

Paper

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## Partition and Cinema

**Title: Hindi Films on Partition - an overview (special focus on *Garm Hawa* and *Tamas*)**

### ABSTRACT

Cinema plays a pivotal role in documenting time and society. And it has been doing so for ages. Cinema has the power to bring reality to the screen. Cinema is a powerful medium that can depict/ portray/ reflect/ show emotionally, mentally and psychologically draining things. The visual elements of motion pictures have a universal power to communicate, educate, and entertain. Cinema has remained one of the most popular forms of mass media for decades, which is believed to have influenced the masses immensely and reinforced dominant cultural values. To show how Indian Cinema has depicted partition, two films have been selected for the paper. The paper focuses on two films based on the division of India, M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* (1988). Both these movies are adaptations. *Garm Hawa* was adopted from Ismat Chughtai's short story and *Tamas* from Bhisham Sahni's novel of the same name.

Keywords: *Garm Hawa*, *Tamas*, partition, 1947, Indian cinema, cinema, Hindi cinema, Bollywood, Hindi film industry.

### INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that cinema plays a vital role in documenting time and society. And it has been doing so for ages. Cinema has the power to bring reality to the screen. The visual elements of motion pictures have a universal ability to communicate, educate, and entertain. Cinema has remained one of the most popular forms of mass media for decades, which is believed to have influenced the masses immensely and reinforced dominant cultural values.

M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* (1988) are important films. Both these movies are adaptations. *Garm Hawa* was adopted from Ismat Chughtai's short story and *Tamas* from Bhisham Sahni's novel of the same name.

Both these films are remarkable ones. *Garm Hawa* is certainly one of the earliest Hindi films ever made in the history of Indian cinema. *Garm Hawa*, with the great Balraj Sahni as its lead, was written by Kaifi Azmi and Shama Zaidi (based on the prolific Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai's short story). The relevance of *Garm Hawa* never ceases to exist. It is based on the lives of those who suffered from the painful partition of India.

While *Garm Hawa* centers on the plight of a North Indian Muslim proprietor and his family, *Tamas*, which features the legendary Om Puri, deals with the plight of emigrant Sikh and Hindu families to India due to the partition. The situation is grim, grave and critical in both movies. It is pertinent to mention that only a handful of films have been made on his moving subject. Manmohan Desai's *Chhalia* (1960), Yash Chopra's *Dharmputra* (1961), Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* (1986), Pamela Rooks' *Train to Pakistan* (1998), Manoj Punj's *Shaheed-e-Mohabbat Boota Singh* (1999) and Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's *Pinjar* (2003) to name a few.

### **M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973)**

*Garm Hawa* begins on a serious note. Mahatma Gandhi has just been assassinated. India is now faced with new challenges (for example, nation-building). Though a large number of families face the problem, *Garm Hawa* shifts its focus to one particular family – the Mirza family. The family has to face some new challenges. They have to decide whether to stay back

in India or newly-formed Pakistan. They find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. Salim Mirza, played by the genius Balraj Sahni, has to deal with the dilemma of moving to Pakistan or staying in India. This question haunts them. The newly-divided India has to face many obstacles before settling down. The Mirzas, running a shoe manufacturing business in Agra in the United Provinces of northern India (now the state of Uttar Pradesh), is headed by two brothers, Salim and his elder brother Halim. Halim is engaged in politics and later migrates to Pakistan for a better future. However, a rooted Salim opposes the idea. Their mother, too, wants to stay back in India. *Garm Hawa* does not always focus on the Mirza family; it also shifts our focus to other problems like unemployment, discrimination, and poverty, among other vices. Salim's two sons (Baqar, who helps him in the business and Sikander, a young student) stay with him.

Though Halim's son Kazim is engaged to Salim's daughter, Amina, Halim later decides to move to Pakistan with his wife and son. He believes there is no future for Muslims in India. It is pertinent to mention that Halim behaves practically by deciding to move to Pakistan. Their mother grows emotional and badly wants to stay back in India. This uncertainty is depicted beautifully in *Garm Hawa*. The family members get divided in this process. The division of India gets reflected in their family also.

Things get worse when Kazim and Amina's marriage keeps postponing. Halim's quiet migration costs the family dear at the crunch. It affects Salim's reputation. His business gets badly hit since banks and moneylenders refuse to help him. They fear Salim might leave India. Halim's migration to Pakistan impacts Salim and the rest of the family members. In a bid to make some considerable progress, Salim's brother-in-law joins the Congress. He also starts wooing Amina. It gets clear here how Halim's migration affects everything related to him.

Another catastrophe that befalls the family is the Indian government's decision to take over the house (the house is in Halim's name, and he forgets to transfer it to Salim). This forces Mirza to move out. Now, what will happen? Mirza has to think of his ailing mother and his wife. Though his wife asks him

to settle in Pakistan, he resists it. He finds it difficult to even think of moving to Pakistan. Mirza, who is on the horns of a dilemma, also finds it hard to rent a house. He faces discrimination owing to his religion.

It becomes clear here how M.S. Sathyu addresses this issue. He finds a small house to rent, but his business fails. Poverty peeps through the window, making Salim Mirza appear diminutive against the backdrop of partition. However, his decision to stay in India irks his wife and son. They grow frustrated. Amidst all these, Sikander graduates from college, a saving grace for the family. Amina and her family give up their hopes of marrying Kazim there since Halim breaks his promise to return from Pakistan. What follows next is a series of heartbreaking incidents in the family. After getting a scholarship from the government of Pakistan to study in Canada, Kazim wishes to marry Amina before he leaves. But here, also tragedy strikes as he gets arrested by police and repatriated to Pakistan for travelling without a passport.

A heartbroken Amina accepts Shamshad's courtship. Sikander, a fresh graduate, faces several unsuccessful job interviews. His problems get accentuated when interviewers repeatedly advise him to try his luck in Pakistan. Disillusioned and devastated, Sikander and his friends agitate against unemployment and discrimination.

Salim, a man of principles, stops Sikander from taking in any agitation. Salim is reluctant to cultivate ties with the newly formed shoe makers union. This results in his business failing. His Baqar decides to migrate to Pakistan with his son and wife. Tragedy strikes again when Salim's mother suffers a stroke. Later, she dies. Later, Amina commits suicide as the second betrayal shatters her.

After Salim loses everything, he decides to leave for Pakistan in anger. But, now Sikander opposes it and suggests fighting the odds for the betterment of the whole nation. The last scene is very pivotal and symbolic. The film ends as Salim Mirza joins a protest and thus ends his isolation from the new reality.

*Garm Hawa* is undoubtedly one of the most moving films based on India's partition. The film brought a new wave of art cinema movement to

Bollywood. Mention must be made of the brilliant actor Farooq Shaikh. The film launched him. It was Sahni's last film (he died before its release). M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* was India's official entry to the Academy Award's Best Foreign Film category, nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, won a National Film Award and three Filmfare Awards. The story begins in the immediate aftermath of India's independence and the partition of India in 1947.

The other cast of the film includes Badar Begum, mother of Salim Mirza, Halim Mirza and Akhtar Begum, Shaukat Azmi, Gita Siddharth, Abu Siwani, Dinanath Zutshi, Jamal Hashmi, Ramma Bains, Yunus Parvez, Jalal Agha, the superb A. K. Hangal, Rajendra Raghuvanshi, Gulshan Verma and Vikas Anand.

### **Govind Nihalani's *Tamas* (1988)**

*Tamas* is a 1988 period television film written and directed by Govind Nihalani. It is based on the Hindi novel by Bhisham Sahni (1974), which won the author the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975. Set in the backdrop of riot-stricken Pakistan at the time of the partition of India in 1947, the film deals with the plight of emigrant Sikh and Hindu families to India as a consequence of the partition. It was first shown on India's national broadcaster Doordarshan as a mini-series and later as a one-off four-hour-long feature film. At the 35th National Film Awards, it won three awards, including the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration. In August 2013, it was shown on History TV18 as a series.

Nathu, a Chamar, is asked by thekedar (played by the brilliant Pankaj Kapur) to kill a pig for the veterinary doctor. Though Nathu declines it, thekedar gives him Rs.5. Cut to the next scene. It is early morning. Bakshi ji (the great A.K. Hangal), along with a few members, are seen cleaning a few drains in the Muslim mohalla. At the end of the scene, we see that party members discover a pig carcass on the steps of a mosque. This leads to unrest. *Tamas* begins here as things go haywire after this. Both Hayat Baksh (Manohar Singh) and Bakshi ji urge

deputy commissioner Richard (Barry John) to take steps to control the situation. But, instead of doing this, he tells them to urge their respective communities to maintain peace and order.

Here again, we feel the helplessness of a certain community and a nation. Nathu realises it is the same pig he had killed last night (when he approaches Thekedar, he avoids him). A guilt-filled Nathu leaves the city, carrying his old disabled mother on his back. But tragedy strikes as she dies. Now, Nathu finds himself in a fix as he has to burn his mother's dead body without proper funeral rites.

Sensing danger, Nathu leaves the city with his wife and mother. They start on foot, Nathu carrying his old disabled mother on his back. During the travel, Nathu's mother dies and has to be burned in the forest sans proper funeral rites. There, Harnam Singh (Bhisham Sahni) and his wife Banto (Dina Pathak) are the only Sikh family residing in the village. They, too, are planning to go to their daughter Jasbir's (Uttara Baokar) house in a Sikh village and reach Ehsan Ali's (Iftexhar) house (Ehsan is a friend of Harnam). However, Ehsan's son discovers them and asks them to leave. This worsens the situation for them. Finding no other way, Nathu, his wife, Harnam, and his wife take refuge in a gurudwara where Jasbir and several other Sikhs have taken shelter.

Enters Teja Singh (Amrish Puri), leader of the Sikh council, who tells the Sikhs that since Muslims are collecting arms, Sikhs should do the same. A series of events led to a chaotic situation. Teja Singh and the council members watch from the terrace of the gurudwara as the Muslim mob approaches Nathu and the granthi; they are surrounded and even attacked. The enraged Sikhs decide to fight. Later, an Aman Committee is formed to send a message of peace. Bakshi ji and Hayat are made vice presidents of the Aman Committee. After that, we see the thekedar shouting communal harmony slogans. The end is symbolic and makes a powerful statement. Nathu is dead, and Harnam Singh, Banto, and Kammo are at the refugee camp. Kammo identifies Nathu's dead body in a hospital, screams, cries and faints. She is immediately taken to labour and brought into the hospital tent by nurses. Harnam and Banto are sitting outside the tent. Moments later, they hear

the newborn's cries from inside the tent mixed with slogans of 'Allahu Akbar' and 'Har labor Mahadev' coming from a distance. It is symbolic. If you hear 'Allahu Akbar', you will also hear 'Har labor Mahadev'.

The cast of the film includes Om Puri as Nathu, Deepa Sahi as Karmo Uttara Baokar as Jasbir, Amrish Puri as Sardar Teja Singh, A.K. Hangal as Bakshi ji, Manohar Singh as Hayat Baksh, Bhisham Sahni as Harnam Singh, Dina Pathak as Banto, K. K. Raina as Mirdad, Iftekhar as Ehsan Ali, Surekha Sikri as Rajo, Pankaj Kapur as thekedaar, Saeed Jaffrey as Karim Khan, Barry John as Richard, Karen Smith as Liza, K.K. Raina as Socialist Comrade, Surendra Pal as Shah Nawaz, Virendra Saxena as Jarnail, Pinchoo Kapoor as Dilawar, Akash Khurana as Dr. Kapoor and Harish Patel as Karada.

## CONCLUSION

Is violence only physical? No, it is not. Violence is not always physical. It can be mental and economical also. People may suffer from untold miseries even if they are not getting physically beaten up. Mental agony and pain make life miserable. In both these films, we see how people suffer due to poverty, joblessness, mental agony and trauma caused by the partition of India. In *Garm Hawa*, Salim Mirza (Balraj Sahni) and his family suffer a lot. In *Tamas*, too, Nathu and his family suffer untold miseries. Both *Garm Hawa* and *Tamas* deal with partition and its pangs, pathos and pains. Ailing mothers, riots, familial ties, bonds, and friendships, among others, are reflected in these movies. The vicious cycle of poverty spares none. Both families try hopelessly to find solace. Though everything is bleak, some bright and positive sides are also shown in these two movies. The communities may differ in ideologies, but not all are alike. The friendship between two people belonging to different communities is also shown.

The endings differ. Though both films deal with partition, it is the treatment that matters the most. In both films, a particular family is presented as an example to generalise the conditions of other families affected by the partition. The problems that films put forth were reflective of the times. Partition had a huge impact on the lives and properties of people. But, the mental agony and pain through which they had to go and perhaps 'grow' also were unbearable. In fact, if we look back at those days, it shatters our imagination/idea of the beautiful land called India. *Tamas* and *Garm Hawa* do not necessarily end in the manner of the typically Hindi film. Both films put forth many questions before us. The struggles and sorrows in both films show how the lives of those persecuted people might have been in those days. Though India won freedom at the stroke of midnight, it was not all that rosy. Most of them could not eat or relish the sweet fruit of freedom. There were families that perished, families that were left to die on the road, families that were asked to leave India, and families that were even butchered.

But cinema is not always dark. In *Garm Hawa* and *Tamas*, there are instances of co-existence between the two communities. If Balraj Sahni is helped by others, Om Puri also receives help from people belonging to other communities. The hopes of some characters get belied, their dreams get shattered, and their lives take sharp turns due to the partition of the country. Both Sathyu and Nihalani deal with the issue sensitively. They use images and symbolism in their respective movies. We see how children, women and older adults suffer. In both films, we know how the victims try their level best to find peace and harmony. The last scenes of *Garm Hawa* and *Tamas* speak volumes. In *Garm Hawa*, we see Balraj Sahni joining the protest movement, and in *Tamas*, a pensive Dina Pathak and a tensed Om Puri look at each other after they hear the cries of 'Allahu Akbar' and 'Har Har Mahadev' in the background.