

Representation of Women in the Partition Films

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Film theorists in the 1970s held that cinema provides its viewers a separation from their own egos or perceptions of reality while at the same time reinforcing those egos and perceptions. Perhaps the power of cinema lies in inducing us to subject our self to a momentary and perceived loss of control, sort of like free fall experience from a twin-engine plane.

In the proposed article I have taken two well-known films 1947 Earth (1998). And Pinjar (2003). The films are selected because their narrative is centred upon the experience of women during the partition of India in 1947. The films raise the same question.. When is a film an exercise to record, to glorify, or condemn a particular view of history and when is it a cinematic unfolding of the human experience, informed by but transcending the politics of the time?

Feminist theorists such as Laura Mulvey believe that film often represents the language of patriarchy by being bound up in the same story of sexual difference that all patriarchy is founded upon.

'Women...stands in the patriarchal order as signifier for the male other...the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.'

In the proposed article I would like to discuss in detail through the films that how the partition with all its burden and trauma had transformed the lives of women completely different from each other in experience of class, caste and socio economic background of a nation.

In the second film of the trilogy, 1947 Earth Deepa Mehta chooses to focus on a historical moment in Indian history. The film is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Ice-Candy _Man. A portion of Sidhwa's novel features a relationship between a Hindu woman and a Muslim youth, a segment taken up by Deepa Mehta to form the core of her film, 1947 Earth. It tells a 'hyphenated' story from a twice-hyphenated perspective. Sidhwa is a Pakistani-American whereas Deepa Mehta is an Indian who resides in Canada. Yet Mehta's cine version seems to overlap Sidhwa's as both focus on a female version of history and both show how the will of men subjugated Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu women during partition, resulting in a profound inequity in gender relations.

What is not recorded in the sweep of the grand narrative is the impact of events on the personal and individual level. What remains neglected is the heap of thousands of little stories that make up the master narrative—the individual experiences of men and women who lived through the horror, suffered, perished and survived. What was their role in the epoch-making event? How did it affect their personal lives and the lives of those around them? These details are not to be found in history or in

government-sponsored textbooks. In them is buried the unofficial memory which comprises the hidden scars of men, women, children who suffered.

The novel by Sidhwa focuses on the trauma of the 1947 narrated from a child's perspective, it transports its characters from a state of easy innocence to a horrendous epoch when terrific atrocities are committed and the dismemberment of the Indian subcontinent takes place. The love story between a Hindu maid and a Muslim masseur forms the core of Deepa Mehta's film, 1947 Earth. While the cine version has all the familiar Bollywood ingredients, at the same time the story retains its original perspective and remains the account of a historical moment experienced on an individual. In the film it is clear that while the different levels of narrative are no doubt present, Mehta chooses to turn a female gaze on the story, pointing to the marginalization and victimization of women during the partition turmoil. The violence of the partition was the consequence of primarily male aggression and its worst victims were women. It was an assault on the country—a violation, a rupture, a betrayal. Etymologically 'Ayah' is a colonial construct, the response of a servant to the master, literally meaning 'I'm coming.. (at your service)'. If the colonial rule is to be overthrown then logically the ayah too must be attacked and humbled. Throughout the story, in the text as also its film adaptation, an idea that is highlighted is that the sexuality of a woman makes her vulnerable. The ayah is exposed to violence because of her radiant sexuality, her bouncy walk and rotund appeal. Belonging to the minority Hindu community in a Muslim dominated area, ayah becomes an easy target, a scapegoat, a symbol of the other which has to be vanquished. It may be noted here the perpetrators and victims of the violence come from the same social space.

The film attempts to domesticate the horror of partition by centering it in a love story, highlighting the romance element through song sequences, kite-flying festivals and other light-hearted portrayal of the times. It is a text that crosses generic boundaries as it moves from the printed novel to its film version. Thus here is a text that knows no borders. And yet it speaks of the creation of a border, a dividing line, the drawing of the Radcliffe line, the cracking of a nation, of the earth of India, creating a rift, a fault, where there should have been none. In the creation of this fault line the heaviest price is paid by women whose role in the tragic sequence of events has not been duly acknowledged, whose voices have not been heard so far. The film tries to tune its ear to the unheard female voices of partition, bringing to public view the role that silent sufferers played during the years of turmoil, underscoring what Butalia refers to as the futility and tragedy of demarcating boundaries and the sense of tragic waste that inevitably follows such an event. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin believe that the story of 1947, while being one of the successful attainments of independence, is also a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession of large scale and widespread communal violence and of the reassignment of family, community and national identities as people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed. It is this reality that Mehta and Sidhwa have tried to portray in Earth/Ice-Candy Man.

Pinjar is an adaptation by the director, Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, of Amrita Pritam's novel Pinjar translated in English as 'The Skeleton.' The film follows the basic plot-line while altering micro-events, characters and some of the setting. The events covered in the novel stretch from the early 1930s to the fateful events of 1947. The film compresses time to about a year. The film argues for disinvestment in all types

of categorical identity and greater investment in practical identity. Working through anesthetization of emotion and not exploitation of emotion, the film succeeds in touching the right emotional codes and uses a form of persuasion that does not threaten or correct but that shifts perspective.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan with formal decolonization in 1947 led to moments of extreme violation and dislocation for many women. This included brutalization by men from the other community, murder at the hands of men from within their own clans and families to preserve honor and forcible restitution to their legitimate families and homes by the newly formed nation-states, eager to sacrifice women's individual rights as citizens to preserve national health and wholeness.

Pinjar the novel by Amrita Pritam is a remarkable and daring work. It does link Pakistan with Ravana and India with Rama. At the same time, however it engages in this mythological emplotment of history.

The 1947 Partition of India was in some ways an extreme case of a historical event in that it was profoundly emotionally conflicted and incomprehensibly chaotic. Thus it has been a prime target for emotional and cognitive simplification through modelling. The film portrays partition as a combined human catastrophe. Amrita Pritam's novel gives graphic description, for instance of Puro's disgust at sexual violation.

According to cognitive appraisal theory of emotion, emotions are always about something, there is always an object, an event and a pattern of reasoning involved.

Palliative appraisal is never more needed than when the dreaded partition actually occurs and chaos reigns in villages and towns.

The culmination of the film comes in 1948. It is the end of Partition violence, the aftermath of this great historical event. On one hand the film represents an actual historical situation, part of this event - the return of abducted women, on the other hand, it idealizes this resolution, presenting a [possibility for the future, thus a revision not only of the historical event, but of the present and the mythical past as well.

What one may ask, happens to other women sufferers in the story? They must find an escape route.

Ice candy Man does not speak of mass suicides or the assisted self-immolation of women, or of their killing by family members in the name of honour, a noticeable omission because, as we know, the cultural memory of the partition of India is made up of stories of women who chose to sacrifice their lives and thus were valorized in many family narratives and popular culture of Punjab.

The film 1947, Earth, attempts to domesticate the horror of partition by centering it on a love story, highlighting the romance element through song-sequences, kite-flying festivals and other light-hearted portrayal of the times. But all the time, present in a sinister disguised form, is the lurking monster of communalism which finally surfaces to crush and kill the weak and unsuspecting, cracking up a nation, splitting it into two chunks separated by an unfathomable chasm, a boundary that is impossible to

negotiate. Ice Candy Man is thus a text that crosses generic boundaries as it moves from the printed novel to its film version, tracing the emergence of India and Pakistan. Deepa Mehta moves between India and Canada and even as Sidhwa, the first narrator, moves between Pakistan and the US. Thus here is a text that knows no borders. And yet it speaks of the creation of a border, a dividing line, the drawing of Radcliffe Line, a rift, a fault where there should have been none. In the creation of this fault line the heaviest price is paid by the women whose role in the tragic sequence of events has not been duly acknowledged. Whose voices have not been heard so far. The film tries to tune its ear to the unheard female voices of the partition, bringing to the public view the role that silent sufferers played during the years of turmoil, underscoring what Butaliarefers to as 'the futility and tragedy of demarcating boundaries, and the sense of tragic waste that inevitably follows such an event.

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