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FINDINGS

The present study explores how minorities are represented in Indian and Pakistani cinema and what these representations reveal about society, politics, and national identity. The findings suggest that cinema is much more than a source of entertainment; it is a powerful cultural institution that shapes how communities see themselves and others.

One of the most important findings is that the idea of a minority is not fixed. It changes according to historical, political, and social circumstances. The study shows that minority identities are often shaped by multiple factors such as religion, caste, class, gender, and ethnicity. As a result, the experiences of minorities cannot be understood through a single lens.

The research also finds that India and Pakistan, despite adopting different national ideologies after Partition, face similar challenges in dealing with diversity and inclusion. While India embraced secularism and Pakistan adopted an Islamic identity, minorities in both countries continue to face exclusion, discrimination, and insecurity. These realities are reflected in the films produced by both nations.

A significant finding of the study is that cinema does not simply reflect society; it actively participates in shaping public opinion. Through repeated images, narratives, and character types, films influence how audiences understand minority communities. In many cases, cinema has contributed to the process of "othering" by presenting minorities as outsiders, threats, or people who do not fully belong to the nation.

The study reveals that the representation of Muslims in Indian cinema has changed considerably over time. Earlier films often portrayed Muslims as integral members of society, represented through characters associated with culture, poetry, friendship, and coexistence. However, from the 1990s onwards, especially after the Babri Masjid demolition and the global discourse on terrorism following 9/11, Muslims increasingly began to appear as suspects, extremists, or

security threats. This shift reflects broader political and social transformations taking place within India.

Similarly, the study finds that Pakistani cinema has historically marginalized non-Muslim minorities, particularly Hindus. Earlier films often portrayed them through nationalist stereotypes or excluded them altogether. However, contemporary Pakistani cinema has shown signs of change. Filmmakers have increasingly begun to address issues of religious intolerance, social exclusion, and minority rights, creating space for more nuanced and empathetic portrayals.

Another key finding is the existence of two distinct cinematic trends in both countries. Mainstream commercial cinema often reinforces dominant political narratives and majoritarian viewpoints. In contrast, regional, independent, and parallel cinemas provide alternative perspectives by focusing on the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Films such as *Naseem*, *Maachis*, *Black Friday*, *Khamosh Pani*, *Cake*, and *Actor in Law* demonstrate cinema's potential to challenge stereotypes and humanize minority experiences.

The study further highlights the close relationship between cinema and state ideology. Political developments, nationalism, censorship, and religious discourses significantly influence how minorities are represented on screen. As political climates become more polarized, cinematic representations often reflect these divisions.

At the same time, the research identifies the growing importance of digital platforms and streaming services. These platforms have opened new avenues for filmmakers to tell stories that may not find space in mainstream cinema. As a result, minority voices are becoming more visible, and alternative narratives are reaching wider audiences than before.

Perhaps the most important finding is that the struggle over minority representation in cinema is ultimately a struggle over belonging. The way minorities are portrayed on screen reflects broader questions about citizenship, identity, justice, and national imagination. While mainstream films often reproduce existing prejudices, alternative and independent cinema demonstrates that film can also serve as a space for dialogue, empathy, and social change.

In conclusion, the study finds that the representation of minorities in Indian and Pakistani cinema mirrors larger tensions within both societies. Yet it also reveals the transformative potential of cinema. When filmmakers move beyond stereotypes and political agendas, cinema becomes a powerful medium through which marginalized voices can be heard, forgotten histories can be recovered, and more inclusive visions of society can be imagined.