

# Partition Trauma Through Hindi Cinema

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**Abstract:** *Cinema can be seen as a new source for understanding and enriching archival history and bringing a new approach to understand various historical events. In spite of being a great source of entertainment, cinema is also a good source of information, education and understanding of a situation in this modern technological world. The Radcliffe line that partitioned the Indian subcontinent on the basis of religion, gave rise to two new nations Hindustan and Pakistan was responsible for opening the floodgates of a terrible human tragedy. The trauma of Partition as portrayed in various Hindi films explains the sufferings caused by it far more effectively than statistical data does. The communal hatred and violence, the pain of being homeless and houseless, the sense of loss, large scale human massacre, forced migrations, economic misery, issues of dislocation and displacement as refugees and the questions of sexuality and gender relations have been well projected in various Hindi films, theatre and in literary writings. This paper focuses on a number of Hindi films that form a variety of ideological and generic viewpoints and articulates Hindi cinema's presentation of the division of a single country into two new states with its attendant wounds.*

**Keywords:** Partition, Cinema, Violence, Displacement, Refugees, Division, Films, Victims, Sexuality

## DISCUSSION

The Mountbatten plan of 1947 not only brought Independence but also truncated a single country into two different independent nations-Hindustan and Pakistan by Redcliff line in August 1947. This was not only geographical division but it also created gorge in the hearts of people. Muslim majority provinces of British India, Punjab in west and Bengal in east were split into two on communal lines.<sup>1</sup> Every type of Partition in itself is a tragic event but this divide of India was based on religious line thus making it more painful, bloody and protracted affair as roughly a million people were butchered in murderous riots that broke out all over, a huge mass of people were terrorised and made homeless who fled in search of security and shelter and partition remains a festering wound in the collective psyche of South-Asia.<sup>2</sup> Partition was a catastrophe which ended the long shared social fabric and erased overnight the bond of love, brotherhood and oneness giving rise to rapes, abductions, mass killings, communal riots and had a great impact on economic, social, political and cultural life of both nations.

Events like partition which have far reaching consequences in history and are unforgettable even after many decades are remembered in many ways. Partition inspired various artistic creative minds and litterateurs to depict this event through literary, cinematic and dramatic representations. The partition of India has been aptly represented by various fiction writers among which Bapsi Sidhwa, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Amrita Pritam etc. are writers of prominence. The best way to memorise an event of significance and understand emotions attached to it is its recreation, and this can be done aptly through cinematic or dramatic representations. Various works of these writers has been dramatised and filmed. Pinjar movie is based on novel of Amrita Pritam, A Train to Pakistan is based on Khushwant Singh's Novel of same name, Tamas is based on Bheesham Sahni's novel, 1947 Earth is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Ice Candy Man, Garm Hawa is based on Ismat Chughtai's novel, Midnights Children on Salman Rushdie's novel.

<sup>1</sup> Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjee-Leonard (Eds.), *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics and Aesthetics*, Routledge Publishers, New York, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2009, p.1

Although literature and cinema can't be taken as historical source in certain aspects yet it can't be denied that literature is the mirror of society because it can well depict the incidents happened in society and are able to portray exact image of society. Several historians also propagated this view. In their work Sujata Bose and Ayesha Jalal advocated this view and wrote, "*The colossal human tragedy of the partition and its continuing aftermath has been better conveyed by the more sensitive creative writers and artists-for example in Saddat Hasan Manto's short stories and Ritwik Ghatak's films than by Historians.*"<sup>3</sup> Richard Bernstein in his article in '*The New York Times*' opined that movie makers have become our most powerful yet least careful Historians.<sup>4</sup> Filmmakers are not historians, they make films not history. Cinema can reflect the complex and difficult situations easily and can make them easily understandable and interesting. Filmmakers can awake the emotions which historians cannot with such degree of perfection. Cinema can recreate events and viewers can feel the pain and complexities of the events. Film makers who worked on the theme of partition are Ritwik Ghatak, Gulzar, Bhisham Sahni, Govind Nihalani, Kaifi Azmi, Yash Chopra, M. S. Sathyu, C. P. Dwivedi, Kamal Hasan etc. Bengali cinema was first to make films on partition The process of representing partition through images, characters and dialogues in Bengali cinema begun immediately after partition at the closing of 1940s, followed by Hindi and Punjabi cinema. Hindi cinema tries to recollect the oral histories and presented that partition history, which was not documented but was felt. Thus cinema provides a kind of picture archives. These movies were so intricately able to explain and depict partition that these could be considered as 'real in reels'. Most of the movies based on partition are based on literary fiction works like novels and short stories. Another noticeable thing about Hindi cinema is that it tries to represent partition of north west i.e. Punjab mostly and not of Bengal with exception of few movies. This was because prominent film makers such as Gulzar, Govind Nihalani, B.R. Chopra migrated to India from Pakistan<sup>5</sup> and were witness to west Pakistan's partition.

There are various Hindi movies that are filmed on partition. Shaheed (1948), Chhaila (1960), Dharmputra (1961), Garm Hawa (1973), Gandhi (1982), Tamas (1988), 1947 Earth (1998), Train to Pakiatan (1998), Hey Ram (2000), Refugee (2000), Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (2001), Pinjar (2003), Sadiyaan (2010), Sarabjit (2016), Veer Zara (2004), Viceroy House (2017), Begum Jaan (2017), are some of the Hindi movies based on partition and Independence, though the list is far from being exhaustive. In Pakistan it is still meagre, as only a dozen movies have been made on the issue of partition.<sup>6</sup> Kartar Singh (1959), Jinnah (1998), Khamosh Pani (2004) are some of the Pakistani movies based on partition. According to Satyen K Bordoli, Indian film industry does not remember Indian partition like Jewish holocaust where hundreds of films and documentaries have been made so far on every conceivable aspect. In Bollywood only few odd films have been centred on partition and the issue has been taken non-seriously in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, countries that faced burnt of this division.<sup>7</sup> But Gita Vishwanath advocated that all Hindi cinema can be considered as Partition cinema as theme of all movies is lost and found or separation of lovers.<sup>8</sup> The paucity of films on partition was perhaps because the memories of partition of India were so morbid that those who experienced it avoided remembering it or talking about this. The initial silence in Hindi cinema was also observed due to this reason. Although Hindi films on partition were made in late 1940's but sudden outburst has been observed in partition cinema since 1997, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of partition and independence. But in comparison to millions other films in Hindi film industry, these films are still sparse and meagre and there is a need to give attention to these. The first Hindi or Bollywood movie on partition and Independence is Ramesh Sehgal's '*Shaheed*' released in 1948 followed by various others. Most of these movies are based on literary works of authors who wrote on partition. The predominant theme of partition movies highlights the unforgettable memory of partition violence, victimization of

<sup>3</sup> Sugatha Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2004, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Bernstein, *The New York Times*, e-Paper, Nov. 26, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Gita Vishwanath and Salma Malik, *Revisiting 1947 through Popular Cinema: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLIV No. 36, 5 Sept 2009, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Satyen K. Bordoli, India-Pakistan Partition-Cinema's Forgotten Footnote, [www.sify.com](http://www.sify.com)

<sup>8</sup> Gita Vishwanath and Salma Malik, *Op.Cit.*, p. 62.

women, massacre of millions and communal riots. Hindi cinema tries to depict that fire, bloodshed, corpses and communal hatred is another name of partition. The paper also tries to advocate that cinema and movies are an unparalleled guide to feel the trauma of partition. This is because cinema can be a new source for understanding partition and trauma of partition instead of statistical and archival data.

Hindi cinema tries to depict multiple aspects of partition. The Hindi movies on partition tries to depict the theme of uprooting from motherland, loss of homes, separation of lovers, friends becoming foes on communal lines, mass violence, mass exodus, political conditions responsible for partition, women problems like rapes, abductions and forcible conversions and conversions due to helplessness and problems faced by refugees. Tamas movie produced and directed by Govind Nihalani in 1973 is first such serious effort. It is based on two novels and two stories and is movie which deals exhaustively with communal tensions created in a peaceful city where mutual brotherhood was destroyed by communal hatred sponsored by Colonial Government. This movie throws light on communal violence. Humanity was forgotten and people were only known as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Religious orthodoxy and fanaticism were real causes behind partition that were utilised by British Government. It also tries to depict that poor were most to suffer from this turmoil and influential people were least affected, although they also faced uprooting. This movie also tries to depict how innocent people like Nathu were used as their weapons to spread hatred and communal disturbances by some fanatic minded people aided by British Government.

Another movie Garm Hawa directed by M. S. Sathyu and released in 1973 deals with the helplessness of a Muslim businessman Salim who chose India as his homeland instead of newly created Muslim nation. The movie very well depicted the economic conditions and problems faced by the Muslims who never bid farewell to India. After partition, Salim and his family had to struggle for their rights in a country which was once their own. This movie tries to depict that Muslims and Hindus in Hindustan and Pakistan respectively, found themselves vulnerable in the sensitive political environment and also focuses that how partition victimised the minority and what impact it had on human lives, lifestyles, ideology and mainly on business and economics.

Movie Dharamputra (1962) depicts the mental condition of a Hindu fundamentalist who hates Muslims bitterly till he knows that he is actually a Muslim. Though Redcliff line partitioned lands but hearts were partitioned or separated by communal hatredness and geographical partition sponsored mass exodus but it was made blood stained only by division in hearts by religious fundamentalism. This movie and another movie of this kind, Sadiyaan tries to depict the love angle of Hindus and Muslims. This movie tries to depict that religion of a person is not decided by acquired characters or practices he follows. It is decided by blood and genes of parents but till date the gene which is responsible for religion of a person has not been found by any geneticist. These movies try to pose a question, what is religion actually? These movies try to depict that some fanatics and fundamentalists exploited religion for spreading hatredness and shattering brotherhood resulting in violent division.

Some movies very aptly represented the horrifying nature of the partition of subcontinent. During partition people were displaced, houses were burnt, crops were destroyed, innumerable people lost their lives, a number of women were abducted and still larger were raped and soil of Indian subcontinent became cremation ground. All these partition problems had been depicted in movies like Train to Pakistan, Hey Ram, Gadar: Ek Prem Katha, Viceroy House, Jinnah, Earth, Partition etc. The heart-breaking screams of people in movies, streets full of blood and corpses, helpless people running for saving their lives and problems faced by their caravans are so depicted in these movies that we all can well imagine the original happenings. The horrifying train massacre incident; streets full of dying people, scattered corpses were depicted in various movies and it clearly depicted the barbarous nature of partition. The trauma faced by Saket Ram in Hey Ram was so deep that he was transformed from a secular person to a religious fundamentalist. The depiction of scene of a blind kid, searching for his grandfather in corpses, is so heart touching that it is representative of whole partition trauma.

These movies depicted various themes of partition and also help us in understanding the complexities involved in partition. If we look closely at the partition movies we could find that various movies tried to highlight communal politics. The movies filmed in Pakistani cinema tried to present betrayals of Indian leaders while Hindustani cinema

does vice-versa. Patrick Hogan writes that *Pinjar* movie depicted Hindustan or Hindus as Rama and Pakistan or Muslims as Ravana embodiment of goodness and evils respectively.<sup>9</sup>

Another theme of partition based movies is issues related to women including rape, abductions, prostitution; inter religion marriages and forcible conversions. These movies depicted that bodies of women were communalised and politicised during partition. Movies like *Pinjar*, *Train to Pakistan*, *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, 1947 *Earth*, *Hey Ram*, *Lahore*, *Khamosh Pani* etc. portrayed women problems during partition and discussed the issues of gender and sexuality. Urvashi Bhutalia is of the opinion that Historians have paid little attention to the women experiences during partition while women were most to suffer during such upheaval.<sup>10</sup> These movies, through light on themes like women abductions, by the persons of other religions to ravish the honour of their co-religionists, *jauhar* like practices adopted by women to save their honour like ending lives by suicidal practices by jumping into wells (shown in *Tamas*), rivers etc. women also faced honour killings by their family members (depicted in *Khamosh Pani*, 1947 *Earth*) where brothers or fathers himself killed women folk of their lineage. Also *Puroo* of *Pinjar* represented the pain and agony of all abducted women during partition. Their non acceptance by their family after losing their chastity and the pain of all women has been depicted in this movie. Similarly, through the medium of *Sakina* of *Gadar* and *Zainab* of *Shaheed-e-Mohabat Buta Singh* (Punjabi movie), the problems created in the lives of various abducted women by recovery commission and recovery act were depicted. The Recovery Commissions and Women Recovery Act was also an insult to injury for women. Did it restored or displaced women twice? This situation was depicted in *Shaheed e Mohabat Buta Singh*, *Gadar*, *Pinjar* and *Khamosh Pani*. In *Khamosh Pani*, the female lead *Ayesha* committed suicide when her original identity was again revealed. Women who had started their life by bowing before the circumstances and were happy in their respective places faced second partition by these acts.

Biopic of *Jinnah* directed by *Jamil Dehalvi*, a London based independent film director held Hindu *Januniyat* responsible for mass violence, rapes and abductions of Muslim women. In this movie *Jinnah* was portrayed as stubborn fellow and he was against Gandhian philosophy from very beginning. His political rivalry and disagreement with Gandhian philosophy made this secular sympathetic fellow to think of a separate nation for Muslims where their interests could be safeguarded. For this reason, he never agreed for united India and common nation for Hindus and Muslims where his rights and rights of Muslim fellows would be relegated to that of Hindu majority. For partition violence, this movie held *Edwina*, *Mountbatten* and *Nehru* as culprits. There are three biopics on *Gandhi* and the one released in 1982 was directed by *Richard Attenborough* is Indo-British co-production. This movie tried to present *Gandhi* as strong and powerful fellow who was against any domination on poor masses either it be foreign or native. This movie also reflected that it was power hungry attitude of political leaders which was responsible for communal divide.

The historical trauma of partition can be much more felt than to be studied. Most of the movies on partition used original video clippings of partition violence. The incident of train massacre, women victimization and communal riots has been presented in each and every movie based on partition. Earlier movies, of fifth, sixth and seventh decades were sincere efforts and tried to describe the plight of both the countries after partition but movies of twentieth century mostly tries to depict Pakistan as terrorist nation state. A number of recent films on partition are not very consistent to their partition approach. This is because early filmmakers were those who were direct victims of partition or had first hand information on partition, so their perspective was serious but the case is not so with modern filmmakers whose impact is second hand and in addition to this they hunted for commercial success.

### CONCLUSION

The predominant theme of all partition movies is depicting partition violence and all considered it as mishapening. The movies depict that British policy of 'Divide and Rule', religious fanaticism and separatist politics of Indian leaders made partition inevitable. During partition religious bigotry transcends humanity and brotherhood was shattered. If

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Hogan, *Towards a Cognitive Poetics of History Pinjar: The Ramayana and Partition* in Rinni Bhattacharya and Debali Mookerjee-Leonards edited book *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics and Aesthetics*, Routledge Publishers, New York, 2015, p.121.

<sup>10</sup> Urvashi Bhutalia, *Voices of Women*, Indian Review of Books, Vol. V, No.11, 1996, pp.4-5.

used judicially, cinema can be a best source for writing partition history in present times when emphasis is laid on alternative sources than archival. It is cinema which externalised partition trauma and converted it into a global perspective.

It is essential to remember partition as partition will never be over. It is destined to return again and again. So it is necessary to remember it in memory so that it cannot be repeated in history, politics and aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> There is a well known saying, 'Forgotten History repeats itself' so we must not forget partition. We had paid a very high price for Independence and that was Partition. So, before celebrating our independence we must not ignore Partition as 'lamenting day' and literature and cinema could play an important role in making us to remember history as all people could not read history or search archives. Also statistics in archives and history is available to lesser number of people but cinema is approachable for all. In such a situation movies based on partition are necessary as they can flood back the memories of forty seven and could be helpful in preventing such type of untoward incidents in future to some extent. The remembrance of partition is necessary as communal disturbances of 1984, Babri Masjid case of 1992, Gujarat riots of 2002, three Indo-Pak wars, Kargil war and Kashmir issue had posed greatest threat to unity and integrity of India. In fact, Kashmir issue has been described by some as unfinished work of partition. The partition of Punjab and Bengal was so painful and still its screams, clutches of fire, blood soaked grounds, and heaps of corpses are unforgettable then partition of any other area on communal grounds could be disastrous and it can only be felt by people by means of movies and cinema which provides comprehensive understanding of the subject.

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<sup>11</sup> Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjee-Leonard (Eds.), *Op.Cit.*, p. xvi.