

There are guided activities for language practice with scope for fun and stimulating interest in language use. Some of the activities under the 'Free Expression Activities' are challenging and could be used with learners at tertiary level. This section ends with some reflections of language teachers who are also creative writers.

Part III of the book discusses short stories. This section is denser with a discussion of the seven key elements of a short story with adequate examples for comprehension of the concept. The activities follow a specific structure: aims, preparation, procedure, follow-up, and variation. The process of writing a short story is complex. It demands not just creativity but also craft, and skill of language use. The activities given in this section are more challenging than in the poetry section and largely suitable for tertiary level, though scope for variations is given. This section ends with reflections of some learners who had worked out the activities.

To write a handbook on Creative Writing and incorporate a number of activities for practice involves considerable thinking and effort because it involves not just the language competence of the learners and teachers but also sense and sensibilities of both. The learners' reflections at the end of the book tell us the activities have been largely successful. It remains to be seen how fruitfully the book is used once it is in the hands of teachers.

*Jayashree Mohanraj is a creative writer and translator, he retired as Professor ELE (EFLU formerly CIEFL), after forty three years of teaching and training teachers in India, Africa and Arab countries.
jayashreemraj@gmail.com*

Mohammad Asim Siddiqui, *Muslim Identity in Hindi Cinema: Poetics and Politics of Genre and Representation*, Routledge, 2025, 186 pp., £155.00, ISBN 978-1-032-26847-7

Reviewed by Adiba Faiyaz

Hindi films have been a major part of Indian culture, and have been enjoyed for their themes, songs and visual spectacle. From the era to

Doordarshan to that of OTTs, the enthusiasm for Hindi films has not diminished. Mohammad Asim Siddiqui in this book has undertaken the huge task of mapping and analysing the representation of Muslims in Hindi cinema, and the study covers a period of almost 100 years from *Sinhagarh* (1923) to *Maidaan* (2024).

The history of Hindi cinema started with *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. The pre-independence era films focused on social reforms as in *Achhut Kanya* (1936). The post-independence era saw movies like *Mother India* (1957) imbibing national pride whereas the emergency and post emergency period saw the figure of the angry young man in movies like *Zanjeer* (1973) and *Deewar* (1975). Over the last few decades, the society has witnessed large scale changes like liberalisation and globalisation, and films as cultural texts have reflected socio-political situations and have influenced public discourse.

Siddiqui's book examines the representation of Muslim identity in different Hindi film genres by focusing on varied aspects of Muslim identity—historical, cultural, and linguistic—and their realisation in cinematic form. Chapter one, "From History to Circus" discusses Muslim representation in biopics like *Azhar* (2016) and *Shahid* (2010); in older period films such as *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Taj Mahal* (1953); and in new historical movies like *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), *Tanhaji* (2020); and in war films such as *Border* (1997), *LoC Kargil* (2003) and *Uri* (2019). Siddiqui highlights the differences between earlier and the more recent historical movies. While certain movies like *Jodha Akbar* (2008) and *Razia Sultan* (1983) depict more humane Muslim historical personages, movies in recent times like *Panipat* (2019) or *Padmaavat* (2018) make closer linkages between religion and violence. The chapter ends with an elaborate discussion of the 'circus' genre through YRF's production *Dhoom 3* (2013) which portrays conflicts like that of the East and West, and underplays the religious angle.

Chapter two critically analyses the diversity of Muslim representations in Hindi films compared to other religious and ethnic groups. It must be noted that of the four Indian states with significant Muslim population, namely, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam, the regional cinema from these regions largely represents Muslims as marginal or stereotypical characters, with the exception of Malayalam cinema. The author questions this lack of representation and selective erasure, and

feels that by comparison Hindi cinema with its global reach, gives a wider representation to Muslims. Siddiqui cites examples of films like *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977) that carry explicit messages of secularism, mutual respect and national integration, as well as the postmodernist Muslim representation in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011).

Chapter three centres on riots and violence in post-Independence India, and these were the subjects of various movies. Partition and communal riots are represented in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) and *Saleem Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989); both movies are disturbing and thought-provoking portrayals of violence. The chapter questions the concepts of nationalism, nationhood, citizenship and the subject position occupied by Muslims during these critical times.

The evolution from dakus to gangsters is traced in Chapter four titled “Nayak Nahin Khalnayak Hoon Main”. The natural progression of a daku into a gangster in an urban setting, necessarily carrying the Muslim identity, became extremely popular on the big screen. Inspired by the underworld, the gangsters became iconic and unforgettable figures in the movies. Siddiqui cites examples from movies like *Company* (2002), *Shootout at Wadala* (2013), *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai* (2010) and *Raees* (2017). The genre of gangster movies enjoyed wide popularity, the movies emphasised criminal activities and portrayed the goons as larger than life figures with immense power. These formula movies portrayed the gangster as soft-hearted criminal who would often find love, rebel against the state machinery and often be Robinhood for the common man. He is depicted as Aristotlean tragic hero with a tragic ending.

Chapter five titled “Courting Terror, Constructing the Terrorist” draws a linkage between partition violence, riots in the country, rise in communal tension, and films on terrorism. Focusing on the post-9/11 world, the chapter analyses movies like *New York* (2009) and *My Name is Khan* (2005) to show how the terrorist identity got associated with Muslims globally. Siddiqui explains the cause and effect behind this ‘courting’ and ‘constructing’ of a terrorist mindset. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma in “Metonymies of Fear: Islamophobia and the Making of Muslim Identity in Hindi Cinema” talks about Bollywood movies post-1990s to examine the category of ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims’ as in *Fanaa*, *Kurbaan* and *New York* by critiquing the category of metonymy of fear. He goes on to make a discourse analysis of select movies like *Shaurya*, *Sarfaroosh*

and *Charas* in the context of majoritarian Hindu setting in which the stories of Hindi cinema are situated.

Chapter six discusses the contribution of Begums, bais and the new Muslim women of Hindi films in carrying forward the cultural aesthetics. Their use of Urdu poetry adds to grace and charm in movies like *Pakeezah* (1972) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981). An important aspect of Siddiqui's book has been to consider cinema as a carrier of linguistic and cultural heritage, and to analyse the treatment of languages in films, especially the use of Urdu. Urdu has played an important role in Hindi films through dialogues, songs and qawwalis, and lent a distinctive poetic and lyrical quality to movies.

Siddiqui's book offers a close reading of films belonging to different genres such as social, action thriller, gangster and biopic. It interrogates concepts of social diversity, marginality, and their reflection in Hindi films. The book extensively discusses character archetypes within genres and explores how these are shaped by the political and cultural scenario. The author delves deep into the poetics and forms of Hindi films while talking about how language constructs identity. It also critically looks at the representation of Muslim women characters and the politics of interfaith romances.

Overall, the book is a comprehensive analysis of Muslim representation in Hindi cinema over the years. It is an extensive analysis of the political and cultural aspects of Hindi cinema, portrayal of Muslims in popular arts, and the linguistic debates about Hindustani in the subcontinent. It promises useful critical reading for scholars of Hindi cinema.

References

- Sharma, S.K. (2016). Metonymies of fear: Islamophobia and the making of Muslim identity in Hindi cinema. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 2(2), 233-255. (Original work published 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861716643874>

Adiba Faiyaz is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.
adiba.english@gmail.com