

# What Makes Us Real?: A Comparative Study of Selected Bollywood Biopics

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**Abstract:** Biopic is a century-old genre and the very first Indian film was biopic named King Harishchandra (1913). While analysing the Indian biopics, one possibly can not overlook the following questions: to what extent it is important to adhere to the reality in order to call a film biopic and whether the representation of the selective reality forfeits the eligibility of calling a film to be a biopic. My paper, by analysing three Indian biopics of the recent time and by analysing their cinematic language, would try to show that unless a film impartially brings out both the negative and the positive sides of a person's life, it cannot be called a biopic and if the purpose of a biopic is mere aggrandisement of the central character, it becomes a work of fiction without doing justice to the historicity of the genre. The films that we would examine in this context are M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story (2016) Haseena Parkar (2017) and Manto (2018). The reason for selecting these particular films is that each of these films brings out a specific side of the genre. M.S. Dhoni is based on the cricket star of the same name and who has been living while the film was being made. Haseena Parkar is based on the real-life character of Haseena Parkar a well-known criminal who had over eighty criminal cases to her name. Though she died in 2014, the film was made under the scrutiny of the retinue of Haseena Parkar. Manto is based on the life of Saadat Hasan Manto the playwright and author who had been famous for speaking up against the social issues that nobody else dared to speak about.

**Keywords:** Indian biopics, selective reality, authentic representation, propaganda film, hero-making, glorification, controversy, alive central figure, mechanism of biopics.

## Article

While biographies have a long history, biopics are comparatively new and with their immediacy of approach, they have been quite popular since their inception. Keeping the key ingredients of biography intact, biopic adds a new dimension of the audio-visual element to it. When we read a biography, we often visualise the person in question in our mind and most of the time—if we have seen that person in reality (even in pictures)—we tend to visualise the person in his or her exact form. However, when we watch a biopic, we are presented with an actor who is playing the role of the central character of the biopic. On that very instant, our mind starts comparing the image in front of our eyes and the image constructed by our mind. In other words, we start looking for the authenticity of the projection based on our individual notion of reality. Timothy Corrigan writes, '[C]inematic adaptation gestures towards the real as the zone of "bare life" in the realm of possibility. Conventional adaptations of the real events and people usually mould and defer this zone in order to redirect value to the illusion of representational authenticity, coherent identities and subjectivities, and the closure of memory so that the ethical challenge of the real is foreclosed as the self-evident.' [Corrigan: 2020:16]

The spectrum of what qualifies as a biographical film is rather wide, leaving room for creative expressions of true life. The biopics made around the world have one fundamental question to face and that is whether it is possible to capture the essence of a life within a film. Belen Vidal, in the introductory note to the book *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, compares different views of the makers of Hollywood's most celebrated biopics. While some of them have preferred calling their works as 'biopic', others have wanted to call them as a 'portrait' or a 'love story'. Vidal notes, 'An ongoing history of profitable but often undistinguished movies suggests that the genre sits at the rearguard of aesthetic innovation...the perception of the biopic as tepid and heavy-handed, perennially tied to the "cradle-to-grave" formula... seems out of step with the incessant flow of productions about historical lives around the world and with the wide spectrum of variation found within the flexible limits of the "based-on-a-true-story" principle.' [Vidal: 2013 :3] Unlike the other film genres which deal with the historical characters or that fictionalise a real character, the biopic has a unique feature of its own and that is to bring the life of an individual who happens to be a real person, in the forefront. Therefore it is no surprise that a biopic might traverse the territory of history and by doing so, complicate the historiography. While the main focus of a biopic is to glorify its central character, in that process the historical accuracy might get marred. Characters presented as role-models are often aggrandised in an improbable manner so much so that the film might end up being some personal propaganda. George F. Custen argues that Hollywood biopics have been secretly fanning to the myth of American aspiration. Custen further notes that these biopics, while projecting the protagonist as the role-model, present a glorified picture of the steadily-moving-upward graph of the protagonist's life in almost an unrealistic manner.

The genre ultimately reinforces the economic logic of the film industry where the stars, directors and the producers become instrumental in creating the idealised version of the great-man narrative. [Custen: 1992:32] What Custen says about Hollywood films can be repeated for the contemporary Indian biopics as well. The mechanism operating behind the making of a biopic, irrespective of its source of origin, mostly remains to be the same—the process of glorification of certain ideas.

Indian cinema had launched itself holding the hand of a biopic, *King Harishchandra* (1913) which is also considered to be the first full-length Indian feature film. In spite of its connection with the mythology, *King Harishchandra* had been primarily a biopic because of its dealing with the life of a particular man. Indian biopic, like many other biopics around the world, has been the part of a genre that overlaps with many other quasi-historical genres. Rachel Dwyer writes, “The genre to which the Indian biopic is most closely aligned is, as in other national biopics, the historical, one of the earliest genres in Indian cinema, dating back to the silent period with films...The historical genre is particularly skilled in depicting a nation in crisis, so the films are about the melodrama of the nation itself, not just about their heroes and heroines.” [Dwyer:2015: 220] Throughout its journey over a century, the biopic has been one of the favourite genres of Indian Cinema that has explored its horizon by incorporating the lives of the mythological characters, freedom fighters, popular film and sports stars and even the lives of the well-known criminals. Some of these biopics were made after the death of the person, but many were made while the concerned persons were still alive. This is where the authenticity of a biopic is questioned as making a biopic on a living person incorporates the liability of presenting the selective reality.

While analysing the Indian biopics, one possibly can not overlook the following questions: to what extent it is important to adhere to the reality in order to call a film biopic and whether the representation of the selective reality forfeits the eligibility of calling a film to be a biopic. My paper, by analysing three Indian biopics of the recent time and by analysing their cinematic language, would try to show that unless a film impartially brings out both the negative and the positive sides of a person’s life, it cannot be called a biopic and if the purpose of a biopic is mere aggrandisement of the central character, it becomes a work of fiction without doing justice to the historicity of the genre.

The films that we would examine in this context are *M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story* (2016) *Haseena Parkar* (2017) and *Manto* (2018). The reason for selecting these particular films is that each of these films brings out a specific side of the genre. *M.S. Dhoni* is based on the cricket star of the same name and who has been living while the film was being made. *Haseena Parkar* is based on the real-life character of Haseena Parkar a well-known criminal who had over eighty criminal cases to her name. Though she died in 2014, the film was made under the scrutiny of the retinue of Haseena Parkar. *Manto* is based on the life of Saadat Hasan Manto the playwright and author who had been famous for speaking up against the social issues that nobody else dared to speak about. The film is not only made years after Manto’s death but also is the most bias-free film out of the three chosen films. *Manto* has been a critically acclaimed film with a moderate box office collection; *Haseena Parkar* was declared to be a box office disaster, and *M. S. Dhoni* has been an excellent success with ₹1.16 billion gross in India. [boxofficeindia.com] However, irrespective of its huge box office success and the film being deemed as the fifth of the highest-grossing films of 2016, [Koimoi: 2016:web] *M.S. Dhoni* garnered negative reviews as a biopic from the critics. Rachel Saltz in her review in The New York Times writes, “To warm to the biopic “*M. S. Dhoni: The Untold Story*,” you probably do have to be a cricket fan and an indulgent one at that... (the film) is not hagiographic or overly obvious. Instead, it’s something of a quiet muddle, with too many squandered or dramatically blurry scenes.” [Saltz:2016:NYTimes]

*M.S Dhoni* has been made to be a Bollywood ‘masala’ film with their indispensable ingredients such as songs, emotional overdose and situational drama and to fit into the bill, many incidents of Dhoni’s life have been obliterated or modified according to the need. Namrata Joshi in her article on the film writes how important issues related to Dhoni such as 2013 Indian Premier League spot-fixing and betting case, Dhoni’s stances regarding the Twenty20 that ultimately led to the Supreme Court asking N. Srinivasan to step aside as BCCI President, his purchase of 15% stake in the player management firm Rhiti Sports, the reason for Dhoni’s being named the vice-president of India Cements are omitted from the film. Joshi further states, ‘Of course such sanitisation makes the film lose out on interesting layers and complexity.’ [Joshi:2016a: Hindu] But what makes the film interesting in terms of studying the mechanism of Bollywood biopics is that it was made under the supervision of the subject of the film himself. It is evident that Dhoni himself played a significant role in controlling what goes onscreen for the film. The producer of the film, Arun Pandey was the founder of the company that signed Dhoni for a Rs 200 crore three-year deal and later it was reported that Dhoni had bought 30,000 shares in the same company. [HindustanTimes:2017] Pandey and Sakshi Dhoni nee Rawat, Dhoni’s wife, were responsible for the promotion of the film as well. Sushant Singh Rajput who played the character of Dhoni had spent significant time with Dhoni and he had to undergo the rigorous training for ten months under the watchful eyes of former Indian wicket-keeper Kiran More to bring authenticity in his performance. Even Sakshi Dhoni had personally designed a dress identical to her own wedding dress for Kiara Advani (who has played the character of Sakshi Dhoni) for the onscreen wedding scene. [IndianExpress:

2016] Maintaining such minute details could have only been possible because the people who incorporated them into the film are the same people whose lives are being presented on the screen. Thus, being heavily influenced by the central character, the film, *M.S Dhoni*, points towards another problem: whether a biopic can be called authentic if it is made as per the mandates of authenticity stipulated by the protagonist him/herself. The process of making a biopic, while the central character is still alive, has both its pros and cons, as S/he can be instrumental in bringing out the authentic flavour in the film, s/he can also manipulate the data to the extent of twisting them up into a complete lie. In other words, in such situations, it becomes rather an autobiopic made by some third party director who has limited to zero control over the film.

Unlike a work of fiction, a biopic (like biographies) has another significant hurdle to overcome and that is the representation of the other real characters associated with the protagonist. It is a very sensitive ground as any negative representation might lead to hurting the sentiments and the interests of the involved parties. This problem gets further intensified in films like *M.S. Dhoni* where the majority of the characters are not only alive but also are renowned people like famous Indian cricketers, influential political figures and the institutes like BCCI. This is the sphere where a biopic might traverse a dangerous territory. Mahendra Singh Dhoni has been involved in many controversial issues that have greater sociopolitical consequences. An article by Hindustan Times Correspondent mentions, 'In fact, its legal team features ahead of the supporting cast in the end credits. Obviously, the film lacked the objectivity of an independent storyteller...And the Dhoni biopic played it with soft hands.' [HindustanTimes: 2017]

Though Mahendra Singh Dhoni, in an interview during the promotion of the film, had said, 'One thing I told Pandey (director Neeraj) is that this movie should not be to glorify me. It's about the journey of a professional sportsperson and that's what it should depict', the only objective of the film seems to be the very act that the central character had outrightly denied—the act of glorification. [Hindu: 2016b] Comparing the film with another contemporary biopic, *Azhar*, Kunal Singh writes in his article, 'Even if the two careers will be remembered differently, the two movies shared one important characteristic: both are puff jobs. Like Hashmi in *Azhar*, Rajput in *The Untold Story* could not put a foot wrong.' [Singh: LiveMint: 2016] The agenda of any biopic often boils down to the act of glorification and *M.S. Dhoni* is no exception. But if the sole purpose of a biopic is to put the protagonist on a high pedestal where s/he is placed beyond the scope of all human follies and becomes almost deified, the film ceases to be a biopic. Then it becomes an instrument of propaganda or, as it has been in the case of *M.S. Dhoni*, it becomes a well-planned scheme of damage control. The positive aspects which are sometimes exaggerated and deliberately coloured up, remain to be the only aspects addressed in the film and it completely shuns the possibility of fallibility—the quality that makes any character real. This can also be said for the other two contemporary biopics—*Azhar* (2016) and *Sanju* (2018). *Azhar* is based on the life of the former Indian cricket team captain Mohammad Azharuddin who had been involved in various controversies including the charges for match-fixing. And *Sanju* is based on the life of the film star Sanjay Dutt who had been associated with various crimes including the 1993 bombing in Bombay (now Mumbai). Both the films play on the same principle as that of the film *M.S Dhoni* and the principle is of hero-making. The central characters in each of the films have been portrayed to be the spotless heroes at their best and the victims of the circumstances at their worst. *Azhar* and *Sanju* could not possibly deny the charges against them which were abjectly visible all over the media, but *M.S. Dhoni* conveniently eschewed those uncomfortable realities. The culmination of such would be the scene where Dhoni is seen dummy talking on his phone to some senior official of the all-powerful Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). During this fake conversation, Dhoni says, 'I have no interest in captaincy because I can't be a "puppet".' The question of being a puppet in the hand of BCCI has been an important conundrum in Dhoni's career and the film seems to offer a brash endeavour of rectification of the truth. Kunal Singh writes, 'To be fair, it is not an easy task for an active cricketer to take on the might of BCCI. But on 28 May 2013...It was apparent that Dhoni was under instructions not to entertain controversial questions. Dhoni revelled in carrying out the instructions.' [Singh: LiveMint: 2016] This could well be perceived as the reason behind the necessity of incorporating the otherwise-insignificant scene into the film. Here we arrive at an important question as to whether to read a biopic from the point of view of historiography or to read it just as a piece of fiction. If we are required to find out the resemblances between the onscreen and the offscreen realities, these biopics would possibly not live up to the standard. And if we are to view it as a fictional work of art their value as biopics cannot possibly sustain. If damage-control becomes the only focus of a biopic, it departs from reality. Such is more apparent in the next film in question.

*Haseena Parkar*, unlike *M.S. Dhoni*, is not a film on a national hero. Rather it is an anti-hero film that highlights the life of a deemed criminal. If we reassess the proposition made so far that the key purpose of the recent Bollywood biopics like *M.S. Dhoni*, *Azhar* or *Sanju* has been damage-control and glorification of the central character, *Haseena Parkar* becomes an interesting case study: how the process of glorification and damage-control is done for a character who has outrightly been deemed as a criminal. The NDTV review by Saibal Chatterjee calls the film, 'A leaden-footed gangster flick that barely skims the surface of the done-to-death Mumbai underworld and the story of its notorious Kaskar clan, *Haseena Parkar* is

bereft of frisson and focus. [Chatterjee: NDTV:2019] Glorification of a Mafia Don is not something new that Haseena Parkar does on the silver screen. From Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Trilogy*(1972-90) to Martin Scorsese and Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah* (2008), it is all about the portrayal of the grandeur of the dark underworld. *Haseena Parkar* aspired to be one of such films that reveal the underworld in its true colour. But while a film like *Gomorrah* which is closely based on the true stories of the modern-day crime family in Italy aptly brings out the reality of the day to day rigmarole of the mafia life (that includes the turf war, the organised crime in Naples and the corruption at all levels of society), *Haseena Parkar* fails to become either a great mob movie or a great biopic. Hussain Zaidi, reporting the underworld, has made several revelations about Haseena Parkar in his book *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*. And from Zaidi's work, one learns a great deal on Haseena. [Zaidi: 2011] Dawood's sister, Haseena was named to be the Godmother of Nagpada, south Mumbai. She was a very influential female figure in the essentially male-dominated world of crime and the film seems to highlight her because of the sole fact that Haseena Parkar was a woman. The story moves back and forth from the sessions court magistrate's hearing to piece together the life of one of the most powerful lady dons that the Mumbai underworld has ever witnessed. It has been an obvious attempt by the film to project Haseena as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and a lady don at the same breath and that has been the supposed Unique Selling Proposition of the film. However, it is altogether a matter of debate whether the projection of Haseena has been closely adhering to the life of the real Haseena Parkar.

In an interview with NDTV the director of the film, Apoorva Lakhia told that originally he was given the offer to make a film on Dawood Ibrahim but after meeting his sister, Haseena, he decided to work on her. It has been obvious from the interview that the film was commissioned by the people belonging to the Dawood clan and Lakhia was given the offer to meet the Dawood family in order to decide upon his project. [Youtube: 2018] With this detail in hand, there goes many a fact under the water regarding the process of making the film. But it would not be hard to assume that making a biopic under the scrutinising eyes of the underworld cannot possibly leave any scope for presenting the unpleasant realities about the central figure of the film. Though the film was finally released in 2017 after Haseena's death (2014), it could never be completely free from the underworld tutelage. Another contemporary biopic can be placed as the example of the similar infringed portrayal of the reality and that is *PM Narendra Modi* (2019). The film has been made at the prime time of the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi's career when he was elected as the prime minister of the country for the second time. Like *Haseena Parkar*, *PM Narendra Modi* has been an exclusionist in its portrayal of the reality. The representation of the unpleasant realities, in both the cases, could have incurred serious consequences, while for the latter there could have been issues related to clearance at the censor board, for the former it could have even meant a threat to life.

With the title cards coming up at the beginning of the film, the vignettes of the destruction associated to Haseena's name—such as dismantled cars and mangled corpse of the Bombay riot of 1993, a demolished hospital during the shootout at JJ Hospital in 1992—were projected on the screen. While reporting the court case, the newspaper reporter says, 'After the release of the warrant against Haseena Parkar, she has vanished into the thin air. Should we consider it to be the strength of Haseena Parkar or the weakness of the government?' This line surmises the problematics of the film narrative: whether it is a story of Haseena's life or of the faulty Indian judicial system that cannot discriminate between the right and the wrong. As the public prosecutor keeps charting the crimes that Haseena and her gangster brother Dawood Ibrahim have committed, flashbacks in Haseena's memory continue negating each one of them by assigning the noble qualities like valour and justice to them. Chatterjee further says, 'The film is hard-pressed to assert that she might have been as much a perpetrator - she thought nothing of bandying about her fearsome brother's name to intimidate people - as a victim who paid the price for her family's deserved infamy. [Chatterjee:NTDV:2019]

The film version of Haseena shows her to be a sensitive and a shy person who has been more of a victim than of an active agent in the committed crimes. It seems a deliberate attempt to identify Haseena as a girl-next-door. Young Haseena shivers in fear when her righteous father whips her miscreant brother, Dawood, with his service belt; she fears her husband and obsessively cleans the floor to avert her husband's wrath and she beats up her son, Danish, in the same way as her father has done before, when she comes to know of his involvement in the crime. Haseena is also cast in the mould of Bollywood's idealised prototype of womanhood. Like every second Bollywood heroine, she romances with her husband and plays with her first-born in slow motion while a romantic number continues playing in the background. Haseena is vulnerable in her helpless clinging on to her dying husband and her son's lifeless body; she is the messiah, the Robin Hood of Nagpada, in her selfless support for the poor; she is an unfailing patriot in her feelings of dejection at the news of her brother's involvement in Mumbai blast—the city she loves dearly; she speaks lofty words that are well crafted (sometimes almost poetic) to justify her stance.

But in all of these, the Haseena we see in Zaidi's work—the unforgiving and menacing lady don— is missing. The power that real Haseena Parkar had exacted upon Nagpada and Mumbai at large can nowhere be found in the film. Except for her

occasional mention of her brother to extract fear (that too only under dire circumstances) she has hardly been shown involved in any malpractice. Interestingly, the same year witnessed another gangster biopic, *Daddy* (2017) based on the life of Arun Gawli who was responsible for the death of Haseena's husband. As *Haseena Parkar* has been a targeted attempt to bring out the humane side of the lady don and her brother, *Daddy* has been almost a counter-narrative of making a good-Samaritan out of Arun Gawli by proving the D-Company to be the evil one. In both the cases, foci of the films have been only to bring out the gallantry and glory of the central characters by leaving out the unpleasant details. Again we are facing the same challenge that we have faced while reading *M.S. Dhoni: If Haseena Parkar* is to be read as a biopic of a lady don, such absence of demonstration of dark power is unjustifiable and if it is to be read as an apology for whatever crime has been attributed to the D-Company, it becomes more of a propaganda film than of a successful biopic.

As I have argued before, in the context of the recent Indian biopics, the element of essentiality gets obscured. The biopics that so far we have discussed have been films made under the surveillance of the central characters and my paper has tried to show how futile the endeavour of authentic representation has been in such situations. But the next biopic in question is about a dead poet and it presents complexities and controversies spanning over the nations and times. *Manto* (2018) is a film on Saadat Hasan Manto whom both India and Pakistan demand to be their own because though he was born in undivided British India, Manto finally settled in the newly formed Pakistan. Manto's writings have been controversial in his lifetime and so is his biopic after his death. This element of controversy becomes, as my paper would argue, the source of authenticity for a biopic like *Manto*. The presence of controversy signifies the presence of the multiplicity of voices that negates the didactic authoritarianism of the singular truth. There had been a Pakistani film on Manto in 2015 which has often been considered the reference point of comparison with the Indian version of 2018.

In Afkar-i-Taza ThinkFest in Lahore (2019), the plenary session began with the controversy surrounding the supposed ban in 'Pakistan on Indian filmmaker and actor Nandita Das 'ambitious film, *Manto*'. [Dawn:2019] In the session Dr. Ayesha Jalal was asked 'what may have changed in the last 70 years as Manto was and remains controversial for some. She mentioned the Pakistani film on Manto directed and acted in by Sarmad Khoosat, saying Nandita's film was more historically accurate'. She also said, 'social critique was different from criticism on Partition and if one doesn't have the capacity to bear critique then it's not about Manto, but one's own self and interpretation of literature than what's in the text. '[sic] [Dawn:2019]. In the same session, when the reason behind the controversy was addressed, Dr. Jalal opined, 'whatever decision Manto made, he reconciled with it, but what he did complain that his status in his new country was never clarified. "One day he was called the best short story writer in the country and the next day asked to abandon the one flat he was given. That's what Nandita has tried to convey, but since it's an Indian film made by an Indian filmmaker I think that's the objection that how dare an Indian tell us that a Pakistani man who moved to Pakistan was unhappy."' [sic] [Dawn:2019]

To describe *Manto*, Maggie Lee writes, 'Dramatizing Manto's struggles as he excoriates humanity during the most tumultuous time on the Indian Subcontinent, actress-filmmaker Nandita Das '*Manto* is elegant and old school, epic without losing sight of the personal. '[Lee: Variety: 2018] Indeed, the representation of Manto not only involves the struggle to reproduce the poet's life with its different shades but also demands an authentic representation of the time which is historically very important for both the countries. Manto has been known for his versatile talents and scathing attack on the social vices, he has been dragged to the court for the obscenity trials at least six times for his writings, his sympathies for the social outcasts have raised many eyebrows during his time. Even the period shown in the film, like Manto himself, is torn apart with the sociopolitical tumult of building the identity of nationhood for both the nations. Therefore, unlike the makers of the previously discussed films, the director of *Manto* has several challenges to face. First of all, if the film fails in terms of historicity, it would mean the failure of the portrayal of Manto with his emotional intricacies as well as the failure of capturing the true essence of the time. Secondly, Manto's life, though short, has enough ingredients for making a dozen of films. It is a challenge for the director to curate the list of events that s/he would bring onscreen and this intensifies the challenge of adhering to the authenticity of the biopic. In her article for The Scroll, Nandini Ramnath writes, 'The filmmaker who seeks to craft the definitive biopic of the man is spoilt for choice. Manto didn't just create memorable characters, he seemed to have stepped off the pages of fiction himself. An entire film could be made, for instance, on Manto's hilarious encounters with the luminaries of Mumbai show business'. [Ramnath: Scroll:2018] The third challenge of Manto's onscreen portrayal is Manto himself. To understand him, it is never sufficient to know the historical facts about him, rather he has left himself in fragments in his writings and his writings form a large part of constructing the identity of Saadat Hasan Manto. Das, in her work, blurs the line between the Manto of his own writings and the Manto that historically existed. But ironically, this very challenge has helped to solve a major problem that most of the other Bollywood biopics suffer from—to present the reality. 'Reality and imagination are diffused through skilfully weaving the

narrative of Manto's life with that of his famous short stories. "Dus Rupay Ka Note", "Sau Watt Ka Bulb", "Khol Do", "Thanda Gosht" and "Toba Tek Singh" make their way into the film that encapsulates four years of Manto's life – two before Independence and two after it. '[Sharma: FirstPost:2018] Devansh Sharma in the same article further notes that it would be difficult for them who have not read Manto to grasp the agile narrative of the film that blurs the distinction between Manto's life and his works. However, it is also true that understanding Manto, excluding his works, can never be possible. With the numerous possible readings to offer, Manto's life creates an opportunity for the director of the biopic as well as for the audiences to create a unique Manto for each one of them. The convergence of the narrative of Manto's life and his writings makes the film an open-ended text that almost can be synonymous to a cubist representation ascertaining the essential third dimension of Manto's character. There is no singular reality for Manto.

Any biopic on Manto could not possibly deny his role in contemporary politics that did not allow the complexity of identity. Manto has been a site of many dichotomies. Harishchandra Thorat writes, 'Punjab, Kashmir, the alleys of Mumbai and being a Mohajir in Lahore; all these dichotomous aspects were united in his character. Manto, as a writer, can be connected to all of these things, but not to any one of them. '[Thorat: TheWire:2019] Das's *Manto* does justice to the delicate issue of Manto's political identity. It does not attempt to convey Manto in terms of the binaries, but it brings out the no-man's-land of Manto's identity that cannot be contained within the boundaries of nation and time. Joseph Walsh writes, 'Das was fascinated by the fact that Manto wrestled with the theme of identity all his life. It was this that inspired her to make the film...Das wanted to do more than simply tell Manto's story... "It's not about showcasing an Indian writer; it is about looking at the idea of boundaries," she says. "It's about how we have created these boundaries of 'us and them', whether its person to person, or country to country, because we are losing our grip on the importance of truth. '[Walsh: TheGuardian:2018]

*Manto* does not become a propaganda film or an apologetic text for the poet, rather it becomes a fragment of Manto which though incomplete is true to his original self. Unlike the other biopics mentioned in this context, *Manto* is not made according to Manto's own dictates, nor it is made to please Manto. Therefore it is safe to assert that the question of authenticity that tags along with the very name of biopics, does not apply for *Manto*, because there is not one but many truths presented here.

To conclude, we can say that each of these three biopics has a different target audience and different purpose to serve. While *M.S. Dhoni* is a film that titillates the sentiment of Indian nationhood and hero-making, *Haseena Parkar* is an Indianised version of the mob movie genre. However, both the films, like many other contemporary biopics which were made with the similar agenda of propaganda or damage-control, fail to live up to the standard of the canonical texts like *Schindler's List* (1993), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) or of the Indian biopics like *Celluloid Man* (2012). *Manto* could do justice to the genre to a fair extent by blending the fact with the fiction and obliterating the concept of any singular truth. As discussed earlier, biopic as a genre always had to struggle for its exclusive existence and the range of the films that can be called biopics is extending day by day. Therefore it is a tricky question as to what makes a biopic authentic. Nevertheless, we can safely conclude that unless a film, like a biography, is able to capture different shades of the human life—both the negative and the positive—it fails to be loyal to the century-old genre called biopic.

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