

19. Partition Politics : A Study of Selected Partition Movies

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Abstract

As the clock struck midnight on August 15, 1947, celebratory shouts of freedom from colonial rule were drowned out by the cries of millions frantically making their way through the corpse-littered landscape of nascent India and Pakistan. After more than one hundred years of British East India Company rule and an additional 90 years of the British Raj, the Indian subcontinent had finally achieved Independence. What should have been a moment of crowning triumph after years of anti-colonial struggle was indelibly marred by unimaginable violence and bloodshed.

Keywords- Partition, Politics, Independence, Cinema, Bollywood, Migration,
Partition Politics: A Study of Selected Partition Movies

Nobody likes the division of India and my heart is heavy. But the choice is between one division and many divisions.

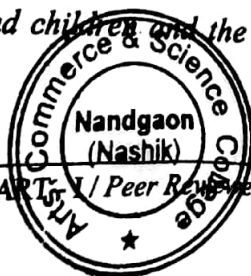
(Sardar Patel on Partition)

The Indian subcontinent was partitioned into two independent nation states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Immediately, there began one of the greatest migrations in human history, as millions of Muslims trekked to West and East Pakistan (the latter now known as Bangladesh) while millions of Hindus and Sikhs headed in the opposite direction. Many hundreds of thousands never made it.

Nisid Hajari, in "Midnight's Furies" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), his fast-paced new narrative history of Partition and its aftermath, writes,

"Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers

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and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits."

The India-Pakistan partition is a topic that spin controversies even after 73 years have gone by. Crossing over lines is unhealthy and painful, in any relationship. And it is this troubled past that keeps both the countries poles apart even when next to one and other. Lives remained affected long after the dust had settled: the sense of loss, the threat of violence, and the disorientation of starting again lingered on. Seventy years on, cinema continues to act as a powerful lens through which to explore its effects on ordinary people. Partition as a subject in Indian cinema took off around the early 1970s, with a surge in output in the 1990s.

"The wounds will take decades to heal, centuries to overcome the trauma." (Gulzar on partition) As Gulzar says partition has deep impact on Indians. Bollywood & other Indian Cinema use the theme of partition for their films; numbers of films are come out on that theme. Partition cinema got its audience & become popular among the world audience. This kind of cinema is not only got its fame in India but also in world. Many film lovers and film critics were attracted towards such films.

In this present research paper I'm going to discuss 5 films, that films are present the picture of politics during Indo-Pak Partition 1947. These films create the scene of partition about lives during that, Indian Freedom Movement, Starting of Gandhi Family politics, Social politics and Cultural Politics of that time.

Earth- 1947

Penetrating portrait that cannot be ignored or ever forgotten

John A. Nesbit

Deepa Mehta represents the partition of India in her film 'Earth' (1999) which is adapted from *Bapsi Sidhwa's* novel 'Cracking India', which portrays the traumatic experiences and collective memories of an intimate group of friends from different religions, ethnicities, castes, class, and gender categories during the violent history of British India's partition into modern India and Pakistan in 1947. This film focuses on the violence of the Indo-Pakistan division through the eyes of an eight years old Parsee child, *Lenny*. The story is set in Lahore, British India, 1947. The central character is a little Parsi girl, *Lenny* (*Maia Sethna*). *Lenny* is from a respected middle class Parsi family. She spends most of her time in the care of her ayah

(babysitter), *Shanta* (Nandita Das). *Shanta* is a poor Hindu girl. *Shanta* is in a small group of friends which has people from almost every major ethnicity that exists in Lahore. Two of them, Muslims, are very close to her. One is *Hassan* (Rahul Khanna), a masseuse. The other is *Dil Navaz* (Aamir Khan), an ice candy man. Both *Hassan* and *Dil Navaz* love *Shanta*, but neither is able to tell her.

Word spreads that Lahore is now going to be part of Pakistan due to partition. Violent communal riots among the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs take place in Lahore. Population exchange begins to occur. Muslims living in India are trying to go to Pakistan and Hindus living in Pakistan are trying to go to India. How this event, partition, affects the lives of *Shanta*, *Dil Navaz*, and *Hassan* is witnessed by *Lenny*.

Mehta shows the ways in which Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are pitted against each other by a political process and they become both victims and perpetrators of the violence of partition. *Mehta* also examines how religious identities become means of enacting gendered violence against men by inscribing power on his body and feminizing it, thus reducing its threat or value in this gendered-system. *Hari*, Hindu gardener, does not leave Lahore for Hindu India, and he is thus forced to convert to Islam, having no alternative way to live as his Muslim friends begin to kill Hindu friends. As one of the friends of the group complains when he hears that *Hari* is going to convert to Muslim, "Our friends want to kill us, what options do we have (Chapter: 13, 06:11)?" This statement raises an important issue regarding the ways in which religious identities were deployed through a politicized narrative of difference to create enmity and to erase lifelong bonds of friendship and human relationship. As Ice-Candy man confesses,

"Yes, I lobbed grenades into several Hindu homes, folks I knew all my life. For each of my sisters' breasts, I want to kill all the bastards (Chapter: 13, 05:09)."

Train to Pakistan

Train to Pakistan is a 1998 Indian Hindi film adapted from *Khushwant Singh's* 1956 classic novel by the same name set in the Partition of India of 1947 and directed by *Pamela Rooks*. The film stars *Nirmal Pandey*, *Rajit Kapur*, *Mohan Agashe*, *Smriti Mishra*, *Mangal Dhillon* and *Divya Dutta*.

Train to Pakistan presents the story of *Jugga* (*Nirmal Pandey*), a dacoit. He is in love with *Nooran* (*Smriti Mishra*) and is having an affair with her right under the nose of her almost blind father. One day a rival dacoit gang kills the village moneylender and the police imprison

Jugga instead. In his jail cell, *Jugga* meets *Iqbal*, a communist worker, who is also in jail because of the moneylender's murder. While *Jugga* is in jail, *Mano Majra* begins to feel the impact of the Partition. Tensions rise as trainloads of dead bodies keep arriving from Pakistan. Because riots break out elsewhere, here too the ripples of destruction reach. All villagers, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus live in a close-knit harmony.

As the story progresses, the nervousness related to the Partition and refugees and massacres begin to creep into *Mano Majra*. Their chief point of entry is the railways, either the station or the railway lines in the wilderness. The first train scene begins with a close up of a steam engine that a stop at a small railway station and a man (*Iqbal*) disembarks. There are several policemen on the platform, including Thanedar Sahib, the inspector (Mangal Dhillon). Walking up to the stationmaster, *Iqbal* shows his ticket upon exit and enquires about a place to stay in the village.

A routine scenario on a railway station subsequently is followed by a shot of a crowded train carrying passengers shouting slogans, "Long Live India. This is our India. India is ours". In the foreground, the stationmaster stands with his back to the camera, which first is looking to the right to capture the incoming train and gradually moves to the left as the train passes the station. It passes through *Mano Majra* without stopping, making the train a mobile device of nationalism that claims the regional as the national territory with slogan shouting.

In an ominous sequence shortly thereafter, a train halts at the station early in the morning. Again, the back of the stationmaster is in the foreground. The engine driver is the only person who gets off. In this shot, wrapped in the steam of the engine the driver silently looks with weary eyes at the stationmaster. In the next shot, the magistrate arrives at the railway station. The inspector is there to receive him but there is no verbal exchange, they only share glances full of heavy seriousness. As they walk into the station, both are framed within the entrance at the end of which a train is visible. Along with the police inspector, the magistrate boards the train for an inspection. The sound of buzzing flies conveys the stench of death before the camera moves and the officials gaze over the compartment that is full of butchered bodies. It is evident that several trains full of corpses arrives at *Mano Majra* and under the military command, mass funeral pyres are prepared outside the village. A few scenes later, as the villagers gather to see a large number of dead bodies floating in the river, another train comes from the direction of Pakistan. It does not blow its whistle nor is its light on. One of the villagers appropriately calls it "a Ghost Train"

because dark, quiet and dangerous it moves towards Mano Majra. The final railway scene Train to Pakistan comes during the climax as the steam engine takes a train full of Muslim refugees towards Pakistan. It crosses the iron bridge safely and an aerial shot shows the train chugging through wilderness towards its destination.

The British, as well as the Congress and Muslim League did not anticipate the degree of communal violence and migration that would accompany the division of Indian Empire. There were no preparations to maintain social order in case of communal violence. As Train to Pakistan demonstrates, previously thriving communally harmonious rural areas were overwhelmed by the impact of the events occurring elsewhere. Mano Majra best exemplifies how the local identities are transformed and shaped anew by national politics and in so doing, create divisions among the inhabitants of the same village. Although the harmony among the residents of Mano Majra remains, men like Malli and his goons act as disrupters and as the representatives of the newly acquired national identity. They loot and kill because it is their profession as dacoits; however, there is an added fervor in the name of religion and nation in their acts. In contrast, Jugga, also a dacoit, maintaining allegiance to his fellow Muslim villagers, sacrifices himself in order to ensure their safe passage across the border by train. He climbs on the railway bridge and cuts off a large rope tied across to kill the refugees sitting on the rooftop of the train. While he is cutting the rope, Malli and his men spot him and shoot him. Jugga, tenaciously hangs on to the bridge and falls down after he successfully foils Malli's plan. The sinister and venomous impact of partition and the indignation it spawned in him has been realistically expressed in a scathing irony in Train to Pakistan.

In the book train to Pakistan Khushwant Singh does not describe the politics of the Partition in much detail. This is mostly because his purpose is to bring out the individual, human element and provide a social understanding, two aspects of historical events which tend to be either ignored or not covered effectively in texts. In the Partition, the major change was political; the partition of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. The effect of the change, however, was significant and as Singh has shown, frighteningly, social, as religious groups rearranged and clashed violently. Singh makes it clear that many people played a part in this chaos and everyone was equally worthy of blame, all while integrating examples of the sheer moral confusion which arises from trying to make sense of an event as momentous as the Partition.

Gadar: Ek Prem Katha

Gadar: Ek Prem Katha is a 2001 Indian Hindi-language romantic period action film directed by Anil Sharma and set during the Partition of India in 1947. The film stars Sunny Deol and Amisha Patel in lead roles alongside Amrish Puri and Lillete Dubey. Sharma's son Utkarsh as a child artist plays Deol and Patel's son.

During the Partition of India, the film tells the story of a truck driver, Tara Singh (Sunny Deol), a Sikh, who falls in love with a Muslim girl, Sakina " Sakku" Ali (Ameesha Patel), belonging to an aristocratic family. The story begins with Sikhs and Hindus being attacked by Muslims in Pakistan when migrating to India by train from the railway station in West Punjab, Pakistan. In response, Sikhs and Hindus reply by killing Muslims migrating to Pakistan from East Punjab, India. During the Hindu-Muslim riots that erupted soon after the Partition,

Tara also plans to kill Muslims. Still, he stops after recognizing Sakina at the railway station, He saves and protects her from a murderous mob chasing her, as the mob attempts to rape and murder her brutally, and Tara Singh defends Sakina by applying blood (implying sindoor) to her forehead to make her his Sikh Wife.

Some years later her father is now the mayor of Lahore. When Sakina calls him from the Pakistani Embassy in Delhi, he arranges to fly her to Lahore. She visits her family and when she wants to come back to her husband her father refused to let her go. Then Tara. The Sikh hero goes to Pakistan to try to persuade his in-laws to allow his Muslim wife to return to India. Surrounded by the Pakistani army, the hero is willing to convert to Islam, but risks his life by refusing to praise Pakistan and curse India. He more or less single-handedly takes on the Pakistani army and brings his family back to India.

The film Gadar was Bollywood Blockbuster story, plot, music was outstanding and the theme of partition is very close to every Indian audience that's why it is still love by people. It is a partition movie masterpiece. The 1947 Indian-Pakistan partition left a deep scarring impact for generations across India but especially in Punjab and Bengal as the two states were most affected by it. 75 years since the India's independence, the partition remains one of the darkest times in the history of the subcontinent which left millions homeless on both sides of the border and many losing their loved ones in horrific riots.

Most Partition films show the unimaginable violence of the terrible time. These films about Partition remind us of the trauma and loss at the founding of the new nation. For many of

us today, the documentary footage spliced into some of these films seems to come from an era which is almost unimaginable. There is not only the violence of the times but the loss of homes as communities were shattered, perhaps hastening the loss of the traditional and the modern, and creating a sense of grievance and sorrow in the communities that persists to this day.

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