

CHAPTER 6

Bollywood, Mobility and Partition Politics

Representation of Displaced Muslims in Films on Indo-Pak Partition

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Partition on Indian Screens

The ultimate horror of history is not the persistent fear that it is bound to repeat itself but the very unfathomable nature of the temporal and spatial coordinates that constitute its existence as an incomprehensible form of knowledge. The discontinuous and disrupted notion of history is a self-negation of certainty and any opposite activity to place the reality of events in the historical timeline has far-reaching consequences. Such a discourse of history is an extension of the violence perpetuated through the fragmented memories of our collective consciousness. India, entwining the webs of its complex and traumatic past, exemplifies this perception of history, not just the narrativization of the past embellished by the ambience of nostalgia but a vortex of uncertainty through which the present finds its meaning. The historical significance of 'Indianness' perplexed in the literary and cinematic forms is a product of the 'historical violence' that literally erupted from the day when India as a nation came into existence, and is subliminally re-represented through the spectacles of artistic imaginations. The event known as the Indo-Pak Partition or the independence of India/Pakistan was a 'seismic political transformation' conjoining the regional identities into the larger geographical narrative of cinema which mutated the linguistic and cultural elements along the way of emerging migratory patterns (Vasudevan 2010). The epistemological, artistic, ethical, cultural, and political modes of 'being' stuck in between the binary border politics emanating from the Partition are precisely historical and this is the vantage point where one must start scrutinizing the inveterate discourses of India.

It has been observed that cinema is 'corollary to Indian psyche' and the social discourse of cinema can be an effective narrative tool to document the statements

about life with its historicity prematurely yet observably delineated in the visual form as a reconstruction (Roy 2003). The laborious task of reconfiguring the traumatic repercussions of Partition through the wider lens of cinema summons the lost memories of displaced bodies, their severed cultural roots and heritage into moving images, invoking the pain of the past. The growing body of Partition narratives is significant as it somehow recreates the reality of the people caught up in the sectarian violence that engulfed everything they considered as part of their homeland. Aided by the radical nationalistic forces, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent unilaterally separated individuals into elusive categorizations of 'us' and 'them'. The displacement and dislocation of Indian Muslims during this catastrophic mass mobilization process requires that special attention is paid to their confused history as an ambiguous existence in a new nation state. This destruction of normalcy was fundamentally a process of creation where a unique ambivalent notion of 'Other' had been born. Partition dissolved the much-celebrated Indian motto of 'unity in diversity' by disintegrating the multitudinous coordinates of cultural differences to engender a unified homogeneous cultural land.

The apparent disillusionment brought by the aftermath of Partition was a thematic source of Indian cinema. Although running a decentralized film industry that epitomizes an idea of 'plural cinema' as it nourishes various regional cinema (Srinivas 2010), Indian cinema is often construed as Bollywood for its international recognition and capital matching the cultural interests of the majoritarianism. This 'Bollywoodization' of Indian cinema and the cultural nationalism inseminated by its ideology as a prominent culture industry in a global level (Rajadhyaksha 2003) retroactively put a halt to veracious representations of the exiled bodies on the silver screen. There have been historical texts to jog the memory of the reader with a conscious determination to divert the discourse from the grand political narratives about Partition to a more subjective approach; that is, to read it as a 'human tragedy' (Tiwari 2013). However, the activity of interpreting history is more crucial as these interpretations eventually become the representations of history itself and such actions are to be done with discretion. The resulting inadequacies of having an inconspicuous past of overlapping stories concerning Partition problematize the ineffectual collective realities of a civilized India that tends to diffuse the illusory line between a violent past and an oblivious present. This challenges the corpus of literature of Partition where some stories have undermined other ones, consciously or unconsciously.

The impetus to trace out the identity crisis of displaced Muslims and their unheard narratives in the spectacle of cinema embarks on an excavation into the past where it adds to the body of academic research on the contours of mobility, displacement and border politics. This goes along with the international problem of minorities and refugees, and how it is projected in the ubiquitous cultural and political text of cinema. Even though the contextualization of this chapter is within the limits of Bollywood cinema and its large canvas that (mis)represented the tragic Indo-Pak Partition in light of the ambiguous existential problem of the (dis)placement of Indian Muslims, it intends to touch the universality of the matters discussed here. As sources of this study, M.S. Sathyu's debut feature film *Garm Hava* (1973), Bhisham Sahni's novel-based film *Tamas* (1988), Deepa Mehta's *Fire, Earth and Water* trilogy film *Earth* (1998), Kushwant Singh's classic postcolonial novel-based film *Train to Pakistan* (1998), a Canadian co-production filmed in both British Columbia and on-location in India entitled *Partition* (2007), are some of the films chosen as historical texts to examine the confounded state of Indian Muslims and the ramifications of the Partition politics that represented their displaced bodies.

Partition Narratives, the Cinematic Cemetery of Departed/Deported Souls

The spectacles concerning the discourse of Partition render a hermeneutic reconstruction of the historical fixation of what is collectively referred to as 'Indian' and its varied significations that qualify the standardizations of the institutionalized state of Indian nationalism. This historical documentation, 'the story of Partition, and the accompanying Hindu-Muslim and Muslim-Sikh riots . . . written up as a secondary story', has been called the 'biography of the emerging nation-state', 'one that, for all its consequences, miraculously left the course of Indian history unaltered, [as] "India" . . . started firmly and "naturally" on its secular, democratic, non-violent course' (Pandey 1992). The greatest task of the filmmaker is thus to contest the violence of narration itself and merge the mutually opposing coordinates of the past to attain a point of harmony between the fragmented pieces, the parts left out by the Partition. Indian cinema always tried to portray Partition in the form of localized stories which had been strategically neglected by the task of border-building that cost millions of lives as collateral damage. The film industry of India has been making a significant contribution to the process of

nation-building (Sarkar 2009). A microcosm of the nation-building energies has persistently been reflected in Bollywood where the filmmakers' subconscious devotion to the culturally 'new-born' India was evident (Chatterjee 2012).

The Partition narratives of Bollywood cinema inadvertently follow a pattern of recreating the ethnoreligious tensions of the Hindu and Muslim communities set against the background of the political debates that shaped the modern India. What these films accentuate is the historically imposed image of the Hindu-Muslim conflict as a discernible characteristic of the displacement of individuals, families and communities, with an emphasis on the theme of estrangement. Early films like *Chhalia* (1960) and *Dharmputra* (1961) try to exemplify the hostility of Partition by using it as a narrative background for the development of the generic Bollywood spectacle where melodramatic romantic tales and the mysticism of the mythical ideal are normalized. Manmohan Desai's *Chhalia* follows the eponymous protagonist's (Raj Kapoor) attempts to reconcile the estranged relationship of Shanthi (Nutan) and her husband Kewal (Rehman). Set in the background of Indo-Pak Partition, the film depicts the displacement of Shanthi from her husband and the resulting dubious existence of their son Anwar. The illegitimacy of Anwar's existence as a Muslim and the disowning of Shanthi's virtuous self for her association with a man named Abdul Rehman (Pran) constitute the body of the film as it tends to reveal the dislocated Muslim selves in the context of Partition. Although *Chhalia's* allusions to the epic Ramayana – where the metaphor of Shanthi, whose name literally translates as peace and sanctity in the Indian mythological context, is a misinterpreted figure in the Partition discourse – are explicitly evident, they make infinitesimally less momentous attempts for reparation. The superfluous climax of the film reiterates the reunion of the characters in harmony but leaving the questions about the historical necessities unanswered and the dislocated Muslim identities intact.

Yash Chopra's *Dharmputra* is considered as the first major film to deal with the monstrosity of religious fundamentalism that peaked at the time of Partition where families were divided on the basis of their collective religious ideals and separated from their former positions of universality and brotherhood. The film portrays the communalism erupted in the wake of Indian Partition that transformed not only the material existence of people but also their psychological temperaments. In *Dharmputra*, a Muslim child who is the product of an illegitimate affair is separated from his mother and forced to live with a Hindu family. The film depicts the metamorphosis of the child, Dileep (Shashi Kapoor), into a Hindu

radical whose antipathy towards the Muslim community mirrors the illogical implementation of hatred which was the epicentre of the violence regurgitated during the Partition.

The Bollywood narrative as an artistic medium of the Indian cultural land neglected the complicated form of interconnectedness of the issues relating to the Muslim population as the oversimplification of its narrativizations reveals the triviality of treatment adopted by filmmakers. Popular films resorted to romantic melodramas as opposed to social realism where myth-making of the past was a preferable narrative trope instead of political evaluation. The political overtones are subjugated by the totality of the film that focuses on how to mitigate the horror of the Partition. Recent film *Pinjar* (2003) uses similar storyline to films like *Chhaila* and *Dharmaputra* to portray a Hindu woman excommunicated for her accidental involvement with a Muslim kidnapper. The film lures the common Indian spectator in to sympathize with the circumstances without having given conscious consideration to the complications of the Partition politics that devoured specific individuals. It is as if the spectator is passively paying tributes to the buried bodies of history with no intention of investigating the 'cause of death'.

Partition films attempt to picturize the process of sectarianizing the Indian subcontinent into the categories of 'Indian Muslims' and 'Indian Hindus' where the former is delegitimized and denigrated to the point of completely detaching the 'Indianness' from their identity. The formation of Pakistan as a Muslim nation-state has been accredited to be the only place for anyone who carries the identity of an Indian Muslim. Bollywood films make sense of this unanimous discreditation of the pluralistic and secular values of the Indian cultural heritage through protagonists who are emotionally and physically ostracized from the newly emerging nationalistic discourse of India. Kumkum Sangari (2003) observes this as 'xenophobic nationalism', a 'chauvinist Hindu discourse of culture and civilization' which assigned all evils to the collective history of the Muslim diaspora. This sectarian view of civilization is the qualitative feature of the subtexts of post-Partition India. The separationism marked the deterioration of the prevailing anti-colonial nationalist discourse of the Indian subcontinent that had never been, in its diversified cultural contours, considered a two-nation / two-culture theoretical proposition.

Bodies at Border, Displacement and Dislocation

Partition envisaged the dissociation of the cultural land of the Indian subcontinent into two distinctive regional spaces demarcated by the discursive terminology of an ethno-religious-nationalistic discourse and the subsequent process of occupation and reoccupation of a mass community of individuals on either side of an imaginary line that redefined their existential position from that historical turning point. This differentiation was an act of minimization of social, political and cultural domains to fit in a field with specific borders which have been '(re)produced, (re)created, (re)conditioned, (re)established and (re)modelled spatially and temporally' (Misra 2016). In closer analysis, these borders can be recognized as 'imaginary lines' in the strict sense that they were socially constructed on the grounds of an outrageous subjectivism asserted by a selected few in a collectivistic manner and embellished purely by the myopic vision of the imaginative fanaticism. The uncertainties and inadequacies of such a bordering explains the unimaginable violence that displaced and distanced lives far away from their homes. The uncertainty brought by the Partition border politics was an existential crisis for those who were suddenly pushed to the inevitable need of reorganizing and dislodging. The identity, ancestry and nationality which they imagined as home being shifted to the other side of the border realigned the structural contours of their existence in a uniquely disproportionate manner. Here the unique status of the Indian Muslims is relevant, precisely in the context of the dichotomization of two nations separated by a border where the territorial space of Pakistan became the ideal home for all Muslims. Deconstructing the way in which Bollywood cinema dealt with the sense of loss and ambiguity of belonging encountered by Indian Muslims across the borders, which were more forceful rather than natural, then becomes the locus point of watching cinema as historical re-representation.

A significant cinematic endeavour that visualizes the complexity of the border politics of India-Pakistan Partition problematizing the confused position of the Indian Muslims came in 1973 as the directorial debut feature film of M.S. Sathyu. The film, *Garm Hava* (Hot Winds), centres around the Mirzas, a Muslim family which resides in North India, and their exponentially deteriorating state of existence amidst the alarming time of Partition. The main protagonist is Salim Mirza, who runs the family business of shoe manufacturing and faces the imminent threat to leave his home for Pakistan, as the dilemma that frames the narrative is

the emergence of the composite notion of border that demands the physical as well as psychological disintegration of social, cultural and familial kinship. The migration of Salim's brother Halim to Pakistan instigates the separation of family members during the mass mobilization as an inevitability of Partition. The film follows Salim's resilience to not succumb to the populist imaginations of the changed politics of the subcontinent.

Garm Hava encapsulates the prejudice and hatred inexplicably incorporated in the body of Partition and reveals the underlying structural tenets of borders that reflect their own immaturity in origin and systematical premeditation in implementation. The border that defined the national identity of the newly emerged states of India and Pakistan is the tool that epitomized the process of distancing groups by identifying and branding them as enemies in terms of culture, community and land. This bordering is the embodiment of sectarianism which reverberates in the alienated self of individuals like Salim Mirza who loses his ancestral home and family business. A constant fear of migration shadows the family, resulting in grave loss and estrangement; the aged mother of the Mirzas, anguished by the thought of losing her home, dies in it and Salim's daughter Amina commits suicide due to the despair of losing her lovers. Partition was precisely an event of compartmentalizing categories of people on the basis of the belief systems that constructed their social identities. The desire to displace Muslims to an imaginary land of Pakistan, which was previously part of the same region where people cohabited with their families and histories, can be witnessed as part of the terrorizing act of forming homogeneous territories. Misra (2016: 39) opines that:

Bordering gives a sense of homogeneity with respect to the outside world. Borders mark the site of identity formation by segregating political, social and geographical spaces in a territorial boundary. The geopolitical representation of self and others and perceptions regarding an imminent danger are instrumental in articulating subjectivity of the world through bordering spaces.

The enunciation of the border and its enactment of displacing bodies to the other side of the line encompasses the incessant polarization of the Indian subcontinent into the ideological edifice of Hindu and Islamic discourse. The globalizing effect on the Bollywood cinematic productions resulted in 'family films' that synched local tradition with global trends (Mehta 2005). The families that embody

traditional Indian qualities were overrepresented on the Indian screen as they were conflated with the identity of the nation itself. The segregation of Muslim families using the border politics of Partition was a recalibration of the apparatus of cultural verification in which the guidelines to commensurate the notion of Indianness have been redacted to the level of sustaining an irrevocable tension between Hindus and Muslims.

Borders uphold the personal liminality of cultural bodies during the rite of passage called Partition. This liminality, in the anthropological sense, is an 'ambiguous state' where the transition from one social status to another 'takes the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or pre-liminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or post-liminal status' (Turner 1974). The body of a Muslim is embroiled in a disputable position which Bollywood cinema uses as a trope to showcase the duality stemming from the interplay of borders. The placement of characters like Salim Mirza in *Garm Hava*, Nathu in *Tamas*, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* (2012) elucidates the articulation of ethical, political, and geographical borders containing and contesting the vegetative state of the disenfranchised bodies. Partition, already observed as a continuation of the colonial policy of 'Divide and Rule' (Sharma 2009–2010) and the opportunistic communal politics of national political parties (Hassan 1993), extends these borders, not only to exploit the illusory qualities of these separating lines but to make the colonial and postcolonial demarcations of Indian history more visible.

Transgressing Borders, Subjectification and Othering

In Partition narratives, the protagonists are represented as travelling bodies who are seen to be crossing borders in order to find a new home or to escape from the violence and misery inflicted upon them. 'Discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalize others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging' (McLeod 2000). They impact thus the spatial orientation of the postcolonial population. The emergence of the Indian nation as the identifiable subject and the state of Pakistan as the reprehensible Other dismantled the common historical continuity of the land. The post-Partition era essentialized a

binary mode of comprehension of history that established a new cultural, political and social normality in India. As a natural reflection of this phenomenon, one can see the influence on the composition of the cinematic text of Bollywood where the stereotypical representation of the harmonious coexistence of Hindu-Muslim population is overemphasized in creating the narratology of the nation. This construction of the pseudo-harmony as a methodical intervention of the filmmaker to conceal the historical reality of the impediments has now been revealed to be problematic in the context of Indian Partition.

The historical genre has been providing Bollywood cinema with the material for the production of politically motivated films where a historical fictionality is embedded in the sense of political causality (Jaikumar 2006). The collective dissent against the British Raj and the desire to unify the population in favour of the struggle for Independence against the colonial horrors define the style of these films. The further transition from pre-Independence to post-independence is assimilated in cinema along with a shift in its emphatic obsession of narrativization: changing from political functionality to the notion of patriotism as the axial point of narration incorporating real and imaginary pasts (Raj and Sreekumar 2013). Critically acclaimed films like *Mother India* (1957), *Gandhi* (1982), and *A Passage to India* (1984) portray the new focus on the image of the nation and the concertedness of the patriotic discourses that structuralize it in the first place. In addition to this, there are instances when the unexchangeable Indo-Islamic shared past is erased in films to strategize the national identities of the nations (Chandra 2018). In light of this, the Partition narratives are overshadowed by the subject of the nation as a supreme entity, and everything outside the nationalistic discourse was identified as 'outcast'.

One of the reasons why the historical films of Bollywood that represented the scenario of Partition failed to address the confused state of Indian Muslims comes from the fact that it could not surpass the accretion of thematic elements of patriotism and nationalism which constitute almost all films. This leads to the realization that the mentally and physically gruelling problems of Partition cannot be settled by the duality of the nationalistic discourse that birthed the two nations and its religiously segregated citizenships. Transgressing the politics of geographical borders, the transnational cultural ambiguity signified by Muslim bodies resonates with the failed conceptualizations of nationalism. Partition substantiates the idea of nation as an 'inherently limited and sovereign' ideology of 'an imagined political community' (Anderson 1991). The ideology of nation, and its inherent

oppressiveness and authoritarianism, is confirmed through the fictional construction of the Muslim community as the common enemy of the nation.

The fundamental narrative of Partition centres around a twofold perception of nation as both home and refugee camp. The people who tend to cross borders are labelled as either citizens or refugees strictly on the basis of their ethno-religious identity. This legitimization or delegitimization was an easy process as it had slowly become ingrained in the collective social consciousness of the subcontinent. In *Garm Hava*, the representation of the Muslim family of the Mirzas shows how the Muslims were denied their civil rights almost immediately after the Partition, without wielding any blatant coercion. The voluntary migration of Muslim characters in the film precisely demonstrates the core conspiracy of the ideology of Partition, that it is a self-asserting and self-implementing process which is hegemonically internalizing the whole sectarian political violence. This antagonizes the self-representation of one's identity as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, in strict conflict with the imagined inclusiveness of the socio-political body of the nation.

Laura Busetta (2019) observes that 'The self-representation of the displaced subject is constitutively and intrinsically a gesture of political resistance' where the subjectivity of the geopolitically suffering migrant subject is perceived in biopolitical terms. However, representing the Muslim identity in Indian films imposes a negative connotation of resistance as it is viewed as a contingency that limits the subject's geopolitical movement in the changed border of the geographical zone. The Muslim subjects in movies like *Tamas* and *A Train to Pakistan* attain the status of a refugee whose mobility is a forceful infraction of their formative identity projected onto the elusiveness of nationalism. Thus, the eventuality of mobilization predetermines the nation as the locus point of the historical narrative replicated in cinematic forms.

Witnessing the Traumatic Past, Cinematic Reproduction of Historical Violence

The problem of impossibility encountered by the filmmakers in their attempts to realistically reproduce the past is one of the major obstacles that hinder the recapturing of a traumatic historical event. Although cinema is always defined by its fictionality, historical re-representations using cinematic narrative demand an authenticity of a higher level as they would actively influence, or in a deeper sense,

alter the epistemology of history. Paramount in the popular cultural imaginations of India, Bollywood cinema, notorious for its populist pervasiveness, political incorrectness, and censorship, has always been in an overtly incompetent position when it comes to portraying the greatest traumatic event in Indian history, the Partition. The filmic corpus of Bollywood film industry is embellished by overexaggerating melodramatic narratives and its aesthetic demonstrated by emotional instabilities with which the character representations are constructed. The basic structural background of mainstream Indian cinema successfully validates the inability of the Indian silver screen to address the trauma of Partition: not only its failure to assimilate the political sympathies and the corporal violence that erupted in the forefront of Indo-Pak Partition, but also the total rejection of the post-traumatic identity crisis of the displaced bodies of Muslims.

While the notion of the history of Partition is mostly remembered in terms of the amount of violence it dissipated while constructing social paradigms, the imperative to make sense of the recurring trauma and the process of recuperating the incessant forms of uncertainties is tantamount to the social construction of new identities that might repair the psychological and emotional suffering of its subjects. William Dalrymple (2015) recognizes that the event of 'Partition is central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent, as the Holocaust is to identity among Jews, branded painfully onto the regional consciousness by memories of almost unimaginable violence' (*The Great Divide* 2015). The violence, though almost unrepresentable in its actuality, finds considerable space as a major theme of Partition films. In Govind Nihalani's *Tamas*, Partition is represented as a catastrophic event through the visualization of the underprivileged. The protagonist Nathu is a tanner who unconsciously becomes the nodal point of the outbreak of sectarian violence among the Hindu and Muslim communities. The film depicts the inception of violence as a consequence of a misunderstanding between the communities; Nathu is unknowingly being led to slaughter a pig, thus desecrating the Muslim sensitivities and eventually disrupting the interreligious peace. The whole narrative of the film is reduced to the 'misunderstanding' between some reactionary religious fanatics. This oversimplification of the unimaginable violence is always how these narratives are formulated to incite the spectators to read history at its most unsophisticated level.

Another significant film on Partition is an adaptation of the celebrated postcolonial work *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Kushwant Singh. The film, directed

by Pamela Rooks, bears the same title of Singh's novel and follows events in the small fictional village of Mano Majra where a communal riot between the majority Sikhs and minority Muslims takes place when a train arrives from Pakistan containing the slaughtered bodies of Sikhs. An eruption of imminent violence as a motivation to return the 'favour' in the form of a 'train to Pakistan' becomes the narrative plot of the movie. The film, like *Tamas*, circulates around the socio-political reality of the unimpeded forms of horror as the immediate repercussion of Partition. These movies use the tokenized ideological presuppositions of the collective violence equally divided between the religious groups that antagonize each other in the duel for domination. As a result, a dominant-submissive polarization is evolved that recalls the old colonial ideological system which 'perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept new social norms and cognitive categories' (Nandy 1983). The Partition narratives in effect transforms the old colonial subjects into a new form where the Hindu-Muslim conflict begins to mimic the colonizer-colonized power struggle.

The complexity of the historicity of Partition prevents anyone from objectively locating the victims and perpetrators of the mass mobilization event. The masterminds behind the political decision are in a position of denial; the event was carried out by a self-motivated mass of segregated individuals who were in fact victims and perpetrators at the same time. Simon Lewis (2019) proposes the term 'border trouble' to define the 'form of cultural trauma that transcends binaries of perpetrator/victim and oppressor/oppressed'. Although the disintegration of the difference between the victim and perpetrator is sceptical (Leys 2000), this historical inaccuracy is an omnipresent predicament that puts the whole process in a state of ambiguity. Yet, the newly created nation state of India transposed the native position of the Indian Muslims into the minority status of refugees. The victimized position of the Indian Muslim is a ubiquitous theme in the narrative mode of Indian cinema. Vic Sarin's *Partition*, a Canadian co-production filmed in both British Columbia and India, portrays the story of a Sikh soldier who protects a seventeen-year-old Muslim girl from the traumatic background of Partition. In imitation of the conventional Holocaust narrative where a Jew is protected or loved by some German, *Partition* emphasizes the inter-religious love affair between the protagonists, the sympathetic approach of humanity transgressing the border politics of national and religious limits, and ultimately the collective hatred subverted by universal love.

This subjugation of the real traumatic past through a narrative that establishes a compassionate and sympathetic interaction between two sectional representatives who ought to be opposing one another, had they not been part of the fictional narrative, problematizes these representations. These narratives that trivialize the traumatic are precisely a forceful assertion of a regulated, suggestive and, more importantly, heavily censored version of historical re-representation. The depiction of a sub-narrative that accentuates the organic unification of the Sikh-Hindu-Muslim communities in *Tamas* is an exception to what it intends to picturize as the social and political displacement of communities, and the dissection of the communal, political and colonial influences affected its development as a transnational event. In fact, the film actually integrates what Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1998: 225) highlight as the problem of ‘individual expressions of human concern that serve sometimes to dilute a notoriously complex historical episode into no more than a conflict between common good and politically motivated bad.’ Disguised as a form of reparation to the violent past of India-Pak Partition, these tales disseminate an imposed image of Indian Muslims oblivious to the traumatic past that dislocated and displaced their cultural origins, and in doing so, bombard them with a more discombobulated sense of existence and belonging, which is inconveniently equivalent to obliterating the historical lineage of an entire generation of people.

Memory-Loss: Duality and Ambivalence of the Partitioned Selves

The paradoxical duality of the India-Pakistan Partition lies at the juncture of an historical event that projects itself as ‘Independence’, much celebrated and narrated upon the cultural memory of the Indian social and political conscience (for a discussion on the role of history in the work of postcolonial filmmakers, see Trandafoiu and Shannon in this volume, who address this issue from the perspective of Egyptian cinema). Even though the simultaneous occurrence of Partition and Independence stands as a reality, the modern pedagogical accounts of history have had a fascination with romanticizing the latter while collectively ignoring the former (Butalia 2000). The nationalistic and patriotic praxis of Bollywood cinema has never posed a threat to the point of re-evaluating this historical moment, particularly with any intentional approach to accommodate the personal and cultural loss into the grand narrative called Indian independence.

For these narrative texts of cinema, the collective trauma of Partition is a memory lost in the labyrinth of historical appropriations and homogenizations. Thus, a theoretical framework incorporating the ‘loss of memory’ and the ‘memory of loss’ ascertains the ambivalent position of the partitioned subject as a cultural product of the duality of their existence in a fragmented state of inextricably infused identities and memories.

The politicization of the private domains in Partition cinema is linked with the perception of the gendered nature of violence heightened during the Partition where women’s bodies become the site to stage the ideological and communal conflict (Viswanath and Malik 2009). Their bodies are inseparable from the violence of Partition reflected in their loss of homeland, home, family and, eventually, the control over their bodies (Mookerjee-Leonard 2018). Deepa Mehta’s *Earth*, released in India as *1947: Earth*, the second instalment of the Elements trilogy (*Fire, Earth and Water*), dramatizes the Partition politics through the female focal view of picturizing history. Narrated by a young Parsee girl named Lenny, the film tells the tale of Shanta, Lenny’s beautiful Hindu Ayah (nanny) who becomes the centre of a triangular romantic relationship including two Muslim men. The melodramatic narrative of the film emphasizes the gradual loss of interreligious friendship and love and the body of Shanta is presented as the epitome of the violence orchestrated in the wake of Partition. The climax of the movie effectively shows a grief-stricken and guilty Lenny who betrayed Shanta to a violent mob. The lament of Lenny and her memory of loss encapsulates the essence of Mehta’s film which forcefully acts as a medium to rouse the forgotten memories of loss. This duality of memory – the continuous act of forgetting and reminiscing – plays as a significant theme in the historical narrativization of traumatic events such as Partition.

Earth recalls Partition as the ‘largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history’. The film vanishes the displaced body of Shanta into a space of uncertainty where her disappearance delineates the mobilization of bodies and their state of ambiguous existence in the post-Partition era of India and Pakistan. The amount of loss brought by this historical uncertainty of displacement is evident in Lenny’s words as she recollects the memory of Shanta at the end of the film: ‘that day in 1947 when I lost Ayah, I lost a large part of myself’. The scattering of the partitioned selves of people like Shanta not only demonstrates the loss of their own bodies but the loss of many others who were associated with them. Similar to *Earth*, Chandraprasad Dwivedi’s *Pinjar* (The Skeleton) also portrays the

recurring image of a displaced young Hindu girl who gets lost in the middle of Partition. The film follows the abduction of the protagonist Puro by a Muslim man, Rashid, and the following disenfranchisement of her abandoned body. *Pinjar* exemplifies the herd mentality of a collective civilization that categorizes and separates the identity of individuals, which precipitates loss and estrangement. The portrayal of a villainous identity attributed to the Muslim protagonists in films like *Pinjar* and *Earth* suggests the abduction and occupation of a Hindu woman by a Muslim man which subliminally mirrors the ‘occupation of the Hindu nation by the Muslim invader’ (Sengupta 2019), thus further problematizing the representations of Muslim identities in these films. The success of the Indo-Pakistani film *Khamosh Pani* (2003) in India, which depicts the gendered nature of violence but in the context of Pakistan, can be viewed in contrast with Bollywood’s balanced style of filmmaking that mostly ignores these problems (Khan 2009).

The themes of loss and estrangement are central to the *œuvre* of the influential filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak who uses the cinematic medium to represent the historical period of 1947. His Partition trilogy, some of his important films, consist of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Capped Star, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (A Soft Note on a Sharp Scale, 1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962), all of which examine the varying degrees of the horror of Partition displacement and the social realities of its aftermath. Incentivized by the motivation for the cultural integration of the land, the impediments of ‘exile’ constitute a structural, linguistic and thematic component of his films (Vahali 2018). In *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak explores the involvement of caste as a significant social reality of the Indian land. The amount of suffering and despair one encounters in *Subarnarekha*, and the unprecedented losses that haunt the physical as well as emotional dispositions of the protagonists, reflect the kind of confused position in which they find themselves lost. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* narrates the tragic story of Nita, the young daughter of a migrant family from Pakistan, and her agonizing life dedicated to the survival of the family. In *Komal Gandhar* all the middle-class protagonists suffer from the torment of separation that invokes a sense of loss about their home on the other side of the border (Mandal 2008). In contrast to Bollywood, Ghatak’s films address the refugee problem of the land with a form of frustration that according to him is tantamount to the feeling of reality, assimilating the cultural shock of Partition (Ghatak 1987).

Memory plays an important role in connecting the temporal and spatial coordinates that articulate the social, individual and historical components of a

geographical area. Both the lack and excess of memory can be traumatic as the reality of events is superimposed onto the consciousness of individuals. This duality of memory, its subliminal and concrete forms of presence, is reflected in acts of perceiving the traumatic event of Partition. Mass culture industries like Bollywood cinema thrive on the synthetic recreation of the traumatic memory which Alison Landsberg calls 'prosthetic memory' (2004). The traumatic memory of Partition as represented in the films of Bollywood is not the reproduction of the lived experience that helps to reflect and recreate the entrenched violence of history but the indirect simulation of a fictional one.

Adapting the Fictional Real: Cultural Re-reproduction of the Mythologized Reality

The unfinished business of representing the traumatic experience of Indo-Pak Partition in the gigantic landscape of Bollywood screen has also been revealed as inauthentic and discontinuous. The inability of the cinematic medium to locate the dislocated identities of Indian Muslims is still an unsolved predicament. The filmic community of India is guilty of following a conventional pattern of recycling old methodologies of popular cinema as the material for new spectacles. It is interesting to note that the major films that came out as Partition narratives were all adaptations of various literary works. To name a few examples of such adaptation: *Garm Hava* from an unpublished Urdu short story by Ismat Chughtai; *Tamas* from the novel of the same name by Bhisham Sahni (1973); *Earth* from the novel *Cracking India* (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa; *Train to Pakistan* from Kushwant Singh's classic postcolonial novel of the same name; *Pinjar* from the 1950 Punjabi novel by Amrita Pritam; and *Midnight's Children* (1981) from Salman Rushdie's famous novel.

Bollywood's fascination with adapting literary works into the visual medium reduces the historical re-representation of Indian Partition into a mere fictional activity of artistic re-reproduction. Reproducing the already fictionalized narrative of historical activity is an imitation of the fictional, thus the realistic portrayal of the same seems an impossible activity. All these Bollywood productions about the Partition, irrespective of how realistically faithful they are to the mother text, are adaptations of the fictionalized real. The reality is fictionalized and re-fictionalized and the process continues indefinitely. This perpetual recycled motion of

fictionalization displaces reality to an unattainable point and the product is a mythologized reality where the subject of the text is in an unreal or hyperreal state. The emanation of the hyperreality is a simulation without having 'a real' as Jean Baudrillard (1994) puts it: 'Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal'.

The hyperreal posits a threat to the conceptual idealizations of the real and its imaginations hence 'sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences' (Baudrillard 1994). The cinematic subject of Indian Muslims in the Partition narratives is the representation of the hyperreal, a mythical image itself, from which the authentic realization of the true identity is lost somewhere in-between the original and the differences of the reproduced fictional real. This in-betweenness is the quintessential quality of Indian Partition narratives that assimilate the experience of the mobilization of Muslims into the narrative structure of its cinematic body. The qualitative in-betweenness of Bollywood narratives can be conflated with the notion of simulacrum which is 'an image without resemblance' (Deleuze 1990), that is, an unoriginal copy.

The historical retelling of the Indo-Pak Partition is an act of problematizing the reality of the past with certain limitations which reveal the very impossibility of the action as a threat. This threat is countered by the postmodern techniques of (de) constructing the reality of events through the construction of an intertextually metafictional text that makes use of the fragmented realities of the past. An example of the postmodern fictionalization of Partition history is witnessed in Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) and the cinematic adaptation of the text by Deepa Mehta in 2012. The complexity of the historical narrativization deliberately adopted in *Midnight's Children*, the self-reflectivity of the tumultuous events that constitute the grand narrative of Partition, all experienced and witnessed by the protagonist Saleem Sinai who is self-conscious of his fictional identity, shows the possibility of understanding the incomprehensible and presenting the unrepresentable. This attempt is essential in deciphering the elusive nature of the dichotomizations of Hindu-Muslim religiosity, the duality of the nationalistic border politics and the pseudo-textual constructions of ethical, cultural and patriotic discourses of the nation states of India and Pakistan. The demystification of the institutionalized historical narratives of Partition is

tantamount to decentralizing the epistemological prejudices that have been denigrating the Partition subjects for years.

Conclusion

Visualization of India-Pakistan Partition in the filmic narrative of Bollywood problematizes the notion of historical reality of the event of partitioning the Indian subcontinent. The popular Indian cinematic medium is characterized by a lack of authenticity and originality in portraying the monumental 'cultural shock' experienced by the massive population of the Indian subcontinent just before it was cleaved into the two border nations of India and Pakistan. The violence that erupted after 1947 created 'new subjects and subject positions: a fact that in itself necessitates a reconsideration of the standard view of history as a process with an always already given subject' (Pandey 2004). The construction of the new historical subjects is often perceived as the cost of freedom achieved and ratified through the twofold religiously segregated narratives of Hindu and Muslim hatred. Bollywood cinema as a social and cultural text of the newly created national entity of India usually assimilated the dichotomization of the Hindu-Muslim conflict as the natural background of its narrative, collectively neglecting the other side of the grand narrative: the unheard stories and incomplete representations. The anti-Pakistan discourse favoured by the patriotic imaginations of the land, which was successfully translated as a collective anti-Muslim stand, consciously or unconsciously forms the narrative base of the majority of the spectacles of Bollywood.

Bollywood cinema overcomes the anti-Muslim or anti-Hindu accusations by incorporating a subplot that demonstrates religious harmony among the protagonists. The trivialization of the plot – a deliberate attempt to ameliorate the rivalry among the communities and to escape the horrors of censorship – does little to address the real issue of the mass mobilization and displacement of the population during the Partition. The back and forth motion of individuals and families to the land of Pakistan and India completes the polarization put forth by religious segregation and the sectarian violence associated with it. There are numerous films that contextualize the Partition and the themes of identity crisis, estrangement, loss, dislocation, and abduction. Films use the narrative trope of inter-religious love affairs and friendship of families to transcend religious, cultural

and political borders. However, the unique condition of the Muslim subject is still in an ambiguous position that cannot be dissected by the instrument of the dualistic nationalistic border politics.

The narrative of Partition is analogous to the narrative of nation and like any socio-political construct loses its origin in the course of time and becomes a powerful historical idea (Bhabha 1990). The nature of borders that transgress the geographical zones of the national demarcations brings a sense of transnationality between the displaced bodies where their spatial and temporal dimensions are interconnected by collective trauma. Witnessing the traumatic re-representations of the violent past brings a logic of solidarity among the subjects where the ambivalence of their psychological suffering is recapitulated through the 'memory of loss' and 'loss of memory'. The counter-representation of the oppressed selves of the partitioned subjects is an almost impossible task strictly for the reason that the authenticity of their 'true self' is always a fictionalized one. Bollywood cinema repeatedly resorts to the method of adapting fictionalized works to represent the historical accounts of the Partition. The result is a re-representation of the fictionalized real, a hyperreality, that perpetually neutralizes and displaces the original to leave the subject in a spiral of fragmented realities where the differences are constantly recurring.

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