make big inroads in the country.

The scholar also highlights about Afghan Society and Bollywood's role to engage and depict it to the global audience.

"In Search of a New Afghanistan" provides a new outlook, denouncing several myths that color common global perception of the country. The author unveils several lesser known facts, while, elaborating the thrill and challenges of working in Afghanistan, from ground

zero". Likewise the Indian Serials such as *Saas bhi kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kasauti Zindagi ki*, *Kum kum* and *Kahani ghar ghar ki*, *Sare Gama pa*, Indian idol *Pratigya*, have been dubbed into Dari Language. These programs earned highest viewership in the region which was telecasted on prime time slots by national as well as private TV channels.

Apart from several governments organizations today, the programs released by Amazon and Netflix are providing a quick service to audience who also enjoy the direct and first hand service of the Indian programs. Sanjoy Ghosh share his experience in these words. "The driver turned on the radio in my car, and I wasn't surprised to hear it blaring out a Hindi song, from some film in the 1990s. A few moments into Kabul, it becomes very clear that Bollywood is big here. "That is the bridge where Amitabh Bachchan killed the villain," says the driver, pointing to a historical bridge over the river Kabul, where some sequences of the blockbuster *Khuda Gawah* were shot way back in the 1990s."

Salman Khan holds sway over the young. A large number of Afghan girls blush into their hijabs at the mention of his name, and pumped up Kabuli boys flex their muscles as they copy Salman's mannerisms. The *Tiger Zinda Hai* did well in Afghanistan even talks about his genealogy is hot topic to be discussed among old and young alike as they believe that "His family comes from Afghanistan. Is that really true?" they say, terribly pleased at this genealogical connect.

The popularity of old Bollywood songs like *Kia khoob lagti ho*, of Dharmendra, *mera joota hai Jappaani* of Raj Kapoor *jab tak hai jaan jaane jahan* of Hema Malini and *ye Dosti hum nahin todenge* of Amithab and Dharmendra still revolve around their imaginations. In terms of the shooting they remain glued by those historical places of Bamyan, and Kabul in particular. In the same manner, the concerts organized by their cultural organization where Hindi songs are sung in live for the entertainments.⁷

My own experience with a Mr. Ahmad who happened to be a friend of mine, despite being brought up in Afghanistan the whole family was well versed in Urdu. To my surprise upon asking from where they learnt

5. Sarkar, Sujeet (2012) "*In Search of a New Afghanistan*" Niyogi Books, New Delhi.

6. IBID

7. Desai, Jigna (2004) "*Beyond Bollywood The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*" Routledge, New York And London.

Urdu they revealed that it is the Hindi films which taught us Hindi. My friend Ahmad also told me that her grandmother from paternal side was a huge fan of Raj Kapoor while his father was a great admirer of Amitabh Bachhan while he himself did miss any Shah Rukh Khan Movie. My submission here is that Bollywood movies are a good bridge to enrich their cultural ties. Because the families like Ahmad's family do not bother any political untoward situation or geographical gap did stop them and no national boundary matters for them to love for Indian cinema and these attachments to Indian cinemas consequently serve the cause of good will between these two neighboring states.

Conclusion :

My concluding remark through this paper would be that the Indian cinemas and films which are considered as the brand ambassadors of orientalism by the global audience are also very much into the service of bringing the neighboring countries closer. As an example, the popularity of Indian cinemas and its stars in Afghanistan has been analyzed, as it shows that the afghan people also consider these films and their stories the manifestations of their own cultural aspects. And they are very much in love with the films and music produced here in India and they consider them as a potential source of enjoyment. In this way the films and serials of India serves a major cause of bringing these two neighboring states closer and from a common and strong cultural links. Since the days of antiquity these two -today's nations-remained culturally united through various traits including religion and civilization and at present the Bollywood plays a major role to enhance those ties between them.

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