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VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF RELIGION: A ŽIŽEKIAN READING OF *DHARM*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to analyze an Indian film *Dharm* to bring forth the violence generated by the ongoing dharma discourse which distributes fixed essences to humans and makes them carry out certain functions. The violence is perceived active at two levels—Intra-community and inter-community levels. At the intra-community level, the violence done to women and low caste people within Hindu community is explored. The inter-community violence has been discussed in relation to the orthodox forces invoking the relation of Hindus and Muslims as the relation of the self and the other. It is found that projecting Muslims as the other generates not only inter-community violence but also supports intra-community violence by making people over-conscious and protective of the self. The film is also read as criticism of politicization of religion for its intensifying objective violence. The paper also explores the concept of love for its strength to generate ethics of the real. Love is shown perturbing the protagonist's heart and unsettling his perception of sharp polarizations asserted in the name of religion.

Key words: Dharm, Hindu-Muslim riots, objective violence, ethics of the real, Film studies.

The influence of religion on the humankind till the present times makes it a significant concept for a study. The concept of religion (dharma) becomes complex as it gets manifested in aspects which are inconsistent with one another. On one hand, there are people who take up charity work in the name of religion, showing amazing capacity for care, love and protection. Instead of spending time in material pursuits, they prefer to grow spiritually by helping the needy. On the other hand, humans kill humans in the name of religion, assert differences of identities, show intolerance towards those with different religious identity. Besides, religious riots too are not an uncommon thing. History is full of religious and racial riots. These two mutually contrastive aspects make it difficult to decipher the concept of religion.

Like many other eastern countries, the impact of religion on Indian art, culture and politics is immense. India - a country which has seen the horrible face of religious fanaticism during Partition - is still grappling with it. Constitutionally, India aspires to be a secular nation, but the growth of religious fundamentalism narrates a different story. Politicization of religion with the growth of organizations such as Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal, Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), Babbar Khalsa etc challenge the secular principles set in the earlier times. In the backdrop of this ongoing struggle

between secularism and religious fanaticism, the present paper seeks to study the cinematic text *Dharm*, which appeared on the screen in 2007, a time when India was trying to heal the wounds caused by Gujarat riots - one of the worst communal riots after Independence.

Dharma, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, means a "truth or law that affects the whole universe." In a general sense, dharma stands for a sense of 'duty', 'way of life' or 'divine law'. People who have faith in any religion have faith in the existence of God and the way of life suggested by God through certain religious scriptures. It is believed that the beings in this world are born with a certain essence which should not be violated. In this context, Steven J. Rosen observes, "Ultimately, dharma is the central organizing principle of the cosmos; it is that which supports and maintains all existence. Dharma is the inner reality that makes a thing what it is. It is the dharma of the bee to make honey, of the cow to give milk, of the sun to shine, and the river to flow. It is a thing's essence" (35). Dharma, in this sense, means to be and to act according to the prescribed essence.

This idea of inner reality or essence that is illustrated through bee, cow, sun and river does not spare human beings; they too are a part of the ongoing dharma discourse. Humans are categorized, divided and put to certain functions by the religious texts. These texts suggest to humans, though in vague terms, what it means to be a man or woman, to be a Hindu or Muslim, to be a brahmin or shudra, to be virtuous or sinful etc. A way of life structured on the idea of fixed essences gives birth to a certain kind of violence which is called symbolic violence by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek perceives this violent aspect as:

Language simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature. It dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity, treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it. When we name gold "gold", we violently extract a metal from its natural texture, investing into it our dreams of wealth, power, spiritual purity, and so on, which have nothing whatsoever to do with the immediate reality of gold. (61)

The perceptions constructed by language give birth to the social structures within which humans behave according to the suggested roles. Language, in other words, makes social customs, rituals and traditions meaningful for people. This understanding of language and violence by fixing the essences of things makes Žižek develop the idea of objective violence. Žižek writes, "It (subjective violence) is seen as a perturbation of the 'normal' peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this 'normal' state of things" (2).

The cinematic text *Dharm* read in the light of this concept of objective violence brings forth an understanding of intra-community and inter-community violence. Herein, the intra-community violence refers to the violence done by the Hindus to the members of their own community by structuring a cultural life that emerges from the holy texts, fixing the essence of shudra or woman. These holy texts like the *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Geeta*, *Manusmriti* etc. which are considered to be the words of God for the religiously inclined hold the authoritative position in the life of Hindus.

The impact and the religio-social power of these texts is such as does not permit any critical thinking to develop vis-à-vis fixed identities and the grand religious narratives. This paper seek to analyse the nature of this intra-community violence through a study of the film *Dharm*. Further, the film provides an opportunity to analyse inter-community violence also by focusing on the Hindu-Muslim relations. In fact, the cinematic emphasis is not on the riots that erupt between the two communities but the perceptions that give rise to riots. These perceptions, developed and preserved by various socio-political interests, comprise the content that the film tries to highlight in order to have a better understanding of the idea of violence.

The very beginning of the film introduces the central character of the film 'Pandit Chaturvedi' commonly called 'Panditji' who occupies a high rank amongst all the Brahmins and pundits in Benaras. He plays the prescribed role of a Brahmin and lives his life strictly according to the teachings of the Hindu scriptures. He wakes up early to do Surya Namaskar and other religious prayers, chants Sanskrit mantras, teaches students the scriptures of Hindu religion and performs religious activities like Shanti Path in others' homes. In the beginning of the film, he is shown to put forward his religious ideals when he tells another Pandit of Benaras - waking up late and chanting mantras loudly - that mantras should not be chanted to show

off since this chanting can only attract customers but not God. Pandit Chaturvedi's character, here, is shown to be ideal, well-disciplined and in contrast to the other money-minded Brahmins. Later, he is shown referring to his lack of interest in political organizations based on religious identities when he tells a member of a political organization that he does not wish to join any association. The central religious figure in this film is unlike the religious figures in recent Indian films such as *Oh My God!* (OMG) and *PK*. These films present religious figures who are rather naive or else they are simply presented as corrupt, money-minded and politically oriented. *Dharm*, in this sense, is different and does not allow the audience to criticize religion easily. Panditji is an ideal character who earns respect because of his knowledge, disciplined way of life, apolitical orientations and lack of greed.

Pandit Chaturvedi's wisdom and morality is deeply rooted in the Hindu scriptures. Whenever he gives advice to any person, he quotes lines from these texts. He looks at the world through these texts and his perceptions are shared by many. Herein, Hindu scriptures can be perceived as the spirits that rule the life of believers; in other words, these texts give birth to certain spirits that walk out of the texts and act in the material world. The words, metaphors, phrases and symbols of these texts become living forces and affect human life, for instance, the concept of caste developed by sage Manu and well protected by the brahminical discourse, makes Panditji act in a certain way in relation to the people of other castes. This results in Pandit Chaturvedi - son of the religious words and symbols - believe in the greatness and purity of his caste, notwithstanding his many admirable qualities.

The beginning of the film presenting Panditji as an ideal person who does not use his knowledge for political or material benefits, allows the viewers to look at other aspects too. A sweeper unknowingly touches Panditji and for this, he is beaten by the people working nearby. Panditji utters no word and does not try to protect that sweeper. He simply goes back to have a bath in the Ganga to purify himself. This short scene presents the behaviour of the people of different castes and makes the viewer think about the religious words and symbols generating this violence. The sense of purity/impurity and superiority/inferiority that makes this violence possible has its roots in the popular religious texts *Manusmriti* or *The Laws of Manu*.

According to Manu, humans are born out of different parts of God who are given different roles by Him. He asserts, "...the lustrous one made separate innate activities for those born of his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet" (*Doniger* 12). The reference is to the four Varnas or classes, namely, brahmins (priests) born of God's mouth, kshatriyas (warriors) of His arms, vaishyas (the trading class) of His thighs and shudras (servants) of His feet. The Varnas which became the basis of social structure of Hindu community, with time, gave way to the making of many sub-classes which are called jatis or castes by Hindus. The division of humans in the name of Varnas or castes, in later times, goes by the vision of hierarchical structure of these. The mouth is called the purest part as, "A man is said to be purer above the navel; therefore the Self-existent one said that his mouth was the purest part of him" (*Doniger* 13). Brahmins are, thus, seen as the purest and also the greatest ones since, "What living being is greater than him? For it is through his mouth that those (gods) eat their offerings, and the ancestors (eat) their offerings" (*Doniger* 13).

What makes this division much more damaging is the idea of innate or natural qualities of humans. This idea of Varnas has been presented by Hindu scriptures as if people were born with certain innate qualities and thus some fixed essences. Even in *Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta*, this idea of innate qualities has been highlighted as, "Farming, cow protection and the business are the natural work for the vaiśya, and for the śūdras there are labor and service to others" (730). The belief in lower and higher births is also indicated by Lord Krishna's words, "O son of Pr̥thā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth - women, vaiśyas [merchants] and śūdras [workers] - can attain the supreme destination" (*Prabhupada* 439).

In the scheme of caste division, shudras who are supposed to be born of the feet of God get the lowest rank in the society. They are supposed to be inferior and impure to the extent that even touching them has been rendered a forbidden act. A child born to shudras is supposed to be born with such innate qualities as are inferior to that of brahmin's or kshatriya's. His is the lower birth in Hindu society and for this reason "The Lord assigned only one activity to a servant: serving these (other) classes without resentment" (*Doniger*13). When the essence of each Varna or caste was fixed, Manu developed the idea of offence and punishment. It

was an offence for a shudra to touch the people of higher castes. Thus, it was advocated, "If a man of inferior caste tries to sit down on the same seat as a man of superior caste, he should be branded on the hip and banished, or have his buttocks cut off" (*Doniger* 281).

These words are extremely violent. Countless humans are thrown into a state of inferiority, shame and fear through these words. The authority of these words is supported by the belief deeply rooted in the minds of religious people that there is a supreme being, God. Since God is superior to humans as humans are superior to animals, so His words must be accepted as truth. The words in the holy scriptures are presented to people as the words of God so as to make those much more persuasive. Besides, there is also the belief pertaining to the concept of *karma* and the circle of life and death. The religious-minded carry this belief that there is another world where people will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds. The holy texts also describe heaven and hell in great detail. This concept is one of the most persuasive ones making people act in the desired way since it appeals to humans' fundamental drives: greed and fear. In *Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta*, Lord Krishna persuades Arjuna by appealing to the same belief, "O son of Kunti, either you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly planets, or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly kingdom. Therefore get up with determination and fight" (*Prabhupada* 110). In the present times, however, the idea of heaven has remained largely a part of the terrorists' psychological framework.

These beliefs give birth to symbolic violence; challenging these beliefs would mean showing disrespect to God's words, turning to evil and thus to be punished in hell. The word 'shudra' reduces a complex human being to a rudimentary state where he or she is nothing other than an impure and inferior being who deserves disrespect as *The Laws of Manu* mentions, "The name of a priest should have (a word for) auspiciousness, of a ruler strength, of a commoner property, and of a servant should breed disgust" (*Doniger* 20). Thus, in the film *Dharm*, merely touching Panditji made the sweeper beg for forgiveness. This means a fundamental social code that a shudra must not ever be touched was violated and the sweeper was beaten for his mistake amounting to a sin. When a British photographer asks about this violence, he is informed about the meanings of 'brahmin', 'shudra', 'shastras', 'purity', 'superiority' etc. - words which carry the seeds of hierarchy, hatred and violence.

These 'shastras' do not spare even women and generate a web of symbols and images to construct the meaning of being a woman. This web offers her a world so suffocating that she cannot connect with her being, realize her potentials and move towards self-actualization. Authoritative figures of patriarchal society are given the power to guard her, as is asserted in *The Laws of Manu*, "In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her son's. She should not have independence" (*Doniger* 115). The value given to these shastras by the believers is also indicated by the enshrining and the widest acceptance of the idea of a virtuous woman. The idea of virtuousness among women is generally related to their submissiveness, sexual purity, sacrificing and self-negating nature. A good woman is thus supposed to have this 'samskara' i.e. innate knowledge of social virtues. Praise is showered upon her when she acts according to the norms; punishment befalls her when she acts otherwise.

In *Dharm*, this is what happens to Manni, daughter of Vishnu Pratap Singh (a follower of Panditji). In one scene, she explains to Paul (a foreigner and a journalist learning Hinduism from Panditji) the relationship of wife and husband in these words, "Husband is God to a married woman" (*Dharm*). She is praised by Panditji for showing knowledge of the holy scriptures. Manni is at the receiving end of love and respect as long as she behaves according to the wishes of her father and Panditji. It is only her love for Paul that makes her challenge the restrictions imposed upon her and that is the time when she suffers. Paul is beaten mercilessly by her brother; Panditji does not let her touch his feet showing her thereby that she no longer deserves blessings; her parents start looking for a match for her within their own caste and class. All this forces her to elope with Paul into a world far from the care, protection and oppressions of her relatives. Thus, loss of the status of a virtuous woman is the price Manni pays for her freedom.

It is Panditji's wife who acts according to the path laid down by religion and culture. She remains at home, does the household work and acts according to the wishes of her husband. In one scene, where Panditji is on his way to conduct a 'Havan' at Vishnu Pratap Singh's house, asks his wife not to wait for him for lunch

since as he is observing a fast that day. In this context, he distinguishes a Brahmin's identity from an animal's by saying that it is the task of animals to take care of their bodies whereas Brahmins seek food for the soul. At the same time, he asks his wife to take lunch since according to the 'shastras', a woman does not need to fast. At a subtler level, asking his wife to take care of her body, reflects the mentality of equating women with animals. Throughout the film, Panditji's wife is shown to be an obedient woman who does not participate in any decision-making at home. Almost similar is the case of Manni's sister-in-law who is presented as a meek character lacking any voice of her own. Even Manni, who dares eloping with Paul, is shown to be dependent on her family after Paul's unfortunate death in the riots. In fact, reducing women to dependency is largely caused by denigrating women only in relation to men and family, having no individuality. The idea of wife in Hindu community gets its damaging restrictions by the myths of Sita and Sati in Hindu mythological stories which are popularized as the role models for Hindu wives, exhibiting virtues of absolute loyalty and obedience to their husbands. The sanctioned web of meanings constructed by words, symbols and images is established and propagated so as to control women and make them act in certain ways. This can be shown clearly through a comparison of one of the most popular images of god Lakshmi Narayan (fig 1) (retrieved from the internet) with one snapshot from the film *Dharm* (fig 2).



Fig 1 Myth



Fig 2 Reality generated by Myth

The nature of the intra-community symbolic violence, discussed above, has undergone a slight change in the present scenario. The status of women and the low caste community is comparatively better in the present times. Progress in the fields of education and social empowerment has made people question and challenge the traditional roles assigned to human beings on the basis of their caste and gender. And yet the battle still goes on. The status of women and the low caste people may not be the same as it was in the earlier eras; however, this does not mean that the force of the fictional world that is desired by the conservative forces has lessened considerably.

Dharm shows women and the low caste people within the Hindu community in a way that it appears to be a story of the older times but this representation can be read as the representation of the desire of the conservative forces. When people stand against the oppressive forces of the older times, these forces do not abandon the battlefield easily; rather, the latter use different strategies to win. One of the strategies to make people act to serve the fictional Self of their community is to make them fight against the Other. This is the point that *Dharm* highlights by representing the Hindu community with its violence to women and low caste people in the beginning but then moving the cinematic narration ahead by focusing on the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations.

The orthodox forces invoke the relation of Hindus and Muslims as the relation of the Self and the Other and, at a subtle, subliminal level, make people conscious about their identity and its roots. This consciousness is the product of the fictional creation of the Other that is represented as different, inferior and dangerous. This fictionalization is, at the same time, the strengthening of the communal Self. The consciousness that can interrogate and dismantle the violent intra-community symbolic world gets pushed onto a different path when it is forced to perceive things in the context of the communal struggle. Raising fear of the Other makes people defensive, further giving up any intentions of dismantling the Self for letting a new Self emerge. This fictionalization of the communal Self and the Other generates symbolic violence at the inter-community level.

Although there are many religious communities in India yet the relations of Hindus and Muslims have remained controversial. Besides, there is a long history of riots between these communities. Indeed, riots erupt from the consciousness that has been engineered by different communities to show how one community is superior and more civilized and rooted in comparison with the other. This is done by spreading the stereotypical image of the Other through cultural stories, symbol-systems, myths and legends of yore. These stories often carry the seeds of hatred that generate violence. Also, these stories are violent since they act as the fictional support to the manipulated reality.

Politicization of religion has intensified the spirit of symbolic violence in India. Sangh Parivaar, on one hand, and political outfits such as Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), on the other, keep asserting sharp differences among Hindus and Muslims. Recently, the demand to ban 'beef eating' in India is one of the strategies to make people conscious about their communal identities. Hindu religious texts describe cow as a sacred animal which must be worshipped by Hindus as mother, while Muslims have no such belief and they treat cow like any other animal which can be slaughtered and whose flesh can be eaten. Raising the issue of 'beef eating' is akin to making Hindus perceive Muslims as the eaters/consumers of the mother cow and thus reinforcing the perception of the other. Similar is the role played by the issue of 'Ram Mandir' which Hindu fundamentalists raise now and then to gain the sympathies of Hindus while at the same time endorsing the Muslims as the antithetical other.

The process of othering Muslims also uses the belief that Muslims are the outsiders. The Hindu nationalists have consistently spread this belief that India belongs to Hindus, as asserted recently by the Assam Governor P.B. Acharya, "Hindustan is for Hindus. There is nothing wrong with that. Hindus from different countries can stay here. They cannot be outsiders" (*HindustanTI*). Even the Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, in a recent Parliamentary address could not conceal this perception of Muslims as outsiders when he used the expression that "the colonial slavery of 1200 years has weakened India" (*Varshney*). The time period mentioned not only includes the British but Muslims also, thereby indicating that the British and the Muslims should be clubbed outsiders. From here, it is easy to deduce that the insiders were always only Hindus.

The obverse side of the above mentioned logic, that Muslims were once the rulers of this land, makes Muslims perceive Hindus as inferior and cowardly. This is what the speeches of Owaisi brothers - leaders of MIM - reflect. One controversial speech by Akbaruddin Owaisi goes to the extent of saying, "Muslims would need just 15 minutes without the police to show 100 crore Hindus who is more powerful" (*Akbaruddin in trouble TI*). Making Muslims up as brave and powerful in contrast to cowardly and weak Hindus is fairly clear from this statement. The political speeches of the leaders of MIM also endorse the perception repeatedly that Hindu beliefs are irrational since "Hindus have so many gods and goddesses, and every eight days, there are new gods coming up" (*Akbaruddin in trouble TI*).

At present, while the 'war against terror' rages on, hatred for Muslims is also spread relentlessly through the popular stereotypy of relating Muslim identity with terrorism. Indian cinema has dealt with this issue in many films such as *My Name is Khan*, *Wednesday*, *Black Friday*, *Khuda ke liye* and *Sarfarosh*. Since there is the powerful belief that Muslims are outsiders, consequently, doubts over their patriotic character also prevail. In a film such as *Chak de India*, the protagonist is shown to be the victim of this belief, wherein, the loss of a hockey match due to a fault by the protagonist makes people question his fidelity to India simply because he is a Muslim.

These beliefs also become visible through the words of political leaders who proclaim that the madrasas are "making the students 'terrorists' and 'jihadis'" (*BJP UnnaoVerma IE*). The twin beliefs that Muslims are outsiders and that they encourage terrorism make Hindu fundamentalists churn out appeals to Hindus to increase their population as Mr. Parveen Togadia of VHP recently claimed, "Now, we will not let population of Hindus decrease to 42 per cent from 82 per cent. Hindus need to increase their population to ensure their safety..." (*Now, Safforn Verma IE*). Almost similar is the belief behind the raising of issues of 'love jihad' and 'ghar wapsi' which are centred on increasing Hindu population in India versus the rising numbers of Muslims.

This context of mutual hatred has not been resolved till date. In fact, Partition went on to show, once more, horrible facet of this hatred and the number of riots after that dark epoch has not brought down the anxieties of secular forces of India. This rise of religious fundamentalism in India makes films like *OMG*, *PK* and *Dharm* appear on cinema screens. The criticism of religion in the first two films is based on logic and reasoning while in *Dharm* the concept of love has been used to challenge religious fundamentalism. The protagonists in *OMG* and *PK* are not deeply imbued with the spirit of religion while in *Dharm* the protagonist is shown to be rooted deeply in the religious soil. The story of Panditji is not simply the story that questions religion from an outsider's perspective, rather it is the story of a man who feels the agony of being a believer and then goads his consciousness to see the fault-lines within his worldview. Thus, Panditji is the one who comes out of the web of meanings woven in the name of religion. This makes him more ethical in comparison with the protagonists of *OMG* and *PK*. This is so because Panditji feels the pain of being a carrier of the perception which is violent by nature.

In *Dharm*, Panditji's struggle with his own self has been depicted in the scene when he comes to know that their adopted son 'Kartikeya' is Muslim by birth. The web of meanings that has always been there making the members of Hindu community perceive Muslims as Other, cruel, terrorists or even untouchables plays its powerful role here. Panditji decides to purify his soul through various ways because he sees himself polluted by being with a Muslim boy. This is what the others also feel in the film. The 'sangathan' of Hindus, which was joined by the son of Vishnu Pratap Singh, decides to elect another head priest of the temple in place of Pandit Chaturvedi. Panditji, for them, turned 'bhrasht' who surely does not deserve to be the head priest. On the other hand, Panditji also looks upon his being in close proximity with a Muslim boy as a sin. His house is sought to be purified through mantras and 'Gangajal'. Panditji takes a vow of silence, for an uncertain time, so as to purify himself. When he does not succeed in letting the memories of Kartikeya vanish from his mind, he decides to take up the 'Chandrayan Vrta' - one of the hardest fasts mentioned in the 'shastras'. The reason he gives for undertaking 'Chandrayan Vrta' is that he "is unable to purify his mind and ideas" (*Dharm*). The reference here is to the presence of Kartikeya who he feels all around him even when he meditates and worships.

On one hand, the code proclaiming essential differences between Hindus and Muslims is most active in the mind of Panditji; on the other hand, the power of love perturbs his heart so much that he cannot settle down calmly in a world of sharp polarisations asserted in the name of religion. Love hits the walls of the internalized perception of identities. In fact, this chasm problematizes Panditji's worldview continuously till it leads him to the deconstruction of the textual world that has ruled his life. He, eventually, pays attention to the voice within the religious texts that is asserting the futility of differences. He hears the voice of the saint who talked about the oneness of the humans in the very beginning of the film. One couplet from Rig Veda "san gacchadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manamsi janatam/deva bhagam yatha purve sanjanana upasate//" (*Dharm*) started ringing in his mind which means, "Assemble, Speak together: let your minds be all of one accord, as ancient Gods unanimous sit down to their appointed share" (*Griffith 506*). Towards the end, the film showcases the unleashing of these repressed voices which make Panditji define dharma in terms of 'unity', 'humanity' and 'goodwill'.

The ending of the film, thus, presents Panditji as an ethical person who frees himself from the symbolic reality of his being in which he used to perceive himself and others through a narrow, parochial outlook. He used to go by the categories fixed for humans in the name of caste, religion and community. In the last scene, he takes Kartikeya (now Mustafa) in his arms and whisks him away from the violent mob through the burnt houses and streets which symbolically represent the burnt perceptions of Panditji which were intrinsically loaded with symbolic violence. Although the ending of the film shows that Panditji can see through the violence inherent in his outlook and boldly dissociates himself from the symbolic reality in which Muslims are seen as the Other, yet this distancing does not mark freedom from the authority of the religious texts. These texts still act as the Big Other that still holds power but with a new face. Panditji's decision is based on the repressed voices within the religious texts but these texts still exist around him as an authority. On the other hand, it works the same way for those people for whom Panditji, at one time, played the role of

superego, symbolically speaking. They are not shown to come out of the authoritative control of the superego figure. Panditji's angry look, at the end, stops the violent mob as if they were bound to follow his command. The film, thus, ends with a paradoxical scene wherein the protagonist performs an ethical action by redefining dharma but, at the same time, the religious texts maintain their authoritative position. The protagonist could not take the daring step, once taken by Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar, of burning the holy texts up.

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