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## **Frames of history: The impact of Hindi cinema on public perception, societal reflection, and collective memory of the partition of India**

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### **Abstract**

Hindi cinema frequently highlights the nation's extensive cultural diversity, encompassing various languages, traditions, and ways of life. This depiction cultivates a sense of national identification while also emphasising regional distinctiveness. Hindi films have significantly influenced public perceptions of historical events, particularly tragic ones like the Partition. This section will analyse the representation of the Partition in Hindi cinema and its impact on popular perception and comprehension. Recent years have witnessed academic interest in perceiving Indian cinema as a reflection of Indian culture and its value systems. These films reflect the artistic sensibility, cultural sophistication, and social and political consciousness of diverse societal aspects, as well as the distinguishing qualities of the socio-economic-political-cultural system to which they are affiliated. The films about the partition of India have depicted the circumstances of that era. In recent years, Hindi film has evolved considerably, beyond its role as mere entertainment to experiment with and present socially responsible narratives, so exerting a greater influence on the public. The film industry is gradually and consistently advocating for social issues and is prepared to undertake challenges to raise awareness among the audience. The study article intends to examine the influence of Hindi cinema on public perception, societal reflection, and collective memory about the Partition of India.

**Keywords:** Partition, cultural sophistication, collective memory, Hindi Cinema

### **Introduction**

Hindi films have significantly influenced public perception of historical events, particularly tragic ones like the Partition. This section will analyse Bollywood's depiction of the Partition in films and its impact on popular perception and comprehension. Bollywood has reflected societal issues and sentiments, particularly on the Partition, with films frequently depicting the trauma, anguish, and dislocation endured by individuals and families. The depiction of topics such as community violence, familial separation, migration, and the intricate identities arising from the aftermath of the Partition in cinema warrants exploration. Films frequently influence the collective memory of a culture, either conserving or distorting historical events for subsequent generations. This section may analyse the influence of cinema on the recollection or erasure of the Partition, influencing how subsequent generations engage with this tragedy. Saint, T. K. (2019) <sup>[23]</sup>.

The manner in which filmmakers and the film industry construct narratives that either affirm or challenge the prevailing recollections of Partition—whether prioritising individual survival stories or highlighting broader political and societal turmoil—can serve as a central theme. The depiction of Partition in film as a collective memory influencing identity, nationhood, and the concept of "belonging" in post-Partition India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is crucial. Hindi cinema may have functioned as a mechanism for healing, providing a means for communities impacted by Partition to reconcile with their shared trauma. The contribution of Bollywood to fostering reconciliation and comprehension among populations fractured by the Partition may serve as an additional focal point. The research may also concentrate on pivotal films that profoundly influenced public perception of the Partition and its consequences. Chakravarty, S. S. (2011) <sup>[8]</sup>.

### **Partition Narratives of Hindi Cinema**

The discussions surrounding Partition provide a hermeneutic analysis of the historical conception of what is generally termed 'Indian' and its diverse meanings that inform the

established norms of institutionalised Indian nationalism. The primary challenge for the filmmaker is to challenge the inherent brutality of storytelling and reconcile the conflicting elements of the past to achieve harmony among the shattered aspects omitted by the Partition. Rege, A. (2023) <sup>[20]</sup>. Hindi cinema has consistently sought to depict Partition through localised narratives that have been deliberately overlooked within the border construction that resulted in the loss of millions of lives as collateral damage. The Indian film industry has made a substantial contribution to nation-building. Bollywood has consistently mirrored the nation's development efforts, showcasing filmmakers' subliminal commitment to the culturally 'new-born' India. Kohli, P. (2023) <sup>[14]</sup>. The Partition storylines in Hindi Cinema unintentionally replicate the ethno-religious tensions between Hindu and Muslim groups within the context of the political discourse that influenced modern India.

The Hindi cinema industry in India has consistently portrayed the Partition from the 1940s. In his analysis of the representation of the Partition in Hindi cinema, Manoj Sharma asserts that the depiction of violence against marginalised groups, the experience of loss, the anguish of dislocation, compelled migrations, economic hardship, and the inhumane brutality enacted under the guise of religious division has, to some degree, been beneficial in conveying the trauma of the Partition. Sharma concludes that cinema is tasked with depicting not only the Partition but also the pervasive trauma linked to it, a trauma that permeates the silences surrounding the Partition to this day. Mukherjee, D. (2020) <sup>[18]</sup>.

Hindi cinema has produced films about partition since the 1940s. Regarding the migration in the northern region adjacent to Punjab and conversely in the vicinity of Bengal, which was transformed into East Pakistan. Bengali cinema has produced numerous films depicting the incident, as both Noor Jehan and Saadat Hasan Manto moved to India from foreign territories. The old films depicted its influence on the masses, the country, and its repercussions in a literal way. The films frequently included a protagonist attempting to rectify injustices and convey moral lessons to the audience, but this approach evolved in subsequent years. Shirodkar, M. (2020) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### Public Perception of Hindi Cinema on Partition

The general perspective of Hindi cinema about partition indicates that the Hindi film industry has been personally impacted by the partition. A few of the creators previously lived in different regions of the country. Prominent individuals that journeyed from Lahore to Bombay were the Anand brothers, B.R. Chopra, Yash Chopra, among others. The personal link to the occurrence resulted in numerous films portraying it from an individual perspective. Exhibiting the anguish and distress experienced by individuals who endured it. Bhalru, M. K. (2007) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Hindi cinema frequently explores historical narratives; in addition to biopics, India's rich heritage include numerous untold stories. A significant event that inevitably comes to mind about the partition of India and Pakistan is how Bollywood and South Indian films have addressed it. The portrayal of independence warriors such as Bhagat Singh and romantic narratives like *Gadar* illustrates the anguish of partition on the cinematic platform. However, it is now presented differently, with a narrative that refrains from labelling us as victims of history. Roy, R. (2010) <sup>[21]</sup>.

Public Perception of Hindi Cinema Regarding Partition from the 1980s to the 1990s, as we gained understanding into historical contexts. Narratives became increasingly personal and emotional. It was consistently portrayed as an event occurring at a considerable distance from us. An occurrence that transpired for us, akin to the romantic narratives exemplified by *Gadar*. Individuals were placed in an incomprehensible predicament and compelled to make decisions based on the caprices of others. During this period, the filmmakers sought to address the anguish inflicted by the partition and the resultant psychological divisions among individuals.

Numerous films sought to reconcile the divide between Hinduism and Islam. Films such as *Amar*, *Akbar*, *Anthony and Veer* exhibit a straightforward, endearing motif that has demonstrated commercial success at the box office. Hindi Cinema takes considerable time to progress beyond this issue, to assign culpability, and to consider it not just from the perspective of victims but also with a comprehensive understanding of public view. Gupta, K., & Gupta, O. K. (2018) <sup>[10]</sup>.

The public perception of Hindi cinema on Partition has evolved, particularly with the emergence of films about political leaders after 2010, wherein filmmakers have sought to attribute responsibility to us. Numerous films and television programs from that era illustrate how politicians, both then and now, exploit religion for divisive purposes. Films not centred on the partition have also illustrated how religious riots are frequently exploited by those in authority to instill fear and usurp power from the populace. These films illustrated the enduring impact of the division on the subcontinent. Bhaskar, I. (2005) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Public perception regarding partition films seeks to illustrate the process of sectarian division within the Indian subcontinent, categorising individuals as 'Indian Muslims' and 'Indian Hindus,' with the former being delegitimised and disparaged to the extent of severing their 'Indianness' from their identity. The establishment of Pakistan as a Muslim nation-state is recognised as the sole refuge for individuals identifying as Indian Muslims. Bollywood films elucidate the widespread discrediting of the diverse and secular principles inherent in Indian cultural history through protagonists who are emotionally and physically marginalised from the burgeoning nationalistic narrative of India. Islam, M. (2007) <sup>[12]</sup>.

The historical genre has supplied Hindi Cinema with content for the creation of politically driven films, wherein historical fiction is intertwined with political causality. The collective opposition to the British Raj and the aspiration to unify the populace in support of the battle for independence from colonial atrocities characterise the style of these films. One reason the historical films of Bollywood depicting the Partition did not adequately address the perplexed condition of Indian Muslims is their inability to transcend the accumulation of theme elements of patriotism and nationalism that pervade nearly all films. This culminates in the understanding that the mentally and physically arduous issues of Partition cannot be resolved by the binary nationalistic narrative that gave rise to the two nations and their religiously divided citizenries. Arya, S. G., & Dewal, O. P. (2023) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Partition films created by directors born post-Independence include Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1998), Anil Sharma's *Gadar Ek Prem Katha* (2001), *Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Pinjar*

(2003), Khamosh Pani (2003), Rajkahini (2015), and Shankhachil (2015), among several more. The quality is inconsistent; yet, many of these films exhibit dedication, garner international recognition, and achieve commercial success, facilitating further production opportunities.

With the exception of *Gadar Ek Prem Katha*, which was a blatant and vulgar commercial endeavour focused only on anti-Pakistani sentiment, the remaining films maintained consistency in their messaging. A profound sense of detachment is evident in *Train to Pakistan*, directed by Pamela Rooks, and in *Earth*, as Deepa Mehta, an exile, is estranged from the firsthand experience that precipitated the Partition and its repercussions on people impacted by it.

*Khamosh Pani*, directed by Sabeeha Sumerr, is not exclusively an Indian film, as it is a co-production; nonetheless, the cast and credits predominantly feature Indian contributors. The narrative depicts the conflict of a Sikh woman who weds the Muslim guy who kidnaps her, yet must confront her history when her son becomes a religious extremist. *Pinjar* (2003), a polished adaptation by Chandraprakash Dwivedi of Amrita Pritam's novel, narrates the hardships of a Punjabi Hindu woman whose family disowns her following her abduction by a Muslim guy.

Public perception of "Partition" has become a double-edged sword for filmmakers, who frequently express a desire to reflect on Partition in India, especially in Bengal, through their cinematic interpretations and personal viewpoints. The inquiry is – how many of these films genuinely seek to restore the spirit of individuals fractured, impoverished, and rendered hungry and homeless due to the Partition, and how many are intended to elevate the status of the filmmaker and his team by attracting the attention of international film festivals and awards?

Public perception of the partition of Hindi cinema was regarded as 'the logical and unavoidable consequence of the intractable conflict between Hindus and Muslims, as asserted by advocates of the Two-Nation thesis. 'One the 'Divide and Rule' approach employed by imperial monarchs is regarded as having resulted in divisiveness. Gupta, P. (2022) [11].

The Muslim League's endorsement of separatist politics and the reinforcement of communitarian identities through shared ideals and symbols, with the Indian National Congress's failure to prevent partition, were also considered. There is an emphasis on employing supplementary sources alongside the archives. This attempt utilises new materials such as personal diaries, letters, pamphlets, memoirs, and oral sources obtained through interviews to document the history of the partition. Literature has served as a foundation for historical writing. Literature has been utilised for cinematic representations of the partition events. Three comprehending the intricacy inherent in partition experiences can be achieved by examining the portrayal of various partition themes in films. BASU, D. (2020) [3].

### **Societal Reflection of Hindi Cinema on Partition**

Hindi cinema has historically served as a reflection of Indian society, illustrating its cultural, social, and political transformations. The 1947 partition of India, a profoundly traumatic event in the nation's history, has been a persistent motif in Hindi cinema. Filmmakers have utilised cinema to depict not just the immediate consequences of Partition but also to examine its enduring effects on personal and community identities, nation-building, and the psychology

of displacement and trauma. Sadasivan, S., & Roy, A. G. (2024) [22].

In the years immediately following the Partition, the trauma of the tragedy was delicately mirrored in Hindi cinema. Films like "*Dharti Ke Lal*" (1946), directed by K. A. Abbas, are regarded as among the earliest to explore the ramifications of Partition. The film, situated within the context of the Bengal famine and the partition, depicted the human anguish resulting from displacement, brutality, and the precariousness of existence. This film, along with others such as "*Jago Huya Sawera*" (1959), contributed to the initial narratives on Partition in the nation's cinema, but the emphasis during that period was predominantly on post-independence reconstruction and social reforms. Khan, M. H. (2020) [13].

In the decades subsequent to Partition, most of the dialogue regarding the trauma of the event was not explicitly confronted, possibly due to the emotional challenges and political sensitivities involved. Nevertheless, the anguish of separation and the fragmented identities started to manifest in nuanced manners. For example, "*Garam Hawa*" (1973), a tragic film by M.S. Sathyu, examined the post-Partition experiences of Muslim refugees in India and their need for belonging. It depicts the personal agony of partition survivors and their compelled relocation to a new territory. The film serves as a crucial depiction of how Partition victims contended with their identity, citizenship, and survival in a new, frequently antagonistic political landscape. Sircar, O. (2024) [25].

Filmmakers during this period began to integrate the themes of lost love and separation as metaphors for the Partition. Films like "*Kagaz Ke Phool*" (1959) and "*Azaadi Ki Liye*" (1958) also indirectly addressed the emotional and societal consequences of Partition. Although not consistently focused on the event, these films began to portray its psychological scars on individuals, particularly those who directly endured the violence and turmoil.

Recently, Hindi cinema has persistently explored the trauma of Partition, frequently via the perspectives of memory, history, and reconciliation. Films such as "*Veer-Zaara*" (2004), "*Partition*" (2007), and "*Train to Pakistan*" (2009) provide a nuanced perspective on the anguish endured by individuals during Partition, while also emphasising the potential for cross-border peace and reconciliation. These films frequently emphasise the human toll of Partition, depicting narratives of love, sorrow, and common humanity among individuals from opposing sides of the newly established borders.

A significant trend in modern Hindi cinema is the depiction of Partition as not merely a historical occurrence, but as a persistent psychological and emotional struggle. In "*Aligarh*" (2016), the narrative shifts from the historical event to its aftermath, concentrating on the life of a man marginalised by his sexuality and the enduring trauma of Partition. Bharat, M. (2024) [5].

Upon analysing ten films of Hindi Cinema set against the backdrop of the Indian Partition of 1947, the researcher concluded that the theme of home is not examined in all the films featuring this historical context. The Partition is commemorated for various reasons, including displacement, migration, and sexual violence against women, abduction, identity alteration, inter-religious violence, and rising unemployment immediately following Independence. Consequently, films reflect diverse sentiments in their

approach and essence.

### **Hindi Cinema on collective Memory of the Partition of India**

Hindi cinema, also known as Bollywood, has significantly influenced the cultural memory of the 1947 Partition of India, which led to the establishment of two sovereign nations: India and Pakistan. This separation resulted in extensive violence, relocation, and the fragmentation of communities that had coexisted for millennia. Over the decades, Hindi film has profoundly influenced both the reflection and formation of popular memory regarding the Partition. Chakraborty, S. (2023) [7].

Here are several significant ways in which Hindi cinema has influenced the common memory of the Partition:

#### **1. Emotional Narration and Representation**

Hindi cinema frequently emphasises the human and emotional ramifications of Partition, portraying the anguish, loss, and dislocation endured by millions. Films such as *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) and *Border* (1997) dramatise personal narratives within the context of the Partition, frequently highlighting themes of love, sacrifice, and patriotism. These films depict the profound emotional toll of Partition, utilising melodrama and powerful performances to leave a lasting impression on the communal consciousness, solidifying Partition as a terrible and significant historical event.

#### **2. The Concept of the "Other" and National Identity**

Hindi cinema, especially in the post-Independence era, frequently depicted the discord between India and Pakistan, emphasising the political, social, and cultural rift established by the Partition. Films like *Heer Ranjha* (1970) and *Pardes* (1997) examine the concept of national identity and the perception of "the other," frequently employing the Partition as a metaphor for broader cultural and ideological disparities. Bollywood films, by depicting the schism between Hindus and Muslims or among individuals from many nations, contributed to the formation of a collective national identity, particularly in India, while concurrently perpetuating a narrative of loss and division.

#### **3. Representations of Migration and Displacement**

The agony experienced by millions of refugees, who were displaced from their homes and compelled to relocate to other countries following Partition, is a prevalent motif in Hindi cinema. Films like *Tamas* (1987), *Chupke Chupke* (1975), and *Umrao Jaan* (1981) examine the experiences of individuals who have been relocated, highlighting the anguish of leaving one's homeland, family, and cultural heritage. These films illustrate the enduring effects of Partition on individuals and communities, fostering a collective memory that transcends the boundaries of India and Pakistan.

#### **4. Political and Social Analysis**

Hindi cinema has served as a medium for political and social critique over the ramifications of Partition, frequently challenging the legality of the bloodshed and the profound socioeconomic divisions it engendered. Films like *Garm Hawa* (1973) explored the refugee situation and the intricacies encountered by those who ended up on the incorrect side of the border post-1947. It underscored the

conflict between individual recollection and collective historical accounts, as well as the societal dislocation that ensued after Partition. These films facilitate discourse on the implications of Partition for human rights, social justice, and the enduring effects of colonialism.

#### **5. Remembrance and Reconciliation**

Certain Hindi films have addressed Partition as a theme of reconciliation and healing, offering avenues for comprehension across religious and national differences. Films such as *Veer-Zaara* (2004) seek to reconcile the divide between India and Pakistan by showcasing the potential for love and empathy among individuals from both nations. Such films imply that the Partition, although profoundly traumatic, ought not to permanently characterise the relationship between the two states, and that a common human bond is attainable despite historical divisions.

#### **6. Influence on Generational Memory**

The depiction of Partition in Hindi cinema has forged a lasting generational memory within the national psyche. The Partition is shown through popular songs, dialogues, and iconic situations, representing not merely a political event but a cultural experience that transcends temporal boundaries. It affects not only those who personally experienced it but also future generations who have gained a communal memory via film. Films consequently facilitate the transmission of narratives regarding Partition, influencing the comprehension of this significant epoch in South Asian history among the youth.

#### **Conclusion**

Hindi cinema has significantly influenced the collective memory of the Partition of India. Films have significantly contributed to the preservation and reconfiguration of the memory of this tragic event through emotive storytelling, political commentary, and personal narratives. Hindi cinema addresses the themes of migration, displacement, grief, and reconciliation, preserving the memory of Partition while facilitating healing, introspection, and continuous discourse regarding its cultural and political consequences.

Hindi film has been instrumental in reflecting, digesting, and reinterpreting the trauma of Partition, from its inception to the present day. The depiction of Partition has progressed over time, transitioning from nuanced representations of grief to direct confrontations with its atrocities, however it continues to be a significant thematic element in Hindi Cinema. The cinematic examination of Partition aims to both safeguard collective memory and stimulate discussions regarding national identity, communalism, and the intricate histories of India and Pakistan. These films encourage audiences to contemplate the lasting impacts of Partition and the continuous pursuit of healing and reconciliation.

The study clearly illustrates how realistic cinema impacts and shapes societal standards while concurrently receiving feedback from the audience. The ideas and beliefs individuals form regarding societal issues are predominantly, if not entirely, influenced by their representation through method acting. Hindi cinema frequently employs the technique of adapting fictionalised narratives to depict the historical events of the Partition.

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