

Transgressions: Transcending Boundaries in Select Bollywood Films

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze transgressive love which transcends ideological, cultural differences, and geopolitical boundaries in Bollywood films, such as *Veer-Zaara* (2004), *Main Hoon Na* (2004), *Ek Tha Tiger* (2012), and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015). The study uses content analysis and cultural theory to carry out the objectives of the research. The selected films show a renewed sense of hope for improving India-Pakistan relations and celebrate the oneness of people on both sides of the border of India-Pakistan through picturizing immortal narratives of love. Law as a healing force, intense cross-border love stories in the diegesis of *Veer-Zaara*; patriotic love, climactic battle to implement prisoner exchange program “Project Milaap” in *Main Hoon Na*; an unparalleled love story in *Ek Tha Tiger*; an inimitable dimension of love and brotherhood in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* attempt to undermine the existing conflicts and to bridge the differences in Indo-Pakistan relation dynamics. Love manifests sublime expression of brotherhood, humanity, and a shimmer of hope. It eventually triumphs despite overwhelming religious and geopolitical conflicts. It locates that love serves as a *dues ex machina* to resolve ideological and cultural differences. These commercially successful films endorse communal harmony and promote bilateral peace/friendship between the two big neighbors of South Asia.

Introduction

Cross-border love stories in Bollywood films bear witness to a renewed sense of hope in India-Pakistan relation dynamics. Bollywood films play significant roles in the case of socio-cultural and political domains. Desai (2004) claims, film is the most popular and significant cultural

form/commodity in the transnational South Asian cultural and political economy. Films are institutionalized within the canons of national cinemas that are nation-building projects (pp. 33-34). There is a dearth of Bollywood films as well as researches conducted on India-Pakistan coming to terms particularly showing bilateral peace and a renewed sense of hope. The attempt to locate how the select Bollywood films promote bilateral negotiation and friendship through depiction of transgressive love transcending boundaries is the point of departure of the study. This qualitative research attempts to show how cross-cultural love and relationship negotiate a possibility of peace.

There are a number of Bollywood films which are based on Kashmir issue and India-Pakistan conflicts/wars. These are J. P. Dutta’s 1997 film *Border* and 2003 *LOC Kargil*, Farhan Akhtar’s 2004 *Lakshya*, Kunal Kohli’s 2006 *Fanaa*, and the most recent Aditya Dhar’s 2019 film *Uri: the Surgical Strike* among others. Only a few films including the select films have celebrated the oneness of people on both sides of the border and shown a possibility of hope and peace. There is an inadequacy of film studies conducted on India-Pakistan relations coming to terms. Partition in 1947, several wars, and cultural and geopolitical issues cause hostility in the two nations. Cinematic efforts can forge bonds of bilateral friendship and threaten the friendship simultaneously. The rationale of the study lies in the cultural and practical implications, that is to say, the select films strongly endorse interracial love, celebrate communal harmony, and attempt to bring people of two nations closer. In the findings of this study, love is found to be a bridge to overcome cultural differences and to normalize political issues.

Workings of Love: Crossing Cultural Differences

Workings of love crossing cultural differences in Yash Chopra’s *Veer-Zaara*, Farah Khan’s *Main Hoon Na*, Kabir Khan’s *Ek Tha Tiger* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* find a marked emphasis with a purpose to strengthen India-Pakistan relations. Williams (1960) states, culture is a body of values superior to ordinary progress of society (p. 91). Drawing on Mathew Arnold, Williams (1960) argues that culture develops all parts of society and all sides of humanity. Culture is a process and not an absolute. It has great passion for sweetness and light and hates hatred (pp. 125-136). The culture of India-Pakistan is bound to provoke enmities and conflicts between the countries because of specific religious beliefs, cultural practices, and specific political stances of the countries. The countries (previously British India) have been separated by 1947 partition. Religious differences cause an occasional communal violence yet there are some good illustrations of communal harmony.

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Though partition geopolitically separates two nations, they are still attached to one another. In *Veer-Zaara*, Zara's namesake grandmother Bebe (starring Zohra Sehgal) is a Sikh woman who connects an Indian Air Force pilot Veer and Zaara. Bebe who is held with great respect in Zaara's rich family in Pakistan asks Zaara to scatter her ashes in the Sutlej River which flows through the crossroad region of Punjab in northern India as well as Pakistan. Before her death, she as her final wish requests Zaara to unite her (ashes) with her ancestors in Punjab region of India. This religious rite of a Sikh woman living in a Muslim family till her death has been accomplished by a Muslim (Zaara) and a Hindu (Veer). It has much to say about transcending boundaries and sustaining communal harmony. What is unmistakable here is that her ashes eventually flow through both India and Pakistan. The implication is that she belongs to both the countries. It effectively foreshadows a saga of love (between Veer and Zaara) which is also going to transcend boundaries.

Just as culture looks beyond specificity and "directs our attention to the natural current there is in human affairs" (qtd. in Williams, 1960, p. 139), so is love which looks beyond the culturally and politically defined specifications. Love serves as a binding force to bring the individuals as well as their cultural values together. *Veer-Zaara* reveals an intergenerational transmission of love as well as self-less love. Zaara's parents, Mariyam Hayat Khan and Jehangir Hayat Khan, exhibit an obvious breach of the religious/cultural categorizations. Their lifelong love and care for Bebe and their approval of Zaara's acculturation process are some good instances. Zaara is highly influenced by her parents' and Bebe's consent (both implicit and explicit) of cultural blending which finds a better expression in her newly found relationships with a Hindu family in India. She finds her second home in India and builds great relationships with Veer's family and his village. Similarly, Veer has been influenced by his adoptive parents', Saraswati Kaur Singh and Choudhary Sumer Singh, approval of cultural blending, self-less love for Veer and Zaara, and their altruistic acts for the villagers. Being highly influenced by them, in the beginning of the film, Veer proposes Zaara to marry him and eventually at the end Veer puts *sindur* (vermilion, a Hindu sign of marriage) at her *sithi* (parting of hair) at the cross-border point of India-Pakistan. This Hindu-Muslim union and reunion bespeak of crossing cultural differences. By implication, it shows a shimmer of hope between India-Pakistan relations.

A glimpse of hope regarding bilateral friendship resonates in *Ek Tha Tiger* in which Avinash Singh Rathore codenamed as Tiger (starring Salman Khan) and Zoya (starring Katrina Kaif) fall in a romantic love with one another during their missions in Ireland. In the film, Tiger belongs to an Indian Hindu family; whereas Zoya belongs to a Pakistani Muslim family.

On political level, the former is a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) agent of India; on the contrary, the latter is an Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agent of Pakistan. Initially, they try to stick to their political stance on their missions at Dublin; but, they gradually succumb to the temptations and deeply fall in a passionate love. A RAW agent must abide by the nation's foreign policy, and as such he is not allowed to love an ISI agent. Tiger and Zoya elope to lead a full free personal life of their own. Their interracial (inter-religious) romance and love triumph over hatred. It indicates their hatred for mechanical progress of the nations with rivalry and their beliefs in progressive culture to make India-Pakistan relations harmoniously developed and innovative in humanity.

Cultural differences divide people; humanity unites people. The goal-oriented narrative of *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* demonstrates an elevated sense of humanity in every possible ways. It tells the story of a six year old Pakistani Muslim mute girl, Shahida, (starring child actress, Harshali Malhotra) lost in India during her visit with her mother, Rasia. They visit the Dargah of famous Sufi saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, at Delhi in India with a hope to restore the girl's articulation. The girl is protected by a great Hanuman devotee, Pawan. He is familiar as Bajrangi who goes on an epic journey from India to Pakistan to get the girl back to her homeland. Alter (1992) says, Hanuman is a popular deity among North Indian Hindus. Hanuman's *shakti* derives directly from his adoration of Lord Ram and his devotion to Ram provides a clear and pragmatic model for the incorporation of *bhakti* into everyday life (n. pag).

Hanuman symbolizes self-sacrifice, reflects cultural values, and emerges as a champion of the persecuted. Lele (1981) says that Hanuman symbolizes nationalism and resistance to persecution (pp. 114-116). Bajrangi's epic journey parallels with that of Lord Bajrangbali on a symbolic level. *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* merges Hindu cultural values to that of Muslims by means of creating a Hindu Indian's personal odyssey transformed into a geopolitical platform. The mute girl utters her first word addressing Bajrangi as "mama" [maternal uncle] and her second words are "Jai Shree Ram" (glory/victory to Lord Rama). Bajrangi's self-less devotion and love to Bajrangbali turns him a universal incarnation. It drives/leads him to cross cultural differences and geopolitical boundaries. He has sworn on Bajrangbali to get the girl back to her homeland and to save the girl from all kinds of hazards. In fact, he succeeds in his mission by dint of his determination, truthfulness, love, and humanity.

Shahida is endowed with her voice after the girl's mother as well as Bajrangi makes prayers for the girl at the Dargah of Hazrat Amin Shah in

the territory of Pakistan. He ties the red thread (called *Mauli*) with devotion and the act itself reflects his cultural blending. It manifests another level of cultural strands in that he will have to come back to Pakistan to untie the thread as his wishes have been fulfilled by the God. Tying the thread incorporates multiple layers of meaning. It might mean tying diverge cultural values as well as tying the two divided nations. The film celebrates differences, promotes multiculturalism, and at the same time shows hope regarding the normalization of India-Pakistan relations. As such, the act binds cultural values of two religions/nations. As film critic Khan (2015) points out, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is an earnest attempt to bridge the religious divide between India and Pakistan (n. pag). The film “with its themes of love and brotherhood, can be seen as an attempt on the part of the Indian film fraternity to bring the two estranged countries together” (Khan, 2015, n.pag). Pakistani journalist Chand Nawab (starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui) has been Bajrangi’s companion in Pakistan. Nawab using online media affirms that it is only love which makes Bajrangi cross the border. He invites people to finish the hate culture and asserts: “[r]aise your children with love, not hatred”. The film effectively sends its message of an interracial love and bilateral peace. The name Bajrangi Bhaijaan is per formative in the sense that it implies Bajrangi’s dual cultural/religious identities. Bajrangi refers to a Hindu name; Bhaijaan means brother among Muslims. Similarly, the film title (*Veer-Zaara*) involves the blending of cultural identities. The hyphenated *Veer-Zaara* wipes out cultural differences and political barriers.

Transgressive Love: Overcoming International Barriers

Love beyond differences shows an underlying possibility of uniting across the cultures. When love creates an obvious breach of the cultural principles and foreign policies, it takes transgressive form. The act of love/transgression goes against socio-cultural and political codes as well as finds the strength to overcome international barriers to promote communal love and harmony. Transgression results from a desire to transcend the everyday and the culturally-prescribed categorizations. Drawing on Chris Jenks, O’Neill and Seal (2012) define transgression as a dynamic force in cultural reproduction. Transgression prevents stagnation by breaking the rule and ensures stability by reaffirming the rule. Transgression is not the same as disorder; it opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order. Transgression can have both liberating effects and severe consequences. It can be liberating to break the rule and to find and go beyond the edges of acceptability. To do so potentially offers new ways of constituting social identities and new ways of living and engaging with others (p. 2-3).

Ek Tha Tiger explicitly addresses an inter-connectedness of power and culture in connection with the conflicting relations between the foreign intelligence agencies of India-Pakistan. As Golani (2014) maintains, a love for treacherous war zones and penchant for politically sensitive issues are essentially what define *Ek Tha Tiger*. Top agent [Tiger] of India subverts the system and insists that love is beyond artificial boundaries that humans create (pp. 58-67). The film is utterly political as Indian and Pakistani foreign policies/politics are only inclined to carry out their missions by defeating one another. Tiger and Zoya’s personal relationships and other activities are controlled by their agencies. This is because “power is implicated in the construction and regulation of cultural classifications” (Barker, 2004, p. 146). They boldly transgress against the political codes of conduct and unyieldingly stay loyal to each other. Their transgressive love poses a threat to the discursive power of the agencies and gives a glimpse of hope to overcome international barriers. The couple asserts that they will return to their respective countries only when India and Pakistan will not need such agencies. They want the two rival nations to solve the unsolved issues working behind an existing hostility.

Veer-Zaara affirms that transgressive love is capable of surmounting international barriers. Lawyer Saamiya Siddiqui’s (starring Rani Mukerji) politeness and high regard to an Indian prisoner, Veer Pratap Singh, and her strong determination to free him from the jail of Lahore is essentially transgressive in a sense that it goes against all expectations. Her respectful love and humanity for Veer goes beyond any fixed boundaries. In several flashback scenes, Veer and Zaara’s love story has been shown on screen. The love which revolves around the trio (Veer, Zaara, and Saamiya) reveals an idealized version of cultural transgression, a straightforward rejection of Hindu-Muslim/India-Pakistan differences and a resistance to cultural specificity and political dicta. Saamiya plays an important role of a *dues ex machina* to resolve India-Pakistan conflicts through reuniting Veer-Zaara and by defeating a hateful Pakistani prosecutor, Zakir Ahmed (starring Anupam Kher). This is truly transgressive and this act of transgression is incredibly important to overcome international barriers. Saamiya’s principle to fight Veer’s case for the restoration of truth, justice, and humanity makes her entirely different from Ahmed who after losing the case admits that the youth or lawyers like her is needed for surmounting international barriers.

The most critical demography that can bring about change in the India-Pakistan dynamic is the youth, because it is they who will shape the future of relations. (Singh 2019: n.page)

Ahmed realizes and asserts that the future of India-Pakistan relations is in the hands of those who do not rake up the past conflicts and historical trauma and do not believe in differences. At this, one thing (Veer's prisoner ID No) is unmistakable which is given a marked emphasis in the film. Veer's prisoner ID No, "786", is an Arabic numeric value meaning in the name of Allah, the ever merciful. It is regarded as a holy number among Muslims. It connects Veer with Muslim community represented by Zaara and Saamiya. Using a number like "786" with a marked emphasis is worth mentioning here. Saamiya makes the jailor ponder over an implication of the number. The ambiance (the mood of the particular scene) in the jail makes the jailor's epiphanic moment noticeable. The epilogue of the film constitutes Veer's recitation of a poem at the court. The poem itself along with several repetitions of the three digit number appears to be a deliberate act on the part of the filmmaker to merge Hindu-Muslim identities for the sake of an idealized culture irrespective of religion and nationality. The poem also serves as a monologue which expresses Veer's repressed thoughts and gives messages of uniting around differences. As Hoffheimer (2005) maintains, the poem's universalist message simultaneously advocates communal harmony in India and promotes international friendship between Pakistan and India (n.pag). Zaara's mother gives Veer an amulet with a conviction that the Almighty will save him. Veer also shows respect to the amulet and believes in its power especially when he escapes death from a bus accident. In continuation of his belief, he gives the amulet to Saamiya who would visit India to find someone for certifying Veer's identity. After reaching there, Saamiya finds that Zaara (after taking divorce from Raza Sharazi, starring Manoj Bajpayee) lives in the house of Veer and runs a girls' school. Veer's father, influenced by Zaara, previously announced to establish the school in the village.

Zaara is a perfect example of sublimation¹ and altruism. This is because she dedicates her whole life to serve Veer's village of which she is now an integral part. A Muslim woman's living in a Hindu house without any lawful marriage is essentially what defines transgression. Saamiya's fruitful attempt to reunite Veer-Zaara makes her a part of the saga of love. As such, the film celebrates cross-border love and oneness of people of India-Pakistan. Yash Chopra was born at Lahore, Punjab (at present Pakistan) and later moved to India. This is love which undoubtedly compels the director to use the concept of cross-border love as the only steadfast ideology to lead life. He has shot the film both in India, Pakistan, and Switzerland. Probably a psychobiography of Chopra would unearth his feelings/motives behind making the megahit film. Same goes with Kabir Khan who was born to a North Indian Muslim father and South Indian Hindu mother.

"Love is a permeating force that, as Mike Featherstone observes, can become a powerful ideology which dominates a society" (Todd 2014: 1). The concept of love in *Main Hoon Na* incorporates public good and family formation/union. It shows Indian army Major Ram Prashad Sharma's (starring Shah Rukh Khan) steady attempt to defeat hatred and win love on both personal and political levels. Love is conceptualized as a driving force to achieve family wholeness and political agenda. The main plot regarding the implementation of "Project Milaap" (a bilateral negotiation and unity) parallels with the two subplots: Ram's duty to save General Bakshi's (starring Kabir Bedi) daughter Sanjana studying in a college and Ram's effort to build relationships with his step-mother Mrs. Sharma (starring Kirron Kher) and half-brother Lakshman nicknamed as Lucky (starring Zayed Khan) to fulfill his recently died father Brigadier Shekhar Sharma's (starring Naseeruddin Shah) last wish. Just as Bebe's ashes connect Zaara with Veer in *Veer-Zaara*, so are Shekhar Sharma's ashes to create mutually constituting relationships between the separated members of the Sharma family. Love as a guiding principle makes Ram achieve his personal along with political goals. Internal political conflicts and family divisions serve as some of the barriers to bilateral friendship and peace. Internal political challenges hinder a country to make friendships with neighboring countries. Ram's killing of an internal enemy, a rogue ex-para commando-turned-militant like Major Raghavan (starring Sunil Shetty), along with Raghavan's team for a peaceful implementation of "Project Milaap" is what defines transgressive love for the mother country and also for the bilateral India-Pakistan friendship for broader international concerns. Ram's love for his step-mother as well as longtime rival country Pakistan eventually triumphs over hatred. As such, the aforementioned subplots support the main plot to develop the film's central concern of love overcoming international barriers.

In *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, Bajrangi's traditional values of Brahmanical culture mark fundamental differences from that of the "other" particularly Shahida's Pakistani Muslim culture. Bajrangi's determination to accomplish the mission makes him go through various positive transformations as regards his personality formation as well as cultural transformation. His father used to call him a "zero"; but, he proves to be a national hero. In addition, an ideal synthesis of traditional and progressive culture makes him more humane. He ceases to be a true Brahmin, rather a true human being with the potentiality to transcend cultural norms. Like his fiancée, Rasika (starring Kareena Kapoor Khan), he exhibits practicality, modernity as well as transgressiveness to build cross-cultural relationships on the basis of love and humanity. Kagalwala (2015) maintains, a Hanuman devotee's religious ideas are compartmentalized. He becomes the savior Shahida's family

wishes for her (n.pag). However, Bajrangi's liberal religiosity as well as act of transgression leads him to risk his own life to get Shahida back to her motherland. An Indian man's filial love and cross-cultural relationship with the little girl reflects cross-national friendship with Pakistan. Hence, such relationship goes beyond particularism and conforms to universalism.

Bajrangi's heroic deed to rescue Munni (as he addresses Shahida before knowing her identity) from sex trafficking resounds Hanuman's Herculean deed to rescue Sita from Ravana. When Bajrangi performs the deed to rescue her from the brothel, a song in praise of the heroism of Bajrangbali is played. Lutgendorf (2007) says, Hanuman, being unable to convince Ravana to surrender Sita, returns to Rama and joins in the war against his former friend [Ravana] (p. 51). He rescues Sita after performing a number of heroic deeds. Bajrangi could have led a simple and happy life with Rasika. However, as part of his responsibility he makes up his mind to reunite the girl with her parents. He never lies to anyone and never uses any dishonest means to pass in his board exams. It takes 20 years for him to pass 10th grade of high school. On the eve of his border crossing, he has been accused of an Indian spy. This is why he has severely been beaten by the police and border guards. He has lied to police just for a greater humanitarian cause related to Munni. Is this not transgressive? His transgressive love appears to show a shimmer of hope for India-Pakistan reunion after 1947 partition. Shahida's temporary partition from her mother country, Pakistan, goes parallel with Bajrangi's partition from his mother country, India. It alludes to the political partition of British India in 1947 following the historical trauma. His successful mission to reunite Shahida with her parents as well as his own reunion with his own country also runs parallel. It marks the denouement of the film. Salman Khan gives his best performance in the film and plays the role of a messenger of peace.

Bilateral Relations and Peace Process

Bilateral negotiations play an incredibly important role for rebuilding India-Pakistan relations and for enhancing peace process. The study finds the promotion of bilateral relations in India-Pakistan relations dynamics through facilitating human rights activism, launching bus service, liberal outlook of the judges, lawyers, police, and border guards. Singh (2019) emphasizes, it is high time to humanize the "other" and move away from the stereotypical "enemy" perception which has dominated Indo-Pak relations (n.pag). Moving away from the negative perception is important to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between two sovereign states.

At the beginning of *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, audience is given several hints of travel restrictions between India and Pakistan. An ex-Army person like Rouf, Shahida's father, is not allowed to go to India. The film reveals lots of hints about the existing conflicts between the countries yet with a marked emphasis on stimulating a peace process. The film indicates bilateral initiatives through showing Samjhauta Express, sporting ties, cross-cultural relationships, friendship between Nawab and an Indian citizen Bajrangi as well as liberal and humanitarian outlooks of police and border guards. Samjhauta Express, a friendship train between Delhi-Lahore, brings the mother-daughter from Pakistan to India. Singh et al. (2015) say that some peace building measures adopted by the two nations are Samjhauta Express and Delhi-Lahore Bus Service, among others (p. 93). India-Pakistan sporting ties have been shown twice in the film. The film director's camera centers on Shahida while she was wearing an Indian jersey but clapping for the victory of Pakistan cricket team. Selecting the Indian jersey as her costume appears to be deliberate. When she smiles in victory of Pakistani team, her face painted with Indian tri-colored flag is unmistakable. A close-up (CU) shot is taken to draw the audience's attention to sporting ties which is an important link between the nations. As Showkat (2013) maintains, cricket has been an important element in the process of improving relations between India and Pakistan. He says that sports diplomacy may transcend cultural differences and bring people together. Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, also states that World Cup semifinal match between India-Pakistan in Mohali proves to be a catalyst for improving ties between the two countries and that it has brought the two nations closer (p. 9-10). Cricketing ties soften tensions between the neighboring countries.

Though the girl gets separated from her biological mother, she finds another mother Bajrangi (*ma ma/mama*). During the break of their train journey from Delhi to Lahore, Shahida's animal loving tendency makes her go down the train to rescue a lamb. She grows to be an animal lover very early in her childhood. They own lots of lambs at their native place at Sultanpur in Kashmir. Her attempt to rescue a lamb juxtaposes her watching the street performance of Bajrangi as a worshipping gesture to Bajrangbali. It foreshadows the mutually developing communal harmony based on the commonality of animal love/worship. Here, Nawab's role is instrumental as he shares a feeling of solidarity with Bajrangi.

South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) is formulated to promote interactions amongst journalists in South Asia, especially between journalists from India and Pakistan. SAFMA prioritizes peace-making between India and Pakistan (Singh, 2019, n.pag). Bilateral initiatives for enhancing peace process through media association are shown through

Nawab's free and purposeful media use. He makes several videos based on an epic journey of an Indian man towards Pakistan. He also shares these videos which go viral. It leads the two countries' news channels, newspapers, and other media to broadcast/publish the real story and eventually turns Bajrangi a brother, a national hero, and a messenger of bilateral peace. There have been several ill attempts on the part of Pakistan to frame Bajrangi as an Indian spy; but, finally Pakistan's love for an Indian brother succeeds in bridging the gaps. An Indian's earnest attempt to get Shahida back to her home country is properly reciprocated by Nawab (a character based on a real life journalist of the same name), another compassionate Pakistani senior police officer Hamid Khan (starring Rajesh Sharma), border guards of Narowal Check Post, and others. Hamid Khan defies the order to keep Bajrangi in Pakistan jail and urges the border guards to allow Bajrangi to cross the border with honor. Bajrangi's promise to Nawab to revisit Pakistan certainly conveys a message of hope.

Thousands of Pakistanis and Indians in response to Nawab's earnest appeal congregate at Narowal Check Post and break the border lock. With an implied permission of the border guards and with an urge for love, they break the lock and enter in each other's territories. This act is historically important as it is suggestive of people-to-people interaction namely Pakistan-India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIFPD). As Singh (2019) says, PIPFD was formed with a view to reducing hostility by increasing interactions between citizens of India-Pakistan. The PIPFD successfully stimulated dialogue and held conventions in both countries during times when communication between the governments was virtually non-existent. Their 1995 Lahore convention was a landmark moment as it came at a point when there had been no dialogue between the two governments for nearly two and half years (n.pag). Audience experiences catharsis during people-to-people interaction and Bajrangi's loving gesture to lift Shahida at the Check Post. Camera takes a brilliant crowd shot with loud, mellifluous, and repeated slogan of "Bajrangi Bhaijaan". The chorus effect suggests unity and resonance. Moreover, it releases tension and the audience burst into tears. When Bajrangi Bhaijaan lifts Shahida up, the action is paused. The action ceases to freeze for a certain purpose. This freeze-frame technique is used to form a still image of the special and significant moment as a milestone in India-Pakistan relations. The freeze-frame image of Bajrangi Bhaijaan with Shahida at the cross-border point provides an iconic lasting image. As such, though it marks the literal ending of the film, it gives an impression of a new beginning.

Pakistani politician (Raza Sharazi) and police's hostility towards Indian ex Air Force pilot (Veer) drive them to imprison the latter in a Lahore jail for a period of 22 years on a false charge of being an Indian spy in 2004 film

Veer-Zaara. But, it is not repeated in 2015 film, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. Hamid Khan ceases to harbor animosity in India-Pakistan relations and espouses cross-border friendship and brotherhood. In *Veer-Zaara*, Pakistan government's steps to review unsolved cases pertaining to Indian prisoners as a goodwill gesture to India, a lenient human rights advocate Saamiya Siddiqui and a merciful judge play significant roles. The judge personally talks with the defense and prosecution lawyers to consider Veer's case from humanitarian lens and so does the defense lawyer Saamiya in her humble appeal to prosecutor, Ahmed. Pakistan seems to put an end to stagnancy (figurative of Veer's silence during 22 years' imprisonment at Lahore) between India-Pakistan power dynamics. In *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, Shahida's muteness on a symbolic level indicates stillness in India-Pakistan relation; on the other hand, her articulateness gives an impression of interactivity in the states. It is suggestive of reinitiating dialogue between the nations. Restoration of the girl's voice is made possible through the earnest attempts of both Shahida's parents as well as Bajrangi. This is easily understandable that the cross-cultural relationships or bilateral relations have been accelerated through the continuous efforts from both the sides. It also bespeaks of one country's initiative taking following the positive response of another for rebuilding political ties.

The political issue of reconstructing political chains in the two nation's finds better expression in *Main Hoon Na*. Bilateral negotiations and peace process are carried out through the accomplishment of "Project Milaap" headed by General Bakshi. In this mission, Major Ram plays the most important role to kill an internal enemy named Raghavan. It can be interpreted from a symbolic narrative approach. At this point, Ram stands for Rama, Raghavan for Ravana, and motherland India for Sita. At last, Rama's love for Sita triumphs over the ploy of Ravana in *Ramayana* and enables Rama to restore peace. At this, Ram is helped by his brother, Lakshman. It is to be noted that the initiative "Project Milaap" is taken by India. Later, government of Pakistan gives their political dicta to do the same. The prisoner releases have taken place at the border on 15th August, the independence day of India. At this, the crowd shot accompanied by background music makes the audience experience catharsis. Like *Veer-Zaara*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, Farah Khan's film also celebrates the oneness of the people of sides of the border.

Ek Tha Tiger is an action romance with its message of peace in India-Pakistan relations. A good portion of the narrative shows the romance between Tiger and Zoya in different countries of the world. Tiger has been assigned on a mission to observe Professor Roshan Seth who is suspected to be an advisory nuclear scientist for Pakistan. Tiger's relation with Zoya is full of warmth, passion, and love. There are no limits to their love in the

midst of crises existing in the two nations. Their moments of mutual understanding and happiness moving between rivalries of two nations give a glimpse of hope and a possibility to be reunited. The film is soaked with a yearning for recovering the glorious past (unity of people before 1947 partition) so as to reconstruct a better future. Their rejection of nourishing rivalry marks a bold disobedience to the foreign policies of the states. Their screen chemistry shows resistance to hate-centered culture and promotes love-centered culture and peace. This is made explicit with a conference call at Istanbul. It is called Istanbul Peace Conference where diplomats of several countries meet to initiate dialogues and to increase mutual understanding among the nations with particular emphasis on India-Pakistan relations. The diplomats coming from different countries of the globe dance with one another and create a sense of harmony with the symphony of music. Going against Pakistani protocol, Zoya accepts the invitation of Tiger to dance with him in the Peace Conference. This act of protocol violation at a diplomatic occasion to unite with her lover gives an impression of the importance of love and peace in relations on both personal and political levels.

Conclusion

Love remains a key motif to establish a renewed sense of hope in India-Pakistan relation dynamics. It also serves as a significant mechanism of socialization and goes beyond the geopolitical boundaries through the cinematic portrayal of cross-cultural relationships. Growing tension about Shahida's separation from her mother in a foreign land is lessened by the entry of the mother figure, Bajrangi, in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. A Muslim Pakistani girl like Shahida's wearing a Hanuman pendant and articulating "Jai Shree Ram" as her first words have much to say about maintaining transcultural ties. It resonates in *Veer-Zaara* in which Veer puts *sindur* at the *sithi* of Zaara as part of a Hindu marriage ritual. Every protagonist in the selected films finds India-Pakistan animosity as their respective antagonists, yet love serves as a *dues ex machina* to get rid of the antagonism in the narratives. Indian Veer and Bajrangi are helped by a Pakistani humanitarian lawyer Saamiya Siddiqui and a journalist Chand Nawab respectively. Juxtaposition of the mentioned characters in the storyline is well established to transmit a message of love and bilateral peace. The selected blockbuster Bollywood films have a great impact on the cultural transformations of the South Asian people and popular culture. The films fantasize about a possibility to bridge the gaps in India-Pakistan relations and the films' commercial success manifests a renewed appeal of the wish fulfillment of such fantasy. The films' latent content of a possible bilateral friendship between India-Pakistan is reflected through the manifest content of interracial love crossing socio-cultural and geopolitical boundaries. Ending

of the films leads to a flash-forward or a kind of belief in a new beginning of bilateral relationships.

Endnote

Sublimation is a defense mechanism, operating unconsciously, by which instinctual drives, constantly unacceptable, are diverted into personally and socially acceptable channels. See (Werner et al., 1984, p. 128)

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