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THE LEGACY OF DIVIDE: PRESENCE OF PARTITION MEMORIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CINEMA, 2012-2017

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyses the continued relevance and representation of India's Partition in contemporary Indian cinema. It highlights the period from 2012 to 2017 as a crucial phase in Partition filmography. This phase attests to the consistent, yet diverse representational treatment of the memories and consequences of Partition in Indian cinema. The chosen fictional body of work engages with, reconstructs and reinterprets this pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

The socio-political context of the fiction films and the motivation behind this regular exploration of Partition memories is critically examined since such a movement draws attention to Indian cinema's role in memorialising Partition. The four case study films fictionalise and represent the memories of Partition in different ways. Therefore, the content of the memories and their subsequent cinematic reimaginations are central to this thesis. The reach and popularity garnered by the case study films is examined in tandem with their dramatic aesthetic. There is a deliberate demarcation of the Indian dramatic structure from other cinemas, to emphasise its manifestation from a theatrical tradition unique to the ancient Indian culture. I hope that this approach encourages a re-evaluation and expansion of the existing parameters of Indian film analysis. This reading highlights the singularity of the Partition experience and the distinct composition of commercial or mainstream Indian cinema utilized for its memorialisation.

The aim of this thesis is to address an identifiable gap in the recent scholarship of Partition inspired narratives and reconstructions. It acknowledges the case study films as tangible contributions of mainstream Indian cinema toward Partition historiography, in the face of their continued vulnerability to communal and gender sensitivities since the occurance of the division in 1947. As India and Pakistan continue to struggle to find neutral ground in an environment beset with religious, political and military ramifications, this in-depth analysis, adds significantly to the multifaceted Partition memorialisation efforts as well as gauges its future implications.

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The decision to partition India was announced for the first time on All India Radio on 3rd June 1947.[1] This sectarian bifurcation of the Indian subcontinent declared India as home to the Hindu and Sikh majority populations, whereas Pakistan was carved out as a nation for the Muslim population. During the broadcast Indian National Congress President Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru admitted, 'it is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals to you, though I have no doubt in my mind that this is the right course'; British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten justified Partition as 'the only alternative to coercion,' while the All-India Muslim League leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah appealed 'to every community to maintain peace and order.'[2] The tragic irony is that this collective decision was envisaged as a peaceful solution to the communal frictions entrenched within the Indian political ranks and social milieu. Instead, while the year 1947 bore witness to India gaining independence from two-hundred years of colonial rule, it also saw Partition paving the way for an unprecedented spread of communal violence and rioting.

An acute refugee crisis followed the relentless spate of lootings, kidnappings, rapes, murders, arson and forced conversions.[3] These devastating events claimed close to 2 million lives and led to the displacement of almost 15 million people.[4] These staggering numbers defines Partition as one of the biggest human tragedies of the century, with accounts no less devastating than the massacres of the Second World War. Chronicling of this historic moment and its repercussions on the millions of lives should have formed an integral part of post-independence discourses of Indian history, however, its official historiography is still criticised for focussing on political events and predominantly revolving around those in positions of power.[5]

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[1] Explorer India, *Lord Mountbatten-Broadcast on Partition 4th June 1947*, YouTube, 5th June 2016, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zql3XEhZHkg&t=153s> [accessed 15th June 2017].
[2] Ibid.
[3] P.R.Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in the Punjab, 1946-47: Means, methods, and purposes 1,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5(1), (2003), 71-101, (p. 72) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520305657> [accessed on 15th April 2016].
[4] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition:Violence, Nationalism and History in India,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 2.
[5] Ibid.

More than seventy years after its occurrence, the memory resonances of this pivotal moment in contemporary cinematic creations form a crucial development that is addressed and examined through my analysis. Indian cinema and television have so far partially utilised their capacities to explore this history. In this context, I suggest that recent cinematic representations provide a platform to the memories and consequences of the separation, as well as help trace the evolution of its representation in mainstream Indian cinema. I contribute to this discourse by analysing a select set of contemporary Indian films and their treatment of the recollections of Partition through a distinct methodological approach. This selection will help comprehend the scope of different cinematic treatments, and their contribution toward Partition memorialisation in recent mainstream cinema works: *Filmistaan* (2012), *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013), *Rajkahini* (2015) and *Begum Jaan* (2017).

The selected films offer distinct cinematic explorations of memories before Partition occurred, the trauma experienced during the separation as well as its ensuing consequences. My focus is on the five years from 2012 to 2017, as it reflects the continued presence and relevance of this historic episode within contemporary Indian cinema. This phase significantly denotes continuous efforts to feature memories of this historic moment, while it stands at a substantive chronological distance from it. The notable occurrence of the seventieth anniversary of Partition within this period is an influential commemorative milestone that substantially impacts the discussion and representation of this history within the earmarked phase. A study of the socio-political context of these five years offer crucial insights into the future implications of narratives endeavouring to explore this history, while effectively demonstrating that distance from Partition has not mitigated its impact. Therefore, the selected recent cinematic forays discussing, fictionalizing and incorporating memories of Partition in their narratives form the crux of this thesis.

My work identifies and addresses the gap in Partition scholarship, pertaining to the discussion of the recent memory explorations of this subject in mainstream Indian cinema. I recognise a corresponding gap in mainstream cinema scholarship and its tendency to overlook attempts made by commercial films to represent the memories and consequences of Partition. I highlight the context of the selected contemporary films and its impact on their choice to explore this subject. I aim to analyse the recent memorialisation efforts, to build a better understanding of the enduring influence of this pivotal moment on Indian

cinema. Through my efforts, I hope to expand the existing discourses on cinematic works centred on or around Partition and gauge the future of such attempts.

As a third-generation descendant of Partition survivors, my connection to this history is personal and precedes its national and cinematic significance. I grew up listening to stories of my grandmother and great grandmother, who were Hindus living in Lahore before 1947. However, after the announcement of Partition, their homes suddenly became part of Pakistan, and since Hindus were no longer welcome there, they were forced to leave everything behind and make the perilous journey from Pakistan to India. This move left deep impressions on our family, as it did in the lives of countless others. However, the noticeable foregrounding of political occurrences in official historiography, drew attention away from such experiences of people during Partition.[6]

Historian Gyanendra Pandey discusses the growing rejection of the dissemination of state approved perspectives among historians, activists, writers and memory scholars.[7] He advocates investigations into the controversial 'complicity of the government, military, and law enforcement authorities in Partition violence,' as well as 'the unique violence inflicted upon women during Partition.'[8] I note that this lapse has driven several projects aimed at unearthing complex traumatic experiences of people as well as featuring their memories. Hence, recent Partition scholarship emphasises the necessity to collate, collect and unearth the various experiences and accounts of survivors.[9] There is an urgency attached to these efforts to ensure documentation and preventing these survivor testimonies from being lost altogether. Therefore, recollective and commemorative works unravelling and preserving survivor accounts have steadily gained momentum. Author and columnist Kishwar Desai discusses the growing popularization and normalization of 'people's history of Partition.'[10]

> For a long time, there was a belief, not just in our country but abroad as well, that the history of a nation is that of the ruler—their victories and defeats and their attempts at nation building. No one was really recording the history of the people and certainly not the history of the common people.[11]

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[6]Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 22.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Mallika Ahluwalia,*Divided by Partition:United by Resilience*, (India:Rupa Publications, August 2018), p vi.
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid. p vii.

According to Desai, this skewed documentation, prone to present history from the point of view of those in power is receding. There is a simultaneous movement toward acknowledging and engaging with personal memories. Partition scholar Urvashi Butalia's oral history project recording the memories of regular people, of women and children who suffered during that time is a pioneering effort, marking the shift in Partition historiography.[12] Butalia finds this a more enduring and inclusive approach to feature individual stories 'told and retold inside so many households in India and Pakistan.'[13] Her efforts signal a shift supportive of the artistic transformation of factual history, where human experiences come to the fore through different media. Moreover, it opens the doors for interdisciplinary discussions and discourses in this field.

I note that film scholar Marcia Landy and historian Robert Rosenstone also suggest that 'stories of individuals' may be more engaging as reconstructions of history or when used for the exploration of a historical context.[14] Hence, support for comprehensive efforts to analyse stories or cinematic works inspired by or dedicated to Partition memorialisation is observable among recent discources on Partition historiography. Scholar Partha Ghosh terms these works as 'cultural productions' as they encompass the lasting impressions left by this division on Indian literature, music, drama, art, and other media.[15] Mallika Ahluwalia, the CEO and curator of the world's first Partition Museum, wrote a commemorative collection featuring Partition survivor accounts of well-known artists, writers, political figures, journalists, people in business and other professionals.[16]

Among the featured interviews in Ahluwalia's collective, I turn to Indian poet, lyricist and filmmaker Gulzar's observation referring to the dearth of films depicting or exploring Partition in Indian cinema.[17] He suggests that the reluctance to broach the subject of the events of 1947, affects the ability of survivors like him to 'purge' memories of their traumas.[18] This criticism levelled by Gulzar, a survivor and filmmaker, is observably

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[12]Urvashi Butalia,*The Other Side of Silence,* (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p 5.
[13]Ibid. p 6.
[14]Robert A.Rosenstone, *History on Film/film on History. History: concepts, theories and practice,* (England:Longman/Pearson, 2006), p 20.
[15]Partha S. Ghosh, 'The Other Side of Partition Resonances on Cultural Expressions.' *South Asia Research* 35.1. (2005) pp 42-60. (p 43).
[16]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p 91.
[17]Ibid. p 92.
[18]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p 69.

experiential, as he has spoken and written extensively about his traumatic experiences, emphasising how the memories continue to haunt him even after twenty-five years.[19] According to Gulzar, the reluctance in representing Partition on film prevents both India and Pakistan from purging the trauma and memories from their national discourses.[20] He supports his hypothesis by comparing Partition filmography to the vast volume of Second World War narratives.

> The second world war was extremely traumatic, but in Europe, in America, in Britain, they made films and they purged it out. But we were not able to make films on Partition, neither in India nor in Pakistan, so it remained suppressed inside us and made us claustrophobic, maybe if we had completely let out our emotions and regretted the violence that happened, it would have been behind us today. But we kept it suppressed.[21]

While the intense trauma is a connecting factor between the tragic events of the World War and Partition, at the same time it is essential to understand that the socio-political trajectories of these events are entirely different. Trauma theorist E. Ann Kaplan does discuss the capacity of cinema to thematically introduce and recreate trauma in order to facilitate a 'comforting cure,' towards the end of a film but Gulzar hints at a much larger socio-political function for Partition films.[22] His reliance on cinema extends beyond its representational capacity, to believing that cinema can heal old wounds.[23] However, instead of ascribing films based on or inspired by the events of 1947 with the capacity to heal or cure trauma, I suggest that addressing this history succeeds in bringing its discussions to the fore.

I do not look to cinema for providing a 'cure' to trauma and in this regard find Gulzar's outlook simplistic and unmindful of the continuing sensitivities surrounding Indo-Pak relations as well as the communally charged environment within our country.[24] Hence, I trace the impact of the fluctuations in Indo-Pak relations on Indian cinema by carefully examining the socio-political environment surrounding my selected case study films. While studying the consequences of Partition, I am attentive to narratives incorporating the

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[19]Ibid.
[20]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 91.
[21]Ibid.
[22]E. Ann Kaplan,'Introduction:Traumatic Contact Zones and Embodied Translators'in E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang,(eds), *Trauma and Cinema, Cross-Cultural Explorations,* (Hong Kong:Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p 47.
[23]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 91.
[24]Ibid. p. 92.

nostalgic and fond recollections of survivors pertaining to the time before Partition, alongside those who predominantly remember the pain. As concentrating only on the aspect of trauma overlooks integral nostalgic and other positive memory strains. Therefore, through the case studies, I have tried to include, discuss and highlight the multifaceted representations of Partition memories.

Today as India and Pakistan navigate the most challenging and acrimonious phase of their tumultuous association, Partition stands at the heart of this tense socio-political scenario. This tragic landmark 'continue(s) to determine the content and contours of the socio-political life of post-1947 India and the two other nations, Pakistan and Bangladesh.'[25] It's impact is felt in every sphere, be it culture, politics, social order and especially the regional security of the affected nations.[26] Thus to comprehend this continued presence holistically, it is imperative to take a closer look at the consequences of Partition. The consequences offer an insight into the prevailing socio-political environment, which largely determines and influences the cinematic approach toward this subject. I suggest that this is evident in the exhibition and reception of the case study films, which is susceptible to the prevalent tenor of Indo-Pak relations and I discuss these factors in detail in the course of my thesis.

Following the consequences I explore the different ongoing memorialisation efforts and diverse projects commemorating Partition, as their presence confirms the relevance of this historic moment. My study includes a thorough examination of the existing Partition and mainstream Indian cinema scholarship, as well as looking at the way Partition is expressed and explored in Pakistani and Bangladeshi cinemas. Subsequently, I discuss the different theoretical influences used to formulate the distinct methodological framework adopted for this analysis and conclude this chapter with the content outlines of the upcoming chapters.

1.1 Consequences of Partition

I suggest that the consequences of Partition are crucial indicators of the context surrounding the memorialisation efforts by Indian cinema. It demonstratively elucidates how the oscillating graph of the relations between India and Pakistan impacts the environment within which media creation and production takes place. The years following

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[25]Ayesha Jalal,'The Legacy of Partition,' *Hindustan Times and Dawn- Partition,* 13th August 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/static/partition/comment/the-legacy-of-partition-ayesha-jalal/> [accessed 14th November 2018].
[26]Ibid.

the separation bear witness to wars, communal unrest, refugee crisis, terrorism, and perilous diplomatic relations in the subcontinent. India and Pakistan went to war over the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. However, even after the restoration of peace, this state continues to be the most contentious issue between the two nations. In the same year, the creation of Pakistan led the Bengali Muslims of East Bengal, amenable to a separate Muslim state become part of Pakistan as East Pakistan. Subsequently, the glaring cultural differences and massive geographical distance from West Pakistan resulted in the Liberation War of 1971 between Pakistan and East Bengal or Bangladesh as it stands today.[27] India's intervention supporting East Pakistan's declaration of independence engulfed the entire subcontinent in a civil war. The joint efforts of India and Bangladesh eventually forced the Pakistani army to retreat, and further marred relations between India and Pakistan.[28]

Subsequent years have seen regular conflicts and skirmishes at the border, eventually escalating into the Kargil War in 1999. Since then, relations between the two countries have continually been affected by consistent waves of communal disturbances and terrorism. The 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai were traced back to *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, a Pakistan based terrorist organisation. The resultant heightening of tensions further disturbed the precariously poised Indo-Pak relations. Over time efforts to advance peace and cooperation between the two countries have been continually revived, and this favourable diplomatic climate between the two countries began in the year 2012 and continued to a part of 2015.

As a result, this period saw a significant leap in favourable cultural media inter-exchange, enabling a freer movement of films, television series, music, performing artists and increased social networking activities between India and Pakistan. During this phase, mainstream Indian films featuring Pakistani musicians, singers, and actors were freely produced and favourably received by the Indian audience. The success of cross border ventures during this time provided an impetus to an interactive entertainment industry cooperation between the two countries, and soon collaborative efforts thrived. I discuss one such significant initiative taken by Indian media and entertainment company Zee Entertainment Enterprise, was the launch of the television channel *Zindagi* (life) earmarked

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[27]Yasmin Khan,*The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, (London: Yale University Press, 2007). p 107.
[28]Ibid.

to broadcast Pakistani television shows. This channel and its shows became a huge success in India. Amidst this thriving cultural exchange, it is noteworthy here that after decades of the Congress party's rule, 2014 saw the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) win the Indian general election by a landslide majority.

The 2014 election ushered a new era of governance in India. The BJP's intrinsic ideological link with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation also gradually started gaining prominence as did several smaller right-wing Hindu fundamentalist groups. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi executed a series of radical and political policies. The controvertial implementation of Demonitisation, levying of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) as well as the Make in India and the Swatchh Bharat (Clean India) Campaigns took centrestage allowing the BJP to maintain a safe distance from any perceived or suspected Hindutva ideological leanings. The Indian entertainment industry was experiencing a thriving and unprecedented access to content and talent from Pakistan. However, this marked insulation of the entertainment industry abruptly ended in 2015, following the militant attacks on the Indian army.

Amid several disputed claims and denials by Pakistan, Indian investigation into the attacks revealed links with Pakistan. In September 2016, India responded with a counter 'surgical strike' along the Line of Control (LOC) and the Indian entertainment industry felt aftershocks of these tensions through massive protests by right-wing groups.[29] Subsequently, Indian Television channels and film production houses placed a blanket embargo on all Indo-Pak collaborations and dissemination of Pakistani media content. This chain of events demonstrates the vulnerability of Indian media and cinema to the unpredictable diplomatic, military and political situations between the two nations. I talk about this political influence and impact in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

In November 2018, both countries reopened dialogue to try and come to a consensus regarding the construction of the Kartarpur corridor, as this corridor could provide visa-free access to Sikh pilgrims to visit the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib located in the Pakistani village of Kartarpur. This temple is located near the Indo-Pak border, and the ensuing tensions between the two countries have mostly made it inaccessible since Partition. However, all steps toward its construction came to a standstill on 14th February 2019,

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[29]Line of Control (LOC) refers to the militarily controlled dividing line between India and Pakistan.

following the horrific attack on the Indian Army in the Pulwama region of Kashmir. A vehicle laden with explosives rammed into an army convoy truck and the Indian Army lost forty CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) soldiers in the attack. In retaliation, the Indian Air Force crossed the Line of Control (LOC) on 26th February and executed a series of airstrikes on terrorist training camps situated in the Balakot region of Pakistan. This was followed by Pakistan closing off their airspace to India and banning Indian films. Gradually as tensions subsided so did some of these restrictions. On 5th August 2019, the Indian government's decision to revoke Article 370 that granted special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, marks the beginning of another acrimonious chapter between the two nations. Since Partition the state of Kashmir situated in the north of the subcontinent has been disputed territory, and today as a result both nations face the most challenging phase of their association.

It is noteworthy that alongside the escalating political, military and diplomatic tensions between the two countries, efforts to memorialise Partition have consistently gathered momentum. These memory projects try and preserve accounts of regular people and their experiences during as well as after Partition. They also constitute significant efforts to transmit memories across generations unfamiliar with this history. The global participation and reach of these memorialisation efforts have enhanced their scope, including and recording memories of the South Asian diaspora across countries. Therefore, I take a closer look at these various attempts at preserving and documenting Partition recollections.

1.2 Remembering Partition

The projects I mention in this section are motivated by the need to uncover as well as discuss the lesser known aspects of the experience of Partition. In the excerpt below, Partition and memory scholar Urvashi Butalia provides an insight into her approach and motivation:

> How families were divided, how friendships endured across borders, how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental, they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their

lives, and indeed the cities and towns and villages they settled in- find little reflection in written history.[30]

Butalia observes that these multi-layered memories have been overlooked during the documentation of this history.[31] Her work *The Other Side of Silence* presents an extensive oral history collection, which has inspired many commemorative works on Partition and one such prominent memorialisation effort is the *1947 Partition Archive*. Started in 2010, the Archive is a registered non-governmental organisation with their centre in Berkley, California. (United States of America). It constitutes a 'digital platform for anyone anywhere in the world to collect, archive and display oral histories.'[32] The archive documents the transformation in people's lives through the years before Partition, the time during Partition as well as the repercussions of post-Partition migrations.[33]

Figure 1

Work of the archive includes documenting, preserving and recording oral histories of Partition witnesses. Interviews are conducted across languages and locations by their 'Citizen Historians' and trained scholars, to try and comprehend how the division transformed lives and the effect it continues to have.[34] The Archive accepts contributions from people all over the world, treating their stories as primary sources of this history. So far, the archive has collected over 7,500 oral histories, emphasizing the sheer volume, permanence and magnitude of Partition's impact on people's lives. The organisation is guided by a unique endeavour to make the collected digital histories available to researchers, students and the public. More importantly, the organisation being a crowdsourced endeavour, it demonstrates the widespread involvement and sustained the interest of people over the years.

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[30]Urvashi Butalia,*The Other Side of Silence,* (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p 3.
[31]Ibid.
[32]*Partition Archive 1947*. (2011-2018) <http://1947partitionarchive.org/mission> [accessed 20th June 2017].
[33]Ibid.
[34]Partition Archive 1947. (2011-2018) <http://1947partitionarchive.org/mission> [accessed 20th June 2017].

| Figure 2 | Figure 3 |

Another significant step commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Partition was taken on 24th October 2016, with the setting up of the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar in North India by The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust (TAACHT) (Figures 2 and 3). It constitutes another non-profit, non-governmental organizational effort, dedicated 'to the memory of the Partition of the sub-continent in 1947 — its victims, its survivors and its legacy.'[35] Under the guidance of scholar Kishwar Desai, also the Chairperson of TAACHT, the organisation ensures that the collections showcased in the museum are collected from 'Partition affected families' instead of relying on Government-sponsored artefacts.[36] The museum reflects the support of hundreds of people, who donated their time, family objects, funds and skills to ensure it that opened in time.[37]

An international effort to mark the momentous 70th Anniversary of Partition, was taken by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in July 2017. The BBC Radio 4 produced a three-part series named *Partition Voices,* presenting the recorded testimonies of survivors now comprising the vast British South Asian population settled in the United Kingdom.[38] The editor and presenter of the programme Kavita Puri describes this endeavour as:

> Many of the south Asians who came to Britain after independence were from places affected by partition. To paint a vivid picture of that time, we never had to leave these shores. The stories were all around us. There was a very real sense of chasing shadows, an urgency in collecting these memories now before they are lost. So many of these stories had been shrouded in silence.[39]

Similar to Butalia and Desai's approach, it is noteworthy that Kavita Puri also expresses

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[35]Partition Museum, 2016.< http://www.partitionmuseum.org/about-us/#trustee> [accessed 20th June 2017].
[36] Ibid.
[37]Partition Museum, 2016.< http://www.partitionmuseum.org/about-us/#trustee> [accessed 20th June 2017].
[38]Kavita Puri, 'Break the silence on Partition and British colonial history- before it's too late', *The Guardian*. 31st July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/31/break-silence-partition-british-colonial-history-south-asian> [accessed 15th August 2017].
[39]Kavita Puri,'Break the silence on Partition and British colonial history- before it's too late', *The Guardian*. 31st July 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/31/break-silence-partition-british-colonial-history-south-asian> [accessed 15th August 2017].

the urgency to bring these memories to the fore to ensure that they are not lost. She notes that 'it is hard to explain how convulsive partition was for British south Asian families and how it still shapes them.'[40] All mentioned attempts are concerned with the need to preserve the voices of survivors and understand its influence on subsequent generations. Even though these projects have to face reservations regarding the authenticity, point of view and accuracy of oral testimonies; Butalia, Puri and Desai strenuously advocate that the documentation of survivor testimonies is integral to expanding the scope of this history.[41]

The films chosen for this analysis incorporate oral testimonies and form intrinsic parts of the narratives as well the journey of the characters. The directors of *Filmistaan* and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, Nitin Kakkar and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra respectively, belong to families who migrated to India during Partition. Therefore, they have a personal connection with memories of the separation, guiding the thematic treatment of the films. The efforts mentioned above to utilise and preserve oral histories are indicative of a definite expansion of the existing boundaries of Partition historiography. The cinematic incorporation and influence of personal memories challenge the prescribed modes of remembering this history. It is supportive of the growing acceptance for discussing memory and history as inter-dependent entities, as well as treating history as a dynamic or 'organic' entity as memory scholar Raphael Samuel suggests.[42] He says that a closer examination of history reveals intersecting patterns it forms through the amalgamations of the 'past and present, memory and myth, the written record and the spoken word.'[43] His observations support the viewing of history as a hybrid unit and acknowledging memory as an active force.[44]

Samuel's definition of popular memory recognizes film, television, science-fiction, video games and other media as acceptable ways of engaging with the past.[45] This symbiotic relationship links with the framework of my thesis, which intends to expand the reading of memories beyond 'a passive receptacle or storage system' or merely 'an image bank of the

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[40]Ibid.
[41]Urvashi Butalia,*The Other Side of Silence,* (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 15.
[42]Raphael Samuel,*Theatres of Memory:Past and present in contemporary culture,*(London:Verso Books, 2012), p 7.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Raphael Samuel,*Theatres of Memory:Past and present in contemporary culture,*(London:Verso Books, 2012), p 8.
[45]Kynan Gentry, 'The Pathos of Conservation': Raphael Samuel and the politics of heritage, *International Journal of Heritage Studies,* 21.6 (2014), 561-576. (p 562). < https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2014.953192> [accessed on 24th July 2018].

past', and the different Partition memorialisation efforts I enumerate in this section reflect this fluidity.[46]

Figure 4

Figure 5

Hence off-beat memorialisation efforts such as Marvel Universe's creation of comic-book female protagonist - Kamala Khan, presents an engaging and stark contrast to the structured and curated memory collections as mentioned earlier (Figures 4 and 5).[47] Popularly known as Ms. Marvel this Pakistani-American superheroine was created in 2013 and her origin was revealed in 2016, traceable to India's Partition.

> The first few pages of the new comic have recently been released and they show Kamala's parents, Kareem and Aisha, as Indian Muslims in the then Bombay in 1947 when the largest human migration in history was underway. They are en route to the newly-found Pakistan.[48]

Widely appreciated for this diversification of their Super-hero lineup, Marvel received the prestigious Hugo Award in 2015 for the best graphic story.[49] The award recognises Marvel's inclusion of a pivotal moment from South Asian history, which connects with this milieu spread across the globe and comprising a large part of their audience.

In addition, BBC's long-running science fiction series *Doctor Who* (2005-present), marks another unconventional attempt at memorialising the separation. The episode titled 'Demons of Punjab, released in 2018 created a furore as the Doctor travels back in time and explores Partition of India in 1947. It boldly discusses how Partition catastrophically displaced and killed millions of people. British-Indian writer Vinay Patel's plot traverses

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[46]Ibid. p 566.
[47]Press Trust of India, 'Ms Marvel Kamala Khan's origin story set in India's partition!', *Business Standard.com,* 30th June 2016, <https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/ms-marvel-kamala-khan-s-origin-story-set-in-india-s-partition-116063000861_1.html >[accessed on 2nd July 2019].
[48]Press Trust of India, 'Ms Marvel Kamala Khan's origin story set in India's partition!', *Business Standard.com,* 30th June 2016, <https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/ms-marvel-kamala-khan-s-origin-story-set-in-india-s-partition-116063000861_1.html >[accessed on 2nd July 2019].
[49]S. Pillai,'Marvel's Latest Comic Features: The Indo-Pak Partition & Here's What It Looks Like.' *Scoop whoop*, 25th June 2016. <https://www.scoopwhoop.com/Marvels-Latest-Comic-Features-The-IndoPak-Partition-Heres-What-It-Looks-Like/#.7nn4d9o52 > [accessed on 29th June 2016].

generational and international barriers, while personalising the history by linking it with the life of Yasmin Khan, a pivotal character in the series.

Figure 6

Figure 7

Yasmin is a Pakistani Muslim living in Britain and in the episode, she embarks on this quest to find her roots (Figure 6). During the episode Yasmin discovers the 'hidden history' of Umbreen, her grandmother (Figure 6).[50] The fantastical time-travel plot device allows her to meet her grandmother as a young woman about to get married to Prem a Hindu (Figure 7). Unaware of her grandmother's first marriage, Yasmin helplessly looks on as waves of communal violence engulf Prem and Umbreen's idyllic world. In the end, Prem was murdered by his brother, who was against their inter-faith union from the start.

The episode of *Doctor Who* delves into the catastrophic consequences of xenophobia and divisive politics of Partition by grounding it in the history of Yasmin's family. Reviewer Caroline Siede notes that the science fiction series takes on a challenging task of representing tragic events transpiring in a different era by foregrounding them in contemporary characters. There is a literal and symbolic meaning attached to the concept of going back in time. Hence, the episode tries to 'marry big, historical ideas with small, personal stories of perseverance that manage to find hope without sugar-coating the past.'[51] The story of Yasmin's grandmother is tailored for a present day audience disconnected or simply unaware of this history and celebrates the resilient spirit of survivors.

The above examination of the different memory projects and productions demonstrates a significant growth in the interest to explore Partition, not just through efforts in India but also by the South Asian diaspora settled abroad. I discuss that these works are supported by

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[50]Caroline Siede, '*Doctor Who* delivers a moving history lesson about the Partition of India', *AVClub,* 11th September 2018, <https://tv.avclub.com/doctor-who-delivers-a-moving-history-lesson-about-the-p-1830369244> [accessed on 2nd July 2018].
[51]Ibid.

a tangible global reach and interest in stories of survivors and their memories. During the course of my analysis I note that cinema and its creations are constantly influenced through its interconnections with memory and history. I suggest that a closer examination of these symbiotic relationships is significant as it guides the theoretical and analytical framework of my research.

1.3   Memory and history as stories for cinema

India's past constitutes an array of momentous socio-political and cultural transformations; narratives of the chosen films trace the country's historic struggle for freedom, the attainment of independence, followed by Partition from the vantage point of the present. Recognising the emotional complexities attached to such momentous events, memory scholars Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin place the experiences and memories of postcolonial nations in a different category.

> Nations which have undergone dramatic changes of regime need to establish a way of remembering that will bridge the gap between past and present, asserting continuity and identity at the same time as difference. The public expression and articulation of memory in a national context is thus both problematic and highly charged.[52]

They suggest that memories associated with such events may trigger nostalgic or traumatic recollections among individuals, while remaining rooted in a national context.[53] Therefore, they single out these memories for the interconnecting relations established 'between individual and collective memory, between the subject and the state, between time and space.'[54] Hodgkin and Radstone reiterate the growing use of personal or collective memories to supplement historical records and challenge any perceived rigid bifurcations between history and memory. Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* fundamentally calls for searching for alternate ways of commemorating history and notes that commemoration as a practice is collective.[55]

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[52]Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone,'Introduction: Patterning the national past', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds), *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York:Routledge, 2003), p 170.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Ibid. p 171.
[55]Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp 7-24. (p 8).

In this context, memory scholar Marita Sturken also discusses collective memories as a conscious practise of 'collective remembering' and infers that it contributes to the shaping of cultural identities.[56] She suggests 'public commemoration' be considered a form of 'history-making', as it forges intricate correlations between personal and public memories, that eventually contribute to a cultural discourse.[57] This viewpoint opens possibilities of a closer examination of memories created outside 'the avenues of formal historical discourse' and gradually, their value gets imbued with cultural meaning.[58] Notably, Sturken's preoccupation is not with the accuracies of these creations, but with 'what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present.'[59] Hence, Sturken calls for recognising different entities as forms of cultural memories. Her approach is relevant in the context of Partition, since its historiography is still considered in its nascent stage. There is a growing consensus among Partition scholars that the role and significance of collective remembrances need to be acknowledged. Scholar Partha Ghosh notes:

> Indeed, as more literature emerges on what happened in those fateful 1940s, there is increasing agreement that the Partition cast long shadows and affects many people's lives even today. [60]

Therefore, effects of memorialisation on the formation of collective consciousness is becoming an important as attempts by memory scholars to assimilate these memories and translate past experiences are shaping diverse memory projects and their discourses. According to scholar Andreas Huyssen, 'this is precisely where memory studies about the past can link up with rights struggles in the present, the realities of the past must be faced.'[61] He lends support to this perspective, and this study locates ways of renegotiating the present by acknowledging the new ways of addressing historicity, belonging to a person and a nation. It brings me to another critical element, which examines the transference of Partition memories.

The case study films communicate this history to generations that are neither connected directly nor are they close to the experience. To this end, the films include recollections,

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[56]Marita Sturken, *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering*, (California: University of California Press, 1997), p 6.
[57]Ibid. p 9.
[58]Ibid. p 12.
[59]Ibid. p 22.
[60]Partha Ghosh, 'The Other Side of Partition Resonances on Cultural Expressions', *South Asia Research*, 35.1. (2005) pp 42-60, (p 44).
[61]A. Huyssen, 'Present pasts: Media, politics, amnesia,' *Public Culture,* Vol. 12, Issue 1, (Duke University Press, Winter 2000), pp 21-38, (p 24).

flashbacks and reconstructions of the 1940s. In this context, memory scholar Marcia Landy explores the possibilities technology offers, through its assistance in documentation and dissemination of personal as well as public histories across generations. Over the years, technological advancements and especially the proliferation of mass media has enhanced their transmission and simultaneously diversified their content. She observes the way history is gradually being revisited digitally, through movements which are influenced, guided and to a large extent, aided by media.[62] She also raises several relevant questions surrounding the process of mass media proliferation and calls for careful consideration of its impact and ethical concerns.[63]

The way we interpret and transmit the past has implications for the future. Landy notes that changes in socio-economic scenarios may affect technologies in myriad ways and could eventually offer 'an expanded and altered understanding of what constitutes historical thinking.'[64] The digitally supported multi-layered attempts by my selected films raise valid concerns about their constitution or perception as historical films, as they liberally reimagine and reinterpret history. While I do not intend to define the case study films as historical endeavours, it is vital to understand the presentation of historical content within these narratives that grapple with the complexities of reconstruction. Historian Robert A. Rosenstone enumerates the concerns of historians as more and more fictionalised versions of history in cinema confront them:

> Historical films trouble and disturb (most) professional historians…because, historians will say, films are inaccurate. They distort the past. They fictionalize, trivialize, and romanticize important people, events, and movements. They falsify History.[65]

This constricted point of view, makes broad generalizations; however, Rosenstone negates this harsh reading of the fictional representation of history. He looks beyond apprehensions of strict adherence to historical facts and is against the constant need to identify lapses in historical films. He advocates giving adequate attention to cinematic narratives focussed on history, instead of ignoring them for being works of fiction:

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[62]Marcia Landy, *Cinema and Counter-history*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015), p 36.
[63]Ibid.
[64]Ibid. p 38.
[65]Robert A.Rosenstone, 'The historical film as real history,' *Filmhistoria online* 1, (1995), pp 5-23, (p 9).

The historical film has been making its impact upon us (and by us I mean the most serious of professional historians) for many years now, and its time that we began to take it seriously. By this I mean we must begin to look at film, on its own terms, as a way of exploring the way the past means to us today.[66]

He drives the focus toward scrutinizing these films by following a basic premise that films are fictional constructions. Rosenstone draws from French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's perspective, who consistently challenges commonly held perceptions of older historical films being more accurate official histories in comparison with any newer, popular or mainstream memory accounts.[67]

First, the subject matter of the history is the origins of present rules, practices or institutions that claim an authority over us. Second, the primary intent is not to understand the past in its own terms or for its own sake, but to understand and evaluate the present, particularly with a view to discrediting unjustified claims of authority. As a proponent of the idea of a history of the present.[68]

Foucault encourages scrutiny of narratives incorporating the past, by taking cognizance of the present and emphasises the function of representative or reconstructed cinematic creations as significant meaning-making entities.[69] American film theorist Vivian Sobchack examines this perennial tension between older and newer renditions of history. She offers similar support to a fluid reading of historical films. Sobchack steers clear of pessimistic readings of historical films and advocates 'democratization' of history.[70] She links the past and present through 'a sense of agency' that actively negotiates the way events are shaped, and how they reflect history.[71] For Sobchack, this democratization is more easily identifiable in contemporary film narratives, as they choose to focus on history through the lives of regular people.[72] She advocates for the development of a 'new

[66]Vivian Sobchack,'The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness', *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Theme Issue 36, (Dec. 1997), 4 –20, (p 5) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2505572> [accessed 15th April 2017].p 10.
[67]Michel Foucault, 'Film, History, And Popular Memory', in Clare O'Farrell (ed), *Foucault at the Movies,* (New York: Columbia University Press,2018), pp. 103–122, (p 106), in JSTOR, E-Book<www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/fouc16706.7> [accessed 7th August 2018].
[68]Ibid.
[69]Ibid., p 108.
[70]Vivian Sobchack, 'The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and Historical Consciousness', *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Theme Issue 36, (Dec. 1997), 4 –20, (p 8) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2505572> [accessed on 15th April 2017].
[71]Ibid.
[72]Vivian Sobchack, *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, ed. by Vivian Sobchack, (New York:Routledge, 1995), p 20.

historical consciousness' and for studying contemporary or off-beat representations of history.[73]

I note that the perspectives of Rosenstone, Foucault and Sobchack's intersect at a critical juncture, recognizing flexible assessments of contemporary films exploring historical subjects. They are supportive of the growing shift from the factual to a 'lived experience', as termed by film scholar Pam Cook.[74] She states that 'the past exists to be reinvented' and makes allowances for the use of 'creativity and imagination', while acknowledging the complexity of the processes involved in historical reconstructions.[75] Hence, understanding and analysing the scope of creativity while remembering the past, in its various forms is gaining prominence among memory and film scholars.

The mix of fact and fiction is intended to engage and involve the audience, ultimately treating remembering as a 'creative process'.[76] Harnessing the creative potential of cinema for memorialisation may prevent memories from becoming mere repetitions of the past. Film scholar Marcia Landy's work *Cinema and Counter-History* points out the futility of preserving or presenting the past, 'as it was', which in her view constitutes a counterproductive movement.[77] She appreciates the imaginative scope cinema offers to representations of the past and encourages a liberal approach toward interpretations of history.

However, I note that the discussions mentioned above do not engage with or highlight the role technology plays in the creative processes of re-inventing, re-imagining and reconstructing history or memory experiences. I suggest that technology is a crucial component with the capacity to impact the audio-visual design of a film and augment its national and international avenues of access and exposure. In this regard, film scholar Robert Burgoyne addresses the 'imaginative' and poetically reconstructive potential of digital or visual effects technologies, as well as their widespread use for the conveyance of

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[73]Ibid.

[74]Pam Cook, *Screening Nostalgia, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema,* (London: Routledge, 2005), p 3.

[75]Ibid.

[76]Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). p 6 and 7.

[77]Marcia Landy, *Cinema and Counter-History*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015). p 10.

the past.[78] He attaches 'meaningfulness' to digitation of memories and notes its impact on the way history is told or retold.[79]

> Cinema, in effect, seems to evoke the emotional certitude we associate with memory for, like memory, film is now, to a greater extent than before, associated with the body; it engages the viewer at the somatic level, immersing the spectator in experiences and impressions that, like memories, seem to be burned in.[80]

Burgoyne's awareness of the role digital advancement makes to a cinematic narrative is central to his analysis of the film *Forrest Gump* (1994). He analyses the liberal use of digital tools in the film and the emotive and narrative value they add to the protagonist's memories.[81] Although thorough, his analysis overlooks the more considerable contribution of technology to the exhibition and dissemination of a film. In contrast, memory scholar Alison Landsberg gauges the narrative utilisation of technology, and the part it plays in film distribution, circulation and facilitating sustained exposure.[82] Landsberg's conception of 'prosthetic memories' emphasises that digital technologies facilitate reimagination and enables access of these memories among audiences.[83] Her perspective extends from narrative transformations of 'significant historical events into spectatorial experiences', to studying their consumption and distribution patterns.[84] Studying the technological influence on memorialisation, deciphering these patterns, as well as the exhibition and reception of the case study films are important aspects of my analysis.

Therefore, the stated viewpoints widen the analytical scope of this analysis by looking at cinematic works holistically. They understand that passage of time changes the interpretations and representation of history and its memories. The mentioned scholarship is mindful of the perennial transformations in socio-cultural positions, their interaction with technological advancements and the cumulative impact on cinema. Alongside, there is a growing emphasis on engaging inter-disciplinary approaches to analyse cinematic representations of history and memory. Therefore, when historian Rosenstone makes a

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[78]Robert Burgoyne, 'Memory, History and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film', in *Memory and Popular Film (Inside Popular Film)*, ed. by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 220–37, (p 222), in JSTOR, E-Book < https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jfm0> [accessed on 23rd May 2017].
[79]Ibid
[80]Ibid. p 223.
[81]Robert Burgoyne, 'Memory, History and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film', in *Memory and Popular Film (Inside Popular Film)*, ed. by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 220–37, (p 222), in JSTOR, E-Book < https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jfm0> [accessed on 23rd May 2017]. p 225.
[82]Ibid.
[83]Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 22.
[84]Ibid.

case for treating factual history artistically, or as 'a story' of human experiences, his perspective finds endorsement from memory, history and film scholars.[85] There is collective support and advocation for storytelling within historiography. In this excerpt Rosenstone elucidates this fictional approach toward history:

> A tale with a beginning, middle, and an end. A tale that leaves you with a moral message and (usually) a feeling of uplift. A tale embedded in a larger view of history that is always progressive. [86]

This perspective may come across as simplistic, yet it effectively explains the process of re-telling history through the integration of emotions and cinematic tropes. The creation of a 'hero', a 'villain', the battles or conflicts between the two and accompanying love interests, are crucial plot elements found in Indian mainstream film structures.[87] Therefore, from the above discourses I surmise that scholars are increasingly acknowledging the need to utilise the relatability of fiction narratives as opposed to encouraging purely objective factual narrations. This provides an impetus to experimentations with memorialisation and representation of history. Thus the use of human drama to explore Partition memories, harnesses the potential of these stories to evoke emotive responses from an audience and forms the foundation of my investigation.

The chosen films treat history as memories emerging from the stories of individuals, drawing attention to the analysis of the portrayal of these memories. I identify trauma and nostalgia as the focal points driving the representation and reconstruction of memories in the selected films. Scholars Bhaskar Sarkar and Partha Ghosh state that various narrative strategies may come into play while addressing memories of the separation. Sarkar observes that the presence of the events of 1947 and correlating themes may be established directly or indirectly in Indian cinema:

> The trauma found an indirect presence in terms of physical injury resulting in bodily scars and wounds, reunion of separated families, the loss of near and dear

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[85]Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/film on History. History: concepts, theories and practice,* (England: Longman/Pearson, 2006), p 20.
[86]Robert A. Rosenstone, 'The historical film as real history,' *Filmhistoria online* 1, (1995), (5-23), p 11.
[87]Ibid.

ones due to accidents or natural disasters, the fate of dishonoured women, the illegitimate child and suspicions about paternity.[88]

The films offer direct and indirect references to Partition, therefore assessing their representations on purely factual parameters is difficult, since the narratives are heavily interspersed with personal memories and rely on individual versions of this history. I suggest that cinema paves the way for recreating the past and intrinsically re-imagine it. Eventhough the treatment of memories differs in the case studies but the effort to emotionally engage is common to all the narratives. This observation guides my analytical focus on two fundamental aspects: the first, is the cinematic approach to Partition memories, the representation of its nostalgia and trauma. The second, delves into the unique narrative influence of the ancient Indian theatrical traditions on the dramatic aesthetic of these representations. This influence is integral to understanding the utilization of Indian fiction film tropes and tracing their narrative impact on the treatment of memories.

Critical acclaim or its absence as well as the commercial success and failure of the case studies are an essential corollary to this analysis. These facets are indicative of the level of audience engagement, particularly with respect to the orchestrations of Partition memories and ascertain their relevance. My thesis aims to stimulate an original discussion through its emphasis on contemporary representations of Partition in Indian cinema, where observably existing scholarship is largely limited to the analysis of art-house films on this subject. I highlight the gradual transformation in Partition depictions and attempt to gauge the credibility of contemporary fictional works within this historiography. I explore the scope of mainstream Indian films, their production and consumption structures as well as the widespread appeal they enjoy among the Indian milieu. Therefore, an in-depth study of the production elements, their narrative function and quality is included in my analysis. My thesis supports scholarship that is conducive to analysing commercial Indian films as significant socio-cultural entities, rather than echoing a school of thought which tends to dismiss them as vacuous mass entertainers.

There has been a steady rise in socially relevant content finding space in commercial Indian films. Hence the success, market value, mass or niche appeal and intrinsic

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[88]Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the wake of Partition*, (London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 6.

messaging of these unconventional narratives of Partition are central to this analysis. I identify a distinct link between the use of mainstream cinema tropes to address this history and the proliferation of mass media. A link indicative of a heightened interest in the past, while tailoring the cinematic treatment of Partition memories to appeal to a contemporary audience. Therefore, taking cognizance of all the perspectives and studies mentioned above have been critical to devising the theoretical structure of my thesis. In the next section I provide a detailed explanation of the methodology adopted for this analysis, which comprises an original endeavour to analyse the memories of Partition and their dramatic treatment as well as representation.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Memory analysis

The content and treatment of memories in the case study films guides my analysis, especially since they demonstrate diverse approaches toward the representation and recollection of Partition. I suggest that the treatment of the memories in the films is closely linked with their surrounding socio-cultural environment. The earmarked chronological period (2012 to 2017), for this analysis demonstrates a shift in the Indo-Pak diplomatic and political relations. I note that this shift is observable in the way Indian cinema tackles the subject of Indo-Pak relations and more specifically the portrayal of Pakistan, religion as well as other related themes in the films.

The prevalent socio-political and cultural factors form the external environment for the creation, exhibition and reception of memorialisation. Understanding this contextual environment is essential, since strong communal, gender and political sensitivities are still attached to the discussion of this history. These factors are known to pose a challenge for cinematic representations of Partition and addressing its consequences, as I will demonstrate later in the chapters. Also, sustaining commercial viability through melodrama, spectacle, songs, dramatic dialogues, dance and larger than life characterisations, constitute key dimensions of mainstream Indian cinema, warranting further examination. The presence of these narrative components impact film reception and effect the relatability of Partition to present-day audiences.

I suggest that Partition memories are multidimensional, making it integral to understand their constitution and their resultant representational considerations. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth addresses the difficulties in representing memories of pain, loss and violence.[89] She discusses the sensitivities attached to these memories, rendering them inadequate for articulation in any form of media.[90] I discuss Caruth's perspective in the context of Partition, where during the riots systematic attacks on Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities were carried out. The process of remembering becomes painful as neighbours, former friends, relatives, colleagues were lost or murdered and at the same time often the perpetrators came in the form of the known. As the violence escalated, it made way for violence motivated by revenge and patriarchal notions of besmirching the so-called honour of communities through the rape and abduction of women.[91]The tendency to assign blame further complicates the process of Partition remembrance as well as the vulnerability of the survivors to the agendas of media agencies or documenters.

I note that the sensitivities attached to Partition memorialisation coincide with Caruth's perspective, 'trauma, that is, does not simply serve as record of, the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned.'[92] Caruth is in turn influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychological study of trauma, this observation suggests repression of traumatic memories 'that it occupies a space to which willed access is denied.'[93] Hence they discuss the attempts of survivors to forget their trauma, as its recollection would force them to confront or relive painful moments.

> For the survivor of trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension. The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility.[94]

Flashbacks are particularly relevant to my analysis, as they attempt to navigate the psychological and repressive facets of trauma. Notably the intersection of public and

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[89]Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p 12.
[90]Ibid.
[91]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery , Rupture , Resistance Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition', *Economic And Political Weekly*, 28.17 (1993), (pp 12–24). p 14.
[92]Cathy Caruth,*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p 22.
[93]Ibid. p 152.
[94]Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone,'Introduction:Remembering suffering:trauma and history', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone*, (eds), *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York:Routledge, 2003), p 100.

personal memories further complicates flashbacks attached to the context of Partition. Case study films *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* deal with representations and reconstructions of violence perpetuated at that time, wherein these memories take the form of flashbacks. Consequently, studies of fictional expressions of collective traumas such as wars, genocide, riots are surrounded by perceptions of 'incomprehensibility and unrepresentability' of these events.[95] Therefore, I suggest that memory and trauma theory scholars are increasingly trying to look beyond this debilitating and repressive conditioning seeking to forget the past.

However, scholars E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang are not in favour of Caruth or Freud's relegation of trauma into a sacred space untouched by critical analysis.[96] Kaplan and Wang advocate a thorough examination of representations of trauma that have devised different ways to interpret and express trauma on screen. According to them representations of trauma may try to 'cure' the traumatized individual, dramatically 'shock' audiences and turn them into 'voyeurs' or simply a 'witness.' [97] I observe that the formulation of these categorizations by Kaplan and Wang encourage a demystification of sensitive memories. They raise concerns about the unidimensional readings of history that would be devoid of memory contributions. At the same time, they note that cinematic expressions of trauma may indulge in 'aestheticization' of violence on the one hand and 'trivialization' on the other.[98] It is significant that Partition cinema and particularly the films chosen for this analysis grapple with these considerations, therefore, I incorporate an in-depth analysis of their representations of trauma.

I notice that characters in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* oscillate between forgetting and remembering the traumatic episodes they have experienced. Hence, the way trauma or the 'unspeakable tries to find representation' through the 'moment of disclosure' are an integral part of the films and their analysis.[99] Memory scholar Janet Walker suggests that cinematic expressions of trauma bridge the gap between memories and history, by making private trauma public.[100] This relocation tries to effectively place

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[95]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) < https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9> p 20 [accessed 12th November 2018].

[96]E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, 'Introduction: From Traumatic Paralysis to the Force Field of Modernity,' in *Trauma and Cinema, Cross-Cultural Explorations,* (eds). by E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p 9.

[97]Ibid. p 10.

[98]Ibid. p 11.

[99]Janet Walker,'The Traumatic Paradox: autobiographical documentary and the psychology of memory' in *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*,(eds), Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (New York:Routledge, 2014), p 106.

[100]Ibid. p 108

'individual suffering in historical and social context, while also foregrounding the problem of historical truth itself.'[101] Her perspective recognizes trauma as a shared link between personal and public memory domains, by acknowledging the suffering perpetuated by external political intrusions of wars, slavery, colonization or moments such as Partition. However, I note that Walker does not detail the aspects of memory transference, generational distance or the role of mass media technologies such as cinema in her discussion.

In contrast, memory scholar Alison Landsberg's concept of *prosthetic memory* examines and features the impact of these facets specifically in the context of cinema.[102] Landsberg's approach tries to comprehend the subjectivity of trauma and nostalgia, as well as the enhancement of their generational communication and scope through media. She actively engages with the inventiveness of cinematic representations and their capacity to engage masses.[103] She makes a significant suggestion to treat cinema as an 'experiential tool', with the capacity to reach out to mass audiences and try to connect them with memories across time and space.[104]Although Landsberg's study aims at assessing the transformation of American remembrance through Hollywood films of pivotal historic episodes of slavery and Civil War. I note that her inferences are relevant in the context of Partition, since she focuses on key moments in a nation's history. The events of 1947 comprise moments that have left lasting impressions on the national ethos, people's lives as well as the media of India, Pakistan and even Bangladesh.

Observably, recent Partition and the mentioned memory scholarship are principally fighting the tendency to overlook survivor testimonies and forget their trauma. I note that simultaneously cinematic depictions try to lend a voice to the trauma experienced by survivors, by portraying incidents of violence to the pain caused by displacement and loss. Landsberg suggests that essentially, Partition memories occur 'at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past,' hence, they are fundamentally akin to

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[101]Ibid. p 110.
[102]Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 32.
[103]Ibid. p 8.
[104]Ibid.

prosthetic memories.[105] Therefore, standing at the cusp of public and private histories Landsberg introduces *prosthetic memory* as a new form of cultural memory.[106] Prosthetics mean 'an artificial limb,' and in the context of memory, Landsberg suggests that it is a formation of or to mark a trauma and gradually through dissemination these memories get prosthetically attached to those who may not have any direct links with the trauma.[107]

In turn Landsberg earmarks the places interactions or engagements of this kind may occur as 'experiential sites such as a movie theatre or museum,' spaces that are specially created to facilitate an experience or a deeper attachment among the audience.[108] I suggest that her reading connects with the recent discourses on Partition historiography; the Partition museum exemplifies a space where personal memories of survivors interact with the history of Partition. The stories retold in the museum, belong to survivors, 'through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history,' instead of circulating a state sponsored narrative.[109] It is noteworthy that Landsberg concentrates on the experiential engagement of such personalised memories in a film's narrative, recognising the prosthetic potential of memories to reach an audience with no referral point or tangible connect to the historical experience. Technology and its ability to transport memories across generational boundaries are credited by Landsberg as facilitators of this communication:

> Through the technologies of mass culture, it becomes possible for these memories to be acquired by anyone, regardless of skin colour, ethnic background, or biology. Prosthetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, 'heritage,' and ownership.[110]

Landsberg observes the revolution in digital technologies and is mindful of the traditional modes of memorialisation giving way to the democratization of access among audiences. In this way media helps bring people closer to the past or specifically their past, encouraging a personalisation of memories tailored for subjective narratives. Alongside trauma, Partition scholarship discusses the intense longing survivors express for the way things used to be before the division. I discuss

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[105]Alison Landsberg, '*Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia University Press, 2004), p 6.
[106]Ibid. p 32.
[107]Ibid.
[108]Ibid. p 24.
[109]Ibid.
[110]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia University Press, 2004), p 52.

Mallika Ahluwalia's interview with eminent journalist and Partition survivor Kuldip Nayar, as he voices the pathos of displacement through the wistful urge to view the past 'the way it used to be' and re-experience it in that form.

> When we reached the border in 1947, there was a sea of people going from Pakistan to India and an opposite movement from India to Pakistan also. We stared at each other silently. They had also come after being looted, leaving behind all their friends, relatives, houses, property and everything and our story was also the same. We had left everything. But we kept looking at each other for quite some time like a relationship of loss had developed, a relationship that both of us had become refugees, a relationship of sympathy, kinship. [111]

This yearning for what is lost, is accompanied by the realisation of its irretrievability, yet nostalgia allows an imaginative passage for memories transcending barrier of time and space.[112] Depictions of nostalgia in the case study films are significant manifestations of a 'yearning for a different time,' that seeks to preserve and simultaneously struggles with the tendency to forget.[113] Memory scholar Svetlana Boym places nostalgia into two categories: restorative and reflective; wherein restorative nostalgia 'attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home', and reflective thrives on a desperate or wistful longing for the past.[114]

Boym observes that the emotional attachment among the millions of people who faced voluntarily or involuntarily displacement from their homes, form complex nostalgic imaginations as the wish to return to the past is accompanied by an awareness of its impossibility.[115] Gradually, this acute sense of loss and longing takes the form of 'reflective nostalgia',which transcends physical constrictions through memory imaginations.[116] Boym's reading of nostalgia guides film scholar Pam Cook's approach and this excerpt reflects the similarities in their readings of this phenomenon:

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[111]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India:Penguin Random House, 2017), p 103.
[112]Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its discontents,' *The Hedgehog Review,* 9 (2), (2007), pp 7-18, (p 3).
[113]Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its discontents,' *The Hedgehog Review,* 9 (2), (2007), pp 7-18, (p 3).
[114]Ibid. p 7.
[115]Ibid. p 16.
[116]Ibid.

> Nostalgia is predicated on a dialectic between longing for something idealised that has been lost, and an acknowledgement that this idealised something can never be retrieved in actuality and can only be accessed through images. [117]

Cook develops this observation further, by exploring the cinematic potential of nostalgic remembrances and their influence on the recreation of the past. She associates Boym's imaginative nostalgic recollections with elements of 'fantasy' and 'suspension of disbelief,' which are commonly observable in film production and analysis. [118]

> This process can be seen as an activity of 'let's pretend', or role-play: past events can be recreated so that the audience can experience them in the present, imagine what it was like then, and connect emotionally with representations of the past. [119]

Cook's study of how nostalgia attached to personal loss or reminisces of happier times reaches audiences through the utilization of a cinematic language, is an important observation. She notes that the juxtaposition of nostalgia and cinema facilitates an access to Partition history, where the the lines between the objective and subjective are blurred. [120] Subsequently, Cook draws the discussion to visual aesthetics or how nostalgia is represented or reconstructed through distinct audio-visual treatments in the case study films. The perspectives of film scholars Paul Grainge and Christine Sprengler relevant here as they closely examine the role of visual aesthetics in narratives recreating the past on film. [121] While Grainge focusses on the use of colour and its support to the construction of the past, Sprengler discusses the representation of history, mise-en-scène, costumes, props driven by luxury and popular consumer culture or Populuxe aesthetic. [122] In the context of my study, visual orchestration of nostalgic elements guide emotive representations of loss and yearning. The fictional treatment of nostalgia connects with their ability to emotionally engage the audience with Partition. The emotional impact or value nostalgia adds to the discussion of history in cinema is discussed by both Cook and Landsberg.

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[117] Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its discontents,' *The Hedgehog Review,* 9 (2), (2007), pp 7-18, (p 17).
[118] Pam Cook, *Screening Nostalgia, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema,* (London: Routledge, 2005). p 4.
[119] Ibid. p 5.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Christine Sprengler, *Screening nostalgia: Populuxe props and Technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p 14.
[122] Ibid. p 14.

Cook observes the reliance on 'empathy and identification' in the cinematic process of recreating and disseminating histories.[123] Simultaneously, I note that Landsberg infers that exposure to prosthetic memories of moving historical moments have the power to evoke empathy among its audience. Both Cook and Landsberg agree that cinema can take 'on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event' through its engagement with both nostalgic and traumatic memories.[124] However, Landsberg takes the influence of this exposure a step further and states 'prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.'[125] She confidently connects exposure to prosthetic memories with enhancement in 'social responsibility and political alliances that transcend, class, and gender.'[126] Landsberg maintains that the response to prosthetic memories is prone to be empathetic regardless of any possible discrepancies or changes within the framework of audience reception. Hence, I deduce that she supports drawing larger inferences from the way an audience connects, feels or reacts to memories, irrespective of an individual's socio-political consciousness.

Although my analysis is not concerned with gleaning specific audience reactions or transformations inspired by prosthetic exposure to Partition memories, as such a hypothesis would rely on the assumption that memories transform individual value systems and thought processes. I suggest that the extent to which memories of Partition impact or emotionally transform its audience is a highly subjective supposition, that largely ignores individual agency and transfers power to the circulation and exhibition of technological productions of memory. In this respect, I note French philosopher Bernard Stiegler cautionary outlook toward this kind of reliance on prosthetic memory and notes the artificiality in its processes, be it recording, transmission and the possibilities of repetitive and habitual exposure.[127] I observe that Stiegler raises pertinent questions about the composition of memories:

> Whether something like a *natural* memory exists, a memory which would not be always already artificial, that is, produced by programs which can be considered prostheses of memory.[128]

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[123]Pam Cook, *Screening Nostalgia, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema,* (London: Routledge, 2005), p 5.
[124]Ibid. p 10.
[125]Ibid.
[126]Pam Cook, *Screening Nostalgia, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema,*(London: Routledge, 2005),p. 10.
[127]Bernard Stiegler, 'Technologies of Memory and Imagination', translated by Ashley Woodward and Amélie Berger Soraruff, *Parrhesia,* 29, (2018), pp 25-76, (p 28).
[128]Ibid. p 12.

He states that 'natural' memory is intrinsically personal and subjective, as it is essentially the total of one's experiences, exposures, environment, cognitive and studied information.[129] I note Stiegler's pertinent warning against assumptions that ascribe prosthetic memories with the capacity to completely transform a culture or an individual's consciousness.[130] In addition, memory scholar Susannah Radstone negates the assumption that sensitive memories linger with the audience long after disengagement from the experiential site.[131] She asserts that this passive attribution to the audience ignores external influencers of a cinematic experience.[132]

> Prosthetic memory models the cinema– memory relation as one in which cinema implants memories into passive spectators, but this takes no account of the spectator's negotiation of images.[133]

I agree with Radstone's circumspect reading of the extent of impact and influence prosthetic memories may wield. I am mindful that Landsberg's supposition over-extends the scope of prosthetic transference of memories and broadly ignores individuality. I avoid the assumption that prosthetic memories will generate empathy among those far removed from its immediate context, is overly simplistic. Hence, I concentrate on the function of prosthetic memories as communicability enhancers of Partition memories across various barriers and through the mass medium of cinema.

As mentioned before, the communication of memories and their reception is also connected with the context in which they are reconstructed and transmitted. The years in which the films were produced and subsequently released attest to the contextual influence of the creations. The manner in which the films address Partition and its memories can be linked with their audience reception and to certain extent their lasting impact. In order to effectively analyse the empathetic value ascribed to these memories, I draw attention to their contribution to the emotive and dramatic structure unique to mainstream Indian films. Such an approach can comprehensively analyse the quality of the memory representations, the complexities of their emotive structures as well as the dramatic construction of the selected films. I highlight these aspects and attempt to decode these particularities by tracing their influence to the Indian theatrical tradition. This link proposes a distinct

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[129]Ibid. p 30.
[130]Ibid.
[131]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,*(eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 328.
[132]Ibid.
[133]Ibid. p 334.

methodological combination that studies the representation of Partition memories in conjunction with the cinematic aesthetic of the films. I highlight the indigenous dramatic aesthetic visible in the construction of memories and analyse their role in effectively maximising the overall impact of the narratives. Therefore, to support my analysis of the dramatic structure and composition of the case study films I turn to the Indian Film Theory and the significance of *rasas* to the intrinsic structure of mainstream Indian films.

1.4.2 *Rasas* and Indian film analysis

There is a growing awareness acknowledging Indian cinema's distinctiveness among film scholars. The orchestration of melodramatic scenes, dialogues and characterisations in mainstream Indian films function as cinematic expectations specific to this branch of Indian cinema. This narrative variety offers inclusions of action, drama, romance sequences as well as the elemental use of songs, their lyrics and picturizations. Hence, I advocate for the placement of the selected works within a theatrical framework that is mindful, supportive and understanding of the unique characteristics of mainstream Indian cinema.

I suggest that the Indian Film Theory can help decode the emotive content and theatrical constitution of the selected mainstream Indian films. It recognizes the ancient Indian Sanskrit text *Natyashastra*, authored in 1st century BCE by mythic sage Bharata as the cornerstone of Indian dramaturgy.[134] The Sanskrit text guides creators, performers as well as the audience, through its 'an exhaustive, comprehensive and encyclopedic practical manual of dance, acting, music and theatre.'[135] Bharata postulates the importance of *rasas* or the 'essence of emotion', as well as the way they should be utilized to create and communicate distinct moods or emotions to the audience.[136] He treats this as the end goal of all forms of Indian performance arts.

I observe that Indian film scholar Gaston Roberge, pioneer of Indian Film Theory, identifies *Natyashastra* as the essential influence, encouraging emotive performances for

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[134]Piyush Roy, 'The Aesthetics of Emotional Acting: An Argument for a Rasa-Based Criticism of Indian Cinema and Television' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016) < http://hdl.handle.net/1842/22910> [accessed 10th June 2017], p 42.
[135]Ibid.
[136]Ibid. p 45.

their ability to induce emotional responses among the audience.[137] In turn, *rasas* are considered integral attachments of the distinct 'multiple genre-mixing narrative style' found in mainstream Indian cinema.[138] I suggest that Partition memories and their representation is a combination of the aesthetic and emotive compositions of *rasas* in the selected films. Drawing on the dynamics of *rasas* helps me decipher the mentioned narrative strategies employed through a comprehensive study of the Indian cinematic tradition.

Indian film scholar Piyush Roy observes that so far Indian film scholarship has paid more attention to Satyajit Ray's realist films and similar art-house productions in comparison with Indian commercial cinema.[139] Roy traces this back to the history of Indian film criticism that reflects 'a preferential bias in favour of reviewing all Indian films using the canons of Euro-American film theories, models and notions of review.'[140] He notes that the occasional application of these canons to commercial films evaluated them as excessive, melodramatic, 'loose and fragmented' narratives.[141] As a consequence, there was a common declaration of films in the popular format as inferior. Therefore, by extension, any unique cultural, traditional or performative aspects of commercial Indian cinema were largely ignored.[142]

Scholars Gaston Roberge and Pravas Jivan Chaudhury advocate for understanding the indigenous influencers on mainstream films, stemming from a rich cultural heritage. Roberge disagrees with the way 'Western film theory has been applied indiscriminately to Indian films which are made according to a completely different aesthetic canon.'[143] They are supportive of film scholarship and criticism that attempts to revisit and review using non-Euro/American models of film criticism.[144] This perspective emphasises that existing canons need to acknowledge the way 'the two traditions of performing arts differ' and be aware of their fundamentally distinct cultural traditions.[145] Film scholar Rachel Dwyer also recognizes 'an inadequacy in prevalent Euro-American film theory' and suggests that the

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[137]Gaston Roberge, *The Indian Film Theory: Flames of Sholay, Notes, and Beyond*, (Kolkata:Sampark, 2010), p. 40.
[138]Ibid.
[139]Piyush Roy, 'The Aesthetics of Emotional Acting: An Argument for a Rasa-Based Criticism of Indian Cinema and Television' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016) < http://hdl.handle.net/1842/22910> [accessed 10th June 2017]. p 49.
[140]Ibid.
[141]Ibid.
[142]Ibid. p 50.
[143]Gaston Roberge, *The Indian Film Theory: Flames of Sholay, Notes, and Beyond*, (Kolkata:Sampark, 2010), p 40.
[144]Kathleen Marie Higgins, 'An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and aesthetic breakthroughs', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 65.1 (2007), 43-54. (p 44). < https://www.jstor.org/stable/4622209> [accessed 20th August 2017].
[145]Gaston Roberge, *The Indian Film Theory: Flames of Sholay, Notes, and Beyond*, (Kolkata:Sampark, 2010), p. 32.

scrutiny of Indian cinema should acknowledge its diversity and uniqueness.[146] I suggest that being mindful of the distinctive characteristics of Indian cinema is a significant step towards developing cogent film criticism and scholarship frameworks for mainstream Indian film analysis. Chaudhury suggests that this distinction between Indian and Western dramatic traditions dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics,* the earliest known Western treatise on drama, is similar to Bharata's *Natyashastra.*[147] Simultaneously, *Rasa* scholar Kathleen Higgins notes Aristotle's *Poetics* and Bharata's *Natyashastra* elucidate the fundamental difference between Western and Indian theatrical traditions. [148]

> Both focus on action, but with very different emphases. Aristotle stresses the plot, the actions of the character within the drama, while Bharata does not. This is appropriate, for Indian drama is less focused on decisive events than is Western drama.[149]

Scholar Higgins observes the main distinctions in their dramatic aesthetic, where Aristotle's drama achieves unity mainly through its plot, and Bharata calls for narrative cohesion through achieving a 'dominant mood or emotional tone.'[150] This foregrounding of emotions in *Natyashastra* definitively highlights the role of *rasa*s. In addition, Sanskrit scholar and Indologist P.V. Kane defines *rasa* as a final state of 'relish/satisfaction/reaction/aesthetic experience' to be encouraged in a spectator while watching and experiencing a performing art.[151] He states that Bharata identifies nine principal *rasas* that comprehensively encompass a gamut of emotions.[152] These nine *rasas* or *navarasas* can be understood as amalgamations of embedded meanings and emotional threads apart from their literal translations and definitions. Their expansion in the excerpt below is indicative that *rasas* essentially cover the entire spectrum of human emotions:

> *Shringar* (beauty, love, devotion), *Hasya* (humour, joy, sarcasm), *Adbhuta* (wonder, curiosity, mystery), *Shanta* (peace, calmness and relaxation), *Raudra* (anger, irritation, stress), *Veera* (courage, pride, confidence), *Karuna* (sadness, pity,

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[146]Rachel Dwyer, 'Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Modern India', *Asian Affairs*, 41.3 (2010), pp 381–98, (p 382) <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2010.508231> [accessed 2nd September 2017].
[147]Pravas Jivan Chaudhury, 'Indian Poetics,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (Autumn,1965), pp 197-204, (p 198) < https://www.jstor.org/stable/i217791> [accessed 12th April 2018].
[148]Kathleen Marie Higgins, 'An Alchemy of Emotion: Rasa and aesthetic breakthroughs', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 65.1 (2007), 43-54. (p 47) < https://www.jstor.org/stable/4622209> [accessed 20th August 2017].
[149]Ibid.
[150]Ibid.
[151]Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p 12.
[152]Ibid.

compassion, sympathy), *Bhayanak* (fear, anxiety, worry) and *Vibhatsa* (disgust, depression, self-pity). Scholar Piyush Roy notes that *Natyashastra's* description of 'an ideal play' is one that evokes and includes all the principal *rasas.*[153]

This detailed identification and enumeration of emotions simultaneously draws attention to the distinctive 'masala' nature of Indian films, that film scholar Priya Jaikumar describes as a unique narrative 'format of multiple emotions, genres, plot and mood transitions.'[154] I observe that keeping these distinctive characteristics in mind Jaikumar defines mainstream Indian films, as an Indian 'masala' (spice) film.[155] The term 'masala' alludes to the popular culture of Indian cuisines and the indispensable role of spices. Here I understand spices to mean *rasas* and their incorporation alludes to the use of emotions in an Indian film. In relation I suggest that her analogy elucidates mainstream cinema's approach, its appeal among audiences and consequently translates into commercial success.[156]

> (It) refers literally to a blend of Indian spices that adds flavour to food, and metaphorically to the necessary combination of filmic ingredients that best guarantees high returns on investment. 'Masala' films were a consequence of producers and directors trying to ensure that every film had a fighting chance to reap good profits—in the absence of studio infrastructure—by incorporating something in the film for everyone. Each film had a little action and some romance with a touch of comedy, drama, tragedy, music and dance.[157]

I note that the blending of Indian condiments forms an interesting analogy adopted by scholar Jaikumar to establish the Indian cinemagoer's affinity towards dramatic or emotive variety within a single story. Author, poet and Indian culture critic, Reginald Massey also observes that 'Indian films provide a vehicle for all of Bharata's *rasas.*'[158] In the context of mainstream Indian cinema analysis, I suggest that it is important to make the connection between the dramatic structure of the these films as well as their mass reach. In conjuction, Film scholar Vijay Mishra's perspective supports this connection made by Jaikumar and

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[153]Piyush Roy, 'The Aesthetics of Emotional Acting: An Argument for a Rasa-Based Criticism of Indian Cinema and Television' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016), p 52.
[154]Ibid.
[155]Priya Jaikumar, 'Bollywood Spectaculars', *World Literature Today*, *77*(3), (Oct 2003), pp 24-29, (p 26).
[156]Ibid.
[157]Ibid. p 28.
[158]Reginald Massey, 'From Bharata to the cinema: a study in unity and continuity.' *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature,* 23.1, (1992), pp 59-71, (p 62).

Massey. In turn he describes the link between *Natyashastra* and Indian cinema as a natural phenomenon. He suggests that this internalisation of *rasas* and the guidelines laid down in *Natyashastra* has impacted the narrative construction and exhibition of Indian commercial cinema.[159]

Studying the observations of scholars Roy, Jaikumar, Massey and Mishra, offers significant insights into the original composition of mainstream Indian films. This is relevant to my analysis as I have chosen to study the mainstream representations of Partition memories. To understand the emotional essence of the memories I observe how *rasas* in the films interact with prevalent mainstream cinema conventionalities. It is noteworthy that American Sanskritist and Indologist Edwin Gerow, recommends the use of the Indian *rasa* aesthetic as a foundation for classification of films.[160] Gerow does so by identifying a film's dominant theme or themes followed by 'attempting to locate their closest rasa counterpart from the *navarasas*.'[161] Although Gerow makes a viable suggestion, I note that his approach is limited to the process of classification of films, whereas scholar Gaston Roberge goes beyond Gerow's idea of classification through *rasas* and focuses on the incorporation and representation of *rasas* in mainstream Indian films.[162] For my analysis, using *rasa* as a tool for evaluating the narrative structure, acting, song and dance performances and other dramatic elements of the case study films is more applicable. Therefore, the above mentioned perspectives help me earmark a separate analytical space for comprehending the mainstream elements of my case study films.

It is noteworthy that my attempts to formulate a cogent framework for the analysis of Indian commercial cinema related to Partition, is also a process of breaking new ground. There are few precedent efforts engaging in the analysis of the dramatic compositions of Indian films representing Partition. I discuss a few of them later in the chapter. However, even these studies do not delve into the dramatic aesthetic or the implications of the reach of Indian cinema. Instead, I am trying to design a methodological approach mindful of their distinct production structures, dramatization and reception, as well as specific to the Indian context. A methodology conscious that the use of commercial cinema tropes interspersed with the persistence of Partition memories in Indian culture represent an

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[159]Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: A Critical Genealogy,* (New Zealand: Asian Studies Institute, 2009), p 14.
[160]Edwin Gerow, 'Rasa and Katharsis: A Comparative Study, Aided by Several Films', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 122,.No. 2, Indic and Iranian Studies in Honor of Stanley Insler on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, pp 264–77, (p 266) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3087620> [accessed 2nd October 2018].
[161]Ibid. p 268.
[162]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian way,*(India: Inkdia Books, 2014), p 89.

unusual occurrence, which necessitates the development of a multidimensional analytical framework.

In this context, I suggest that the process of recognising and deciphering *rasas* rescues Partition from being limited to the discourses of memory and history. The use of songs, dialogues, emotional plot points, dances, and so on in the case study films work to make this history more accessible for analysis. Significantly, although the chosen films draw a lot from the past, they simultaneously weave their stories through a present-day environment. Roberge's perspective extends the cinematic fluidity of mainstream Indian films and links it with memories that they generate. Roberge suggests that a film becomes an integral part of a viewer's memory, for its ability to linger in the audience's mind long after being seen.[163] I observe that this makes an important connection between 'popular' cinema, 'collective memory', the viewing experience and the dramatic treatment of the film.[164] According to him, emotions propel this longevity among the audience as they retain the way a film makes them feel.

> The aim of the movie is to arouse emotions in the emotions in the viewers, not to analyse and discuss the situations depicted in the movie. [165]

I have already discussed the significance of emotions to memories and particularly in the context of Partition, in conjunction Roberge's theory allows me to take this discussion further. By drawing on his reading I concentrate on the unusual features in Indian cinema and their strategic engagement of different emotions.

> Music and dance are essential to unleash the emotional strength of the characters of their word and of their actions. The development of the story is not what matters first, but the moving images and music that constitute the movie as an audio-visual means to arouse emotions.[166]

Here Roberge reiterates Bharata's perspective which hinges on the arrangement of all dramatic elements be designed to trigger emotions. Recollection is a process that largely relies on that triggering of memories, which is integral to my analysis. I examine the

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[163]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian way*, (India: Inkdia Books, 2014), p 89.
[164]Ibid.
[165]Ibid. p 90.
[166]Ibid.

treatment and representation of memory triggers, including their interplay with *rasas*. It comprises a thorough textual analysis of the films, by breaking down the dramatic structure and emotive value of the different kinds of memories. I suggest that understanding the way *rasas* engage with Partition brings fresh insight into pivotal socio-cultural and historic phenomena.

In addition, the massive quantitative successes of mainstream films both in India and abroad suggest an in-depth look into their content that should also acknowledge their deep-rooted cultural connect. The widespread reach of Indian films attests to the sustained relevance of these traditional aesthetics, primarily since the postulates of *rasa* extend to how spectators absorb or react to performances. I surmise that the intended purpose of *Natyashastra* was to guide theatrical arts to achieve inclusivity and accessibility among spectators irrespective of their caste, class or creed. In Indian theology it is believed that *Natyashastra* was recited and taught by the Gods to the human priest Bharata, for propagation among the general populous. Thus, mass reach and dissemination gradually became the primary goal of the Indian commercial film. Eventually, the sheer volume and extensive popularity generated by them soon led this body of work came to be categorized under the generic title of 'Bollywood'.[167] The ability of this commercial branch of Indian cinema to crossover and connect with audiences in countries across the world is a well-documented phenomenon. Film scholars Elke Mader, Rajinder Dudrah and Bernhard Fuchs talk about the global attraction of mainstream Indian cinema or Bollywood has garnered over the years:

> Raj Kapoor's socialist melodramas made Indian cinema popular in the erstwhile USSR, China and Eastern Europe in the 1950s, Amitabh Bachchan's angry young man masala films widened its appeal in the Middle-East and Africa in the 1970s. Shah Rukh Khan's post 1990s' aspirational candy floss romances have inspired cultural engagements like Bollywood-style dancing classes in Europe beyond its South-Asian diaspora. For 'holding the largest audience from diverse places and cultural backgrounds in the contemporary world of cinema.' Khan was the subject of a multi-disciplinary international conference organized by the University of

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[167]Edwin Gerow, 'Rasa and Katharsis: A Comparative Study, Aided by Several Films', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 122,.No. 2, Indic and Iranian Studies in Honor of Stanley Insler on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, pp 264–77, (p. 270). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3087620> [accessed 2nd October 2018].

Vienna in 2010 focusing on the contribution of his stardom to Hindi cinema's (post-2000) gaining of popularity among mainstream Euro-American audiences.[168]

In the context of my analysis, I draw on this reach to understand the reception of Indian films discussing Partition in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Since the context of these memories is applicable to all three countries, therefore, I suggest that it is important to locate Partition memorialisation efforts in their cinemas as well. Since Partition is not just about what occurred in 1947, it is also about what is happening now; communal tensions, violence, biases, intolerance, extremism, skewed gender politics and so on, still plague our nations. Therefore, depictions of these issues are prone to incite some level of emotional connect or impact. The ability or capacity of these stories to forge empathetic relationships with an audience is central to this analysis.

I start the next section by outlining Indian cinema's exploration of this historic moment. Delving into this aspect is integral to evaluating Indian cinema's approach in the past and how it has developed. Including this aspect helps identify gaps in this cinematic historiography. I take a closer look at its exploration in cinemas of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. How the countries deal with Partition history and memories guides my understanding of the evolution of this subject. The inexorable links among the historical, cultural and political developments of the three countries may simultaneously influence the representation, circulation and reception of these works. Being mindful of these developments helps cultivate an informed perspective on Partition memorialisation and its connection with recent mainstream cinematic approaches.

1.5 Partition & Indian Cinema

Indian cinema is known for its forays into mythological and period film genres since its inception in 1913. Stalwarts K.Asif, Kamal Amrohi and Sohrab Modi produced and directed many historical dramas with humongous sets and elaborate costumes, dominating Indian cinema from the 1930s to the early 1980s.[169] Scholars Gita Viswanath and Salma Malik note that history in these films is used 'only tangentially or as a backdrop', not as the

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[168]Rajinder Dudrah, Elke Mader and Bernhard Fuchs, (eds), *SRK and Global Bollywood*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), p10.
[169]Gita Viswanath and Salma Malik, 'Revisiting 1947 through popular cinema: a comparative study of India and Pakistan,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2009), pp 61-69, (p 66).

main focal point.[170] The Mughal period became a popular background for memorable love stories instead of making pure or singularly focused historical films.[171] For decades, this tangential strategy of obliquely incorporating historical events into narratives are being followed effectively in mainstream Indian cinema. The strategic placing of historical references allowed films to use history as a setting without specifically engaging with its memorialisation. The impact of Partition on Indian cinema is still visible today, although ironically overt or even tangential expressions of this history did not figure into mainstream films for a very long time.

Pre-Partition India saw the Bombay and Lahore film studios closely connected since they catered to the largely Hindi or Urdu speaking audience in the northern and central regions of India.[172] However, this scenario drastically changed after Partition, as the mass migrations resulted in Hindu and Sikh artists relocating to India. This movement essentially shifted the talent and capital resources to India. Therefore, the Bombay based industry received a huge impetus whereas, the Lahore based film industry never recovered from that loss. [173]

> The Partition affected film production and many great performers had to make choices about their location. Legendary film personalities like Noor Jehan, Zia Sarhadi and Ghulam Mohammed left for Pakistan. Similarly, prominent Indian filmmakers such as Gulzar and Govind Nihalani, B.R. Chopra and Yash Chopra migrated to India from what became Pakistan. [174]

Partition is responsible for both forced and voluntary movements of film talents. The presence of the mentioned prominent actors, producers, directors and technicians was positive move for the Indian film industry. At the same time, the migration became a painful and direct personal experience for these individuals and significantly, this connection did not translate into films on the subject of Partition.

> Only in a handful of Hindi–Urdu movies, out of a total of about 1,800 movies produced between 1947 and 1962, did the events of Partition figure directly. A

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[170]Ibid.

[172]Gita Viswanath, and Salma Malik, 'Revisiting 1947 through popular cinema: a comparative study of India and Pakistan,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2009), pp 61-69, (p 64).
[173]Ibid.
[174]Ibid. p 65.

silence (that according to him) could be a memory statement and even a resolve for future action. [175]

Scholar Bhaskar Sarkar in *Mourning the Nation,* notes this vital and deliberate reluctance on the part of mainstream filmmakers in tackling the subject of Partition. I suggest that the silence he notices cannot simply be attributed to the proximity to the event and its traumatic memories. His suggestion is part of a complicated socio-cultural environment that emerged after Partition, where communal rhetoric became a permanent fixture in politics, and this eventually percolated to Indian mass media. Partition survivor and filmmaker Gulzar talks about this imposed 'claustrophobic silence' as producers did not want to back such a controversial topic. Director Yash Chopra and his family were also Partition survivors, but in contrast to Gulzar, Chopra had the wherewithal to finance film projects. This experience allowed Chopra to address this subject through his film *Dharmaputra* (1961). This film stands apart not just for discussing Partition but also for addressing Hindu fundamentalism in a mainstream film at that time. Despite the success of this bold and risky attempt, this film is where mainstream Indian cinema's contribution to Partition filmography ends for more than three decades, until its revival in the late 1990s.

Subsequently, this lengthy and widespread reluctance or omittance inspired a parallel movement in Indian cinema through directors V. Shantaram (1901-1990), Bimal Roy (1909-1966), Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), Chetan Anand (1921-1997), Mrinal Sen (1923-2018), Tapan Sinha (1924-2009), Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976) and Guru Dutt (1925-1964). These directors became auteurs, of what came to be known as *Parallel* or *Art* or *Independent* cinema in India. From the 1940s to late 1960s their films forged a space devoid of idyllic, extravagant, romance-driven narratives.

> Its exploration of reality is continuous with typically modern forms of cognitive enquiry and it is bound by the rules of wakefulness. This tendency prevents it to assimilate the elements of fancy with the plot.[176]

The mentioned filmmakers wanted to present the country as it was; grappling with famines, communal riots, poverty, unemployment and related daunting problems. This period witnessed a categoric refusal to mask criticisms of any exploitative social and

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[175]Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation : Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (London: Duke University Press, 2009), p 21.

[176]Vinay Lal and Asis Nandy, (eds), *Fingerprinting Popular Culture: The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2007). p 6.

political practices , and where confronting reality and cultivating awareness became central to this category of cinema. Yet the reluctance to address Partition persisted in mainstream cinema. At the same time, Indian authors have tried to piece together narratives that steered clear of the official or State-approved Partition historiography. Literary works by eminent writers Khushwant Singh (1915-2014), Salman Rushdie (1947-present), Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991), Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003), Yashpal (1903-1976) to name a few, used their stories to express the impact of Partition on ordinary people's lives. They locate their narratives within contexts of familial displacement, communal violence, refugee conditions and other painful consequences millions were forced to endure, while also providing glimpses into a world that existed before Partition occurred.[177]

> Here, public history is told as private history. This weaving together is common enough for fictional retellings of history, wherein private histories are coded with public history's narratives of national duty and loyalty.[178]

This focus on personal or private histories inspired many filmmakers to cinematically explore these stories, providing an outlet to the sensitive, more personalized memories in *Garam Hawa* (1973), *Tamas* (1988), *Train to Pakistan* (1997), *Mammo* (1994), *Earth 1947* (1998) and *Pinjar* (2003). Identified by their subtle and restrained aesthetic handling of complex and volatile themes, these reconstructions of Partition are placed in the category of art or independent cinema. The cinematic approach, reception and reach of these films guide this categorisation, especially since mainstream Indian cinema still shied away from portraying intense and sensitive issues. Bold explorations of victimization of women, communal violence, discrimination, religious intolerance, radicalism, class and caste conflicts and other related complex issues are visible in these films.

The mentioned films exercised esoteric choices in actors and consciously worked to avoid 'over the top' dramatizations readily found among conventional mainstream narratives. Hence, they stand apart for their understated cinematic style that risked portraying sensitive memories and themes. The films are critically acclaimed and internationally recognised as significant expressions and representations of Partition. Now their viewership falls largely under the purview of digital viewing platforms that reach a limited

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[177]Ibid. p 42.
[178]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) < https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9> p 35 [accessed 12th November 2018].

spectatorship through television broadcasts, DVD sales or retrospective film festivals. At the same time, these efforts were highly susceptible to controversies. It is noteworthy that acclaimed Partition narratives *Garam Hawa* (1973)*, Earth 1947* (1998) and *Tamas* (1988), were subject to protests, attempts at arbitrary censorship and communal backlash. The content of the films not only made bold statements, but they also braved financial risk as representations of such subjects were not prone to invite large investments. This broadly explains the modest production budgets of the mentioned art house films as well as their limited theatrical or mass media reach. Public opinion was also largely divided due to the perennially oscillating graph of Indo-Pak relations. In conjuction I note that audiences were and are still likelier to select an entertaining Bollywood or commercial film over a poignant Partition narrative. As a result, mainstream Indian cinema has struggled to maintain a balance between pursuing complex narrative themes and ensuring favourable monetary returns.

Film scholars Ira Bhaskar and Priya Kumar single out art house films as being capable of dramatizing the poignant memories of Partition.[179] They firmly state that directors of the mentioned Partition films: Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976), M S. Sathyu (1930-present), Shyam Benegal (1934-present), Govind Nihalani (1940-present), Deepa Mehta (1950-present) are torchbearers of Partition cinema.[180] Although Bhaskar and Kumar find their creations to be powerfully affecting in capturing and sensitively portraying Partition testimonies and memories.[181] Vishwanath and Malik note the acclaim accorded to Partition dramas *Garam Hawa* (1973), *Tamas* (1988), *Mammo* (1994) and *Train to Pakistan* (1997), yet, the films have not received adequate attention from Partition scholars. While these narratives find appreciation for dealing with issues of communal conflicts and other 'repressed issues,' they have not been as widely studied or analysed within Partition discourse.[182] Hence, the aim of my analysis is to look beyond these sources or expressions of the Partition experience and toward more recent films.

By setting up a methodology that looks at the myriad contemporary explorations of Partition and the transmission of its memories allows me to gauge the larger implications

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[179]Ira Bhaskar, 'The persistence of memory: Historical trauma and imagining the community in Hindi cinema', (Doctoral Thesis, New York University, 2004).
[180]Priya Kumar, 'Testimonies of loss and memory: Partition and the Haunting of a Nation', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies,* 1(2), (1999), pp 201-215, (p 202),<https://doi.org/10.1080/13698019900510311> [accessed 12th April 2018].
[181]Ira Bhaskar, 'The persistence of memory: Historical trauma and imagining the community in Hindi cinema', (Doctoral Thesis, New York University, 2004), p 10.
[182]Gita Viswanath, and Salma Malik, 'Revisiting 1947 through popular cinema: a comparative study of India and Pakistan,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2009), pp 61-69. (p 67).

of this historic moment. The design of this methodology is intended to closely scrutinise the memories in their various forms. Partition memories comprise a complex gamut of emotions experienced by the survivors and subsequently by those exposed to them. At the same time, as explained above, the dramatic structure of mainstream Indian films makes the representation and reconstruction of these memories a significant aspect for analysis. These multifaceted elements are equally challenging to analyse and to envisage a singular streamlined memory approach. Hence, the methodological framework attempts to keep the nostalgic, traumatic and empathetic strains of these memories as well as their cinematic representation in mind to enable a well-rounded analysis. Simultaneously highlighting the presence of this subject in the cinemas of Pakistan, Bangladesh and West Bengal. My scrutiny sheds light on the approach of their cinemas, which in turn links to the reception and circulation of the selected recent Indian Partition narratives and the dissemination of contemporary Indian cinema in these countries.

1.6   Partition cinema in Pakistan, Bangladesh & West Bengal

1.6.1   Pakistan

After Partition the film industry in Pakistan was facing a huge crisis due to the migration of all its major producers, directors, actors, technicians as well as the shortage of filming equipment.[183] Post-Partition cinema in Pakistan has produced a few films on the issue of Partition, and interestingly, they were also successful commercial ventures:

> *Kartar Singh* (Saifudin Saif, 1959), *Khaak aur Khoon* (Masood Pervez, 1979), *Tauba* (S. A Hafiz, 1964), *Lakhon Mein Eik* (Raza Mir, 1967), *Behen Bhai* (Hasan Tariq, 1968) and *Pehli Nazar* (Aslam Dar, 1977). These movies fared well on the commercial and trade circuits, with *Kartar Singh* being a record breaker and very popular in India as well.[184]

An important project is the film *Jinnah* (1998) based on Mohammed Ali Jinnah's life, the founder of Pakistan. Directed by Jamil Dehlavi, the production created a furore for its casting decisions:

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[183]Erum Hafeez, 'Lollywood-Pakistani Cinema through a Transitional Lens', *Journal of Independent Studies & Research: Management & Social Sciences & Economics*, 13.1, pp 81–91, (p 82).
[184]Gita Viswanath, and Salma Malik, 'Revisiting 1947 through popular cinema: a comparative study of India and Pakistan', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2009), pp 61-69, (p 64).

The film was criticized for the selection of *Dracula* fame actor Christopher Lee in the role of Jinnah depicting Quaid-e-Azam and casting of Indian actor Shashi Kapoor as the angel Gabriel. Despite the criticism, Jinnah proved to be a milestone in Indo-Pak joint film ventures.[185]

The film not only received a lot of criticism, it was also subject to protests by large sections of people all over the country. The choice of Indian actor Shashi Kapoor in the film has been one of its kind collaborations that has not been repeated in Pakistani cinema since. Another Partition film *Jannat Ki Talaash* (Hasan Asskari, 1999) was well received and garnered a lot of awards. However, the more recent film *Laaj* (Khalid Rauf, 2003) was not successful. [186] Following these films, incentives to touch upon this topic in Pakistan decreased further, leading to a silence that continues to this day. Scholars Gita Viswanath and Salma Malik in their article *Revisiting 1947 through Popular Cinema: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan,* make a note of this ambivalence in Pakistani cinema toward Partition memorialisation. According to them, this could be due to the preference for light-hearted entertainment that allows the overlooking of thematically loaded and unconventional films.[187]

The volatility of Indo-Pak relations is another major influencing factor that affects decisions to ban Indian films, inter-exchange of artists and participation in cricket tournaments. The most recent terrorist attack on the Indian Army in February 2019, directly impacted the release of Indian films in Pakistan. The bi-weekly train service between Delhi in India and Attari in Pakistan started in 1976, named *Samjhauta* (Compromise) Express and the proposal for constructing of the Kartarpur Corridor, have also been affected by Indo-Pak tensions.[188] Therefore the release of Indian films in Pakistan is subject to intense scrutiny by Pakistani authorities. I will take up the consequences of Indo-Pak relations on the distribution and exhibition of the case study films in Pakistan, in greater detail in their respective chapters.

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[185]Erum Hafeez, 'Lollywood-Pakistani Cinema through a Transitional Lens', *Journal of Independent Studies & Research: Management & Social Sciences & Economics*, 13.1, 81–91, (p 83).
[186]Ibid. p 84.
[187]Ibid. p 86.
[188]Samjhauta Express: The word *Samjhauta* translates to compromise. The Samjhauta Express is a bi-weekly train that runs between Delhi and Attari in India to Lahore in Pakistan. This service was started on 22nd July 1976.

1.6.2 Bangladesh

Partition experience for the state of Bengal stands in complete contrast from that of India and Pakistan. The population of Bengali Muslims in East Bengal was amenable to the creation of a separate state for Muslims in the form of Pakistan and became a part of the newly founded country as East Pakistan. However, the euphoria soon gave way to realizations of their mammoth differences in cultural practices and geographical distances. It led to a rise in Bengali nationalism culminating into the Liberation War between East and West Pakistan; the result was a newly independent East Pakistan known as present-day Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi film scholar Fahmida Akhtar makes an in-depth analysis of the growth and development of Bangladeshi cinema. She observes the Liberation War as 'the singular defining event of Bangladeshi history, its national identity' and forms the core of the national cinema of Bangladesh.[189] Therefore, Liberation War features in many Bangladeshi films and not explorations of Partition.[190] Indian films were banned in Bangladesh in the year 1972 in order to encourage indigenous production of films. However, this ban was lifted four decades later in the year 2011, but this move met with furious protests by actors and directors of the Bangladeshi cinema. In 2015, following an assessment of the adverse commercial impact on Bangladeshi cinema this ban was reinstated. The context of the formation of Bangladesh is explored the case study films *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan,* therefore looking closely at the response of Bangladeshi cinema toward Partition provides a relevant backdrop to my analysis.

1.6.3 West Bengal

In contrast to Bangladeshi cinema's response to Partition, I note that West Bengal's stands at the other end of the spectrum. Regional Bengali cinema has provided a platform to its memories and experiences. The 1960s saw a burgeoning of narratives contextually and experientially exploring Partition: Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), *Subarnarekha* (1962) and *Chitra Nodir Pare* (Tanvir Mokkamel-1999)

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[189]Fahmida Akhtar, 'Panning from the Past to the Present: The Climate, Context & Concept of Bangladeshi National Cinema', *Shilpakala*, XXII (2014), pp 1–20, (p 16).
[190]East Pakistan or present-day Bangladesh was a provincial state of Pakistan that existed in the Bengal region of the northeast of South Asia from 1955 until 1971.

[191] are considered exemplary contributions to Partition discourse. However, the years that followed did not see an increase in the number of films being produced on this subject.

One of the films I focus on for this analysis is a Bengali film *Rajkahini* (2015). Director Srijit Mukherji talks about making a conscious effort through this film to break this silence shrouding Partition's devastating impact on Bengal. He identifies an underlying parochialism with regard to how and especially where Partition is remembered. He observes a dominance of Partition films situated geographically, linguistically and culturally in North India:

> In India, any dialogues on Partition is just about Punjab. It's as if nothing happened in Bengal. But the fact of the matter is that the Punjab Partition happened in one blow. But here in a trickle riot here, a skirmish there. As the courses of rivers changed people were left without a home, a nationality. But no one has dealt with that; its as if we've been living in a no man's land of the mind for decades.[192]

Mukherji dedicates *Rajkahini* to 'every refugee in this world,' since after Partition the refugee crisis in Bengal is still a reality that India faces on a national. This dedication is a direct reference to the refugee settlement known as Coopers Camp at the border of West Bengal.[193] Journalist Dan McDougall talks about this refugee crisis:

> It is probably beyond the comprehension of most people that refugees could exist from partition 60 years ago, but it is one of the bitterest present-day truths of India's split with Pakistan.[194]

Therefore, *Rajkahini* becomes an important representation of what happened in Bengal during Partition. I suggest that identifying and analysing regional efforts to memorialise Partition is an important link to gain a holistic comprehension of this cinematic body of work. Hence, understanding the efforts to commemorate Partition in the places and countries deeply affected by it, also becomes integral to develop a holistic perspective on

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[191]Bengal: Bengal is a state in eastern India, between the Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal.
[192]Ojha Satadru, 'I don't believe in putting laurel leaves on my film posters.' *Times of India.com,* 12th January 2017 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms> [accessed 20th October 2018].
[193]Dan McDougall, 'The forgotten refugees who wait for justice after 60 years', *The Guardian.com, 5*th August 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/05/india.theobserver> [accessed 10th August 2018].
[194]Ibid.

this phenomenon. Scholarship of this cinema is important in charting the growth and development of this filmography and indicating gaps.

1.7   Partition and Mainstream Cinema Scholarship

In the course of my research I have found that Partition scholarship lays a strong foundation for the discussion of survivor testimonies and their memories. The underlying aim of this scholarship and particularly of the recent scholars has been to unveil and unearth memories of the separation consistently. Scholar Paulomi Chakraborty highlights the oft-ignored experiences of refugee women, particularly those affected by Partition of Bengal and their presence in Partition literature.[195] In a related study, scholar Terri Tomsky's *Fifty Years On: Melancholic (Re)collections and Women's Voices from the Partition of India*, focusses on the 'the relationship between affect, life narratives, and the emerging genre of literary partition anthologies.'[196] She emphasises the space and scope for the conception of such anthologies, further reiterating the need to record traumatic memories borne of this historic moment. Efforts by Chakraborty and Tomsky also reiterate the significance of collecting and preserving oral histories focussed on women's stories. In this regard, I have mentioned the pioneering work of scholar Urvashi Butalia. Her efforts have motivated memorialization studies in the field of Partition research and particularly drawn attention to addressing women's experiences during and after Partition.

In conjunction, scholar Anjali Bhardwaj Datta in *Renegotiating the Self-Recovery and Restoration – The 'Gendered' Histories of Partition,* tries establish that Partition history of women is not the same as that of men. [197] She investigates 'women who faced the worst of violence, abduction and then forcible recovery during and after the Partition, the subject of enquiry.'[198] Unlike Butalia, Datta does not only rely on oral history and interviews, she supplements these sources with memoirs of social workers and archives. Therefore, I note that her work offers a thorough understanding of these different sources and brings them together to encourage an in-depth discussion of women's narrative histories.

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[195]Paulomi Chakraborty, 'Gender, Women and Partition: literary representations, refugee women and partition studies', *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia,* (2014), pp 53-64. (p 54).

[196]Terri Tomsky, 'Fifty Years On: Melancholic (Re)collections and Women's Voices from the Partition of India', *Life Writing* 5.1 (2008), pp 61-78. (p 62).

[197]A. B. Datta, 'Renegotiating the Self: Recovery and Restoration—The 'Gendered' Histories of Partition', *Indian Historical Review* 35.2. (2008), pp 191-208, (p 198).

[198]Ibid.

The exploration of gendered violence is an integral thread that emerges from the oral history accounts of Partition. In *(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction*, scholar Rosemary Marangoly George studies the way gendered violence and its reconstructions are featured in Partition literature and cinema.[199] She considers the impact of the many complexities and sensitivities accompanying the revisitation of these violent memories. I note that scholars Dorothy Barenscott, Jisha Menon, Devi Prasad Sharma Gautam and Vishnupriya Sengupta make significant contributions to this discourse by examining specific Partition literature and film works.[200] Their work focuses on the examination of literary works mainly by these prolific writers Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), Khushwant Singh (1915-2014), Chaman Nahal (1927-2013), Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003), Bapsi Sidhwa (1936 to present), and Amitav Ghosh (1956 to present), to explore stories voicing and expressing the traumatic experiences of people due to Partition.[201] Therefore, these studies come together to form a collection of concerted efforts to understand the salient features gender violence depictions and their contribution to women's historiography of Partition.

In addition to the scholarship focussed on addressing Partition memories and fiction. I note a growing awareness of the lack of documentation in the media dedicated to this memorialisation. Scholar Partha S. Ghosh in *The Other Side of Partition: Resonances on Cultural Expressions,* categorises works inspired or based on Partition as *cultural productions* and identifies a gap in the analysis and scholarship of this body of work.[202]

> While some aspects of Partition have received considerable scholarly attention, its impact on culture has remained relatively less discussed…Hopefully, further research would be undertaken in respect of the plentiful South Asian experiences of 1947 and its aftermath…The idea is, basically, to generate more interest in a complex interdisciplinary field of research with huge untapped potential.[203]

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[199]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics,and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)', *The University of Chicago Press*,33 (1),(2007), pp 135–58, (p 136) <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016].

[200]Dorothy Barenscott,'This Is Our Holocaust: Deepa Mehta's Earth and the Question of Partition Trauma', *UCLA Historical Journal*, 21(0), (2006), pp 60-79 < https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86v9q8t5> [accessed on 28th March 2016].

[201]Devi Prasad Sharma Gautam, 'Violence and History in South Asian Partition Literature', (Doctoral thesis, University of Miami, 2014) in University of Miami Scholarly Repository, <https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/1281/> [accessed on 12th January 2019].

[202]Partha Ghosh, 'The Other Side of Partition Resonances on Cultural Expressions', *South Asia Research*, 35.1. (2005) pp 42-60, (p 45).

[203]Bhaskar Sarkar, Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the wake of Partition, (London: Duke University Press, 2009), p 54.

Ghosh is particularly concerned with the lack of films exploring this subject as well as the widespread absence of in-depth research on films that do memorialise Partition. Therefore, he calls for expansion of the categorisation of Partition narratives and its scholarship. An expansion of what qualifies as Partition cinema would be a more inclusive approach. One where the scope of Partition cinema scholarship extends beyond literary adaptations and period reconstructions. So far, in the course of my research I find the domination of adaptations and reconstructions in this branch of Indian cinema scholarship. *1947 Earth* (1998)*, Khamosh Pani* (2003)*, Hey Ram* (2000)*, Ramchand Pakistani* (2008)*, Pinjar* (2003) are some of the most studied Partition films. Of these films *1947 Earth* and *Pinjar* are adaptations of Partition literature; the former is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and the latter Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar.* Another significant commonality I note among these mentioned narratives is that they bring forth women's stories. Therefore, in a similar move cinema has taken to expressing experiences of women during Partition. Therefore, portrayals of sexual violence, displacement, forced conversions and resultant trauma dominate this cinema.

Scholars Humaira Saeed, Manju Jaidka, Joya Uraizee and Shahnaz Khan take up the representation of these issues in their essays. Humaira Saeed looks at the way trauma experienced by women is dealt with in the films *Ramchand Pakistani* and *Khamosh Pani.*[204] Manju Jaidka analyses diversions between the novel and its screen adaptation focussed on the depiction of trauma.[205] In their respective essays Shahnaz Khan and Joya Uraizee base their analysis on an in-depth study of the cinematic language of these films.[206] They specifically discuss the visual language adopted for the representations of incidents; including symbolism in the mise-en-scène, cinematographic and editing techniques. According to Khan and Uraizee assessing these production inputs in detail can effectively help understand the reconstructions of Partition memories. Their approach acknowledging the importance of production in reconstructions supports the analytical structure I develop for my analysis.

Although interest among mainstream Indian filmmakers to represent and discuss Partition onscreen is growing and comprises an important development; at the same time, in-depth or analytical studies of such works are unfortunately few and far between. Hence,

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[204]Humaira Saeed, 'Ramchand Pakistani, Khamosh Pani and the Traumatic Evocation of Partition, ' *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Routledge, (December 2009), pp 483-498.

[205]M. Jaidka,'Hyphenated Perspectives on the Cracking of India: Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man.' *South Asian Review* 25. (2004), pp 43-50.

[206]Shahnaz Khan,'Floating on silent waters: Religion, nationalism, and dislocated women in*bos.' Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 9.2, (2009), pp 130-152.

comprehending the scope of mainstream cinema scholarship, in order to gauge the presence of Partition and its corresponding gap this thesis aims to fill. A large part of mainstream cinema scholarship works to decode Bollywood strategies, use of established narrative tropes and socio-political implications of its representations. Film scholar Tejaswini Ganti's *Bollywood: a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema* and *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*, provide a comprehensive study of Indian cinema. [207] She studies Mumbai as the epicentre of Hindi language cinema or Bollywood. In the first book, she looks at the history, development and structure of Hindi language cinema and follows up with an in-depth ethnographic study of the Indian film Industry from the mid-1990's to 2010 in her second book. Similarly, scholar Derek Bose in *Brand Bollywood* talks about the growth and development of Bollywood.[208] He and Ganti recognise the global expansion, popularity and reach of these films.

Scholars Rini Bhattacharya Mehta's *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora* by and *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* by Ravi Vasudevan also provide crucial readings into the gamut of globalisation, liberalisation and expansion affecting the thematic and economic structures of mainstream Hindi films.[209] Bhattacharya traces the changes during the different phases of Indian cinema to the country's economic Liberalisation. Vasudevan's discussion factors in the various socio-cultural, historic and political changes, as well as their significant conjunction with melodramatic tropes in Hindi films. [210] As a consequence, there has been re-positioning of identities.

> Individual identity vis-a-vis nation, religion, class, and gender. On one hand, the definition of 'nationhood' and/or community has become much more fluid, keeping in tune with the sweeping universal claims of globalization.[211]

Gradually, Indian film scholars turned to Indian cinema as a marker of cultural and sociological changes. In his article, *Geographies of the Cinematic Public: Notes on Regional, National and Global Histories of Indian Cinema,* Vasudevan maps the journey

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[207]Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema,* (London: Routledge Film Guidebooks, 2013).
[208]Derek Bose, *Brand Bollywood,* (New York:Sage Publications, November 2006).
[209]Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande, *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora (New Perspectives on World Cinema),* (eds) Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande, (London: Anthem Press, 2011).
[210]Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema,*(London:Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). p 10.
[211]Ibid.

of Indian cinema from the British era or as he calls it the 'pre-national' era, to post-independence or 'period of nation-state formation', regional films and finally to its reach abroad.[212] It chronologically traces Indian cinema through its formative years, its present status as well as its wide circulation and popularity. I note that an increase in the use of popular colloquial term 'Bollywood' to denote Indian cinema among Indian film scholars is observable. Bollywood has been an accepted nomer in Indian film scholarship for many years now. Over the years this term has become more than a derivative of Hollywood; it emphasises the widespread popularity Hindi films garner in India and abroad. There is a growing consensus among Indian film scholars regarding Indian cinema's capacity to make larger commentaries through its ability to explore socially and politically relevant themes.

In conjunction, scholars Sumita S. Chakravarty and Jyotika Virdi analyse the early years of mainstream Indian cinema for its evolution for a medium intended for entertainment to a more socially conscious one. In *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987,* Chakravarty identifies the transformation of the mainstream cinematic experience into a cultural practice affecting national and individual identity, ideology and consciousness.[213] It traces Indian cinema through its early tumultuous years as it struggled to find meaning in a newly independent country. She notes the way popular films chose to look at concerns and conflicts of class, caste, religion and region. Jyotika Virdi's *The Cinematic Imagination- Indian Popular Films as Social History,* makes a similar reading that examines Hindi cinema's concerted efforts to build a portrait of India as a unified nation in the face of the various post-independence conflicts and the socio-cultural-political transitions.[214] Chakravarty and Virdi pave the way for studies to look at the Indian nation and the proliferation of a national image through popularised Hindi film narratives.

Film scholar Madhava Prasad draws attention to the rise of parallel cinema in the 1970s in India. His work *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* surveys Indian economic structures, the polity and the impact on cinema in 1970s.[215] He chooses this particular period because it saw the emergence of filmmaker Shyam Benegal whose early

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[212]Ravi Vasudevan, 'Geographies of the cinematic public: Notes on regional, national and global histories of Indian cinema,' *Journal of the Moving Image* 9, (2010), pp 94-117, p 96.
[213]S. S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987,*(Texas:University of Texas Press, 2011).
[214]Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation [sic]: Indian popular films as social history*, (New Jersey:Rutgers University Press, 2003).
[215]Madhava. M Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi film: a historical construction*, (London:Oxford University Press, 1998). p 12.

films had a strong reformist streak that exposed feudal systems and showed mobilization of exploited of groups. Prasad discusses the development of middle-class as a strong spectator base, 'development realism' as a model for art house films and audience's ideology that is influenced by their surrounding institutional forces. These different perspectives converge to reaffirm the relationship between the prevalent environment of a nation and its media. [216]

Besides, the political rise of right-wing Hindutva radical ideology and movement in India has given rise to several articles scrutinizing Indian cinema's reaction to the same. Rachel Dwyer, well-known authority on Indian cinema has authored several books and articles exploring its socio-cultural and political facets. In *Bollywood's India: Hindi cinema as a guide to contemporary India,* she suggests that Bollywood is a reliable source for understanding Indian polity, communal and milieu.[217] Her article *God on the Wrong Number: Hindu-Muslim Relations in PK (2014) and Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015)* provides an in-depth analysis of the way both the films depict religion and religious groups.[218] In *The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema,* Dwyer explores both the reluctance and dearth of films based on Mahatma Gandhi.[219]

The exploration of socio-political and cultural facets has a direct bearing on the portrayal of minorities and specifically of Muslims in Indian cinema. Scholars A.D. Needham and R.S. Rajan's *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, contributes to the discussion of secularism in mainstream Hindi cinema, particularly during a crisis in the relations between state, society, and religion, as well as analysing minority representation politics.[220] While the article *Yeh mulk hamara Ghar* selects only one Hindi film to understand the trajectory of changes in the portrayal of the Muslim identity onscreen.[221] In contrast, scholar Sanjeev Kumar makes a significant contribution to this discussion in his article by scrutinising a number of mainstream films in tandem with the prevalent socio-political situation.[222]

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[216]Ibid. p. 20.
[217]Rachel Dwyer, *Bollywood's India: Hindi cinema as a guide to contemporary India,* (London:Reaktion Books, 2014).
[218]Rachel Dwyer, 'God on the Wrong Number: Hindu-Muslim Relations in PK (2014) and Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015)', *The Muslim World,* Vol 107 (2), (2017), pp 256-270 < https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12189> [accessed 12th June 2018].
[219]Rachel Dwyer,'The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi Cinema,'*Public Culture* (2011) 23 (2): pp 349-376, < https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1161949> [accessed 1st August 2017].
[220]A. D. Needham and R.S. Rajan, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, (New York: Duke University Press, 2007).
[221]V. Fazila-Yacoobali, 'Yeh mulk hamara ghar: The 'national order of things' and Muslim identity in John Mathew Mattan's Sarfarosh', *Contemporary South Asia 11(2)*, (2002), pp 183-198.
[222]Sanjeev Kumar, *Constructing the Nation's Enemy: Hindutva, popular culture and the Muslim 'other' in Bollywood cinema, Third World Quarterly*, Vol 34 (3), (2014), 458-469, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.785340> [accessed 5th January 2016].

Film scholars Pankaj Jain and M.K. Raghavendra in their respective analysis also draw from a selection of films and critique the portrayal of the Muslim characters. In his article Jain states that Muslim identity in Indian cinema is largely 'demonised, marginalised and the other.'[223] Raghavendra supports this premise and observes that victory of a Hindu political majority influences portrayals of Pakistan. He extends this to Partition films as well, especially those made during that regime.[224] Unfortunately, both scholars fail to provide any cogent reasons for the selection of certain films and ignoring other films that may have more nuanced portrayals. Scholars Sehrish Mushtaq and Dr Fawad Baig add an important perspective to this discourse by presenting their insight into the representation of the Kashmir issue in *Exploring Transition in Indian Perspective about Kashmir Issue through its Mainstream Cinema 1992-2015.* Their observations make a valuable contribution as it distinguishes the representation of the Kashmir issue from the depiction of Islamic characters.

Scholar Natasha Master's perspective offers crucial support to my study, as she advocates for representations of Partition memories, its trauma and consequences.[225] She cites the presence of communal sensitivities and socio-political agendas furthering the perception of Partition being a 'taboo' subject, as the main reasons for its limited exploration in cinema.[226]

Master identifies a 'post-traumatic repression in the nation' and discusses its impact on the dearth of cinematic explorations of Partition in 'Bollywood.'[227] Her work highlights the role of popular Indian films as cultural texts with the potential to prevent the loss of Partition memories or revive those lying dormant. Master makes a strong case for defining 'Partition cinema' as a separate category of films.[228] However, she restricts her study to the examination of three mainstream films, *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), *Bombay* (1995) and *Pinjar* (2003). Among the films, with the exception of *Pinjar,* which is an adaptation of author Amrita Pritam's Partition novel by the same name, the other two films do not

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[223]P. Jain, 'From Padosi to My Name is Khan: The Portrayal of Hindu–Muslim Relations in South Asian Films,' *Visual Anthropology 24(4)*, (2011), pp 345-363, (p 350).
[224]M. K. Raghavendra, *The Politics of Hindi Cinema in the New Millennium: Bollywood and the Anglophone Indian Nation,* (United Kingdom:Oxford University Press, 2014).
[225]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) in Carleton University Research Virtual Environment, <https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9>[accessed on 12th June 2016]. p 4.
[226]Ibid. p 9.
[227]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) in Carleton University Research Virtual Environment, <https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9>[accessed on 12th June 2016]. p 4.
[228]Ibid. p 10.

adequately address or feature the division.[229] Therefore, the films are unable to offer a cogent perspective on Partition memorialisation.

Master's preoccupation with defining 'Partition cinema' prevents her analysis from taking the context of the films and their specific memory contributions into consideration.[230] To avoid the same lapses, I try to examine the context of my case study films, their distinct memory treatments and approaches, through a specifically designed analytical framework.The last decade has witnessed a marked increase in projects dedicated to the discovery and preservation of survivor testimonies. The films I discuss in my research reflect the influence of this movement, as their stories foreground the impact of the events of 1947 on individuals.

Although there is scholarship on Indian mainstream cinema, it is yet to achieve the status of being a substantive field of film analysis. Additionally, the application of European or American analytical structures are more prevalent and inhibit development of contextually aware criticism of Indian cinema. At the same time, I note the tendency to ignore mainstream cinema narratives prevents an understanding of its scope and implications. Eventhough there are fewer films dealing with Partition as ethnic and political sensitivities still make it a difficult topic to broach. Attached stigmas, prejudices and anxieties of being ostracised are still prevalent among survivors of Partition as well as their families.[231]The reluctance to narrate stories of those violent and chaotic days is inexorably linked with the present, as we continue to live in countries and societies still plagued by religious intolerance and prejudices.[232]

The above discussed scholarship talks about the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and stereotypical portrayals of Muslims, without addressing the heightened propensity to stage protests and threaten film releases. They delve into the sensitivities attached with the way communities, nations and events are portrayed have the power to determine their reach and reception in India. However, they also tend to impact the release of films within India and outside the country. The exhibition and distribution of commercial Indian films in Pakistan

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[229]Author Amrita Pritam, (1919-2005) Indian novelist and poet. She mainly wrote in Punjabi and Hindi.
[230]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) in Carleton University Research Virtual Environment, <https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9>[accessed on 12th June 2016]. p 24.
[231]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*,(New Jersey: Rutgers University Press,1998). p 21.
[232]Ibid.

and Bangladesh is relevant as the two nations continue to grapple with the memories as well as consequences of Partition. Through the case studies I comprehensively analyse all these diverse perspectives and considerations.

The second chapter, analyses the film *Filmistaan* (2012), an unusual narrative using the popularity of Indian cinema as a shared historic and cultural foundation between India and Pakistan. The way this unique cultural affinity and familiarity is used to navigate cross border terrorism, Indo-Pak relations, communal stereotypes as well as nostalgic recollections of Partition, form the core of my analysis. The film's subtle exploration of pre-Partition nostalgia, the use of humour to explore relationships between Indian and Pakistani characters and consistent mainstream film references, are all closely examined in my analysis. It is noteworthy that this light-hearted ode to commercial Indian cinema is the only one among the case study films comprising a debutant ensemble cast and director, yet it piqued and sustained audience interest through its distinct narrative treatment and approach to the discussion of complex issues. Therefore, incorporating this film in my analysis helps expand the boundaries of cinematic portrayals ascribed to films exploring Partition and its related aspects.

The third chapter, presents an analysis of the 2013 film *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (*Run Milkha Run*). It traverses athlete Milkha Singh's life as it maps the trauma and displacement caused by Partition as well as his subsequent journey of becoming an athlete of international repute. The narrative reconstructs the peaceful days before 1947, the tragic events happening during the division and the tumultuous times after Partition. The discussion and representation of these sensitive moments alongside the inclusion of songs, dances, romantic and comedic interludes, comprises a mainstream cinematic treatment of this Partition themed narrative. This cinematic treatment and the presentation of memories through the extensive use of flashbacks interspersed with archival footage, form the analytical structure of this chapter. Helmed by an established director, the presence of established actors and utilization of mainstream cinema tropes, are significant aspects of the film. The contribution of these production features and the inclusion of mainstream elements are scrutinised in this chapter, for the way they impact the treatment of Partition memories and consequences.

In the fourth chapter, I put forth the analysis of two films: the Bengali film *Rajkahini* (2015) and its Hindi language adaptation *Begum Jaan* (2017). The films highlight female

perspectives by representing women's experiences during Partition, as opposed to the male centric narrative explorations of *Filmistaan* and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*. The story presented in *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan*, and the director of both the films is the same but the films offer two distinct treatments. Both narratives are situated at the time of Partition, thereby presenting a timeline of the political events and their simultaneous impact on the lives of the characters. Thus, connecting the macro or national level decisions with their micro level implications. The films draw heavily from Partition literature, largely presenting fictional reconstructions of the stories as memories of survivors. This chapter studies the cinematic treatment of the portrayal of women's experiences and their presence in Partition historiography.

In conclusion, the selected films showcase Partition, its different aspects and cinematic evolution. It encourages an in-depth scrutiny of the representation, re-imagination and treatment of Partition memories from various angles and standpoints. My analysis provided a rich analytical framework that include unusual readings of Partition as an experience, subsequently bringing out multifarious and complex themes for portrayal. I foreground cinematic experimentations incorporating mainstream tropes and unconventional storytelling techniques to address Partition and its context. Especially as these narratives grapple with the daunting task of trying to engage large audiences, including those belonging to generations that may be farthest from the memories and recollections of Partition.

Therefore, the methodological framework I have designed for this analysis is an original approach mindful of the complexity of the subject of Partition, the surrounding perennial fluctuations in Indo-Pak relations and their multi-layered impact on Indian cinematic creations. I aim to thoroughly examine these changes through the visualisations, aesthetics and representations of the chosen films. Such a study could help build a better understanding of the way the treatment of Partition in Indian cinema has evolved. Deciphering their enduring appeal and political outlooks, particularly through their existence in a sensitive communal and political environment, can offer insights into the future of such portrayals. I also address the gap in film scholarship that recognizes and studies mainstream Indian cinema's forays into Partition memorialisation. My examination looks closely at the cultural impressions made by Partition, reiterating the space its memories continue to occupy within our present and future contexts.

Chapter 2

Filmistaan (2012): a tableau of quintessential Hindi films and Partition memories

> Whenever Aftab brings a film to show in the village from India, I always come to watch it. Under this guise I can visit that side, meet those people, walk those streets, I can feel the trees there and my heart gleams with happiness.[233]

These words spoken by one of the character's in *Filmistaan,* are a poignant reminder of the memories still complexly embedded in people on both sides of the border. They signify the countless indelible scars Partition left on millions of lives. Simultaneously it ascribes Indian cinema with a unique capacity to bridge the vast chasm existing between the two nations (Figure 9). The coexistence and exploration of these divergent elements in the film form the core of this chapter.
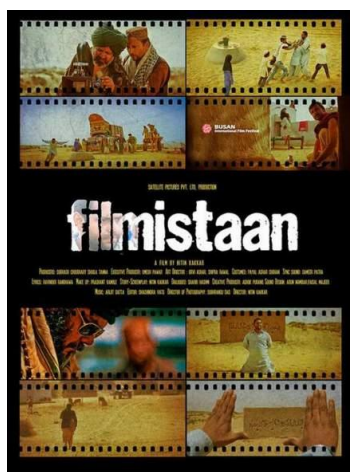
Figure 8

Filmistaan explores Partition nostalgia and its present consequences through its protagonist Sunny Arora, a cinephile of Indian mainstream cinema. The film begins with entertaining audition snippets of Sunny, a struggling actor, who hams through mimicries of famous Indian actors and their popular dialogues. Sunny's decision to

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[233]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).

assist an American crew on a documentary project changes the course of his life irrevocably. The planned kidnapping of an American crewmember goes awry and Sunny ends up as the unlucky hostage of a group of Pakistani Islamic terrorists. This incident suddenly shifts the film's action from India to a small village in Pakistan near the Indo-Pak border. From this point, Sunny's responses to the challenging circumstances, his interactions with the terrorists and the Pakistani villagers become intriguing plot points for the audience to follow. Hence, the narrative becomes an interesting interplay linking Sunny's comical exploits, exaggerated popular Hindi film references and the context of Partition.

The film presents a distinctive and entertaining approach to Partition memories that incorporates humour to traverse the past, present as well as future implications of this historical divide. It addresses pre-Partition nostalgia, strained diplomatic relations, cross-border terrorism, communal anxieties and other interconnected threads through an innovative arrangement. Nitin Kakkar's directorial debut creates a distinct space for itself in Partition cinema. In order to understand this unique effort, I trace the origin of the idea of *Filmistaan* that provides important clues regarding the film's premise, story and innovative cinematic treatment.

The director's admiration of and attachment to the works of Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto (1912 –1955) an eminent writer, playwright and author, form the nucleus of this exploration. Born and raised in India, Manto was compelled to move to Pakistan during the Separation, after this his life and writings became a testament of that time. The context the highlight of his best-known play *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) is that the play's protagonist meets his end standing in 'no man's land', unaware of whether he belongs in India or Pakistan. It reflects a poignant dilemma that millions who were displaced faced during and even after Partition. The emphasis is on people's incomprehension of a decision that savagely divided the two countries physically and emotionally.

More than seventy years after Partition, this play became the foundation of *Filmistaan's* conception, as Kakkar uniquely interprets the concept of 'no man's land' between India and Pakistan as *Filmistaan*: a symbolic representation of a place celebrating a shared love for Hindi cinema and metaphorically transcending borders, its attached acrimony and divisive prejudices. In the director's own words:

It is a tribute to all the films we have grown up watching...At the same time we are exploring relations between India and Pakistan…it is a kind of metaphor that takes 'no man's land' and makes it into *Filmistaan.* A place where there is a lot of love…mainly a lot of love for films and all those associated with filmmaking be it technicians, artists, musicians…it's our tribute to all of them.[234]

Therefore, *Filmistaan*'s tribute to popular and iconic mainstream Indian films showcases Indian cinema as a strong connection between people of India and Pakistan. It attributes these films with the performance of a unifying function, reiterating commonalities in belief systems, moral codes and practices among the people of the two countries. The film features several positive exchanges between Sunny, an Indian and the different Pakistani characters. I note the film's attempt to portray the continued existence of certain fundamental ties and a natural affinity among people who were once on the same side. The film extends the similarities in the subcontinent's theatrical tradition to a shared socio-cultural background.

The film highlights the possibilities of developing multifaceted associations among the characters, irrespective of nationalities. At the same time, Partition is still the primary connecting point, as its consequences continue to dictate relations among the people of both countries. In an interview, Kakkar talks about this complex lingering impact:

Somewhere, those (Partition) stories remained at the back of my mind and helped me during the making of *Filmistaan*. One day you are uprooted and told that this is not your home any more. Not only that – this is a different country altogether! Then follows an insane bloodshed, which scars the lives of friends and neighbours for years to come. I cannot understand this absurdity. I find it very stupid, drawing lines on paper and fighting over land.

[234]Exclusive Interview with the *Filmistaan* Team, by *Cinecurry*, 5th June 2014 on 'Youtube.com'.
<https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%E2%80%98Interview+Nitin+Kakkar%2C%E2%80%99+May +2014%2C++Cinecurry%2C+. > [accessed on 3rd January 2016].

The worst is we continue to thrive on hatred, the seeds of which were sown in 1947.[235]

Kakkar belongs to a family of Partition survivors; hence I suggest that his perspective is guided by the memory interactions among the past and present generations. From this vantage point, his perspective reflects the sentiments of a generation reacting to Partition decades later. This direct connection of filmmakers with Partition is a vital link that emerges many times in the course of my analysis. However, while acknowledging the acrimony Partition created, Kakkar chooses to look beyond it, as well as question the futility of borders and the ensuing mutual distrust.[236] I note that this perspective is reflected in the film and demonstrates his distance from the immediate emotional context of that experience permitting a certain level of objectivity.

In this context, I observe that Alison Landsberg analyses inherited memories and ascribes them with the possibility to augur change.[237] Her conception of prosthetic memories is dependent on transference of memories and their prospective internalisation. Notably Kakkar uses pre-Partition recollections as a connecting factor among different characters, evoking a shared sense of nostalgia and performing an emotional function in the narrative. Therefore, the dramatic treatment of these memories is crucial to *Filmistaan's* analysis, as is the overlaying of humour in the story. I suggest that this observable infusion of humour is a manifestation of drama or *rasas,* opening the narrative up to varied cinematic possibilities.

My analysis takes cognizance of the narrative impact of *rasas* (emotions) their ability to evoke emotions among the audience. For this, drawing on Gaston Roberge's Indian Film Theory helps my investigation to comprehend the deliberate incorporation and orchestration of emotive and dramatic elements. As Roberge foregrounds the Indian

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[235]Nitin Kakkar, interviewed by L. Melwani,'Crossing Borders with Nitin Kakkar in *Filmistaan*', in *LassiwithLavina.com*, 11th June 2013, <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/crossing-borders-with-nitin-kakkar-in-filmistan/html> [accessed June 10th, 2016].

[236]Nitin Kakkar interviewed by L. Melwani,'Crossing Borders with Nitin Kakkar in *Filmistaan*', in *LassiwithLavina.com*, 11th June 2013, <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/crossing-borders-with-nitin-kakkar-in-filmistan/html> [accessed June 10th, 2016].

[237]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 21.

cultural context and its resonating presence in Indian mainstream cinema.[238] In *Filmistaan,* Kakkar articulates this specific emotion-cultural connect:

> Our emotions are governed by cinema in a very subconscious way and whatever we see becomes larger than life for us. I saw appreciative comments left on Coke Studio, Pakistan by people from India and vice versa and realised that we shared a common cultural link. [239] The film carries an underlying message about how cinema knows no political or geographical barriers and can bring people together.[240]

He suggests that such an open circulation of media content is demonstrative of optimistic inter-exchanges between India and Pakistan. His perspective links various themes together, as the film addresses the consequences of Partition's aftermath, the emotionality of its memories and mainstream Indian cinema's influence on Indo-Pak relations. To this end, I study the presentation, construction and development of these issues in *Filmistaan*, through a thorough examination of the film's budget, cast, art direction and other significant production inputs.

To begin with, I scrutinise *Filmistaan's* fundamental artwork, trailer and production structure. An analysis of these fundamental inputs helps gauge the rationale behind the film's narrative treatment. I suggest that these aspects have a specific design, providing a comprehensive insight into the placement and arrangement of visual and aural components in a film. I proceed to analyse important scenes, dialogues, songs and characterisations, specifically looking at the way they bring together divergent themes of Indian cinema's cinephilia, Partition memories and a gamut of aspects pertaining to Indo-Pak relations. I conclude this chapter with the reception of and response to the film.

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[238]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 12.
[239]Coke Studio: Sponsored by Coke, a music show which records famous musicians compose and perform original songs that feature a blend of Indian folk music and modern Western music. Has its counterpart in Pakistan as well.
[240]Veenu Singh interview of Nitin Kakkar, dir. of *Filmistaan*, '*Filmistaan* has no stars because it is about real people: director Nitin Kakkar', *Hindustan Times*, Brunch, 5th June 2014. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/filmistaan-has-no-stars-because-it-is-about-real-people-director-nitin-kakkar/story-wHfR7GRKvb9mu3THut3TYK.html.> [accessed 20th October 2016].

2.1 Artwork, trailer and production structures

Observably, a film's artwork and trailer combine to form an essential initial point of communication for a film. The visuals combine to form illustrative first glimpses of a film's subjects or themes. I carefully scrutinise the pictorial and figurative clues of *Filmistaan's* content embedded in its artwork. This scrutiny is particularly relevant when viewed alongside the production structure and design that I take up in due course. The poster (Figure 9) shows a typical rustic shrine with carefully placed elements replicating the setting of a traditional ritualistic Hindu prayer ceremony. [241] This setting is replete with an old sacred banyan tree wrapped with holy threads, portraits of divinities, burning incense sticks, offerings and devotees. Here the crucial symbolic deviation is that the devotees are praying to portraits of iconic mainstream Hindi film actors or Bollywood superstars as known in popular parlance. Protagonist Sunny and the other principle character Aftab are praying to the so-called 'Gods of Bollywood': Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, instead of actual Gods. This satirical representation of devotion to these large-than-life personas hints at the significance of mainstream Indian cinema to the film.
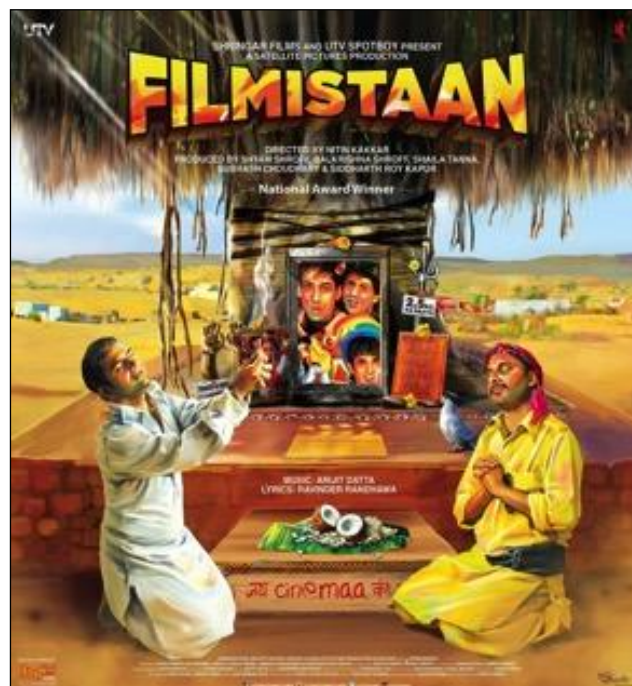
Figure 9

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[241]Hindu: a follower of Hinduism

This depiction of 'Cine-Gods' being worshipped taps into a ritually immersive as well as intensely obsessive side of fandom. Film scholar Madhava Prasad analyses this practice and finds that it is actively thriving in many parts of southern India.[242] According to Prasad, it forms a known cultural phenomenon wherein certain sections of the audience are so enamoured by the screen idols that they have constructed temples to worship them.[243] This kind of reverential treatment links with the orchestration of cinematic elements into larger than life narratives commonly found in mainstream Indian cinema, as well as supports the perception of actors and actresses as divine entities.[244] American Indologist Philip Lutgendorf, in his article, *Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking* investigates the nature and import of such visual perceptions in Indian Cinema.[245] He supports Prasad's advocacy for developing a critical vocabulary for analysing the visual complexities embedded within the popular tropes used in Indian cinema.[246]

Lutgendorf explains the physical act of seeing/looking translates to '*darsana*' in Hindi language when referred to in the context of a devotee looking at God. [247] According to him, this action forms the cornerstone of the spiritual foundation of Hinduism, which is rooted in attaining the visual '*darsana*' of one's deity. [248] Lutgendorf emphasises that the notion of '*darsana*' has been an inseparable part of the Indian theological tradition of Hinduism dating back almost fifteen centuries.[249] It is the practice of looking with concentration at an entity that is perceived to gaze back and therefore, it seems to forge a willful spiritual connection between the two.[250] In conjunction, Prasad observes that this ideology, its practice of '*darsana*' or the reverential gaze has contributed toward developing the Indian cinematic aesthetic.[251] I note that *Filmistaan* draws from this idea, by presenting the practise of worship of iconic actors and popular film references in its artwork. The film's artwork succeeds in visually

[242]M.M.Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi film:A historical construction*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), p 12.
[243]M.M.Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi film:A historical construction*, (Lodon: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), p 12.
[244]Ibid.
[245]P. Lutgendorf, 'Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?,' *International Journal of Hindu Studies.* 10.3. (2006), (pp 227-256). p 228.
[246]Ibid.
[247]M.M.Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), p 26.
[248]Ibid. p 26.
[249]Ibid.
[250]P. Lutgendorf, 'Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?,' *International Journal of Hindu Studies.* 10.3. (2006), (pp 227-256). p 229.
[251]Ibid.

signifying the all-encompassing devotion of two cinephiles towards mainstream Indian cinema. Moreover, I suggest that this cinephilia is discernible among the stylistic features of *Filmistaan's* posters.

In addition, the stylistic references made embody the changes that have taken place in the art of poster creation in cinema over the years. Before the advent of technology and digital posters, the practice of poster making involved painstaking work of artists who spent months on painting portraits of actors on giant canvasses. I suggest that the painted canvas look, bright colours, the yellow-red-orange hues used in *Filmistaan's* posters (Figures 9, 10 and 14)) pay tribute to the hand-painted style and colour schemes used in the posters of iconic films designed in the 1970's Figures 11, 12 and 13).
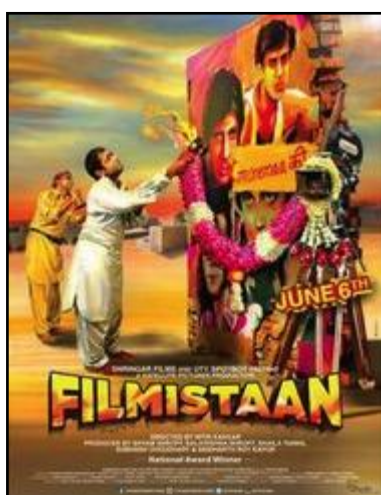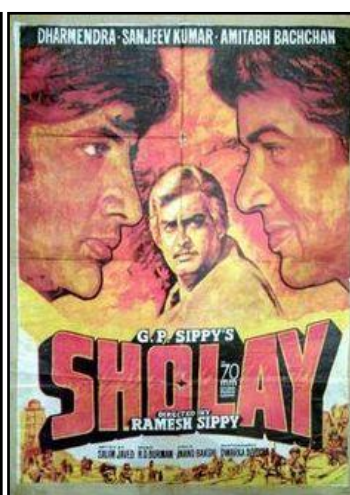
Figure 10   Figure 11   Figure 12

The era of the 1970s in Indian cinema (Figure. 11 and 12) is recognised for ushering in the star phenomenon. Films *Sholay* (1975) and *Deewaar* (1975) (Figures 11, 12 and 13) are replete with melodramatic styles of storytelling. They are considered quintessential examples of commercial Hindi films, featuring amalgamations of well-known mainstream Indian cinema tropes.[252] This inference refers to the inclusion of different dramatic elements such as action, romance, drama, comedy within their narratives; as well as the exaggerated treatment of emotive content, which became permissible and was expected from these films. I suggest that the wall fresco in *Filmistaan's* posters (Figure 10 and 14) alludes to the reverence these commercial

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[252]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian way*,(India: Inkdia Books, 2014), p 12.

capers continue to inspire among cinephiles. Moreover, the success garnered by both films cemented the presence and acceptance of their archetypal dramatic elements in mainstream Indian cinema. In addition, the typography and colour scheme of *Filmistaan's* title in posters (Figures 9, 10 and 14) are visibly inspired by the font style used in the titles of *Sholay* and *Deewaar* (Figures 11, 12 and 13).
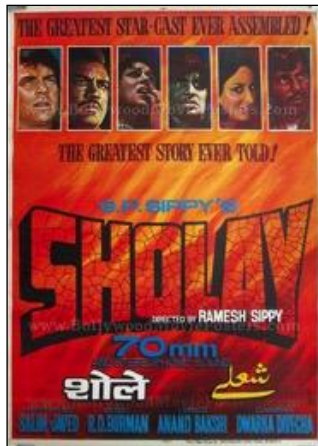
Figure 13   Figure 14

The poster of the film *Sholay* (Figure 13) celebrates the advent of cinemascope technology, as it injected new life in the Indian film viewing experience. The influence of the Hollywood Western is both narratively and technologically evident in *Sholay,* as it became the first successful Hindi film to be released in cinemascope, with stereophonic sound and screened on the 70 mm widescreen format.[253] The format of cinemascope with its panoramic visuals, highly impactful stereophonic sound augmented the sheer scale and scope of Indian commercial cinema. Observably *Filmistaan's* title text (Figure. 14) is written and designed to reinforce a larger than life, grandiose theatrical experience supported by the visuals presented on a grand cinemascope scale. While all these different artistic inspirations, references and influences pay homage to the popularity of mainstream Indian cinema; it is noteworthy that the production design and treatment of *Filmistaan's* narrative follows a more understated approach.

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[253]Box Office India Report,'Week Total Collection Box Office *Filmistaan',* by Box Office India Team. 6th June 2014, <https://boxofficeindia.com/movie.php?movieid=2255> [accessed June 12th 2016].
Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: a guidebook to popular Hindi cinema,* (London: Routledge Film Guidebooks, 2013).

Filmistaan, made on a budget of 5.4 crores INR (54 million USD), is indicative of a significantly, modest budget and production value.[254] The film's duration is approximately 105 minutes and shot in a crisp 20-day schedule.[255] These factors along with its production cost sets *Filmistaan* apart from big-budget film productions, which usually have much lengthier durations either two and a half or in some cases even three hours long. Also noticeably, big budget commercial Indian films are predominantly replete with elaborate sets, foreign locales and established names in principle roles. However, notably the film's selection of cast, locations, costumes, props and other production elements all stand in stark contrast. I discuss these deviations from formulaic commercial cinema inputs as significant because it simultaneously highlights the film's off-beat attempt to explore the subject of Partition, its memories and implications.

Instead of showcasing popular actors and actresses as is the norm in high commercial value films, *Filmistaan* supports fresh talent. The film marks the debut of many, including director Nitin Kakkar and actor Inaamulhaq who essays the role of Aftab, and a mostly unknown actor Sharib Hashmi plays the lead Sunny Arora. Another critical production choice is regarding the location where the film is shot. I note that in place of creating elaborate sets or choosing picturesque foreign locations, director Nitin Kakkar selects the film's location as per the script requirement, budget and permission constraints. It is noteworthy that within the first ten minutes of the film, Sunny is captured and transported to Pakistan. However, shooting an Indian film in Pakistan is a complicated procedure, entailing diplomatic entanglements with unpredictable visa-permissions as well as incurring high security costs. Therefore, instead, the film is set up in the north-western state of Rajasthan in India to recreate the small Pakistani village. Located in the desert of Beermana, a town 80 kilometres from the city of Bikaner that comprises of largely stark, barren landscapes which one could associate with any border village[256] (Figure 15).

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[254] Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian way,*(India: Inkdia Books, 2014), p 25.
[255] Nitin Kakkar interviewed by L. Melwani, 'Crossing Borders with Nitin Kakkar in Filmistaan', in *LassiwithLavina.com.* June 2013. <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/crossing-borders-with-nitin-kakkar-in-filmistan/html> [accessed June 10th, 2016].
[256] Ibid.

Figure 15

Exercising the choice to centre the narrative around a limited number of characters and situating them in a remote desert village is significant. This decision further simplifies costumes and property needs of the film. Kakkar's simplified production structure was also noticed and appreciated by film critic Subhash K. Jha, 'the film is shot in authentic locations by cinematographer Subhransu Das who brings to the table an enticing aura of believability.'[257]

Figure 16

The above still is (Figure 16) of Sunny inside a room, which is depicted as part of Aftab's home and used as the main interior location where Sunny is held hostage. Inhabitants of the Pakistani village, Sunny and the terrorists have noticeably simple costumes (Figures 16, 17 and 18). In this way Kakkar succeeds in keeping the socio-economic backgrounds of these different characters in mind while depicting them. Therefore, I gather attempts to maintain a certain degree of authenticity in the portrayal from the minimalistic sets, costumes and characterisations.

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[257]S. K. Jha, '*Filmistaan*: Movie Review', Review of *Filmistaan* directed by Nitin Kakkar in Ndtv.com, NdtvMovies, 20th June 2014 <http://movies.ndtv.com/movie-reviews/filmistaan-movie-review-977 > [accessed 15th July 2016].

Figure 17

Figure 18

Therefore it is noteworthy that while *Filmistaan's* artwork and trailer present an attractive mainstream dramatic construction, the film's production design is subtle. I suggest that the treatment of *Filmistaan's* trailer is more in sync with the described artwork of the film and supports the film's thematic depiction in its poster. I note that *Filmistaan's* posters and trailer offering brief glimpses into the content of the film showcase it essentially as a mainstream entertainer. Selected elements are strategically placed to present the arc of a protagonist's journey are common practice in mainstream Indian cinema. The snippets are arranged to give the pivotal plot points of the narrative: starting with Sunny's unsuccessful but funny auditions, his kidnapping, the camaraderie he develops with Aftab, a Pakistani and the villagers as well as the hostility the terrorist Mahmood harbours against Sunny.

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

Figure 24

I observe that the above images (Figure. 19 to Figure. 24) from the trailer depict an entertaining presentation of complex situations. They represent a strategic interspersion of pivotal points with humourous moments, inviting the audience to expect the film to solely be entertaining. I note this an interesting strategy, in contrast to showcasing any overt references of a film revolving around religious, political, cultural, sociological and historical complexities. Hence, observably Kakkar chooses to discuss sensitive issues of terrorism, Indo-Pak tensions, communal prejudices, lingering Partition memories and so on, through a light-hearted approach. This is a commonly used strategy in commercial films. Thus, the trailer encourages the audience to 'pay their respects to Cine-*Maa'* (Figure 23 and 24) creating an interesting wordplay with the Hindi word *Maa* (mother). On one level, it alludes to cult mainstream Hindi films that the audience has most likely grown up watching. On the other, the reference to the word mother in Cine-*Maa* (Figure 24) could be making a broader suggestion of nations or motherland. However, interestingly memories of Partition and its experiences are not mentioned in the trailer. I suggest that the omission of the exploration of Partition from the film's trailer is a deliberate strategy used by filmmakers to effectively avoid any controvertial perception among the audience.

Earlier films that have potrayed Partition such as *Tamas* (1988) and *Earth 1947* (1998) have faced protests for choosing to explore events of that time. Partition films are riddled with the complexities of depicting communal riots, gendered violence and assigning political blame. Hence I suggest that filmmakers are prone to strategically avoid overt references to Partition in the initial promotional or marketin material of their films. Director Nitin Kakkar does not allude to Partition memories in *Filmistaan's* trailer but does refer to Pakistan. Similarly Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra creates the trailer of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* without including any references to

Partition. However both films do clearly establish that they would be talking about or addressing Pakistan.

By establishing this parallel link between cinema and the nation, both the films do present trilers revealing that they would to explore the intricate facets of the volatile relationship between India and Pakistan. However, the representation of memories of Partition are treated as dramatic inclusions that would eventually create an element of surprise for the audience. Hence, my analysis examines the presence of Partition memories in the narratives that precludes the artwork and trailers of both the films. The presence of these memory strains draws attention to the cinematic treatment of this nostalgia. It reflects the motivation among contemporary Indian filmmakers to cinematically explore the lingering remembrances of Partition. I draw Landsberg's conception of prosthetic memories to understand the how rememberances of pivotal moments in a nation's history are being approached.

2.2   Prosthetic memories & Partition nostalgia

As discussed in the introduction, remembering Partition is a multifarious process and experience. Especially for those who grew up in a united India and later survived Partition, their memories are amalgamations of a whole range of experiences.[258] Partition survivor and artist Krishen Khanna believes that today's generation cannot understand what the separation means since they don't know Pakistan; they've never lived there.'[259] He talks about growing up as part of a community, speaking the same language and the shared sense of camaraderie.

> All that's disappeared. I have a lot of friends and people I know now, but the friendships don't have that kind of depth as it had with my childhood friends. He deeply feels the loss of a way of life left behind…I have always felt like a refugee. I still do. I still do.[260]

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[258]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India: Penguin Random House, 2017). p 94.
[259]Ibid.p 12.
[260]Mallika Ahluwalia,*Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India: Penguin Random House, 2017) p 34.

The same sense of loss is echoed by survivor and journalist Kuldip Nayar, who revisited his home in Pakistan almost thirty years after the division had taken place. He felt lost, poignantly acknowledging that 'a home is not made of walls and rooms, a home is made of neighbours and friends---here I didn't know anyone anymore.'[261] The pathos of this unfamiliarity and the feelings of rootlessness are intensified among Partition survivors since they remember the way things were. The accounts collated by Mallika Ahluwalia, reflect this complex relationship of Partition survivors with their memories. She observes that survivors are nostalgically drawn to memories of their lives before the separation as it denotes a time replete with a sense of security, kinship and peace.[262] Memory scholars Christine Sprengler and Svetlana Boym also note that survivors are prone to experience dominant strains of nostalgia during their recollections of the past. Sprengler emphasises that 'feelings associated with 'looking back' to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship,' to what is known to be lost.[263]

According to artist and Partition survivor Krishen Khanna, many survivors like him, carry the memories of what they lost with them and believe that younger generations can never fully comprehend those experiences nor their memories.

> Today's generation doesn't understand Partition, he feels; they don't know Pakistan, they've never lived there. But he has and he knows what that separation means. [264]

However, I find that *Filmistaan* negates the assumption that younger generations are incapable of being sensitive to the past. In this context the film examines pre-Partition nostalgia, by facilitating an interaction between a character belonging to the present generation and a Partition survivor. This interaction presents a percolation of nostalgic memories through the communication that takes place between survivors and their offspring. It is significant that director Nitin Kakkar is personally connected to Partition through his grandfather was born in Lahore and migrated to Jalandhar (in

[261]Ibid.
[262]Ibid. p 94.
[263]Christine Sprengler, *Screening nostalgia: Populuxe props and Technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).
[264]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience* (India: Penguin Random House). p 94.

Northern India) at that time. He grew up listening to stories of the years his grandfather spent in Lahore. [265] I observe that Kakkar uses this significant detail from his personal life in the film, where the protagonist Sunny interacts with a Partition survivor. Therefore, through this pivotal fictional sequence in the film, Kakkar depicts a factual transference of Partition memories, inspired by his life.

This scene in *Filmistaan,* investigates the impact of Partition memories seventy years later and their capacity to influence relationships between characters. It is illustrative of the way different generations react as well as connect with memorialisation of Partition. Analysis of this sequence entails understanding how memory relationships among the past, present and future are developing narratively. Hence, I classify *Filmistaan*'s contextual connection with memories in two parts: the first is an examination of selected conversations about Partition. The second connection is established through Sunny's constant revisitation of commercially successful Hindi films for their role and relevance to Indo-Pak relations. The poignant memory exchange between Sunny and an old village doctor is a crucial moment in the film (Figure. 25) demonstrating the first category of memorialisation in *Filmistaan*. In this particular scene, Sunny has been shot in the arm by the terrorist Mahmood, and the village doctor is treating him. Sunny addresses the doctor in Punjabi, and the doctor responds in the same language.[266] Sunny and the doctor are both pleasantly surprised at each other's knowledge of this dialect. It prompts the doctor to tell Sunny that he has extensively travelled across northern parts of India, namely Amritsar and Delhi.

Figure 25

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[265]Jalandhar: a small town in the Indian state of Punjab in northern India.
[266]Punjabi: a language spoken and associated with people who are from Punjab, a state in North India.

Sunny who is from Amritsar, is elated by this unexpected connection and reintroduces himself using his full name Sukhwinder Arora.[267] The doctor then reveals that he too is originally from a small village in Amritsar, although was forced to leave during Partition and says, 'the memories of Amritsar are still alive in my heart and it's as if I came here just yesterday.'[268] I turn to memory scholar Svetlana Boym's exploration of nostalgia and note that this instance of nostalgic memory exchange may be considered 'reflective nostalgia'.[269] According to Boym, reflective nostalgia expresses the contrasts 'between 'there' and 'here', 'then' and 'now', in which the absent/gone is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented.'[270] Similarly, I observe that the doctor is reflecting on the his past and his memories allow him to revisit the time before the separation.

In conjunction, Pam Cook's perspective on nostalgic memories is also relevant here, as she infers that memories are essentially recreated through a survivor's imagination and attempts to convey the emotional value of those recollections.[271] Cook significantly differentiates this nostalgia in cinema from reconstructed or reimagined flashbacks. Both the characters in this scene, are reliving memories in their minds, and talking about them establishes an emotional connection between them. When Sunny asks the doctor where he lived in Amritsar, the doctor tells him of a small neighbourhood that Sunny has never heard of. To this the doctor responds poignantly, 'when two whole countries can get destroyed, what chance does a tiny neighbourhood have'.[272] This memory exchange takes a look at the way things were before the displacement forced the doctor to leave India.

Hence, I suggest that memories reflecting on the past become a way to temporalize space and recreating the past while situated in the present.[273] In turn, Sunny is able to understand the doctor's feelings because in tragic irony Sunny's grandfather was from Lahore and had to move to India during Partition. Sunny is reminded of his grandfather who would share his memories of Lahore and repeatedly say, 'who hasn't

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[267]Amritsar: is a city in the northwest region of India, in the state of Punjab.
[268]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar, (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[269]Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its discontents,' *The Hedgehog Review,* 9 (2), (2007), (pp 7-18), p 4.
[270]Ibid.
[271]Ibid. p 7.
[272]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[273]Pam Cook, *Screening Nostalgia, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema,* (London: Routledge, 2005), p 6.

seen Lahore hasn't been born'.[274] I suggest that Sunny's grandfather shares his memories with his grandson, in an attempt to ensure that his memories lived on through Sunny. This scene also reflects the way many identities today are largely amalgamations of diverse cultural contexts and their remembrances. People move from villages to towns to cities in search of better prospects, like Sunny did to pursue acting in Mumbai, however their buried histories and memories are inseparable accompaniments. The doctor's sorrowful words 'now there are only memories left' make an important point.[275] Looking back essentially allows him to grieve and express the emotional attachment he still has for a part of his life that is lost.

This memory exchange creates a distinct experiential framework for Sunny, so can comprehend the perspectives of a generation who experienced Partition. It helps him grasp the trauma of their displacement as well as the associated melancholic nostalgia for the past. Therefore, Sunny understands the doctor's longing to revisit his roots in Amritsar, just as he does his grandfather's desire to go to Lahore. At the same time, there is an awareness among the older as well as present generations of the prevailing political and military hostilities that effectively prevent any constructive attempts to reconnect with the past. I suggest that Kakkar succeeds in unravelling the pain of a generation forced to sever all ties with their past through this evocative sequence.

Even though the destruction and displacement still seem to gnaw inside them, they know going back is not an option, as it entails overcoming painstaking diplomatic formalities, fighting against the dominating waves of distrust and animosity between the two nations. Sunny's grandfather prevents his personal history from fading away with time, by talking about the heritage and roots of their family with his grandson, Sunny. This communication of his personal history attempts to transfer the historical import of Partition through memories. Alison Landsberg attributes such a prosthetic exposure to memories with the ability to instil an awareness of contexts farthest from the experiences of different generations.[276] She equates the composition of prosthetic memories with an 'artificial limb', associated with the occurrence of trauma. According to her, those exposed to those memories are not only received but tend to

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[274] *Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[275] *Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[276] Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture,* (Columbia University Press, 2004), p 24.

get attached to them.[277] The way Sunny recounts the memories of his grandfather mirrors an emotional and empathetic attachment that Landsberg observes prosthetic memories are capable of inducing. [278]

I note that *Filmistaan* depicts strong empathetic strains that are visible in the transformative arc of different characters. Sunny empathizes with the doctor's reminisces that are surrounded by his present constricting circumstances. The other significant characters Aftab, his father and the villagers do not sympathize but empathize with Sunny. Moreover, yearnings for the good old days expressed by Sunny's grandfather and the doctor are not limited to nostalgic recounting for younger generations. In fact, the melancholia attached to this recollective process makes way for a kind of catharsis to take place. It allows an unlikely kinship to develop between two strangers. By the end of this scene they discover a commonality that is stronger than the differences in their age, religion or nationality. Moreover, the narrative gives these Indian and Pakistani characters an internal strength, which enables them to boldly look beyond the military and political rhetoric surrounding them.

Sunny's character is noticeably untouched by divisive discourses and in spite of the bleak realities of his circumstances, he does not spew venom against Pakistan. He befriends the villagers, and his amicable attitude even extends to the terrorists. True to his name, Sunny's bright disposition and his ability to smile through his struggles (Figure. 26) endear him to those around him. He smiles, laughs at himself and makes everyone around him laugh with his buffoonery. In one particular instance, even after being beaten up by one of the terrorist's in front of a group of children Sunny bursts into a song (Figure. 27). He does this to prevent any psychological scarring the children may experience after witnessing such a violent incident. In the end, it is this exceptional spirit and unexpected amiability that rallies everyone around him.

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[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.

Figure 26

Figure 27

I suggest that this characterisation and narrative treatment are unlike the usual portrayals of an Indo-Pak plot involving Indian hostages and Pakistani terrorists. Scholar Faiza Hirji, makes a broad study of Muslim presence from the 1960s to the 1990s and finds 'the Muslim presence in Indian cinema actually took a turn for the worse, moving towards marginalization and extremism.'[279] This was visible in Indian cinema's filmography from the 1990s to mid 2000s focussed on perpetuating 'Muslim characters replete with a peculiar form of certain cultural symbols,'that largely 'disseminates the idea of mistrust and suspicion towards Muslims.'[280] Hirji observes that in these films Muslims and especially those from Pakistan had particularly damaging portrayals:

> Where Muslims…are frequently presented as threats of some kind: terrorists, sexual predators, traitors or abnormal in some way, departing from the cherished values of the nation. [281]

[279]Faiza Hirji. 'Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema,' *South Asian Popular Culture,* 6:1, (2008), pp 57-69, (p 61).
[280]Maidul, Islam. 'Imagining Indian Muslims: Looking through the Lens of Bollywood Cinema.' *Indian Journal of Human Development.* 1.2. (2007), pp 403-422. (p. 406).
[281]Faiza Hirji. 'Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema,' *South Asian Popular Culture,* 6:1, (2008), pp 57-69, (p 59).

Hence Hirji and Maidul observe that Indian mainstream films such as *Border* (1997), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001), *The Hero: Love Story of a Spy* (2003), exploring the Indo-Pak context have been susceptible to a stereotypical or unidimensional treatment of terrorists and the response of the other characters to them. In complete contrast,Kakkar crafts an unlikely affinity between Sunny an Indian and the Pakistani villager Aftab. This rapport rises above the more common hackneyed tropes of pity and sympathy. It is a camaraderie stemming from a mutual consciousness that they have more things in common, irrespective of their nationalities. Similarly, Sunny develops a warm relationship with Aftab's family and even the villagers seem to accept him as one of their own. This is visible during a heated exchange that takes place between the terrorists and Aftab as well as his family. In this sequence, Sunny tries to escape but is caught. However, instead of letting Sunny face a furious terrorist Mahmood alone, Aftab takes full responsibility for planning the escape.

In another selfless and courageous act Aftab's father pleads with the leader of the terrorist group for Sunny's safety instead of his own son's life. Aftab's father tells the leader of the gang that Sunny is a good kid: 'Bada hi nek bacha hai' (He is a very good kid).[282] This defiance by Aftab and his family eventually extends to the villagers. All of whom come together to try and save Sunny, rather than letting him die at the hands of misguided extremists. I observe these actions not merely as expressions of sympathy or pity, but as efforts of the director trying to explore possibilities of deeper humane connections and genuine affection developing among characters, regardless of them being Indian or Pakistani.

Therefore, I draw on Landsberg's concept of empathy to analyze the emotive and empathetic strains developing in these unusual relationships and suggest that the scenes may be read as a growing sense of 'social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend race, class, and gender' among the characters.[283] The evocation of empathy through these scenes highlights Kakkar's design to predominantly explore a sense of humanity, amiability and cooperation, as opposed to

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[282]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[283]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 34.

strife and communal discord. He strategically gives these pivotal plot points a diametrically opposite treatment to the more prevalent and expected depictions of acrimonious Indo-Pak relations.

Landsberg suggests that the cultivation of such emotionally-driven understandings devoid of hard-liner rhetoric is augmented through exposure to prosthetic memories. [284] She further offers that a certain amount of sensitisation is conceivable if individuals are made aware of a larger past present and future continuum facilitated by mass media. [285] They comprise efforts to ensure that a historical narrative becomes more than a chance encounter; that it takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.'[286] Therefore, the importance of personal histories, their communication and the context of Partition, form significant aspects of this study, which are consistently emphasised in *Filmistaan.*

A conversation between Aftab and Sunny substantiates that Partition still has a viable pull regardless of its generational distance, as they start discussing the futility of the border between India and Pakistan (Figure 28). In the conversation that ensues, Sunny expresses his dream for an idyllic, utopian world where Partition would never have happened. Sunny develops an understanding of the divisiveness of the border as well as experiences the underlying memory connections. Therefore, even though Sunny and Aftab know that reunification is implausible, it still makes for an intriguing scenario to imagine, particularly from the standpoint of another generation.

It makes this seemingly casual discussion takes on a broader significance through their historical re-imagination; it also demonstrates that prosthetic memories could be responsible for shaping or reshaping a person's political beliefs as well as subjectivity.[287] Sunny makes an evocative assumption that a united India could have become a force to reckon with. He points out the strength of the combined power of Indian and Pakistani talents: from the presence of cricketing legends from both countries in one team to the combination of the musical talents and other artists. It is a

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[284]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 40.
[285]Ibid.
[286]Ibid.
[287]Ibid. p 45.

captivating idea that the absence of Partition could have resulted in world-class athletic, artistic collaborations and presence. Sunny's naïve thoughts envisaging a pre-Partition or no-Partition world are not easily dismissible as farcical or a shallow bid for humour because the audience has been made aware of his emotional link with this history through his grandfather's memories. Sunny and Aftab dissect what the Partition means to them through thought-provoking conjectures, they reiterate Landsberg's supposition of the far-reaching influences and consequences of prosthetic memories.

Figure 28

I note that terrorist Jawaad's decision to ultimately save Sunny's life may reflect another instance of a gradual attitudinal transformation. *Filmistaan* presents terrorism as one of the unfortunate consequences of Partition. I observe an effort to establish that people have an innate empathetic capacity to look beyond the prescribed and dated rhetoric. Sunny's innocent questions to Jawaad, and his subsequent responses offer a brief glimpse into the bleak story of Jawaad's life. Although this exchange does not drastically soften Jawaad's attitude toward Sunny, nor does it turn Sunny into a sympathizer. This interaction provides an integral insight into the possible adverse circumstances and situations faced by those seen only as extremists. Furthermore, this perspective reflects Kakkar's efforts to humanize various communal and political threats or conflicts. As Sunny and Jawaad acknowledge each other purely on a humane level this exchange develops into another empathetic connection between characters in the film.

Figure 29

In addition to his interaction with Sunny, Jawaad's exposure to cinema also eventually builds a sense of camaraderie. Making Jawaad watch popular Hindi films becomes another innovative deviation by Kakkar, from the typical hostage-captor depictions (Figure 29). In this instance, the villagers gather at night to watch the cult Hindi film *Maine Pyar Kiya,* a 1989 romantic musical starring the popular hero Salman Khan. Sunny hears the movie playing nearby and as an ardent Salman Khan fan he longs to watch it. He continuously pleads with the terrorists to allow him to go and watch the film. This enthusiasm is in spite of the fact that he has seen this movie multiple times as well as knows each dialogue and song verbatim. After Mahmood refuses, Sunny starts speaking the dialogues out loud, singing the songs and literally acting out the entire film by himself (Figure 30). The crosscutting between scenes from the film and Sunny's flawless recitation of the dialogues from his cell is an amusing interlude.

Figure 30

Eventually an exasperated Mahmood, who is tired of listening to Sunny's recitation, allows him to go and watch the film supervised and guarded by his subordinate, Jawaad. This sequence is a comic diversion that helps humanize the terrorist, who in turn looks more like a disgruntled parent giving into the annoying demand of a child. It reinforces the film's function as a celebration of Indian popular cinema, depicting a

different kind of fervor that succeeds in overshadowing the tense divide between Indians and Pakistanis as well as a hostage and his captors. Also reiterating the continued existence of a shared cultural foundation among the people of the two nations. *Filmistaan,* features this unique phenomenon and showcases it as a larger connection with treasured recollections of people. Landsberg identifies cinema as that technological medium linking a significant historic episode to even those with no identifiable connect to its immediate context.[288] It demonstrates an unusual intersection of cinema and inherited Partition memories. Thus, bringing the consistent circulation of media products and prosthetic memories across time, countries and generations to the fore. As a result, the rapport among characters is facilitated through their participation in a shared cinematic experience.

Interestingly, the piracy of commercial Indian films goes from being a mere economic transaction to becoming a powerful community construct. I suggest that the platforms exhibiting mainstream Indian films be read as,'experiential sites,' a term Landsberg uses to discuss spaces facilitating cultural and memory interexchanges.[289] This integrating function of Indian cinema is dependent on a conducive circulation of this body of work. In *Filmistaan,* this dissemination starts with the smuggling of Hindi films by Aftab, bringing a mainstream theatrical experience to the small screen of a television (Figure 31). Simultaneously, transforming the Pakistani village into a site for a shared cultural interaction between the two countries.

Figure 31

Therefore, I suggest that Kakkar utilises the massive appeal enjoyed by commercial Hindi films to construct a unique culturally unifying platform. It is a politically neutral platform, where cinema is appreciated for its entertainment value rather than

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[288]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 4.
[289]Ibid. p 12.

being looked at through the lens of propaganda. Memory Scholar Christine Sprengler analyses the scope and attraction of mass media creations as enablers of cinematic nostalgia.[290] She significantly attributes media and cinema with the power to tangibly recreate and enable audiences to relive past eras.[291] However, Sprengler examines the appeal of retrospective reconstructions, which is dependent on recreating that time and transporting the audience into that world.[292] Her approach is concerned with the act of recreating and re-engaging the audience. In contrast, I observe that in *Filmistaan* poignant Partition memories are triggered by an exposure to Indian films. Kakkar uses Indian cinema as a nostalgic site to remember India or the time before Partition. I connect this phenomenon with Landsberg's reading of mass media as carriers of meaning, with the capacity to facilitate audience interaction with the past.[293]

> The turn to mass culture—to movies, experiential museums, television shows, and so forth—has made what was once considered a group's private memory available to a much broader public.[294]

Hence, Landsberg recognises an integral link between mass culture and mass media, which according to her, may also connect private memories with the public.[295] In conjunction, Kakkar uses collective cinematic experiences to discover underlying commonalities. Film critic Subhash K. Jha observes: 'Nitin Kakkar averts all the corny clichés of brotherhood across the barbed wire, by simply using Bollywood as the binding factor between the two countries.'[296] To emphasise this bond, Kakkar creates another important character Aftab, a Pakistani, who illegally crosses the border and smuggles pirated films from India to sell in Pakistan. The entire village gets together at night and watches these pirated Indian films together (Figure. 32). Aftab's home is also used by the terrorists to confine Sunny, which creates the ideal

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[290]Christine Sprengler, *Screening nostalgia: Populuxe props and technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009). p 16.
[291]Christine Sprengler, *Screening nostalgia: Populuxe props and technicolor aesthetics in contemporary American film*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009). p 16.
[292]Ibid.
[293]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 42.
[294]Ibid.
[295]Ibid.
[296]S. K. Jha. *Filmistaan*: Movie Review, Review of *Filmistaan* directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *Ndtv.com*. June 2014. <http://movies.ndtv.com/movie-reviews/filmistaan-movie-review-977 > [accessed 15th July 2016].

proximity bringing the two movie buffs into direct contact with one another. Therefore, the popularity of commercial Indian cinema is constantly foregrounded to emphasise the cultural, social and emotional similarities among individuals in both the countries.

Figure 32

I study Sunny as an 'experiential' character exemplifying the celebratory and inspirational influence of mainstream Indian cinema.[297] This undaunted filmy spirit shines through his constant imitations of popular actors and the recitations of his favourite film dialogues. The conceptualisation of Sunny's character simultaneously fits Kakkar's treatment of *Filmistaan* that keeps its humour intact in the face of serious circumstances. Sunny presents an unlikely hero who is not stereotypically debilitated by fear, nor is he a typically hapless or hopeless victim. Instead Sunny epitomizes absolute passion toward Indian cinema, which is visible in almost every interaction he has in the film. During his emotional confession to Aftab he reveals that his passionate attachment for Indian cinema started out merely as a pastime, which over the years became an intrinsic part of his nature.

This singular characterisation of Sunny provides the narrative with a lightness that would otherwise be inconceivable in such thematically loaded terrorist-hostage plot. Sunny's funny antics and constant imitations amuse, entertain and eventually endear him to the villagers. This also works as a cinematic strategy toward attracting and appealing to audiences who are most likely familiar with the many references of mainstream films. Thereby making Sunny's obsession with commercial Indian cinema a relevant feature of the film. To further examine this aspect, I look at

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[297]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 20.

Landsberg's inferences of the concept of 'emotional possession' as defined by sociologist Herbert Blumer.

> *Emotional possession*, implies that 'the individual identifies himself so thoroughly with the plot or loses himself so much in the picture that he is carried away from the usual trend of conduct.' [298]

Blumer suggests that the cinematic experience of the film may become as powerful and integral to the person or audience member as actual life experiences. Whereby what people see might affect them to such an extent that they include it in their personal archive of experiences. This kind of 'emotional possession' toward mainstream Indian cinema is clearly visible in Sunny's character. His constant regurgitation of dialogues accompanied by mimicry is a visual manifestation of this possession. Using an unusual theatrical style, Sunny hams, mimics and re-enacts popular dialogues or scenes from noted cult films. Moreover, Philip Lutgendorf makes noteworthy observations regarding the significance and presence of such film dialogues in mainstream Indian cinema. According to him, dialogues have many more facets apart from their perfunctory function of communicating information.

> (They) convey the clever colloquial patois, dramatic innuendo, wordplay, double entendre, and intertextual referencing that abounds in these films and that makes '*film* dialogue' a performance genre unto itself—an artificial but admired speech register that is jokingly referred to in such Hindi expressions as '*film dialogue mårnå*' (to speak in an exaggeratedly emotional manner). [299]

Sunny's character thrives on such 'dramatic innuendo, wordplay, double entendre, and intertextual referencing,' throughout the film. [300] He constantly caricatures dialogues by the likes of Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan and

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[298]Alison Landsberg, *'Prosthetic Memory', The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p 54.
[299]P. Lutgendorf, 'Is There an Indian Way of Filmmaking?,' *International Journal of Hindu Studies.* 10.3. (2006), pp 227-256, (p 250).
[300]Ibid.

Sunny Deol, all famous Hindi film actors considered icons of Indian cinema. In figure 33, Sunny is parodying the dialogue delivery style of actor Amitabh Bachchan. It is one of the many impressions Sunny performs through the film that becomes an active comic device and helps mask the harsh reality of his hostage situation. As a result of this narrative treatment Sunny's cinephilia is not merely an escapist strategy, but becomes his way of connecting with the people around him, be it Aftab, the children or even the terrorists (Figure 33).

Figure 33

I note that Kakkar uses this distinctive strategy as a parallel reminder of the integral role mainstream Indian cinema plays in *Filmistaan*. I also read this strategy as an effort to steer the narrative toward showcasing relational commonalities, instead of emphasising differences. Pakistani film scholar Ali Nobil Ahmad talks about the visibly intertwined cinematic aesthetic still prevalent among Indian and Pakistani films.[301] He traces these shared origins, back to pre-Partition film studio set ups in Bombay, Lahore and Karachi, including Dhaka.[302] Ahmad recognises this indelible link between Indian and Pakistani cinemas, and states that the notion of their being 'culturally different does not account for the way culture seeps across historically constructed geopolitical borders.'[303] Noted Indian film scholar Ravi Vasudevan support Ahmad's observation; acknowledging the many cultural commonalities among people of the two countries.

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[301]Ali Nobil Ahmad, 'Film and Cinephilia in Pakistan: Beyond Life and Death', *Bioscope*, 5(2), (2014), pp 81–98, p 83.
[302]Ibid.
[303]Ibid. p 84.

I observe that *Filmistaan* draws on these cohesive similarities, as they simultaneously explain the massive appeal and demand for mainstream Hindi films in Pakistan. This observation accounts for the way the village doctor attributes Indian films with the ability to transport him to India through their narratives. The epigraph of this chapter is his dialogue, wherein he talks about the way watching Hindi films reminds him of the time he was once a part of that milieu. An innocuous viewing of a smuggled mainstream Hindi film enables him to 'visit that side, meet those people, walk those streets, I can feel the trees there and my heart gleams with happiness.'[304] Hence the connotations of watching an Indian film in Pakistan evolve in different ways in the course of *Filmistaan.* The approach of mainstream cinema toward Partition and its memorialisation is the central concern of my investigation. Therefore, to develop a comprehensive perspective on this crucial aspect, I analyse *Filmistaan's* utilisation and referencing of mainstream Indian cinema.

2.3   Mainstream film references and *rasas*

Notably, *Filmistaan* showcases cinematic creations that have successfully overcome the vagaries of time, changing cinematic trends and fluctuating audience preferences. In this section, I scrutinise the overall treatment of these insertions, their characteristics, emotive value and overall contribution to the film's narrative. Indian Film critic and analyst, Gaston Roberge's Indian Film Theory, explores the presence of *rasas* in a film's narrative treatment and the incorporation of mainstream cinema tropes. As previously mentioned, *Filmistaan* is not produced on a mainstream Indian film scale, yet the film consistently makes identifiable references to popular commercial Hindi film content. Roberge makes an interesting suggestion, that 'a movie has no other existence than in the mind of a viewer' and explains this as the intersection of the movie viewing experience and the memories they generate among the audience.[305]

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[304]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[305]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 71.

According to him, 'when a movie is seen by millions of spectators then these spectators become the movie not just for the time of viewing it, but as long as it lives in the memory of the viewers.'[306] Additionally, I observe that Roberge's hypothesis ascribes a degree of permanency of mainstream films among movie audiences that assumes a uniform recall value and longevity. While, I do not endorse, Roberge's blanket ascription, I note that his supposition is relevant to the depiction of mainstream Indian cinema's memorialisation in *Filmistaan.*The film constantly emphasises the longevity of popular cinematic creations and their memory presence through various references. I suggest that Kakkar's homage to iconic cinematic moments, dialogues, and actors through cinephile Sunny, attests to mainstream cinema's consistent memorialisation in the film. Alongside featuring the film alludes to the memories mainstream Indian cinema evoke with a unifying function. These dual attributions made of mainstream cinema denote a fluidity in the medium of cinema, also noted and described by film scholar Ravi Vasudevan:

> (the) shifting amalgamation of people, technologies, narrative forms, performance cultures, work practices and business contexts as these moves across and overlap territorial boundaries. [307]

Vasudevan's observation acknowledges the malleability of mainstream Indian cinema as well as its ability to transform itself. This viewpoint supports Kakkar's premise of presenting commercial films as 'crossover cinema', whose distribution and exhibition challenges national, as well as international territoriality.[308] Similar to Roberge's understanding, Vasudevan's perspective also recognises Indian cinema's capacity to exceed 'the boundaries of the national.'[309] Both Roberge and Vasudevan trace this durable appeal of Indian mainstream cinema to its strong 'cultural formations.'[310] Drawing from their observations, the circulation of mainstream Indian films in *Filmistaan* can be explained as a 'cultural flow,' operable outside governmental or

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[306]Ibid.
[307]Ravi Vasudevan, 'Geographies of the Cinematic Public: Notes on Regional, National and Global Histories of Indian Cinema', *Journal of the Moving Image*, (2010), pp 94-117, p 94.
[308]Ibid. p 95.
[309]Ibid. p 102.
[310]Ibid.

political policies.[311] Therefore, it helps understand how these creations transcend the restrictions of Indo-Pak borders, politics and communal frictions.

Alongside this singularity in circulation, Scholar Mukund Lath takes a closer look at the overall composition of mainstream Indian films. He isolates the 'elements of showmanship and ornamental stylization' as crucial factors affecting the reach of mainstream Indian cinema among the audience. Deducing that these elements have always been crucial to the aesthetics of Indian cinema and especially its commercial body of work.[312]

> (the) constitutive role of songs in popular Hindi cinema and the juxtaposition of such numbers with mimetic episodes are among the many points at which modern practice corresponds to the traditional aesthetic codified in Bharata's *Natyashastra.*[313]

Lath's study recognises the influence of *Natyashastra* on commercial Indian cinema and reiterates the importance of understanding the distinctiveness of the Indian cinematic experience.[314] Therefore, my approach is to comprehensively analyse *Filmistaan's* narrative structure mindful of its preoccupation with mainstream films and the deliberate utilisation of its tropes. I suggest that mainstream Indian cinema's effortless extension 'across surficial disparities among people,' is aided by reinforcing the socio-cultural similarities between India and Pakistan.[315] An undeniable shared history, memories and cultural practices exist between the two countries since before Partition.[316] I suggest that this commonality is used to explain the reach and appeal of mainstream Indian cinema in Pakistan. This is visible in the narrative inspiration drawn from the iconic mainstream Indian film *Sholay* (1975). Roberge discusses *Sholay* for its prompt recall value and cinematic longevity among the audience that extends beyond the confines of time and place.[317] According to him, the film's quintessential dramatic and emotive arrangement has made it part of Indian cinema's

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[311]Ibid.
[312]Mukund Lath, 'Identity Through Necessary Change: Thinking about Raga-Bhava, Concepts and Characters,' *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 20, no.1 (2003), pp 85-114. p 86.
[313]Ibid.
[314]Ibid. p 90.
[315]Ibid. p 100.
[316]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 52.
[317]Ibid.

'folk culture.'[318] As a result, the film's audio-visual treatment, characterisations and dialogues have become recognisable motifs or icons for the Indian mainstream cinema audience.[319]

Kakkar incorporates *Sholay's* recognisability or identifiability in different ways throughout the narrative. I have already discussed *Sholay's* influence on *Filmistaan's* artwork, and within the narrative, I notice it in the intense bond that develops between Sunny and Aftab. Their friendship is evocative of the onscreen friendship depicted in the film *Sholay* between the lead characters – Jai and Veeru, essayed by popular actors Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra (Figure 34).

Figure 34

I observe that this analogy is an innovative presentation of familiar and popular mainstream cinema elements, not intrinsically part of *Filmistaan's* narrative structure. It suggests that this strategy may be an attempt to enhance the overall appeal of *Filmistaan.* Roberge deconstructs mass appeal, as any form of communication with the capability to cater to demographics across ages, caste, creed, gender, strata, and so on.[320] As mentioned above, Roberge considers the film *Sholay* a prime example of the engagement of masses through the inclusion of mainstream cinema tropes supported by dramatically orchestrated *rasas*.[321] The unlikely fellowship between *Sholay's* protagonists Jai and Veeru's became the ultimate benchmark for the portrayal of friendship on Indian cinema. I suggest that one of the reasons for this appeal could be the depiction of solidarity stemming from diversity: starting with their physicality and extending to their personalities. Jai (Amitabh Bachchan) is tall, lean and an introvert. Veeru in contrast (Dharmendra) is shorter, powerfully built, and an extrovert by nature with a boyish charm (Figure 35). At the end of the film, Jai sacrifices his life

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[318]Ibid. p 71.
[319]Ibid.
[320]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 72.
[321]Ibid.

for his best friend Veeru, an act that conferred an unparalleled status to their bond and came to epitomise the portrayal of friendship in Indian cinema.

Figure 35

Film critic Madhureeta Mukherjee recognises that this, '*Sholay*-like undying brotherhood is born out of pure *pyaar (love)* for Bollywood.' [322] She supports the parallel drawn between Jai and Veeru's friendship in *Sholay* and Sunny and Aftab's bond in *Filmistaan.* I observe that this juxtaposition forms a cinematic link with the political, social and historical ramifications of Partition. It is akin to Jai's selflessness in *Sholay,* in *Filmistaan,* Aftab a Pakistani is willing to risk his life to help Sunny, an Indian escape the terrorists.

By portraying such an action, Kakkar challenges communal and national boundaries between India and Pakistan, Kakkar attempts to debunk the perceptions of ingrained bitterness, prejudices and hostility between people of the two countries. Hence Kakkar extends the symbolic scope of Sunny and Aftab's friendship and takes it a step further from the cinematic effect of Jai-Veeru's relationship in *Sholay* (Figure 36). Therefore, I examine *Filmistaan's* mainstream cinema inspired influences in more detail.

Figure 36

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[322]Madhureeta Mukherjee, *'Filmistaan: Film Review'* Review of *Filmistaan* by Nitin Kakkar in *Times of India,* April 13, 2013 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/movie-reviews/filmistaan/movie-review/36096884.cms> [accessed 14th July 2016].

Scholar Bharat Gupt's analysis of the Greek dramatic aesthetic *Poetics* and *Natyashastra* narrows down the fundamental motivation for audience to go to a theatre, as the attraction to partake in an emotionally moving experience.[323] Roberge reiterates this observation by noting the way mainstream Indian films makes a conscious effort to incorporate multitudinal emotional shades or *rasas* in their narratives.[324] According to him, an Indian film mindful of keeping the Indian sensibilities and ethos in mind enhances the appeal of its drama, story, actors, characters and dialogues.[325] In this context, I look closely at music in *Filmistaan* and how it form an important component of the narrative and if it enhances its exploration of the context of Partition.[326]

While usually mainstream film songs are accompanied by a striking dance choreography and its picturization poses a substantial attraction for audiences; however notably Kakkar uses songs more as an expressive tool in *Filmistaan.* I suggest that the music score by Arijit Datta tries to complement the situation and narrative tone of the film. Kakkar forgoes the common practice of presenting songs through the typical and oft used lip-sync choreographed song-dance routine. Placing the songs in the background is an integral decision that creates a different format for the film's song presentations. This treatment makes the lyrics written by Ravinder Randhawa a significant input to study, as they are designed to communicate emotions, add dramatic value or meaningfully enhance situations of the characters.[327]

The first song in the film: '*Udaari*' (To Fly) is an upbeat musical number accompanied by a vibrant montage of Sunny's travels, while shooting with the American documentary crew. It showcases the excitement and invigorating hard work involved in the process of filmmaking. The lyrics of the song simultaneously mirror Sunny's passion for cinema and his intrinsic ability to rise above adversity.

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[323]B. Gupt, *Dramatic Concepts Greek & Indian: A Study of the Poetics and the Nāṭyaśāstra*. (Delhi: DK Print world 1994). p 23.

[324]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 63.

[325]Ibid.

[326]Ibid. p 64.

[327]Vipin, '*Filmistaan*- Music Review (Bollywood Soundtrack), in *MNMusicAloud.com*, 24th May 2014 <https://www.musicaloud.com/2014/05/24/filmistaan-review-bollywood/> [accessed on 2nd July 2016].

Udaari (To Fly)

Raata Bhale Thak Jaave, (The night may tire)

Sapno Ko Neend Na Aave (Yet dreams won't fall asleep)

Yaara Himmat Haar Na Paave (Friend, courage won't lose)

Aisa Man Mein Fitoor Chadha Re (When such a passion takes over your heart)

The song '*Uljhi'* (Complex), expresses the challenging situation Sunny finds himself in. Interestingly, the word *Uljhi* means complex, yet the song's lilting melody and lyrics talk about the resolution of complications.

Uljhi Uljhi (Complex)

Gathe Suljhi (knot got resolved)

Kaisi Hawa Mein Gud Gudi Hai (what is this delightful tickle in the air)

Raaz Yeh Hasi (the secret is laughter)

Aji Bin Baaton Ke (Oh without speaking)

Baat Samjhte (we understand the unspoken)

Yahi Mizaj Dosti Ke (this mood of friendship)

Aa Lage Zindagi Ke Gale (lets embrace life like this).

The song *Uljhi* is set to a visual montage of many happy moments Sunny spends with the Pakistani village children, Aftab and the villagers. It reaffirms the camaraderie and the possibilities of mutual trust and brotherhood, which is a complete contrast to what the audience would expect a character to experience in Sunny's situation.The montage of this song presents many endearing moments shared among Sunny, Aftab and the villagers. The lyrics describe a friendship, where the connections made look beyond the confinement of the concepts of Indian, Pakistani, hostage, danger and so on. Another important song in the film is, *Bol* (Speak), which expresses the pathos of Partition from the point of view of survivors like the village doctor. The poignant lyrics of the song follow the visual of the village doctor as he leaves (Figure 37).

Bol (Speak)

Yaadana Hun Ji Nai Lagda (Memories no longer satisfy the heart)

Hiknal Lake Tu Bol (Come close to the heart and speak)

Had- Sarhad Kaagaz Te Lekha (limits and borders are written on paper)

Behad Hoke Bol (speak without restrictions).

Figure 37

The lyrics of the song *Bol* (speak)*,* are in Punjabi, reiterating the shared regional language context between the doctor and Sunny. I suggest that the use of this regional dialect acts as a reminder of their roots, articulates their sentiments toward Partition and the memories they are left with. The song talks about the many restrictions survivors still face that prevent them from expressing their memories and how the creation of borders has silenced most of these stories and memories. The song is encouraging the exchange of memories and ignoring the limitations inflicted by borders. Kakkar makes the musical component of the film stand out by infusing songs with meaningful lyrics that convey more than if they had the common song-dance routines. As a result, the songs act as emotional milestones charting Sunny's journey. I note that the songs perform specific dramatic and emotive fuctions in *Filmistaan,* which leads me to a scrutiny of other key dramatic and emotional orchestrations in the film.

In particular, I dicuss Kakkar's integration of humour, which considering the complex thematic undertones of Partition and Indo-Pak relations in the film, makes for an intriguing choice. A humorous tone is set in *Filmistaan* from the first scene and is consistently visible throughout the film. However, although the dominance of *Hasya* (humour) *rasa* for exploring sensitive issues makes for a controversial choice, it is not a new phenomenon in cinema. Noted American writer and Holocaust scholar Terrence Des Pre talks about the criticism the inclusion of humour in Holocaust narratives tends to receive in his article *Holocaust Laughter*. He says:

> 'Holocaust etiquette' dictating that anything pertaining to the Holocaust must be serious must be reverential in a manner that acknowledges (and supports)

the sacredness of its occasion.[328]

Des Pre's perspective moves away from an indiscriminate acceptance of this 'Holocaust etiquette' , as he advocates for the acknowledgement of laughter and humor as helpful and enabling coping mechanisms. [329] In this context he suggests:

> I want to consider the energies of laughter as a further resource. We know to begin with, that a comic response to calamity is often more resilient, more effectively equal to terror and the sources of terror than a response that is solemn or tragic.[330]

Therefore, humour in Des Pre's estimation shows a resilience of spirit that according to him is more powerful than a purely somber treatment and response to a tragedy.[331] I turn to the example of the award-winning Italian film *Life is Beautiful* (1997) based on the subject of World War II. It starts out as a typical romantic comedy between Guido played by Roberto Benigni and the female lead Dora, though soon the narrative shifts to the events experienced by Guido and his son Giosue at a concentration camp during the war. The comedic tone of the film is maintained through Guido's efforts to make his son believe that everything happening around them is a game.

In an interview, Italian actor and director Roberto Benigni states that the premise of the film took shape during a conversation with his coauthor Vincenzo Cerami.[332] They came up with the 'idea of a man in the most extreme circumstances who tries to convince himself he's not.'[333] I suggest that the characterizations and overall narrative structure of *Filmistaan,* mirror this line of thought. Particularly the characterisation of protagonist Sunny, his natural enthusiasm and exuberance in the face of dire circumstances is reflective of Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful.* Des Pre terms the narrative technique using humour as a coping mechanism as 'displacement.'[334]

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[328]Terrence Des Pres, 'Holocaust Laughter?, in *Writing and the Holocaust* ed. by Berel Lang (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 216-233, (p 218).
[329]Ibid.
[330]Ibid. p 220.
[331]Ibid. p 218.
[332]Sander L. Gilman, 'Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah Be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp. 279-308, (p 280).
[333]Ibid.
[334]Terrence Des Pres, 'Holocaust Laughter?, in *Writing and the Holocaust* ed. by Berel Lang (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 216-233, (p 219).

According to him, film's based on serious subjects may use displacement, so the narrative can take more imaginative leaps to explore how so-called victims work through their hostile surroundings or difficult circumstances. He deduces that this strategy may pave the way for more nuanced and layered narratives.

Although I do not negate serious portrayals, I suggest that understanding the utilization of humour as an emotive and dramatic device is relevant to my analysis of *Filmistaan.* Especially when I place the film in the broader framework of my analysis, as a distinct exploration of the contextual implications and memories of Partition. It helps validate the existence of multifarious approaches toward the same discussion and opens up possibilities and alternate readings.

I observe that Kakkar's use of humour neutralizes any possible adverse effects resulting from any sharp commentaries or observations in the film. This treatment notably that helps humanise the characters and the situations they find themselves in as well as makes the narrative more accessible. This is best explained through the most hilarious and ironic sequence in the film, which is the recording of Sunny's ransom video. The terrorists are supposed to record a video of Sunny addressing and pleading with the Indian and international governments to comply with the demands of the terrorists. The irony is that none of the terrorists know how to use a camera and Sunny volunteers to guide them. This results in a highly amusing sequence in which Sunny becomes the main lead and director of his ransom video.

Figure 38

Sunny treats this like a genuine professional film project and sets up a typical hostage video. He tries to place identifiable elements in the ransom video, such as: a background with words written in Arabic (Figure 38), the location of an obscure desert, along with a helpless victim flanked by intimidating armed terrorists. I suggest that this amusing use of popular tropes and expected terrorist-hostage

conventionalities makes a sharp commentary on the way extremism has become a cliché. This treatment exposes the way radicalism has become a part of and contributes to popular culture stereotypes.

I discuss this sequence as a caricature of a terrorist-hostage situation. Interestingly, Kakkar turns the demands of the terrorists into dialogues that Sunny will now deliver as an actor, even though he is actually their hostage. It draws a parallel reference to Sunny's hilarious unsuccessful auditions snippets shown in the beginning of the film. The scene moves from amusing to absurd, as Sunny criticises his own acting and the diligence with which Sunny is trying to direct a good quality ransom video. He takes charge of all aspects of the video like a professional and issues directions to the terrorists. Ironically, all the terrorists follow his instructions, two of them are instructed to stand over Sunny in an intimidating position, while terrorists Mahmood and Jawaad are operating the camera (Figure. 39).

Figure 39

From terrorists Mahmood and Jawaad saying camera rolling and acting' before every shot, to Sunny choosing Mahmood to play the most threatening and convincing terrorist, this sequence presents a series of ludicrous events. In figure 40, Sunny is critically reviewing the takes with the terrorists, then dissatisfied with the take, he decides to reshoot, telling the terrorists that 'no matter what the shoot is, he must ensure a quality product.'[335]Through these outlandish and amusing actions, I also note the sudden shift in power dynamics, wherein now the terrorists listen to Sunny and follow his instructions (Figure 40).

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[335]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).

Figure 40

The sequence casts a satirical look at the stereotypical equation between a hostage and his captors. As I mention before that this largely farcical scene succeeds in making larger pertinent commentaries, by using a relatable, light-hearted approach. Through this treatment, I suggest that Kakkar is rejecting the portrayal of an overly cruel terrorist given a grotesque villainous caricature and instead these men are humanised, and their dogmatic views are vilified. The film tries to establish the possibility of falling prey to or imbibing any kind of rigid and extremist belief systems needs to be feared.[336]The film also portrays that the villagers do not endorse militant ideology, nor do they seem to have internalised hatred for everyone and everything Indian. They serve and harbour the terrorists only due to their powerlessness in the face of brute force and guns.

In addition, through *Filmistaan's* ending Kakkar orchestrates a conclusion that is a culmination of a series of dramatic moments. I note that these dramatic and emotional elements are designed to create an emotionally affecting, yet moralistic stance. Roberge cites these kind of endings as one the intrinsic features of mainstream Indian films.[337] During this tense climactic sequence Jawaad shoots Mahmood, to save the lives of Aftab and Sunny and they start running toward the Indian side of the border. When the other terrorists arrive they decide to kill Jawaad for his disloyalty and subsequently incessant bullets are aimed at Aftab and Sunny (Figure 41).

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[336]Nitin Kakkar interviewed by L. Melwani, 'Crossing Borders with Nitin Kakkar in Filmistaan', in *LassiwithLavina.com*. June 2013. <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/crossing-borders-with-nitin-kakkar-in-filmistan/html> [accessed June 10th, 2016].
[337]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 72.

Figure 41

I observe that such an action-packed sequence is reminiscent of many commercial entertainers. Furthermore, during the ensuing chaos of the heavy gunfire, Aftab comes to possess a gun and volunteers to shoot at the terrorists so Sunny can cross the border. However, Sunny refuses to leave Aftab behind to face death at the hands of the terrorists. This scene reconstructs the popular self-sacrificing trope, evocative of the friendship depicted in *Sholay*. It culminates in a melodramatic portrayal intensified by portraying a Pakistani willing to endanger his life for an Indian. I suggest that Kakkar reflects an idealistic vision of communal harmony, Hindu Muslim unity and camaraderie that the subcontinent continually hopes for since Partition.

In this sequence Sunny and Aftab are trying to escape to the Indian side of the border. While this is logical since Sunny is an Indian, I suggest that is also symbolises a place where cinema flourishes and there more freedom and safety from extremism. Therefore, I find that although Kakkar intends to present a completely politically neutral film, he does end up playing to certain stereotypes. Firstly, there is a clear representation of two extreme faces of Pakistan: the fanatics represented by the terrorists on the one side and the brave pacifists represented by Aftab, his family and the villagers on the other. Secondly, India is presented dominantly as the land of entertaining mainstream film productions and the amiable and amusing character Sunny.

It is noteworthy that the intended target of the terrorists was an American so that they could have pressurised the United States of America. Kidnapping an Indian was not their plan, thereby making a strong statement ignoring Indo-Pak relational hostility and uncertainty. Therefore, I note that the acrimony between the two nations is largely

left unexplored, except when it is brought to the fore in an incident where all the characters are listening to an India versus Pakistan cricket match on the radio. During this scene, emotions are running high as the villagers and the terrorists are cheering for team Pakistan, and Sunny is the only one cheering for the Indian team. In a nail-biting finish team India wins the match. Sunny unable to contain his joy, starts cheering for India and dancing in front of the disappointed Pakistani villagers, including the terrorists (Figure 42). Everyone looks displeased at his celebrations, but terrorist Mahmood is particularly upset, since he and Sunny recently argued about which cricketer is the best, the Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar or Pakistani player Shahid Afridi.

Figure 42

The intensity surrounding the rivalry between the Indian and Pakistani cricket teams is a well-documented phenomenon among people of both the countries. Popular Indian cricketer Virendra Sehwag is quoted saying, 'When India and Pakistan play a match, it is nothing less than a war. We should win the war, not lose it.'[338] As a result the cricket pitch becomes a war zone and cricketers the soldiers representing both nations. Journalist Dipankar Lahiri states that the essence of this sport is steeped in drama and conflict:

> When India and Pakistan meet on a cricket field - the frenzied emotions, the desperate passion, the pitched *nationalism* bring a deadly seriousness that goes beyond sport.[339]

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[338]Dipankar Lahiri, 'India-Pakistan Match Like War, We Should Win: Virender Sehwag' in *NdtvSports.com,* 13th April 2019, < https://sports.ndtv.com/world-cup-2019/india-pakistan-match-like-war-we-should-win-it-virender-sehwag-2022298> [accessed 21st April 2019].
[339]Ibid.

Therefore, team members symbolically and literally fight on the field to uphold their nation's honour and prestige against their arch nemesis. An unprecedented level of national interest and patriotic fervour is ignited among spectators of both countries. I suggest that this animosity in sport is also one of the principle consequences of Partition. Journalist Dipankar Lahiri talks about 'the partition left wounds that would fester. These carried over to the cricket.'[340] Hence the scene where Sunny and Aftab are imagining a united cricket team combining the world class talent of Indian and Pakistani cricketers is farcically oblivious to these ground realities. At the same time, I note that *Filmistaan* attempts to place these overly idealistic conjectures alongside the fault lines created by Partition.

I observe that a more obvious reference to Partition is made in the film's final scene. While Sunny and Aftab are running towards the border, selected portions from the speeches given by the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers are playing in the background. The audio alternates between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's address to the nation at the dawn of India's Independence and Mohammad Ali Jinnah's words celebrating the birth of Pakistan. The contradiction between the hopeful words being spoken and the visuals create a powerful cinematic moment. The promising words outlining the future vision for their countries are tragically ironic when juxtaposed onscreen with a shower of bullets trying to kill Aftab and Sunny. This exposes how the freedom of both countries is still held ransom to dogmatic stereotypes, religious conflict, mutual distrust and hostility, completely negating what the leaders of these nations envisioned at the time when the decision to brutally separate the subcontinent was taken.

The impact of the speeches is enhanced when Prime Minister Jinnah is heard saying, 'to acquire Pakistan we have sacrificed a lot' and Aftab, is seen firing back at the terrorists to give Sunny a chance to escape. Therefore, here a Pakistani is sacrificing himself for an Indian.[341] Similarly, the visuals of Sunny almost reaching the Indian side is aurally accompanied by snippets from Prime Minister Nehru's famous freedom speech, 'At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake

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[340]Ibid.
[341]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).

to light and freedom.'[342] This leaves the audience with dramatically blurred visuals of Sunny and Aftab without making it clear who actually survives. The attainment of freedom from the speech is symbolically linked with Aftab and Sunny's attempts to escape and survive the onslaught by the terrorists. Hence, inclusion of the speeches not only rekindles memories of Partition but also compels reflections on if and how circumstances have changed since Independence.

I highlight the absence of brawny heroes performing synchronised action sequences, glamorous heroines, romantic sub-plots and choreographed songs in *Filmistaan*. Due to these exclusions, I find that *Filmistaan's* unconventionality supports its potpourri of dramatic moments, Partition memories, film references and interconnected complex issues. The film tries to examine the widespread proliferation of destructive ideologies along side people struggling for normalcy. However, I suggest that my analysis of this unusual multifaceted narrative would be incomplete without a closer study of its reach, success and scope. These factors help understand the reception of such an unconventional cinematic effort trying to tackle the difficult subject of Partition as its connected themes. I take up these aspects in the next and final section of this chapter.

2.4   Reception

> What kind of meanings does a text have? For whom? In what circumstances? With what changes over time? And do these meanings have any effects?[343]

Janet Staiger in *Media Reception Studies* asks these pertinent questions to emphasise the significance of building a contextual examination or study of films.[344] Staiger advocates for extending the interpretation or extraction of meaning from a singular analytic framework of a film's text to the inclusion of cognitive, emotional, social, political and other interconnected context-dependent readings.[345]

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[342]*Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).
[343]Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, (NY:NYU Press, 2005). p 14.
[344]Ibid.
[345]Ibid.

Contextual factors more than textual ones determine the experience viewers have while watching a movie and how they use these experiences in daily life, research in this field explores sources, such as press reviews, interviews, articles and letters to the editor of film magazines, or reports in the trade press.[346]

I discuss the relevance of this approach to my analysis as it into account the subjectivity of interpretations, variability in tastes over time, modes of production and channels of accessibility.In conjunction, I note that scholars Sonia Livingstone and Ranjana Das in their article *Interpretation/Reception* also consider these aspects and define the study of film reception as a multi-layered approach, by taking the 'production and reproduction of meaning' at different levels into cognizance.[347] Film Scholar Barbara Klinger also acknowledges this approach for it factors in the fluidity and changeability of time, the accompanying social and historic transformations as well as their consistent impact on films.[348] Klinger notes the significance of 'adjacent intertextual fields such as censorship, exhibition practices, star publicity and reviews, and the dominant or alternative ideologies of society at a particular time.'[349] My analysis of *Filmistaan's* reception is mindful of the contextual facets discussed by the mentioned scholars in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the film's distribution, exhibition, promotion strategies as well as the many critical responses to the film.

Filmistaan was screened at various prestigious international film festivals in the year 2012: Busan, Palm Springs (California), TROMSO (Norway) and Goteborg (Sweden) garnering international acclaim.[350] Additionally, it was screened and won awards at many national film festivals won the National Award for Best Feature Film the same year. Despite this honour the film did not find any film distributors to release the film in theatres nationally, echoing the struggles of many or most small budget films that

[346]D. Biltereyst, K. Lotze and P. Meers, 'Triangulation in historical audience research: Reflections and experiences from a multi-methodological research project on cinema audiences in Flanders.' *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 9(2), (2012). pp.690-715. (p 700).

[347]S. Livingstone, and R. Das, Interpretation/Reception. *Oxford bibliographies online: communication. Oxford , UK : Oxford University Press,* (2013), < http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/62649> [accessed 5th June 2016].

[348]Barbara Klinger, 'Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies.' *Screen* 38.2, (1997), pp107-128, (p 110).

[349]Ibid. p 112.

[350]Nitin Kakkar interviewed by Bijan Tehrani, '*Filmistaan*' at Indian Film Festival of LA, for *Cineequal,* on 4th June 2013 <https://cineequal.org/3366-nitin-kakkar-filmistaan-iffla/> [accessed on 12th July 2017].

are forced to fight to get released in spite of garnering accolades. These films stand-alone due to the absence of a star-studded cast and minus the backing of a recognised production house. The film's national award win and its festival exposure worked to familiarise people with the film. Film critic and blogger, Bobby Singh explains:

> It is quite easy to make or invest in a safe film with a known star, ensuring you a decent opening and a sure shot sale of additional rights making a good profit or at least recovering the money invested. But it's too unsafe to finance or market an offbeat product with an all unknown fresh star-cast and a director, made on a rather tricky subject.[351]

However, the accolades *Filmistaan* received finally persuaded one of the leading studios in India- UTV Motion Pictures, to distribute and purchase *Filmistaan's* exhibition rights. This support enabled the film's full-fledged theatrical release in 2014, ensuring its presence across the country as well as in territories abroad. The backing of UTV simultaneously opened avenues to execute strong publicity and marketing plans to promote the film on a massive scale. The film used a quirky promotional strategy, where actors Sharib Hashmi (Sunny) and Inaamulhaq (Aftab), are performing a devotional hymn (*aarti*) for the famous Indian actress Katrina Kaif (Figure 43) in a video.[352] The video and this marketing strategy both received extensive coverage in the press:

> Starry devotion for the heroine is meant to serve as a marketing trick - and for a film in which she does not even feature! The creative team of debutant filmmaker Nitin Kakkar's award-winning comedy *Filmistaan* have created the song, *Jai jai Katrina*, which has been shot only for promotional purposes. It will be aired on TV ahead of the film's release (Figure 43).[353]

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[351]Bobby Singh, '*Filmistaan*: Review', directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *BobbyTalksCinema.com*. June 2014 <http://www.bobbytalkscinema.com/recentpost/FILMISTAAN-And-this-small-ad-1287 > [accessed 28th September 2016].

[352]Mail Today Bureau. 'Katrina Kaif inspires promo drive for new comedy Filmistaan But she's not even in the movie.' *DailyMail.co.uk*. May 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2620803/Katrina-Kaif-inspires-promo-drive-new-comedy-Filmistaan-But-shes-not-film.html > [accessed 30th July 2017].

[353]Mail Today Bureau. 'Katrina Kaif inspires promo drive for new comedy Filmistaan But she's not even in the movie.' *DailyMail.co.uk*. May 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2620803/Katrina-Kaif-inspires-promo-drive-new-comedy-Filmistaan-But-shes-not-film.html > [accessed 30th July 2017].

Figure 43

The two actors are seen praying to actress Katrina Kaif because she was part of a string successful mainstream Hindi films and soon many in the media began superstitiously attributing the success of a film to her presence in the film. Applying a humorous twist to this superstition, *Filmistaan'*s publicity and marketing team use her name and reference. By endorsing her perception of as a lucky mascot of films, they try to bring luck to their release.[354] Alongside these promotional strategies, *Filmistaan* garnered positive reviews from almost all major Indian news publications, film critics and TV channels, providing a tremendous boost to its revenues.

Filmistaan received a lot of positive attention on social media platforms. There was a circulation of many favourable reviews by those who saw the film. The film received strong endorsements from mega star Amitabh Bachchan who praised the film on Twitter. Renowned film producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra announced in an interview that he would personally sponsor a vacation for the *Filmistaan's* entire team. Articles of carrying actor Amitabh Bachchan and director Vinod Chopra's statements were circulated and eventually all of the above mentioned publicity activities contributed significantly to the film's success. In the following weeks *Filmistaan* grossed approximately 9,99,40,000/- crore INR worldwide (more than 90 million USD), making it a commercially successful film. However, as stated by Kakkar, this all-round commercial success did not allow the film to reach a crucial segment of the intended target audience.[355] He had hoped to release his film in Pakistan but that did

[354]Ibid.

[355]M. R. Vijayakar, '*Filmistaan*: Heady Brew of Terrorism, Comedy and Bollywood,' Review of Filmistaan dir. Nitin Kakkar. *India.west.com*. June 2014.
<http://www.indiawest.com/entertainment/bollywood/movie_reviews/filmistaan-heady-brew-of-terrorism-comedy-bollywood/article_93d91552-ec2c-11e3-9e14-001a4bcf887a.html > [accessed on 20th October 2016].

not happen. The film did not get a certification by the Censor Board in Pakistan. In Kakkar's words:

> I really want this film to reach the common man in Pakistan. It is the voice of a common man in India. I want to take it to Pakistan, and would really love to have it released in Pakistan.[356]

The hope to exhibit the film in Pakistan and the timing of the release of the film coincide at an intriguing juncture. Film critic Taran Adarsh significantly notes that the year 2014 saw an unprecedented diplomatic gesture that had not been made by the heads of either country since Independence: the swearing-in ceremony of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was attended by Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In turn, marking a noteworthy time for the release of *Filmistaan* and its intended pro Indo-Pak cooperation and peace message.[357] However, this positive wave of cultural interexchange between the two countries did not help the film release in Pakistan. I suggest that the message of the film was well-received due to this period of burgeoning socio-political, cultural and diplomatic relations. Staiger has already talked about the significant impact of a film's contextual environment on its commercial success and future circulation. In conjunction with *Filmistaan's* context, I discuss the content of the film and how it also played a vital role in it's favourable reception.

The use of mainstream Indian cinema as an integral element of the plot has been particularly commented upon. The film's highlighting of this commercial branch of Indian cinema has been appreciated as a clever narrative device by film critics. Film critic Paloma Sharma draws a striking parallel between India's father of the nation - Mahatma Gandhi and Kakkar's creation of the concept *CineMaa* (mother of cinema).[358]

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[356]Ibid.

[357]Taran Adarsh, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*: Film Review, Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *BollywoodHungama.com.* July, 2013, < http://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movie/bhaag-milkha-bhaag/critic-review/>[accessed 25th June 2016].

[358]Maa: colloquial word for mother in the Hindi language.

(CineMaa) that is the undisputed mother of not only India but also its neighbouring Pakistan. The much-revered *CineMaa* blesses her devotees with business on both sides of the border, serving as a common thread between the protagonists Sunny and Aftab in Nitin Kakkar's *Filmistaan. Filmistaan* is successful in its juxtaposition of art and extremism, of freedom and fear. It makes it easy for the viewer to walk in the shoes of Sunny and Aftab, as well as Sunny's captors.[359]

Thus, such a narrative utilization of mainstream cinematic tropes has been applauded for taking an offbeat track to make problematic themes more relatable. I note that the film has almost unanimously been recognised and praised for exploring Indo-Pak relations and all its multifarious tangents, through the incorporation of popular cinema references. Film critic M. Basu states:

Nitin Kakkar deserves a salute for seamlessly binding heavy topics of infiltration, cross border terrorism, the ideals of right-wing Islamists and yet the prevailing love for Bollywood. Anything dealing with the hostility of India and Pakistan gets sucked in by gloom but Kakkar manages to maintain his film consistently light hearted.[360]

Critics Sharma and Basu observe that mainstream film references provide the narrative with a necessary deviation that they find refreshing due to its complementary humour and comedic inclusions. [361] In addition, the amusing dialogues in the film have been specially noted and positively received. For instance, the exchange found in one particular scene where Sunny compares his camera equipment with his abductor Mahmood's guns. Sunny humorously tries to highlight the similarities in their professions: 'You shoot; we also shoot,' he explains. 'You use

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[359]Paloma Sharma, 'Review: *Filmistaan* is absolutely flawless', directed by Nitin Kakkar.'*Rediff.com.* June 2014. < https://www.rediff.com/movies/report/review-filmistaan-is-absolutely-flawless/20140606.htm> [accessed 1st July 2016].
[360]Mohar Basu, '*Filmistaan*: Review', directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *Koimoi.com.* June 2014. <http://www.koimoi.com/reviews/filmistaan-review/> [accessed 21st December 2015].
[361]Paloma Sharma, 'Review: *Filmistaan* is absolutely flawless', directed by Nitin Kakkar.'*Rediff.com.* June 2014. < https://www.rediff.com/movies/report/review-filmistaan-is-absolutely-flawless/20140606.htm> [accessed 1st July 2016].

magazines; so do we.'[362] These comedic moments are noted and their contribution toward lending a certain light-heartedness to the narrative. The well-known film critic for the New York Times, Ben Kenigsberg, reiterates this feature:

> Sunny's friendship with the villagers — particularly a fellow cinephile (Inaamulhaq) who sells pirated films — *Filmistaan* gradually morphs into a serious disquisition on Indo-Pakistani relations and the lingering animus from the nations' 1947 partition.[363]

Kenigsberg observes how the film's various cinematic elements attempt to make larger socio-political commentaries, particularly the way Kakkar develops a narrative trajectory trying to gauge the impediments to a seamless and harmonious relationship between the two nations. I suggest that Kenigsberg recognises *Filmistaan's* overall unconventional approach to Indo-Pak relations, particularly in the context of Indian cinema. Since the more common treatment of Indo-Pak related issues in mainstream Indian cinema comprises broadly of hackneyed portrayals, replete with anti-Pakistan rhetoric. The cinematic stereotypes usually found are anti-Pakistan and tend to be:

> Full of anti-Pakistan venom, enabling you to leave as a pride-filled Indian, armed with more information about everything that is wrong about your neighbour. That's where the second surprise came in. Filmistaan totally defies norms of the 'anti-other' nationalistic brand of cinema.[364]

Kakkar's choice to create a completely contrasting narrative to deal with these problematic themes is acknowledged by critic Paloma Sharma as a 'successful juxtaposition of art and *Filmistaan* is successful in its juxtaposition of art and extremism, of freedom and fear.'[365] Although, it's treatment broadly avoids

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[362] *Filmistaan,* dir. by Nitin Kakkar, (Satellite Pictures, Pvt Ltd., 2012).

[363] B. Kenigsberg, '*Filmistaan*: A Bollywood Take on Indo-Pak Relations. directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *New your Times*. June 2014, < https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/06/movies/filmistaan-a-bollywood-take-on-indo-pakistani-relations.html. > [accessed on 21st January 2016].

[364] N. Shendurnikar, 'India, Pakistan and Filmistaan, Filmistaan directed by Nitin Kakkar,' in *Aman Ki Asha.com.* June 2014. < http://amankiasha.com/?p=3735.> [accessed on 23rd January 2016].

[365] Paloma Sharma, 'Review: *Filmistaan* is absolutely flawless', directed by Nitin Kakkar.' *Rediff.com.* June 2014. < https://www.rediff.com/movies/report/review-filmistaan-is-absolutely-flawless/20140606.htm> [accessed 1st July 2016].

predictable melodrama to address Indo-Pak relations, in favour of a more balanced interpretation of this problematic subject. There are a couple of problematic instances that have not really been commented upon. The climax of the film shows Aftab and Sunny running blindly toward the Indian side of the border, amidst a shower of bullets. As the speeches of the first leaders of the two nations play out in the background, I observe that crossing over into India for Aftab and Sunny signifies freedom. In contrast Pakistan is shown riddled with extremists who are against the fostering of any kind of constructive relationship or dialogue between the nations. I trace this depiction back to Partition, as the root of this deep-seated acrimony, which Indian cinema mirrors.

This brings me to the important aspect of Indo-Pak relations explored through the strong presence of Partition memories in the film. I observe that this important narrative feature has not been highlighted among the film's prominent reviews. Although *Filmistaan* uses Partition references to underline its continuing relevance to the national discourses of both nations, I note the absence of a cohesive analysis of this integral narrative thread. Even though essentially *Filmistaan's* approach to Partition is very subtle, it is focussed on exploring this historic moment as a wistful and nostalgic recollection of memories. Hence, the emotional memory exchange between Sunny and the doctor is an essential and impactful inclusion.

It is noteworthy that even though critics appreciate the sensitivity with which Kakkar presents Partition memories through this sequence but the broader significance of these memories is limited to just this sequence. Therefore, this oversight is symptomatic of a prevalent silence that accompanies any comprehensive dialogue surrounding Partition. Reviewers repeatedly comment on the treatment of references to mainstream Indian cinema or 'Bollywood' as it is popularly referred to and how it serves as a reminder of cultural similarities, facilitates Indo-Pak camaraderie and drives Sunny's mimicry. The commemorative thread of Partition memories is rarely commented upon, film critic Taran Adarsh, I observe is one of the few who hint at the strong underlying presence of Partition and Indo-Pak relations:

Filmistaan may appear as yet another film that looks at the popularity of Hindi films in the neighbouring country but scratch the surface and you realize that it highlights the bonding between an Indian and a Pakistani wonderfully, communicating strong signals of love, friendship and brotherhood between the two nationalities.[366]

Moreover, Kakkar strategically keeps dominant political and military perspectives away from the idealistic hopes of characters focussed on the furthering peace, brotherhood and cooperation between the two nations. At the same time, Kakkar's construction of mostly congenial and affable characters, designed to support an entertaining narrative, notably makes way for discrepancies in the script. Hence, several reviewers comprehensively identify and discuss these 'loopholes.'[367] A prominent criticism is of the kidnapping of Sunny, as the film does not answer some of the most relevant and obvious questions. Critic Bobby Singh discusses this loophole:

What was the actual reason of kidnapping, how was the warning tape used which they shot after making so much effort and what did the shooting crew do after finding one of their members missing?[368]

Singh's observations are relevant, as surprisingly there is absolutely no information of any reaction to Sunny's kidnapping. Also, he observes that Aftab adopting a pragmatic outlook and refusing to partake in any attempts by Sunny to escape is much more plausible. Rather than Aftab's overly emotional promise to help Sunny across the border, an action that jeopardises his life and the safety of his family. However, according to film critic Suhani Singh, Kakkar's preoccupation with mainstream

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[366]Taran Adarsh, '*Filmistaan*: Review, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *BollywoodHungama.com*. 2nd June 2014<https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movie/filmistaan/critic-review/>[accessed 25th September 2015].

[367]Bobby Singh, '*Filmistaan*: Review', directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *BobbyTalksCinema.com*. June 2014 <http://www.bobbytalkscinema.com/recentpost/FILMISTAAN-And-this-small-ad-1287 > [accessed 28th September 2016].

[368]Taran Adarsh, '*Filmistaan*: Review, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *BollywoodHungama.com*. 2nd June 2014<https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movie/filmistaan/critic-review/>[accessed 25th September 2015].

Indian cinema and utilisation of its tropes essentially provides a plausible explanation for these lapses:

> Like Hindi movies, which to be enjoyed require audiences to set aside logic, Filmistaan also requires the same occasionally. The gravity of Sunny's situation doesn't come across because nobody seems to be concerned that he is missing - neither the film's crew nor the Indian army or the Border Security Force. This anomaly perhaps has to do with Kakkar's decision to focus his story around four characters in a Pakistani village, but the parts of terrorists are underwritten.[369]

Therefore, many critics explain these breaks in logic, as Kakkar's inability to strike a balance between creating realistic scenarios while embracing a more mainstream fiction inspired treatment. The narrative style Kakkar adopts reflects the mainstream cinema style of storytelling that *Filmistaan* pays homage to. It is the type of cinema known for its excesses in drama, characterisations, crafting implausible scenarios and endings; all of which are less focussed on tying up loose ends. I suggest that the simplicity of *Filmistaan's* script goes hand in hand with its propensity to take certain creative liberties. According to film critic Sudhish Kamath this delicate balance is difficult for Kakkar to maintain, as he tries 'to be realistic and funny at the same time' and aptly describes *Filmistaan* as a 'tightrope walk.'[370] Kamath notes:

> The makers falter a little, and the narrative wobbles quite a bit in the second half. And soon, the makers decide that they had enough of realism, jump off the rope, and go all out filmy to justify the film's title — almost like an afterthought so that the ending feels botched up. Is feel-good alone enough to sustain a film's pace?[371]

His observation criticises the sudden shift in pace and the heightening of melodrama. The film almost hurriedly reaches the end, which belies the subtle and nuanced

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[369]Suhani Singh, 'Movie Review: *Filmistaan* is engaging, but just not enough', irected by Nitin Kakkar,' *IndiaToday.com*. June 2014. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/movie-review-filmistaan-sharib-hashmi-sunahi-singh-nitn-kakkar/1/365511.html > [accessed on 16th July 2016].

[370]Sudhish Kamath, 'Review: *Filmistaan: For the love of cinema.',* directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *TheHindu.com*. June 2014. <http://www.thehindu.com/features/cinema/cinema-reviews/filmistaan-for-the-love-of-cinema/article6092735.ece> [accessed 12th June 2016].

[371]Ibid.

narration up until the climax. I note that conceptualising a plot tackling serious Indo-Pak issues without being serious enough is in itself a controversial choice and by choosing humour, Kakkar makes an unchartered foray into the exploration of a political situation that is perpetually in a state of flux. Moreover, Kakkar repeatedly presents situations that try to humanise terrorists and has even been accused of trivialising the complexities attached with terrorism.[372] Critic Bobby Singh raises issues with the conciliatory tone the film uses to address sensitivities of terrorism:

> Above all, the writer-director seems hell-bent on showing terrorists as soft-hearted people. Now, what was that for? Can we so easily forget and forgive the way these people have attacked Indians irrespective of gender, age and religion? Why show even this much lip-sympathy to them just for a few laurels?[373]

On the one hand, I observe that this 'soft-hearted' attitude is exceptionally vulnerable to reproach, after terror attacks in India and regular border clashes. On the other hand, I note the ability of the film to take a compassionate look at terrorists, their origin and the long-term effects of exposure to extremist rhetoric, as adding an important dimension to the film. It is noteworthy that Kakkar tries to present well-rounded characters, not confined to stereotypical expectations from terrorist and hostage plots. He tries to explore an outlook that encourages empathetic reactions from the audience as they gradually learn the backstory of one of the terrorist's Jawaad. In this case, I find that it is Sunny's characterisation, his affability, spirit and innocence, that lends plausibility to this empathetic exchange. I discuss the resurfacing of Jawaad's traumatic childhood memories as providing the narrative with a cruicial moment of pause, encouraging the audience to look at terrorism from different standpoints. Critic Veenu Singh recognizes *Filmistaan's* fundamental placement of itself as a neutral space. Kakkar conceives it as no man's land that highlights commonalities rather than

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[372]Bobby Singh, '*Filmistaan*: Review', directed by Nitin Kakkar,' *BobbyTalksCinema.com*. June 2014 <http://www.bobbytalkscinema.com/recentpost/FILMISTAAN-And-this-small-ad-1287 > [accessed 28th September 2016].
[373]Ibid.

division, a neutrality consistently depicted as a resolute reminder of 'what we share in common.'[374] Singh says:

> This is a film about friendships that are rarely nourished because an agenda of hatred and animosity dictates how we look at each other. Films are just part of the media with the potential to connect people on both sides.[375]

Through this observation Singh distinguishes cinema from the agenda setting role performed by mass media. His perspective is based on a broad assumption crediting films like *Filmistaan* with the 'potential to connect people on both sides.'[376] In conjunction, film scholar Nidhi Shendurnikar describe cinema as a 'cultural force' and recognises *Filmistaan* as a message-oriented film that 'can go a long way towards building positive opinion on both sides.[377] Moreover, Shendurnikar endorses *Filmistaan* for not being held 'hostage to nationalistic sentiments that appeals to people irrespective of their nationalities.'[378] I suggest that envisioning such a constructive role for cinema is similar to Landsberg's perspective, whereby she also qualifies cinema with a capacity to present thought-provoking scenarios. Landsberg advocates that cinema be seen as an entity with the potential to encourage and inspire social change.[379] Even though I do not agree with Landsberg's complex ascriptions of the socio-political role of cinema, it does encourage closer examinations of layered narratives like *Filmistaan.*

This chapter attempts to analyse *Filmistaan* as an inspired tribute, enabling an entertaining treatment of sensitive themes. I suggest that the film presents a treatment illustrative of the tangible influence of mainstream cinema, while interweaving it with Partition memories. It is significant that the presence and inclusion of Partition

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[374]Veenu Singh interview of Nitin Kakkar, dir. of *Filmistaan*, '*Filmistaan* has no stars because it is about real people: director Nitin Kakkar', *Hindustan Times*, Brunch, 5th June 2014. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/filmistaan-has-no-stars-because-it-is-about-real-people-director-nitin-kakkar/story-wHfR7GRKvb9mu3THut3TYK.html.> [accessed 20th October 2016].
[375]Ibid.
[376]Ibid.
[377]Nidhi Shendurnikar, 'India, Pakistan and *Filmistaan',* for Aman ki Asha, 25th June 2014, <http://amankiasha.com/india-pakistan-and-filmistaan/> [accessed June 10th, 2016].
[378]Ibid.
[379]Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004) p. 53.

memories in its narrative is symptomatic of a sustained cultural and generational interest in this shared history. It identifies a shift in the cinematic expression of these memories from reconstructive chronicles focussed in history, to a more current perspective on the division as well as its generational consequences.

Kakkar has repeatedly stated that through this film he attempts to present a perspective that could possibly encourage individuals or even generations that are willing to look ahead while embracing their past. I note that the past is not singularly used as a historical reference or memory of one event; instead it envelops an entire gamut of a shared culture between the two nations. Protagonists Sunny and Aftab mirror a generational embodiment with the past, present and future of Partition. They question rigidly held mind-sets and vocalise fresh perspectives as they search and forge a new path. Their bid to escape becomes a literal and symbolic manifestation of the almost habitual prejudices and stereotypes perpetuated on both sides of the border since Independence. In this way Kakkar tries to systematically debunk these by accentuating commonalities, particularly by introducing commercial Indian cinema as powerful unifying entity. His words reflect a faith in Indian cinema as a platform for entertainment and an entity instrumental in facilitating change:

> I am proud to be a part of this cinematic heritage. I wish we continue making good films and evolve in the process. Cinema can influence minds and I hope the new filmmakers use it to voice their opinions and entertain the audience too. The focus is not only to make a film, the focus is to make a difference – if even a few minds are changed, the purpose is solved.[380]

Kakkar's statement elucidates his utilisation of cinema as a dynamic medium to explore political, social and cultural transformations in myriad ways. It simultaneously reminds me of the conceptualisation of *Filmistaan,* wherein a simple hostage drama is engaged in creating a utopian construct. The film envisages a symbolic neutral space between Pakistan and India, which is inclusive and integrates

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[380]Nitin Kakkar interviewed by L. Melwani, 'Crossing Borders with Nitin Kakkar in Filmistaan', in *LassiwithLavina.com*. June 2013. <http://www.lassiwithlavina.com/thebuzz/crossing-borders-with-nitin-kakkar-in-filmistan/html> [accessed June 10th, 2016].

through people's shared passion for cinema.[381] Kakkar postulates that the existence of such a place might prompt individuals to rethink their deep-seated perceptions and re-engage with their memories. At the same time, it is significant that the production and subsequent dissemination of Kakkar's optimistic perspective is made in the years 2011 and 2012. A phase that was actively encouraging of a positive Indo-Pak media interexchange surrounded by a favourable political and diplomatic environment between the two countries. However, it is equally significant to point out that the waning of this positive socio-political climate in the subsequent years, does limit the film's lasting impact, in spite of the filmmaker's stated intention that:

> This thought is not restricted to India-Pakistan Issue. It is relevant to all the countries, which are divided into smaller parts. It is a human story. It is relevant every time a human stop being humane.[382]

Therefore, I surmise that *Filmistaan* is indeed a brave attempt at looking toward a future that may be ready to heal from the past. It tries to rekindle the hope for a time when boundaries will pave the way to foster peace and cooperation. The film encourages the audience to become part of *Filmistaan's* enticing cinematic world, which is a place brimming with infinite utopian possibilities standing stand independently of any borders. It constitutes a distinctive cinematic effort to explore memories utilising the popularity of mainstream Indian cinema, where the focus is shifted from political tensions to cultural harmonies, envisioning a future that may be ready to heal from the past. Observably the secular leanings and premise of this film are becoming more relevant as tensions between the two nations continue to escalate, making it a stand alone entity among the recent cinematic body of work exploring Indo-Pak relations. Therefore, even while the film largely romanticizes Partition and its memories, it attests to a continued cultural relevance of this historiography in contemporary Indian cinema.

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[381]Hindustan: is a geographic term for the northern/northwestern for the Indian subcontinent.
[382]R.M. Vijayakar, *Filmistaan*: Heady Brew of Terrorism, Comedy and 'Bollywood', Review of *Filmistaan* directed by Nitin Kakkar.' *India.west.com.* 4th June 2014, <http://www.indiawest.com/entertainment/bollywood/movie_reviews/filmistaan-heady-brew-of-terrorism-comedy-bollywood/article_93d91552-ec2c-11e3-9e14-001a4bcf887a.html > [accessed 20th October 2016].

Chapter 3   *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013):

Flashbacks of Partition

Based on the life of Indian athlete Milkha Singh, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* presents the story of the Indian nation through his journey. The turbulence caused by Partition in his early years extends to the trials and triumphs of his illustrious career. 'Milkha ban gaya India' (Milkha becomes India), this dialogue is spoken by protagonist Milkha Singh and embodies the literal and symbolic essence of this narrative.[383] The film provides the audience with a glimpse into Partition through Milkha Singh's memories and experiences as a survivor.

> In 1947 while many were celebrating the independence of India, there were many who were mourning Partition. Lakhs of families became homeless overnight and forever. One of which was Milkha, who's village was in Pakistan. He was very young then, maybe 10 or 12 years old when he somehow managed to save his life and reach Delhi all alone, completely alone.[384]

This extract from *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, poignantly recounts Milkha Singh's past. Director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra reconstructs the violence perpetrated during Partition, the impact of the displacement and long-term struggles of its survivors. I analyse the cinematic treatment of memories that are tailored to include all the structural elements of a mainstream Indian film. The film's high production value, its songs, cast as well as the overall creative reimagining of actual incidents comprises an intriguing combination to study. It steers Milkha Singh's story through the multiple memory threads of pre and post Partition times. As a biography, the film contends with challenges of representing a well-known public figure. However, Mehra does not consider *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* solely a biography or a biopic. Instead, he talks about it as a 'movie on Partition.'[385] He emphasises that the film focuses on the 'human story' of Milkha Singh:

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[383]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).
[384]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).
[385]Indo-Asian News Service. 'Who to cast as Milkha, gave Rakeysh Mehra sleepless nights.' *Ndtv.com,* 26th June 2013,<http://movies.ndtv.com/bollywood/who-to-cast-as-milkha-gave-rakeysh-mehra-sleepless-nights-633760.> [accessed 5th October 2017].

Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, more than a biopic, was a movie on the hatred of Partition, the hatred Milkha Singh had to live with. I was trying to heal those wounds more than trying to make a biopic.[386]

Mehra talks about 'the hatred of Partition' and tries to heal the wounds it precipitated through this 'human story.'[387] Besides, the mainstream narrative treatment allows Mehra to take creative liberties while interpreting the memories, characters and incidents. This chapter examines the different manifestations of Partition trauma, memorialisation and their cinematic expressions in detail.

The film is essentially a series of flashbacks interictally crafted as they move among memory narrations of Milkha Singh and other characters. It begins with the most famous and controversial aspect of Milkha Singh's life, which is his loss in the 400-metre final race at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. Milkha Singh was already a prolific athlete by this time and started the race as one of the favourites for gold. In this incident, he is running in the lead for the first 200 metres, but suddenly and inexplicably, he turns to glance behind him. He slows down, loses momentum and finishes fourth. Losing on an international platform like the Olympics severely affected him and his popularity among people in India. His performance is castigated across the country, especially his decision to look back. Mehra provides an intriguing explanation for this action, connecting it with Milkha's experience of Partition. I discuss this interpretation in detail later in the chapter. Before entering the discussion of his memory interpretation, I present the narrative structure of the film, which is a compound movement from one memory to another.

Milkha, crushed by his loss at the Olympics, goes incommunicado upon his return to India. Then the story moves on to a sports tournament being organised between India and Pakistan by the heads of state of the two countries. This event is an attempt to promote peace and cooperation in the aftermath of Partition riddled by acrimony, wars and conflicts. The refusal by India's star athlete Milkha Singh to go to Pakistan to participate and lead the Indian contingent in the games threatens to derail this diplomatic effort. This refusal becomes a catalyst, which the director uses to bring three characters important to Milkha's

[386]Tatsam Mukherjee, Interview of Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,'Mirzya director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag was a movie on partition, not a biopic,'*Indiatoday*, 26th September 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/mirzya-special/story/rakeysh-omprakash mehra-mirzya-director-bhaag-milkha-bhaag-interview-343189-2016-09-26.> [accessed 12th October 2017].
[387]Ibid.

life together to undertake a journey. The then Prime Minister of India (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) entrusts Milkha's former coach Gurudev Singh, his current coach Ranveer Singh and Mr Wadhwa (close aid to the then Prime Minister) with the responsibility to meet Milkha and convince him to change his decision. These characters undertake a figurative and literal train journey to understand Milkha's present through his past. His first coach Gurudev starts his non-linear foray into the story of Milkha's life. These indirect memories are simultaneously narrated to his audience – Ranveer Singh and Mr Wadhwa as well as the cinema audience. The narrative gradually builds up to try and explain Milkha's actions, reactions and motivations.

Gurudev starts by recounting the first time he met Milkha as a young recruit of the Indian Army. Gurudev discovers Milkha's athletic talent during the time Milkha was a recruit. Under Gurudev's encouragement, guidance and training, Milkha broke the national record in one race and this major victory propels Milkha's induction into the national team. These flashbacks are interwoven complexly as they shuttle from Gurudev's recollections to Milkha's memories. The memories navigate through happier times of his childhood before the division as well as the trauma he endured and witnessed during Partition riots. These accounts extend to include the impact on Milkha in the aftermath of the separation. They include the murder of his family, brutal displacement and subsequently, how Milkha as a young boy is forced to fight for survival in the refugee camps. The memories also show Milkha's formative years spent as a petty criminal, through exposure to unsavoury elements during his time in the refugee camps.

Apart from his coaches Milkha Singh's relationships with the female characters in the film are significant. Milkha's relationship with his sister Ishri, as well as the romantic relationships with Biro and Stella, are significant and emerge at different points in the narrative. I note that the female characters receive the least screentime in the film and a couple of picturesque songs mainly marks his romantic interludes. Despite that, these relationships form significant features of the film, and I discuss them in detail later in the chapter. Interestingly, throughout the film, memories of the trauma he faced during Partition consistently resurface at pivotal junctures, and as the film progresses durations of the traumatic memory flashbacks keep getting longer. Alongside memories of his personal life, the film follows the trajectory of his athletic career. These recollections are interspersed with visuals of the gruelling training Milkha underwent, the national and international races

he participated in. Therefore, the narrative presents an intriguing amalgamation of the memories of different incidents and recollections.

In turn, such a multi-dimensional, multipart narration explains the lengthy 188 minutes or 3 hour-long duration of the film, as this vast canvas is created to do justice to all the different phases of Milkha Singh's life. During his career Mehra has directed, written and produced many films and is considered a leading filmmaker of contemporary mainstream Indian cinema. *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is produced by his own production house-Rakeysh Omprakash Pictures in collaboration with the Viacom18 network. Viacom18 is a joint venture between the American multi-media conglomerate Viacom Inc. and the Indian Reliance Industries owned- Network 18 Group, gradually making it India's largest and fastest-growing entertainment networks.[388] Such large-scale collaborations are usually found among big-budget mainstream Indian films. In this case it is reflected in its budget which is approximately 50 crores INR equivalent to 500 million USD.[389] In addition, Mehra tries to stay authentic to the factual recreation of the locations, the look and feel of that era. The film's production involves recreating the years from 1947 through to the 1960s. While Mehra tries hard to absorb crucial places, persons and experiences in the film, he admits that recreating the incidents, characters and that time period posed a big challenge:

> The film is set in an era when I wasn't even born. So the toughest part of shooting a biopic was understanding how people would react to events that played out at the time.[390]

As a result, many characters and incidents have been re-interpreted and re-imagined. This makes the production of the film an important aspect since it is indicative of its narrative treatment. The film is shot in various locations in North India, including Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Ladakh as well as in locations abroad with a considerable portion shot in

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[388]BT Online Bureau, New Delhi, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* box office collections top Rs 102 crore,' in *BusinessToday.com,* 12th August 2013 <https://www.businesstoday.in/lifestyle/off-track/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-box-office-collections-cross-102-crore/story/197575.html> [accessed 12th January 2017].
[389]Ibid.
[390]Preetika Rana and Aarti Virani, Interview of director Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra, 'Making the Flying Sikh's Biopic,' for *The Wall Street Journal,* 12th July 2013, <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/07/12/making-the-flying-sikhs-biopic/ > [accessed 17th January 2017].

Australia. During various interviews Mehra highlights the 'authenticity' he attempts to weave into the film's narrative.[391]

> Almost 90 percent of the movie has been shot on location. We made a film about a real person. Hence, we had to shoot on locations. To show and depict his life, we had to shoot on location. There aren't really any disadvantages. These kinds of movies are shot on locations.[392]
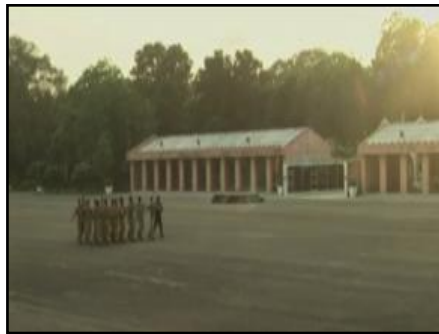
Figure 44

Figure 45

Figures 44 and 45 above, show the Rajputana Rifles Ground at the Delhi Cantonment in New Delhi where sequences of Milkha's time spent at the army were shot. These sequences represent Milkha's early years in the army, comprising the years that finally instilled a sense of discipline in the young man. The army eventually allowed him to race and brought him in contact with his first coach Gurudev. This part of the film shows the camaraderie he shared with his fellow soldiers as well as the first few crucial races of his career. Furthermore, the art direction of the film is extensive, considering Mehra chose to depict Milkha's time before and after the Partition. The figure 46, below depicts Milkha's home and family before Partition struck. I suggest that a deliberate sepia tint is given to these memory reconstructions to emphasise that period.

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[391]'An Exclusive interview with Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra the man behind '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaa*g,' for *Punjab 2000.com*, July 2013, <https://punjab2000.com/an-exclusive-interview-with-rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-the-man-behind-bhaag-milkha-bhaag/.> Punjab 2000.com. [accessed 2nd May 2017].
[392]Ibid.

Figure 46

These sequences portray the safe, secure and happy days of his childhood (Figure 46). In these memory flashbacks Milkha is a cheerful eleven or twelve-year-old boy. He is also the youngest, most adored and pampered amongst his family and relatives. He belongs to a place called Govindpura situated in a small district in Multan, which was a large province in Punjab before Partition. However, for logistical expediency, Mehra reconstructs Milkha's home in Firozepur, a district in Punjab in North India. During Partition the province of Multan came under Pakistan since Multan's majority population were Muslim. As a result, the Hindu and Sikh families were forced to leave due to the widespread threat of violence and persecution by rioting mobs.

Mehra depicts how Milkha, a Sikh and his family are directly affected by this event. His father and other clan members chose to stay and fight the mob instead of leaving their homes. As a result, during the riots, almost all of them are killed except Milkha who luckily manages to escape. Mehra reconstructs these incidents in the film and goes on to portray the aftermath of Partition through the eyes of a bewildered, scared, traumatized boy who witnessed the murder of his family. The film follows Milkha as he makes his way all alone from his small village to the refugee camps in Delhi in India. Mehra chooses to recreate the location of the refugee camp in Delhi at the Tughlaqabad Fort (figure 47 and 48). This recreation in Delhi lends a certain degree of authenticity to the narrative.

Figure 47

Figure 48

The sequences filmed in this reconstructed refugee camp extensively represents the appalling conditions of the camps. Refugees face a constant paucity of food, space, medical care and basic amenities. This portrayal accentuates the scarcity as the survivors are still grappling with the loss of their loved ones, homes and livelihood. The young Milkha (figure 49) mirrors the emotional pain of refugees as well as the sudden overwhelming bleakness of his surroundings and circumstances. The sepia tone of the scenes in these flashbacks is an aspect I will be taking up later in more detail. Mehra includes Milkha's days as a coal thief in the film, and to recreate them actual trains are used in these sequences. (Figure 50).

Figure 49

Figure 50

Trains are an essential motif in the film. They are featured regularly and are tools to denote journeys and transitions from one state of being to another. Mehra's use of different locations both in India and abroad, is an effective way of demonstrating Milkha Singh's life as a magnum opus. Scholar Preeti Kumar correlates visuals of rivers, mountains and other territories in biography films to the function of a nationalist ideology:

Landscape becomes important, and the emerging consciousness of the nation can be seen in the attention paid to spatial details of a visually infinite panorama. (In *Bhaag Milkha* Bhaag) The vastness of India is foregrounded by the practice of naming – The physical representation of India – rivers, mountains, states – is more rugged and extensive than beautiful; national space is depicted in the permanent aspects of topography, not the ephemeral facets of nature.[393]

Kumar aptly discusses the rugged and majestic locales of the valley of Ladakh in Jammu Kashmir (North India) chosen to recreate Milkha's intensive training is an important inclusion. I agree that showcasing the length and breadth of India, attributes a larger symbolic meaning to his training, of superhuman efforts being made to bring glory to the country. The harsh terrain of these mountains simultaneously celebrates his athleticism with an overriding nationalist spirit (Figure 51). Undergoing this arduous military style training depicts both sides of his persona, that of the soldier and the athlete.

Figure 51

The lengthy training montage takes place in Ladakh, which is known for its beauty as well as its extreme weather conditions.[394] It is cold, windy and the oxygen levels are low due its altitude and these aspects emphasize the gruelling level of physical training Milkha is undergoing, which aims to stretch the human limits of endurance. This training took place after his loss at his first international tournament the Melbourne Olympics and showcased as the turning point of Milkha's athletic career. As Milkha trains with an unparalleled level of

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[393]Preeti Kumar, 'Reconfiguring India: Narrating the Nation through Great Men Biopics', *The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film,* Vol.II, Issue I, (2014), pp 39-58, (p 41) <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.2.1.04.pdf> [accessed 12th July 2017].

[394]Preeti Kumar, 'Reconfiguring India: Narrating the Nation through Great Men Biopics', *The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film,* Vol.II, Issue I, (2014), pp 39-58. (p 42) <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.2.1.04.pdf> [accessed 12th July 2017].

dedication and discipline, challenging his mind and body, it brings him closer to achieving his aim of becoming a world-class athlete. From this point in the film, he goes on to win at many international tournaments. Therefore, apart from the many locations in India, Mehra shot necessary sequences abroad. For instance, the scenes of the Melbourne Olympic Games is filmed in Australia. The Melbourne Cricket Ground is used to film the race and portions of the Indian team's training. A picturesque beach location in Australia is used to shoot a romantic song between Milkha and an Australian girl Stella (Figures 52 and 53).

Figure 52

Figure 53

The use of so many locations both in India and abroad reflects the freedom that big-budget commercial films enjoy. However, the film struggled initially to find financial backing and thereby compelled Mehra to step into the role of a producer. In an interview, Mehra talks about the challenges of finding finance 'it is still very difficult to make a non-formula film without producing it.'[395] The controversial subject choice, focussed on portraying the sensitive memories of Partition through the life of Milkha Singh, proved challenging to find financiers. He mentions that the unconventional casting of the lead actor also adversely affected the perception of commercial viability for prospective investors. Therefore, in addition to the production structure, the film's cast comprises an integral input in mainstream Indian cinema.

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[395]An Exclusive interview with Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra the man behind '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*,' for *Punjab 2000.com*, July 2013, <https://punjab2000.com/an-exclusive-interview-with-rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-the-man-behind-bhaag-milkha-bhaag/.> Punjab 2000.com. [accessed 2nd May 2017].

Mehra admits that it took almost two and a half years to cast the lead actor.[396] Ultimately actor Farhan Akhtar was chosen to essay the role of Milkha Singh, which is an unconventional choice. Even though he is a well-known actor, Akhtar's casting did not make for a very popular choice for a commercial film. His unconventionality stems from his unusual career trajectory and his work in offbeat films. Akhtar started out as a film director; he has helmed some of the most memorable, acclaimed and profitable mainstream films. However, he took a surprising decision to act and made his acting debut at the age of forty. The success he found as an actor gradually shifted strengthened his pursuit of a career in acting, and he has not turned to direction since then.

In *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, Akhtar needed to represent a young competing athlete in his prime and convincingly portray a Sikh. So far, Akhtar had predominantly played urbane, anglicised roles, which makes him an unusual choice to play the protagonist in such a project. [397] This portrayal required Akhtar to speak fluent Punjabi and demanded a complete physical transformation. He had to pick up a native Punjabi accent that reflected Milkha Singh's background. Additionally, in order to convince audiences of the character's athleticism, Akhtar underwent extensive physical training to represent a young competing athlete in his prime. This uncanny resemblance between the young Milkha Singh and Akhtar became a subject of elaborate discussions and conjectures after the release of the film's first look (Figure 54).

Figure 54

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[396]Indo-Asian News Service, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*' is not a sports film: Rakeysh Omprakash', *News18.com.*, June 2013 <http://www.news18.com/news/india/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-is-not-a-sports-film-rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-617441.html.> [accessed 10th September 2017].
[397]Punjabi: a language spoken and associated with people who are from Punjab, a state in North India.

Noting the efforts of actor Farhan Akhtar, film critic Taran Adarsh says, 'Right from his chiselled, athletic physique, the hair, the body language et al, Farhan has pushed himself beyond limits to illustrate the eminent and renowned character of Milkha Singh with precision.'[398] Upon observing the film's posters and trailer, it became apparent that the actor had worked hard to ensure that he convincingly plays the part of a young, Punjabi athlete. As a result, Akhtar's physical transformation became a major focal point of the film before and after its release. I elaborate on this portrayal of masculinity and its influence on the narrative in the course of this chapter.

Actor Sonam Kapoor cast as Biro opposite Farhan Akhtar, is mainly known for her glamorous persona and roles. Her casting makes for a surprising choice as the role, is brief and a non-glamorous female lead. However, even in a brief role her presence in the film targets her vast fan base. Therefore, choosing actors with an appeal among the audience is one of the most common strategies followed in Indian cinema while casting for big budget film productions. This is especially relevant to a film like *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* which is backed by a substantial investment.

Depicting the many phases of Milkha Singh's life raised the requirement of many actors in small but crucial roles. Many well-known and critically acclaimed actors are cast in these roles: actor Pavan Malhotra plays the role of Milkha Singh's first coach-Gurudev Singh, Divya Dutta as Milkha Singh's sister- Ishri Kaur, Art Malik plays Milkha Singh's father, Prakash Raj is the Army chief and Dilip Tahil as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. To portray Milkha Singh's national-level coach (Ranveer Singh) former cricketer, Yograj Singh is cast. Although Yograj Singh is not a professional actor, his background as a sportsperson reflects in his body language, making him another noteworthy and unconventional choice. The production and cast inputs mirror the scale of the film's budget. It allowed Mehra to engage acclaimed actors for brief appearances and enabled an extensive production. All these aspects combine to reconstruct and reimagine the memories of Milkha Singh's life.

After examining these inputs, I take a close look at the posters and trailer of the film. It is noteworthy that the posters do not allude to the Partition in any way. The focus is on

[398]Taran Adarsh, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*: Film Review, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *BollywoodHungama.com*. July, 2013, < http://www.bollywoodhungama.com/movie/bhaag-milkha-bhaag/critic-review/>[accessed on 25th June 2016]

showcasing the athlete's robust features, which connects with the expectation of a sportsperson's journey. The posters in figures 55 and 56, primarily highlight and in many ways celebrate Milkha Singh's physicality and athletic prowess. Relevance of the physical aspects of Milkha's character in the film extends beyond just replicating the athleticism of a sportsperson. The notions of masculinity and national pride are intricately intertwined in the film. As the film is a detailed account of a male survivor, it simultaneously raises questions about male represension. I discuss this aspect later in this chapter and explore it in chapter four, to compare with the way women survivors are represented as well as their connect with the nation and the national discourse.
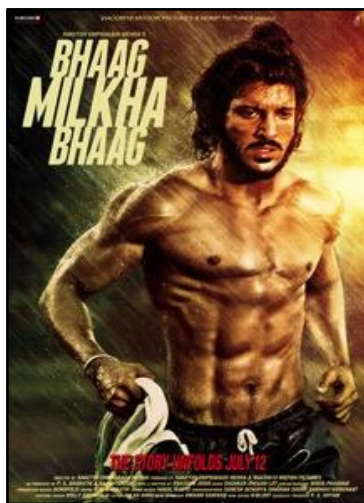
Figure 55   Figure 56

The other two posters below, in figures 57 and 58 depict the trajectory of Milkha Singh's life in different ways. The first (Figure 57) shows the heroine Sonam Kapoor and highlights the romance between the protagonists, the other poster (Figure 58) shows Milkha in different stages of his life: as a boy, a young man, a lover and finally an athlete. It is noteworthy that the visuals offer no hint of the presence of Partition.

Figure 57

Figure 58

In contrast, the film's trailer does reveal that the film delves into Indo-Pak relations, since it starts with the image of a newspaper headline with Milkha Singh's quote (Figure 59) and an accompanying voiceover reading the headline: 'I will not go to Pakistan.'[399]

Figure 59.

This reference does not say anything specific about Partition, but its inference is implied. Even though friction with Pakistan is traceable to Partition as its source, still the trailer's reference to Pakistan does not automatically imply that the film would be broaching this subject. The reference to Pakistan does create a possibility that the film may be connected to Partition, but this hint is not clarified. I surmise that this strategy applied to the trailer may have been a clever device to keep the interest of the audience within the purview of a sports film, wherein the intense sports rivalry between the two nations is a well-known documented fact. It may also have helped Mehra overcome any reluctance on the part of the audience to watch a film that includes the highly sensitive subject of Partition. At the same time, the audience is made aware that the story is being told in retrospect. The events presented have already happened and that they belong to a different era.

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[399]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).

Hence, the narrative is pieced together through a series of flashbacks. They feature as memory recitations of protagonist Milkha Singh and his first coach Gurudev. Throughout the film, their memories intersect, overlap and in some instances suddenly move from narrator Gurudev's recollections to Milkha's memories. This chapter analyses the content and treatment of these memory presentations. To begin with, I scrutinise how the memories are digitized and archival footage is extensively used to convey the interconnections between personal and public histories. Memory scholars Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin while recognizing the power of technology, suggest that the way it is harnessed in flashbacks allows memories to navigate freely through a narrative. Therefore, I turn to the representation of trauma, depicted in the film through memory flashbacks and scrutinise them as a means of communicating memories. Milkha Singh is both a witness and a survivor of the violence and destruction wrought by Partition.

The flashbacks reflect a deep and lasting psychological impact of trauma, and even though he tries to bury and suppress the traumatic memories, the film shows that they resurface against his will. Making it important to understand what triggers these remembrances and what is it that Milkha wants to forget. Particularly since these memories constitute moments of intense violence and loss, studying their representation form a crucial part of my analysis. I analyse the role of female characters, the inclusion of mainstream tropes, songs and the overall dramatic structure of the film. I also study their influence on the placement, approach and emotional constitution of the flashbacks and end this chapter by taking a close look at the film's reception, which is indicative of the response garnered by a mainstream film featuring Partition.

3.1   Memory, archives and experiential sites

Memories in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, cover a gamut of Indian historical, social and political scenarios from the 1940s to the 1960s. The director, Rakeysh Mehra consistently changes their visual treatment, reiterating that the audience is accessing the incidents through different memory recitations. They are amalgamations of personal and public recollections. For instance, the film begins by presenting athlete Milkha Singh competing in the 1960 Rome Olympics race. Although, the year 1960 is presented as the

chronological starting point of the narrative but visually it is given a sepia tint. Therefore, even though the film began in 1960, Mehra establishes the film as a retrospective narrative. Wherein the overall chronological framework of the script is treated as a flashback. (Figure 60 and 61).

Figure 60

Figure 61

Starting the film with the most crushing and controversial loss of Milkha Singh's long, athletic career is an interesting choice. The filmmaker takes us through the spectacle that the public was witnessing at that time. The commentators introduce Milkha Singh as a well-known athlete in the international circuit, mentioning that he holds the previous world record and is a favourite to win the gold. Slowly homing into the nerves and tension Milkha is experiencing on the field. Then the race starts with Milkha in the lead (Figure 62).

Figure 62

Then this sequence combines what is visible to the public versus what Milkha is experiencing internally at that moment. Here only the cinema audience is privy to the sudden flashbacks Milkha is seeing while running, which prompts him to look back behind. This move proves to be a costly lapse as Milkha loses precious time, which ultimately costs him the Olympic medal. Initially, when Milkha is in the lead, the commentators are heard saying he is likely to win the first gold medal for India but after

he glances back, they are frantically asking why he did that, an action that clearly led to his loss (Figure 63).

Figure 63

Here the audience is privy to the glimpses of a violent incident that Milkha may have witnessed as a child. By choosing the Olympic race as the site of this memory resurfacing, the film shifts the focus from a crucial moment in India's sporting history to Milkha's personal history. The details of this incident are revealed gradually through flashbacks introduced at various points in the course of the film. The connection of these flashbacks with Partition form the crux of the narrative. I delve into the traumatic, psychological and visual representation dimensions of this memory later on in the chapter. Before that, I examine the intersection between broader cultural or public memory and their percolating significance found in flashbacks experienced by individuals on a personal level.

Alison Landsberg notes that understanding history can be facilitated through connections with personal memories and even traumas.[400] She suggests that the use of mass media to transfer memories prosthetically mitigates the distance between the individual and collective.[401] The starting sequence of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* establishes this convergence of micro and macro contexts as well as public and private memory domains. Susannah Radstone concurs with Landsberg's observation and notes the malleability of memories across media:

> Memories have the capacity to emerge through many different media: individual consciousness and state institution, local legend and official memorial, family

[400]Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004) p. 52.
[401]Ibid. p 53.

stories, newspapers, television. Memory in these discussions is visibly both an individual and a collective possession, so to speak; it is shared, transmitted, expressed, in various and complicated ways.[402]

Radstone recognises the diversity of memory sources and the different ways they may be transmitted. Conjunctionally, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* demonstrates the movement of memories from Milkha's personal history and their seamless integration into a broader cultural context. Therefore, the role of media is integral to memory diffusions in the film. The images below (Figures 64 and 65) are of the press coverage after the 1960 Olympics. They provide glimpses into the public's reaction to the race and Milkha Singh's loss.

| Figure 64 | Figure 65 |

Their inclusion demonstrates the role media plays in recording and documenting moments of national importance. In this case, integrating actual newspaper coverage of the event into the narrative provides access to a modern audience to the public's reaction to this incident at that time. From the beginning of the film Mehra establishes that Milkha Singh's life and the impact of his memories are not purely limited to him. Milkha Singh is featured as a public figure and reflects the scrutiny he was subjected to at that time by the media. At the same time, the media persona of Milkha Singh the athlete is used to delve deeper into his personal life. The film utilizes a mixture of fact and fiction to re-imagine and re-construct the myriad recollections of Milkha Singh's life.

Scholar Vivian Sobchack supports the use of different memory and experience fragments to re-interpret history through a human story.[403] According to her, this 'democratization' encourages the development of a new historical consciousness, that fluidly engages with

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[402]Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone,'Introduction:Remembering suffering:trauma and history', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds), *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York:Routledge, 2003), p 101.
[403]Vivian Sobchack*, The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, (ed) , Vivian Sobchack, (New York: Routledge, 1995), p 40.

memory and history while communicating them to an audience.[404] I find Sobchack's perspective explains the significance of personalization of history and the fluidity it brings to the reading of history. Mainly, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* presents a personalized account of Partition history, which is supported by factual inputs from archives. Through the use of archives, the film incorporates broader socio-political contexts within personal remembrances. I have already mentioned the incorporation of newspaper headlines, in addition to these Mehra utilises audio-visual archives as well. He supplements and supports many reconstructed memories with archival material. For instance, actual footage of major international athletic events is incorporated in the film (Figures 66,67,68 and 69).

Figure 66

Figure 67

Figure 68

Figure 69

The reconstructive use of archives in these sequences became an interesting audio-visual interchange between the past and the present (Figures 66 to 69). Viewing the past through archives helps augment the historical authenticity of those events. On the one hand, it takes the audience belonging to a younger generation into a world of prominent national and international occurrences, to which they have no cultural or visual references. On the other hand, older generations can relive moments that constitute a part of their past. Hence, Landsberg's contention that cinema has the capacity to implant memories of

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[404]Ibid. p 42.

events unexperienced by audiences and previously unknown to them, supports this approach Mehra adopts.[405] Moreover, the contribution of technology is essential to the discussion of the prospective transference of prosthetic memories, therefore, Mehra's integration of press and digital archives provide a significant window or view into history. Memory scholar Maureen Turim specializes in analysing the role of flashbacks in cinema, and she makes an important observation regarding the use of archive footage.

> If flashbacks give us images of memory, the personal archives of the past, they also give us images of history, the shared and recorded past. In fact, flashbacks in film often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience.[406]

This extension is observable in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* as it enables a constant movement from the personal to the socio-political, national and even international experiences of India. The archives of the various sports events extend the context from the individual to the nation. They show Milkha representing India on various international platforms. His accomplishments become interlinked with notions of national pride. Simultaneously, archives supplement this connection with Partition, a vital moment of national significance.

A significant consideration of prosthetic memories and flashbacks is their presentation or representation. Hence, the use of sepia tones and the placement of archival footage are all integral aspects of this analysis. Radstone and Hodgkin support Turim and Landsberg's observations with regards to media's role in the transference of memories. At the same time, they specifically highlight trauma as an occurrence that forges a connection between the individual trauma and a 'larger social phenomena.'[407] They state that memories emerging from a character's 'personal archive' may simultaneously allude to 'images of history, the shared and recorded past' and this relationship is more pronounced while discussing major moments in history which may have traumatically affected people.[408] In *Contested Pasts,*

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[405]Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 22.
[406]Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in film: Memory & History*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p 24.
[407]Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone,'Introduction:Remembering suffering:trauma and history', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds), *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York:Routledge, 2003), p 101.
[408]Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in film: Memory & History*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p 24.

Radstone and Hodgkin put together examples of such moments from across the world that range from World War II accounts, Civil Wars and Apartheid, to name a few.[409] These historic events are acknowledged for their far-reaching consequences and their memories reach beyond the confines of the time of their occurrence.

Bhaag Milkha Bhaag presents Milkha's archive of personal memories in relation to the 'large-scale social and political history' of Partition and its ensuing consequences.[410] This is done by depicting journeys as an intrinsic theme and by using the train as a physical motif or manifestation of this transformative passage. The train represents both a physical movement and is symbolic of a more profound journey into history. It became the starting point of the audience's slow voyage into the recesses of Milkha's life. Figure 70, is an image of the train before the journey into this narrative begins.

Figure 70

Metaphorically the train represents time as well as a fluidly that allows the story to move back and forth in different directions. The movement from one context to another, from one narrator to another and even one flashback to another, is a central quality of this film's narrative. The image below (Figure 71) shows Mr Wadhwa, Gurudev and Ranveer Singh in the train travelling from Delhi to Chandigarh to meet Milkha. At the start, the train is reducing the distance between them and Milkha- the celebrated athlete. However, in the course of the journey the narration of memories brings them closer to Milkha- the individual.

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[409]Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone,'Introduction:Remembering suffering:trauma and history', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds), *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York:Routledge, 2003), p 102.
[410]Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in film: Memory & History*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p 30.

Figure 71

The journey transforms many pre-conceived notions of Milkha that may exist in public memory; revealing aspects of his personal life that are not part of the public domain. Through this journey the audience witnesses Milkha's transformative arc from a young boy, to army man and finally the athlete. The images below depict the first part of Milkha's journey, which brought him from Multan in Pakistan to India during the Partition. The archival visuals of overflowing trains shown in the images below help Mehra emphasise Milkha's arduous and traumatizing voyage. One he was forced to make all by himself at such a young age. On the right side of the images, the visuals used are from the archive footage recorded at the time of Partition.

Figure 72

Figure 73

Figure 74

The above images (Figure 72, 73 and 74) have a darker sepia tint, different from the one used for Milkha's happy childhood recollections. They have been digitally manipulated to combine the shot of Milkha with actual archival footage documented during Partition. The visuals of trains overflowing with people, their plight and appalling conditions are slowly revealed during this sequence. Mehra's strategy to combine the films visuals with archival footage presents a compelling visual montage, reiterating the ordeal, trauma and loss that not only Milkha and scores like him were forced to endure during Partition. Mehra uses these graphics to depict Milkha's train journey from Multan in Pakistan to Delhi in India. This graphic representation communicates the horror of the forced mass migration during Partition while maintaining the focus on the main character.

The film also documents Milkha's struggle at the refugee camps after Partition, where in order to combat the paucity of food, bullying and in order to survive Milkha joined a gang. They are all young boys who would steal coal from trains, which was a commodity in high demand during the 1940s and 1950s.

Figure 75

Figure 76

The metamorphosis visible in the images (Figures 75 and 76) shows Milkha as the coal-stealing boy, becoming a young man but one who is still living the same reckless life. Mehra used the same sepia tint to depict Milkha's childhood. This digital colour tone covers the time before, during and after the Partition. The visuals of Milkha's subsequent years as a young man are vibrantly coloured, a contrast visible in the two images. The train becomes a significant fixture in the film which links the past and the present. It symbolically represents the movement from the experiential sites of the past to their memory representations in the present.

This constant back and forth of memories is akin to a meandering journey across logics of time, place and persons. In addition, the key moments in the film, are also attached through journeys that characters undertake. Be it the long train journey Milkha takes from Pakistan to India or the one Gurudev, Wadhwa and Ranveer take to reach Chandigarh to meet Milkha. The train acts as an anchoring entity, which is there through all the accompanying emotional threads, playing a significant part in this whole recollective process. The film oscillates mainly between the recollections of Gurudev and Milkha's own memories, the significance of this interplay is associated with the convergence of memory and history. Turim suggests that such an association facilitates the examination of films 'as fragments of a cinematic discourse on the mind's relationship to the past and on the subject's relationship to telling his or her past.'[411] While the incorporation of archives and the thematic and physical use of train journeys is significant they do not elucidate the content of the memories. What and how the memories portray the subject, Milkha Singh's relationship with his past warrants a detailed examination. As these memory fragments depict or reconstruct the incidents that had a traumatic impact on the individual, who in this case is Milkha. Radstone defines trauma as:

> a singular and extraordinary event that leaves a deep and uninterpretable wound on the individual psyche. The suffering inflicted by a trauma stands outside everyday experience and outside an individual's ability to make cognitive or emotional sense of the experience.[412]

Radstone identifies one of its main behavioural manifestation or coping mechanism as as 'shutting him or herself off from the memory,' but the trauma continues to exist and may have adverse physical and or psychological effects.[413] Trauma theory attempts to understand the aftereffects or psychological implications of buried trauma, and according to Janet Walker, a traumatized person may re-experience such events as 'recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions', that may take the form of memories, dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations,

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[411]Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in film: Memory & History*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p 20.
[412]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,*(eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 336.
[413]Ibid.

recurrences, and/or dissociation.' [414] This makes the imagery associated with trauma and how it resurfaces equally significant to the study of memory flashbacks in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*. I will discuss these facets of Milkha's traumatic past in more detail in the next section.

3.2 Traumatic memories and flashbacks

The cinematic trajectory of Milkha Singh's life is an intricately woven plethora of memories. The primary mode of introducing these memories into the narrative are flashbacks. Maureen Turim's definition of a flashback that it is essentially 'a representation of the past that intervenes within the present flow of film narrative,' is aptly applicable to *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag's* narrative structure. [415] In the film, flashbacks traverse traumatic and nostalgic memories. However, an overriding link that brings the different phases of Milkha Singh's life together is the impact of trauma. This is observable in the recreation and reimagination of Milkha's participation in the Olympic race. Mehra takes Milkha Singh's loss at the Olympic race from its national and international context and reconstructs it as the aftereffect of trauma.

Interestingly, the film uses the mystery and hype surrounding this infamous action to present a completely different justification for it. During the race upon hearing his coach shout out *'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag'* (*'Run Milkha Run'*), Milkha is gripped by the memory from his childhood. In the images below (Figures 77 and 78) the transposition of the visions of this personal memory into the present. Milkha is no longer running on a track in Rome on a sunny day but running through a thunderstorm in muddy fields in an unknown location. The traumatic memories from his childhood enter the temporal context of the race psychologically transporting him and the audience into Milkha's past. Only the audience can view the images and memories as they flash through Milkha's mind.

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[414]Janet Walker,'The Traumatic Paradox: autobiographical documentary and the psychology of memory' in *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*,(eds), Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (New York:Routledge, 2014), p 108.
[415]Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in film: Memory & History*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p 22.

Figure 77

Figure 78

Figure 79

Suddenly, Milkha sees himself as a boy, who is scared and running to escape a sword-wielding demonic figure on horseback (Figures 77 to 79). Instead of hearing the sounds of the cheering crowd in the stadium, Milkha can now only hear the voice of a man shouting at him to run. As he is running the sound of the hooves of the horse chasing him start getting louder and the horseman seems to be getting closer. At this point, the boy turns to look back, and so does Milkha in the present. This simultaneous movement reveals how Milkha's mind is unable to distinguish between the present and the past and therefore, he can not disassociate himself from the traumatic memory.

Anthropologist and trauma theorist Christopher J. Colvin studies the emotional attachment to traumatic memory and how it does not allow the subject to maintain a 'neat and progressive distancing of the present from the past.'[416] He observes that an omnipresent connection exists between a person's past and present, so even if the memories of the trauma are suppressed, they are not destroyed but left in a state of abeyance. According to Colvin, in order to experience or encourage any manner of therapeutic healing requires an 'encounter between the past and the present,'[417] one where:

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[416]Christopher J.Colvin, 'Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid of me, Trauma, history and the therapeutic imagination in the new South Africa', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds) *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p 158.
[417]Ibid.

The suffering of victims acquires historical meaning by highlighting the ways in which their suffering became part of the overall movement from oppression to freedom. The transformation of the dangerous, injured victim into the reconciled 'survivor' is affected through an encounter with traumatic memories, a reliving and taming of these painful experiences.[418]

Colvin suggests that a victim may transition into a survivor through the process of reliving traumatic memories. While the intersection of memories may not always result in such a transformation, it does emphasize the long-term psychological impact of trauma that may interfere with a victim or survivor's present. I note the similarity in Mehra approach, as he depicts the convergence of past and present in a way that renders Milkha's traumatic memory alive. Radstone concurs that the human mind may refuse to accept or register catastrophic moments. The inference drawn is that when something is beyond thought or recollection, it becomes inaccessible to memories 'because the psychic wound inflicted by the event was intolerable.'[419] Milkha's character is seen grappling with a trauma that he struggles to recollect and therefore cannot accept. This movement consistently interferes and disrupts the representability of this event, which is visible in the many fragmented flashbacks. Colvin takes this a step further and suggests the concept of a 'therapeutic solution,'[420] which involves:

(F)orcing the sufferer to confront the repeating, painful memory, relive the moment of violation in difficult, painstaking detail and come to understand that the trauma is actually over, a past event that need not continue to cause harm in the present.[421]

These perspectives have been developing and broadening the scope of Freud's psychoanalytical observations on repressed memories and the subconscious. The complex treatment of Milkha's memories allows me to reference nuanced perspectives discussing trauma and its therapeutic aspects. At the same time, prosthetic memories engage with the

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[418]Ibid. p 157.
[419]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,*(eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 330.
[420]Christopher J.Colvin, 'Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid of me, Trauma, history and the therapeutic imagination in the new South Africa', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds) *Contested Pasts: The politics of memory*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p 156.
[421]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,*(eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 331.

communication of painful memories, as they attempt to highlight the sites and tools used to transfer or introduce previously unconnected people to the context. The empathetic connection these memories forge is significant and leaves room for delving deeper into the content of the memories. In this case, the trauma endured, its tangible psychological and behavioural impact, as well as the final emotional catharsis all, come together in one narrative, adding to Landsberg's perspective and expanding the scope for holistically studying these memories.

It is noteworthy that in the film, memories do not play out uniformly; instead, they are triggered. These different memory triggers try to lend seamlessness to the sudden transitions from one narrator to Milkha's recollections. For instance, Milkha's coach Gurudev began his narration with Milkha's days as a young army recruit. He reveals that Milkha's initial motivation to race was an extra ration of milk, eggs and a break from the daily marching drill. This reference to milk triggers Milkha's childhood memories of the time before Partition. It constitutes a happy and peaceful time for Milkha as he lived with his family, and Milkha's memories intersect with Gurudev's memory narrations.

In another pivotal sequence, a traumatic memory is triggered by the phrase 'bhaag Milkha bhaag.' During the years Milkha made his living as a coal thief, the traumatic memories of his childhood continued to haunt him. In this particular scene, Milkha and his friend are caught travelling in a train without a ticket. They jump off the train to escape the ticket checker and as his friend calls out 'bhaag Milkha bhaag', it triggers a similar flashback. Suddenly Milkha cannot move as the horrific images of what happened to his parents and family during Partition flash through his mind, day turns into night, as he sees a horseman charging toward him with a sword. He is frozen with terror as he did when he was a young boy (Figures 80 and 81).

Figure 80   Figure 81

As the figure moves closer to him, Milkha takes out a knife to defend himself and in reality, ends up attacking the ticket checker with the knife. He is completely in the grips of that memory. The fear he experienced as a child has affected him so strongly that after years those recollections wield power over Milkha. While in the grips of this memory he loses the ability to distinguish between imagination and reality. The film succeeds in highlighting the deep-rooted impact survivors of Partition continuously grapple with. At the same time, the train becomes an integral fixture in Milkha's life, connected seamlessly with all his memories. The manifestation of this trauma could change from individual to individual, but the debilitating fear and pain experienced while remembering those times acknowledge the permanent emotional scars.

These personal memory triggers exist alongside a complex movement of memories continually shifting from one narrator to another. Coach Gurudev's recollections represent a public awareness of specific facts of Milkha Singh's life, whereas memories from Milkha's perspective offer a personal insight into his life. Mehra uses a distinct visual treatment for Milkha's childhood memories. The depiction of Milkha as a young boy is consistently given a particular sepia tint (Figure 82 and 83) throughout the film. This sepia tint differentiates this part of Milkha's life from the other phases.

Figure 82

Figure 83

Figures 82 and 83, provide a clearer glimpse into Milkha's childhood, depicting his family, village and circumstances. These memory insertions provide the clues for piecing together the puzzle of that childhood traumatic memory that continues to haunt him. The audience now knows that the man shouting at Milkha to run in that incident is his father and the location is his village. Simultaneously this traumatic memory effectively reinforces Milkha's emotional ties to his childhood. However, it is the sudden inclusion of these memories in the middle of Gurudev's narration, which complicates Mehra's treatment of memories. Scholars Walker and Colvin allude to this seemingly unstructured and spontaneous intrusion of memories, which in this case, Mehra applies to the nostalgic recollections of Milkha's childhood.

Gurudev's initial narration is that of a promising young athlete's journey to his audience in the film, which constitutes Mr Wadhwa and coach Ranveer. After listening to Milkha's initial struggles, motivation and successes of his athletic career, Mr Wadhwa says 'although these incidents are interesting, they still don't explain why Milkha refuses to go to Pakistan.'[422] From the beginning of the film the audience knows that Milkha's childhood holds the key to his refusal to go to Pakistan. At this point Gurudev talks about Partition as the defining moment of Milkha's life and relationally of the film. The revelation of Partition comes across as the reason behind the train journey of the three characters and the discussion of Milkha Singh's life. More importantly, it gradually leads to the explaination of Milkha's refusal to go to Pakistan. Gurudev reminds Mr Wadhwa of the catastrophic impact the division had on many lives including Milkha's:

> Sir, in 1947 where many were celebrating the independence of India, there were many who were mourning the Partition. Lakhs of families became homeless overnight and forever. One of which was Milkha, who's village was in Pakistan. He was very young then, perhaps maybe 10 or 12 years old when he somehow managed to save his life and reach Delhi all alone, completely alone.[423]

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[422]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).
[423]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).

The flashback goes further back to reveal why Milkha was left to make that harrowing journey all alone. This reconstructed sequence shows Milkha's father's refusal to move to India, despite being warned of the threats Sikhs and Hindus would face if they decided to stay back in Pakistan. A group of men on horseback armed with swords and guns attack the members of Milkha's family as he watched. Milkha's father saved him by ensuring that he ran away but not before Milkha witnessed the gruesome decapitation of his father by the assailants. Therefore, only after knowing these memories, Mr Wadhwa begins to understand, empathise and look at the events of 1947 through the eyes of a survivor. He is deeply disturbed and to a certain extent even ashamed that he seeks to convince Milkha to go back to Pakistan, where it had all taken place. The transference of Partition memories impacts Mr Wadhwa's approach and his original intention of convincing Milkha.

Depiction of the Indo-Pak sports meet in the film is based on true events and publicised as a battle royal between Pakistan's star runner Abdul Khaliq and India's champion athlete Milkha Singh. The then Prime Minister (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) had to convince Milkha to go to Pakistan to compete. The film also features this conversation between them but after Milkha's trauma has been shown. I suggest that the portrayal of Milkha's trauma before his conversation with the Prime Minister is a deliberate move, as it reveals how those in power, like the Indian Prime Minister- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, do not face any compunctions toward survivors or their ordeals. Instead, the Prime Minister reminds Milkha of his duties as an army man and emphasises the value of national duty over personal sentiments. Mehra distinctly addresses the way those in power react or respond to the same event as opposed to someone who has experienced it. In this light, the dissection of Milkha's life seems a cruel act carried out to fulfil the self-interest driven agenda of governments. At the same time, it reveals the hollowness of the many Indo-Pak perfunctory initiatives since 1947.

Drawing from personal memory experiences like Milkha Singh's, I suggest that these promotions of peace and cooperation have not worked because they do not adequately address the trauma of that time. Radstone discusses 'the workings of memory and forgetting, and what memory does with wounds.' [424] *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* demonstrates the propensity to forget as well as the reluctance to discuss painful moments of Partition.

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[424]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,*(eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 337.

According to the chronological placement of the narrative, Gurudev is revisiting the memories of Partition in 1960, which is barely 13 years after it happened, yet he needs to reintroduce and re-sensitise Mr Wadhwa. Mehra does not shy away from extending this short span of public memory to the Indian Prime Minister who was at the very centre of the decision that allowed Partition to take place. In its aftermath, political heads or those working for the State consider their focus to be looking beyond Partition and not at it.

In this context, Mehra's depiction of the aftermath of Partition in Milkha's memory flashbacks plays a critical role. The time he spent as a refugee enables the film to represent the horrific and deplorable conditions borne by survivors at the refugee camps. Although the narrative focus is on Milkha, the reconstruction of the refugee camp allows the audience to gauge the shocking conditions faced by millions of people. Hordes of people walking with their paltry belongings, staying in tents, facing paucity of food, space as well as rampant disease, crime and so on. The images below depict the affecting visuals of the suffering endured by hundreds and thousands. Their outstretched hands, the incessant pushing and shoving to try and get their hands on the meagre rations of a couple of *rotis* (naan breads) are shocking and upsetting. (Figure 84).

Figure 84

It is noteworthy that as the film progresses, Mehra continues to intensify the depiction of incidents that took place during Partition. The images below are revealed almost towards the end of the film. These are the horrifying details of the trauma that Milkha does not share or describe to anyone in the film. Through these flashbacks Mehra reveals the true extent of Milka's trauma particularly after he is convinced to go to Pakistan by the Indian Prime Minister. In contrast, by presenting a heroic figure and athlete as a traumatised survivor, Mehra is talking about the need to exorcise the trauma of Partition survivors.

Therefore, even though Milkha agrees to go to Pakistan for the Sports meet, his past continues to haunt him. Upon reaching Pakistan, Milkha travels to his village and finds his old home. Going back to his home triggers another flood of memories and Milkha is compelled to relive those horrifying moments, which he had kept buried for so long. This memory is not mentioned by Gurudev during his narration, as even he is not aware of it. It is noteworthy that in this sequence the audience is privy only to Milkha's thoughts and memories. I suggest that Milkha's memories are designed to shock and expose the extent of the violence and brutality people faced during the riots.

| Figure 85 | Figure 86 |

Young Milkha after managing to escape the attackers returns home the same day hoping to find someone alive. Instead, he steps into a pool of blood, which leads him to the bodies of his family members who were brutally killed (Figures 85 and 86). Mehra recreates these gruesome visuals in graphic detail. This revelation reiterates to the audience the magnitude of the destruction, and sheer devastation Partition caused. Mehra's dramatic audio-visual treatment of Milkha's return to Pakistan is significant for this final shocking unravelling of Milkha's traumatic past. These Partition recollections function prosthetically, as they also attempt to encourage the audience's reaction, an audience that is generationally and chronologically removed from the Partition's immediate context by more than seventy years. Yet the audience is being directed to absorb the acute physical, emotional and psychological suffering Partition survivors had to face. Mehra attempts to use the prosthetic function of these memories raises pertinent questions regarding the ability of people to forget as well as deliberately push certain painful memories to the background.

Radstone makes an important observation that addresses the therapeutic role traumatic memories can play not just for the affected individual but also for society at large.[425] It connects with Landsberg's idea of encouraging empathy by looking at the re-sensitisation of the public through the acknowledgement of trauma.

> The memory of individual actors in the trauma is solicited in order to cure the entire society; the production of history is thus tied to a narrative of disclosure, closure and reconciliation, along with the particular model of the relation between past and present that the traumatic narrative implies.[426]

I interpret 'the cure' to be recurring reminders of moments in history that have left a significant impact on a nation or society. The effect of these memories on individuals may vary but according to Radstone and Landsberg their reintroduction at any given point have the potential to make a larger socio-political impact. The extent of this impact is difficult to gauge but the impressions serve as reminders, making the timing of the revelation and substance of the memories significant. Milkha's memories are reminders, which act as testimonies of the pivotal moments of a nation's history. The ones that may transcend the confines of time and still have the capacity to create emotional or empathetic connections. For this to take place it is imperative that such memories resurface, be spoken about or find a way to reach people. Since Partition there have been many narratives that have worked to bring these memories to the fore. The 2003 critically acclaimed Partition narrative *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters) shares similarities with *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*. The emotive and visual treatment of Partition memories comes close to Mehra's approach to dealing with trauma (Figure 87).

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[425]Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates,* (eds), Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p 334.
[426]Ibid.
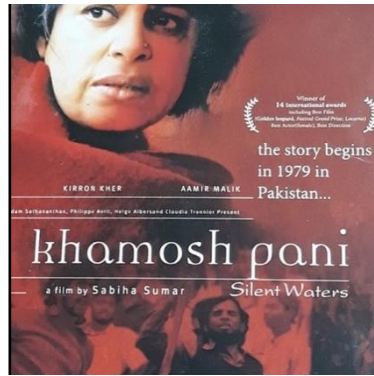
Figure 87

Directed by Sahiba Sumar, the theme of silence is central to *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters) as it shrouded the painful memories of protagonist Ayesha's assault during Partition and the ensuing disavowal of her identity. Interestingly it is a Pakistani film with an Indian actress Kirron Kher playing the lead. The film is set in 1979 and looks back at Partition through frequent sepia coloured flashbacks. Ayesha, a Sikh, survived a vicious sexual assault during Partition, later married a Pakistani and converted to Islam.[427] Thirty years after Partition Ayesha seems to be a rehabilitated survivor, but through a short flashback of the year 1947, Sumar establishes the presence of Partition very early on in the film.

From that point, there are short recurring flashbacks into Ayesha's trauma triggered by seemingly innocuous remarks, making it clear that Ayesha lives with these memories every day while never discussing it with anyone. Ayesha and Milkha mirror each other's inability to forget their lives before Partition and the agonising memories of their experiences during Partition. The flashbacks of trauma in both instances are intrusions that affect their rehabilitated lives in the present. Therefore, silence is the primary way survivors deal with their memories in both films.[428] However, this is where the similarities end, because the understanding and empathy received by Milkha's Partition memory revelations is a complete contrast to the social and familial ostracism Ayesha faces after the revelation of her story. Ayesha's religion overshadows her trauma, as she was a Sikh and not born a Muslim as well as the sensitivities attached to the discussion of

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[427]Shahnaz Khan, 'Floating on silent waters: Religion, nationalism, and dislocated women in Khamosh Pani.' *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 9.2, (2009), pp 130-152. (p 131).
[428]Shahnaz Khan, 'Floating on silent waters: Religion, nationalism, and dislocated women in Khamosh Pani.' *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 9.2, (2009), pp 130-152. (p 134).

her sexual assault.[429] Ayesha is driven to suicide by the emotional and circumstantial upheaval caused by the resurfacing of the memories, while *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* allows for a complete physical and emotional catharsis to take place.

The above analogy could be noted as a fundamental difference between male and female memory narratives of Partition. Mehra's subject, a famous athlete, gave him much more room to manoeuvre the plot and story. The sub-plot of Milkha's sister Isri and what she endured during Partition is the only measure preventing the film from completely glossing over what women faced. Therefore, understanding the characterisation and presentation of female characters in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is crucial to deciphering their role in this mainstream narrative structure, which I will discuss alongwith the emotive and dramatic structure of the film.

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[429]Ibid.

3.3 Drama, emotions and mainstream cinema tropes

I suggest that the dramatic treatment of the subject of Partition and its memories is guided by emotions more than narrative logic and coherence. Similar in approach to Roberge's study, scholar George M. Smith discusses the significance of emotions in a film's narrative in *Film Structure and the Emotion System*.[430] He observes that a movie theatre is a space 'where many societies gather to express and experience emotion.'[431]

> The cinema offers complex and varied experiences; for most people, however, it is a place to feel something. The dependability of movies to provide emotional experiences for diverse audiences lies at the centre of the medium's appeal and power.[432]

Roberge acknowledges Smith's study of cinema as an expressive and emotive space but notes that Smith fails to highlight the tendency of emotional elements getting precedence over logistic plot or narrative considerations in mainstream Indian cinema. For instance, while the sudden and at times careless jump from Gurudev's memory narration to Milkha's own is problematic, yet the emotive and dramatic value of these sequences takes precedence over maintaining linearity in the story. Mehra's approach toward Partition is one that not only seamlessly weaves Partition into the life of Milkha Singh, but he also makes it the focal point of the film. Partition is the force that guides and charts the film's emotional trajectory. Mehra establishes the emotional significance of Partition from the beginning of the film and consistently features it referentially and as detailed reconstructions. Roberge points out 'movies contribute largely to our collective memory of the past,' and I suggest that this is especially applicable in the case of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* where memories help piece together the puzzle of Milkha's life and provide a better understanding of that period.[433]Therefore, the athlete's life is emblematic of the entire gamut of Partition experiences.

Consequently, an integral narrative motivation is the attempt to understand the man

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[430]G. M. Smith, *Film structure and the emotion system,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). p 4.
[431]Ibid.
[432]Ibid. p 5.
[433]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 25.

behind Milkha Singh's star persona. For this exploration, Mehra relies on engagement with the many emotional facets of the athlete's life. The first five minutes of the film reveals the most controversial and shocking incident of Milkha's career alongside the deeply scarring and painful memory of his life. This revelation compels the audience look beyond a professional loss to the emotional wellbeing of the protagonist. Mehra's strategically pits shattered aspirations of a nation against painful Partition memories that continue to haunt its survivors. Symbolically it represents the remnants of a fractured India that is still grappling with its consequences; hence it is the emotional catalyst that sets the film in motion.

The narrative reconstructs what took place at that time and subsequently, what followed, through different incidents to explain the environment surrounding the year 1947. These emotionally charged moments represent the profound and far-reaching consequences of the division on the lives and families of regular people. Emotional reactions of anger and anger and a strong sense of injustice drove Milkha's father's decision to stay back despite warnings of detrimental repercussions. Among the many flashback sequences, Mehra includes a reconstruction of this pivotal moment and decision. This sequence depicts Milkha's father making a passionate speech to his family, relatives and villagers, encouraging them to stay and fight for their rights to their homes and lands where they had been living for generations (Figures 88 and 89).

| Figure 88 | Figure 89 |

Usually, in Indian mainstream fictional narratives, such heroism and passion might have led to an epic battle, wherein these people would have won against all the odds. The whole sequence would have been a beautifully orchestrated fight celebrating their valour. However, in this case, Mehra draws the audience into the reality of Partition, where such impassioned voices and brave hearts were sadly outnumbered, as they faced enemies who were ruthless and better equipped (Figure 90). Consequently, the fateful decision taken

by Milkha's father and many others led them into a spate of brutal attacks that end in the merciless slaughter and murder of countless innocents.

Figure 90

Memories of these atrocities form an integral part of Milkha's connection with Pakistan. It is a link that starts the film and therefore, the narrative appropriately brings Milkha back to the same place. The visit to his home not only brings his traumatic memories to the forefront, but it culminates into an emotional and dramatic catharsis. In this emotional sequence, Milkha is overwhelmed by memories of the horrifying massacre of his family, to which he was a witness. His legs no longer support him as he is overcome with emotions and bursts into tears, remembering the suffering of his family during Partition.The intense pain that so far had been bottled up inside him, bursts open. (Figure 91).

Figure 91

During these emotional outbursts, Mehra strips away Milkha Singh's aura of being a famous athlete and transforms him into one of the millions of Partition survivors. I view Milkha's memories of Partition and his eventual catharsis as emotionally laden excerpts that present an amalgamation of all the *rasas*: from the intense love for his family (*Shringar rasa*), the bravery of his father (*Veera rasa*), the anger and fear (*Raudra* and *Bhayanak rasa*) he experienced. The horrifying things he saw (*Vibhatsa rasa*), his miraculous escape (*Adbhuta rasa*) to finally allowing himself to feel the sadness (*Karuna*

rasa). All these emotions come together in this final emotional breakdown and provide a release to his pent-up feelings and finally confer a sense of peace (*Shanta rasa*) to him.

Figure 92

In the same sequence, Milkha is reunited with his childhood friend Sampreet (Figure 92). The village Maulvi (Muslim religious scholar) rescued Sampreet even though he was a Hindu. In order to survive Sampreet converted to Islam, as many survivors did at that time when they found themselves on the other side of the border. Sampreet gauging the tumultuous emotions Milkha is experiencing, says: 'Log bure nahi hote, haalat bure hote hain' (People aren't bad, circumstances and situations are bad).[434] Mehra reintroduces Sampreet as a rehabilitated, family man and this vital inclusion allows the exploration of the experience of another survivor. Additionally, Sampreet's ability to look beyond the heinousness of Partition and focus on the good, has a calming effect on Milkha's emotions and maybe even assuages some part of his pain. The film's emotional journey comes full circle only after Milkha himself goes back to his birthplace and recounts these memories. It acts as a memorial site for the revelation of trauma as well as re-demonstrating the deep-rooted Partition wounds and memories, re-emphasizing how difficult it still is for survivors to confront their demons.

Another significant facet of the film is the treatment of relationships, as they comprise a crucial part of mainstream Indian storytelling. These relationships reflect crucial aspects of Milkha's past and here I particularly refer to the different associations he forms with women in the film. Roberge discusses the impact and importance of relationships within mainstream Indian narratives.[435] Relationships form the premise of many popular Hindi films and in the film women are incorporated following certain mainstream cinema tropes. Roberge

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[434]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).
[435]Gaston Roberge, *To View Movies the Indian Way*, (India: Inkdia Publications, 2014). p 15.

attributes this to the socio-cultural roots of characters that capture the imagination by making audiences feel and react to the characters.[436] Therefore, understanding the treatment of female characters in this Partition centric story, also draws attention to its intrinsic commercial features.

The roles played by women in the film are contradictorily central and peripheral to Milkha's journey. Mehra uses the portrayal of Milkha's idyllic life before Partition to establish one of the most important relationships of Milkha's life, which is his strong emotional bond with his elder sister- Ishri Kaur. She got married when Milkha was still a young boy, yet the deep attachment between the two is visible irrespective of their considerable age difference. Alongside the strong emotional connect she shares with Milkha, her character is significant for the glimpse she provides into her experiences during their time in the refugee camps. Ishri's husband is against her father's decision to stay back in the village and escapes with her in time. However, although they are safe, their struggles are far from over. They reach India and are compelled to live in refugee camps.

Figure 93

Figure 94

Mehra reconstructs the refugee camp painstakingly as it depicts the plight of millions of survivors like them and it is also where Milkha is reunited with his sister Ishri. Their emotional reunion is significant for its representation of hope amid all the hopelessness one can see in the refugee camp. It allows Mehra to recreate a poignant moment (Figures 93 and 94) that is at once happy and replete with a shared sense of *karuna rasa* or sorrow, due to the loss of their families.

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[436]Ibid. p 20.

The glimpse into Ishri's life at the refugee camp signifies another emotionally scarring moment for Milkha, as he witnesses Ishri's husband's abusive treatment towards her. Mehra does not shy away from highlighting issues of domestic violence and marital rape through Ishri's story. He shows Ishri's helplessness and her abject acceptance of this situation. Milkha witnesses this abuse as they are all cramped together in a tent. The young boy is filled with rage but is equally helpless in the circumstances. He expresses his anger by trying to destroy the tent, which is now another traumatic site where his sister's abuse takes place. A skirmish ensues, and Ishri's husband decides to cut off all ties with Milkha. As a result this incident becomes another turning point in Milkha's life as he is forced to fend for himself, and he does so by joining a gang of juveniles.

It is noteworthy that Ishri's role in Milkha's life abruptly ends at this point. Mehra does not furnish any more details about what happened to her. She suddenly resurfaces in the narrative after a gap of many years, when Milkha now a coal thief is arrested and jailed for attacking a ticket collector. Ishri bails him out, and he meets her outside the jail. His bail cost a lot of money and he realizes that Ishri raised the money by selling her gold earrings. Interestingly, Ishri does not admonish or chastise him in any way. Her attitude depicts her unconditional love and I suggest, a love that is blind to the faults of her brother as well. In typical mainstream cinema style, Ishri and Milkha's relationship represents an ideal loving, sacrificing and highly sentimental brother-sister bond (Figure 95). The next time we see them together, Mehra orchestrates this extremely emotional sequence, where Milkha has transformed himself from a lawless youth into a disciplined army man and a national level athlete. Milkha gifts her a pair of gold earrings similar to the ones she had sold off many years ago for his bail. Even though Mehra strengthens this bond through their shared Partition trauma and experiences, I observe that Ishri's character is barely given any agency or point of view, apart from being a selfless and loving sister to Milkha.

Figure 95

Her relationship with him is treated as her only source of happiness and contentment. We are witness to Ishri's abuse at the hands of her husband and Milkha's anger towards it, however years later she is still a passive and dutiful wife to her abusive husband. In the film, Milkha is not shown taking any concrete steps towards her welfare or rights even after achieving success, except for gifting her the earrings. Therefore, Ishri's traumatic experiences mainly function as a narrative arc for Milkha's character. I observe that this treatment is meted out to all the female characters in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*.

The emotional impact of Milkha's success is magnified manifold when we are made to see the impact Partition left on him psychologically and his external circumstances. In contrast, the female characters are either witnesses or aid in Milkha's transformation and at the other end of the spectrum they temptations that would only distract him from his goals of becoming a world-renowned athlete. Instead of his sister Ishri, the spark for Milkha's transformation comes from the woman Milkha falls in love with, Biro. Mehra brings in the love at first sight angle through Biro's character and gives it all the trimmings of a typical Hindi film romance set in the 1950s.

| Figure 96 | Figure 97 |

Although this romantic relationship is taken from Milkha Singh's life, its treatment is largely enhanced through orchestrated visuals and melodious songs (Figure 96 and 97). I note that her presence is chiefly limited to two romantic songs and is largely ornamental in the narrative. In this way, *shringaar rasa* is used to explore emotions of love and passion in the film. At the same time, it is noteworthy that she becomes the catalyst for his transformation from a common thug to an army man and later a prominent international level athlete. Biro refuses to be with him while he is involved in illegal activities. So, in order to marry her, he chooses the army as a way to earn a living respectably. However, he returns home to find out that Biro was forced to marry someone else and this brings another abrupt end to the role of a female character in the film. Milkha's romantic involvement with Biro ends in heartbreak. Subsequently, Milkha treats

all the female characters he develops relationships with or interacts with as unnecessary romantic entanglements.

Figure 98

Milkha meets Stella an Australian while part of the Indian contingent selected to represent India at the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956 (Figure 98). It is noteworthy that this romantic relationship also plays out through two songs in a similar manner to Biro and Milkha's relationship. In the days before the race, Milkha who travels abroad for the first time is seen drinking, dancing and spending time with Stella on the picturesque beaches of Australia. Castigated by his coach Ranveer Singh for losing, Milkha ends up blaming his loss on his relationship with Stella. Therefore, while Mehra shows Biro as the positive impetus to Milkha's life and career, Stella is problematically portrayed as the distraction that led to his ignominious loss (Figures 98 and 99). I suggest that Mehra uses Stella and Biro, mainly as romantic interludes.

Figure 99

From this point on, the film shows Milkha dedicating all his energies to training and the sport. However, observably his determination is problematically established through his rejection of Stella and subsequently another female character Indian swimmer Perizaad. Both Stella and Perizaad are not portrayed as enablers but distractions that should be avoided at all costs. Barring Ishri, the film largely limits the role of women to inclusions in songs and their contribution to the narrative is ornamental.

However, despite the conventional treatment of the songs, they still form a pivotal emotive and dramatic function in the narrative. They act as communicators of emotions, even supplementing the meaning of visuals through lyrics as well as some functioning purely as peppy entertaining song-dance numbers. The overall audio-visual treatment of the songs enhance their appeal and popularity, since each song is created with a distinct lyrical structure, melody, visualizations as well as contributed to particular moods or situations in the film. Delving deeper I analyse the distinctive *rasa* each song represents, for this I take up the songs individually, understand their placement as well as accompanying dramatic or emotive narrative contribution.

The first time Biro and Milkha meet is at a communal water pump where women came to fill water. The visuals of this sequence play out with a romantic song in the background. Significantly, their relationship is mainly expressed musically in the film. Their relationship is played out through two slow melodic romantic songs. The first romantic song – '*Mera Yaar*' (My companion) is a melodious ballad that romanticizes their 'love at first sight' meeting. The lyrics by Prasoon Joshi mirror the intensity of Milkha's feelings for Biro and marked the beginning of their romance. The second song, '*O Rangrez*', takes place after Milkha returns home from the army for the first time. His career as an athlete has begun and he is looking forward to his reunion with Biro. It is similar to a dream sequence song, replete with a slow-paced tableau of shots between the lovers. The visual composition of both these songs is similar, comprising picturesque slow-motion visuals and close-ups of Biro and Milkha. The shared pictorial styles of the songs extend to their lyrics as they use multiple languages. Lyrics of the first song '*Mera Yaar*' are predominantly in Punjabi, which is one of the primary indigenous spoken and written languages prevalent in North India. Punjabi is Milkha's first language and lyricist Prasoon Joshi emphasises its usage even through the songs in the film.

Language and its usage in the film are significant for providing additional clues as to the origin, social and educational background of the characters and particularly of Milkha. It reflects his limited academic instruction as well as through the instinctive and consistent use of his native language to express himself. It is an accent noticeable in the dialogues of Milkha, Gurudev, Biro, Ishri's and other characters belonging to Milkha's village before Partition as well as in the songs. The second song '*O Rangrez*' is a combination of Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu words. Again, lyricist Prasoon Joshi highlights Milkha Singh's use of

Punjabi through the songs '*Slow Motion Angreza', 'Bhaag Milkha'* and the '*Gurbani.'*
The songs succeed in reflecting the Punjabi lilt and intonation noticeable in Milkha's
dialogues. I suggest that he reiterates the principal geographic context of the narrative,
lending a certain authenticity to the era and socio-economic framework recreated.

This attention to detail contributed to the popularity garnered by these songs as well as
the film. The song '*Zinda'* (Alive)*,* celebrates young Milkha's determination to survive
and maps his journey in the refugee camp. It is a rhythmic, high tempo song with heavy
western rock music style orchestration. The extensive use of electronic guitar and drums
is markedly different from the standard Indian instrumentation. This energetic number is
set to a fast-paced montage of Milkha's formative years post Partition. The harsh
conditions of the refugee camp propel Milkha into a gang of young boys who are petty
criminals. He learns to brandish a knife, steal coal from trains and gamble.

The images below reflect his rapid transition from someone who was traumatized and
vulnerable into an independent, confident, street-smart boy (Figure 100 and 101). While
the images depict the loss of Milkha's childhood, at the same time the lyrics and music
praise a spirit that chose to fight for his survival instead of succumbing to the depressing
circumstances around him. The allegory of coals is both literal and symbolic as it traces
Milkha's years as a coal thief as well as his struggles that ultimately turned coal into a
diamond. It also features the train as a motif that represents the transformation of Milkha.
This observation is better understood through the lyrics of the song *Zinda* (Alive):

Zinda (Alive)
Zindaa, hai to, pyaala, poora bhar le (You're alive, so fill the cup to the brim),
Kanchaa, phoote, chooraa, kaanch kar le (If the glass marble breaks, break the glass to
powder)
Zindagi ka ye ghadaa le (Take this vessel of life),
Ek saans mein chadhaa le (drink it in one breath)
Hichkiyon mein kyaa hai marna (It's no good to die in hiccups)
Poora mar le (Die once, completely).
Koylaa kaalaa hai (This) coal is black),
Chattaanon ne paala hai (and brought up by rocks),
Andar kaala, baahar kaala (It's black inside and black outside),
Par sachcha hai saala (but it is truthful).

Figure 100

Figure 101

Figure 102

Figure 103

The song titled '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag'* in the film is another fast-paced music track. A lot of time and attention is devoted to showcasing the intensive training that Milkha Singh underwent in order to achieve success as an athlete (figures 102 and 103). Its visualisation is akin to the way the iconic character Rocky Balboa in the film *Rocky* (1976).[437] I explore the aspects of masculinity of later in the chapter. The representation of the final race between Milkha and Pakistani athlete Abdul Khaliq is essential for the broader political statements it makes, where music plays a crucial role in its orchestration. Milkha's coach Ranveer cordially greets Abdul Khaliq and his coach before the race. However Khaliq's coach reciprocates with an unprovoked comment, 'This might prove to be the last race of your life,' to which Milkha confidently replies, 'I'll run like that as well.'[438] In the images below (Figure 105 and 106) Milkha is in the lead and the following lyrics accompany the music playing in the background during this scene:

Utar ke phenk de sab janjaal (Get rid of all your worries)

Beete pal ke sab kankaal (and the skeletons of the past moments)

Tere talve teri naal (your destiny depends on your feet),

Tujhe to jeetna hai har haal (you have to win at any cost).[439]

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[437]*Rocky*, dir by John G. Avildsen (United Artists, 1976).
[438]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).
[439]Ibid.

The lyrics are motivational, addressing Milkha's need to 'get rid of his worries and the skeletons of his past.'[440] He needs to finally exorcise those horrific memories that have been holding him back. Milkha's 'destiny' depends on his feet and he must run his best to win this race. This particular race between Pakistani athlete Abdul Khaliq and Milkha Singh is cinematically treated as the ultimate clash of the titans by Mehra; making an important political statement regarding the underlying tensions between the two nations post Partition.

Athlete Abdul Khaliq was defeated by Milkha Singh in a race before and that encounter set the tone for a stereotypical hero versus villain scenario. Before the commencement of the race Khaliq's coach jeered at Milkha's escape from Pakistan during Partition, his thoughtless attack mocking Milkha's trauma vilifies the Pakistani coach instantly. It depicts the start of unhealthy frictions, and through this exchange, Mehra establishes that the race between them would be an emotionally charged, aggressive battle between the two athletes. The final race between Khaliq and Milkha is advertised with flyers (Figure 104) depicting a kind of battle instead of a friendly sporting event.

Figure 104

Notably, the film's celebratory ending is complexly interwoven with the jingoistic overtones, as during the race Milkha is shown in the lead running past the flag of Pakistan (Figure 105 and 106). Next, the Indian flag is shown before the Pakistani flag, therefore, Mehra visually uses Milkha's victory to make a subtle yet perceptible political statement.

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[440]Ibid.

Figure 105

Figure 106

The visuals (Figures 105 and 106) of the race are cross-cut with shots of droves of people in India sitting by transistors and radio sets listening to the live commentary intently and fervently praying for Milkha's victory. By presenting this race as the climax sequence of the film, Mehra portrays it as a more significant moment than Milkha's loss at the Olympics. It becomes Milkha's redeeming feat, which is ironic considering that Mehra set out to celebrate the spirit of kinship through sports and herein lies the glaring dichotomy in the way Mehra tackles Milkha's return to Pakistan. It is an ironic comment exposing the hollowness of mutual diplomatic relationship building efforts between the two countries, transforming a sports arena into an India versus Pakistan show of one-upmanship backed by strong anti-India and anti-Pakistan sentiments. The film negates attempts at improving Indo-Pak relations through competitive sports platforms with scepticism. This cinematic representation leaves many critics divided and questioning the agenda of the filmmaker. Film critic Saibal Chatterjee states that the race is orchestrated as the most crucial race of his life because he is facing an opponent from Pakistan.

Instead of presenting Milkha Singh as the sporting hero that he was for a newly-independent nation seeking its place in the world, the film positions him as an emblem of nationalistic fervour when he is pitted him against Pakistan's Abdul

Khaliq, who was regarded at the height of his career as the fastest man in Asia.[441]

Instead of symbolizing a bridge between the two nations, the race comes across as an outlet for the ever-present mutual undercurrents of anger, animosity and trauma. At the end of the race Milkha is conferred with the title of the 'Flying Sikh' by the President of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan and the film recreates the moment where the General compliments Milkha saying, *'tu aaj bhaaga nahi, tu uda hai'* (You didn't run today, you flew).[442]However, inspite of this felicitation exemplifying genuine admiration and appreciation of talent, the race largely vilifies Pakistan. After winning Milkha sees himself as a boy again, but this time without the intrusion of traumatic memories. This moment is a drastic change from the Olympic race where a similar appearance of his younger self transported him to the violence, pain and helplessness of Partition memories. This time the young Milkha appears happy and is smiling (Figure 107 and 108), even though he is in Pakistan, the place where his family and childhood were destroyed.

Figure 107   Figure 108

The filmmaker suggests that the smiling child symbolizes Milkha's sub-conscious overcoming of trauma. This visual plays to a melodic slow-paced background score, which is how the film ends (Figures 107 and 108). The ending implies that Milkha finally emerged from the shadows of his traumatic past; however, this happens after winning a race against a Pakistani athlete in Pakistan is a problematic inference. I discuss these sensitive political strains and their cinematic treatment in detail in the upcoming section of this chapter. Thus far, my analysis has identified mainstream cinema tropes utilized in the characterization, songs and script treatment to enhance the overall emotive content of the story. The next part

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[441]Saibal Chatterjee, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*:Movie Review, in Ndtvmovies.com, on 7th March 2014.
<https://movies.ndtv.com/movie-reviews/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-movie-review-839> [accessed 11th August 2019].
[442]*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* dir by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra (Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, 2013).

of this chapter presents an analysis of the film's reception. I suggest that this is relevant considering *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* represents sensitive themes and memories of Partition.

3.4 Reception

Bhaag Milkha Bhaag released in India and overseas on 12th July 2013, garnering enormous success commercially, earning approximately 164 crores INR (1.64 Billion Dollars). An integral boost to its revenue came from the entertainment tax exemption the film received in different States soon after its release.

> (Many Indian states including) Goa, in South India, gave a three-month reprieve on Thursday. Karnataka state is considering the tax break while Maharashtra, home state of Bollywood, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi territory have already approved it.[443]

Indian states have the discretionary power to exempt films from the state levied entertainment tax. This tax exemption is given to films usually considered 'socially and nationally relevant.'[444] For instance, the Chief Minister of the State of Madhya Pradesh, Mr Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced the tax exemption, 'after a long time, there has come a film which is full of patriotic feelings and hence the government has decided to make it tax free.'[445] As a result, the perception of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* as a patriotic film grew, with a steady increase in the number of states implementing this move. The primary motivation behind this step was to enhance the film's accessibility among the Indian milieu. Since the tax exemption rendered the cost of tickets to a nominal amount, enabling multiple viewings and 'the film would now be accessible to those middle-class

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[443]Shalini Dore, 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag tax-free status helps box office collections', *Bollywoodlife.com.* July, 2013. <http://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-tax-free-status-helps-box-office-collections/> [accessed 21st June 2017].

[444]Vinod Mirani, 'View: Tax exemption never really helped', in TheEconomicTimes.com on 28th July 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/view-tax-exemption-never-really-helped/articleshow/70417689.cms?from=mdr> [accessed 10th August 2019].

[445]Press Trust of India, Delhi, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* made tax free in MP because it is 'patriotic.' in FirstPost.com on 21st September 2013,<https://www.firstpost.com/fwire/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-made-tax-free-in-mp-because-it-is-patriotic-973491.html> [accessed 10th August 2019].

Indians who cannot afford the ticket prices at multiplexes.'[446] Mehra reiterates this aspect in another interview:

> Normally, many families wait for a good film to come on cable television and other platforms. But, now with the tax exemption, the ticket prices will fall and more people will come to theatres to watch the film. [447]

This concession increased the film's viewership and encouraged the film's perception as patriotic. Mehra repeatedly acknowledged this support given by the different State governments, that helped *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* reach 'every nook and corner of the country.'[448] The director also states that 'this film is a family watch and is made to inspire the youth,' through the story of Milkha Singh.[449] Soon the film came was treated as more than entertainment and was being viewed as a motivational and educational tool. For instance, schools took their students in large numbers to see the film. I observe that the film's success brought the story of Milkha Singh's the athlete to the fore and increased exposure to the struggles and triumphs of a Partition survivor.

At the same time, the film's messaging is complicated by its nationalist streak, the treatment of Pakistan and an overemphasis on Milkha Singh's masculinity. Scholar Preeti Kumar observes that in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* 'masculinity is imbricated in the congruence of stamina, sports and spirits, through images connoting athleticism, appetite and brash insouciance.'[450] Previously I have mentioned the extensive training montages showcasing actor Farhan Akhtar's physique. This focus on Milkha Singh's physicality starts with his time in the refugee camps and continues into his athletic career. The film maps his journey from a boy to a man visibly through the development of his masculinity. From becoming a gang member wielding a knife, to drinking up two big cans filled with *desi ghee* (clarified butter) or finally during his gruelling athletic training, Kumar identifies such 'narrative

[446]Indo-Asian News Service, Mumbai, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* gets tax exemption in Maharashtra', in ThePioneer.com on 20th July 2013 <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2013/potpourri/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-gets-tax-exemption-in-maharashtra.html > [accessed on 10th August 2019].

[447]Shalini Dore, 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag tax-free status helps box office collections', *Bollywoodlife.com*. July, 2013. <http://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-tax-free-status-helps-box-office-collections/> [accessed 21st June 2017].

[448]Business Today Online Bureau, New Delhi, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* grosses over Rs 90 cr, now tax free in Haryana too', in BusinessToday.com, on 30th July 2013, <https://www.businesstoday.in/lifestyle/off-track/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-tax-free-box-office-collections-17-days/story/197327.html> [accessed 11th August 2019].

[449] Ibid.

[450]Preeti Kumar, 'Reconfiguring India: Narrating the Nation through Great Men Biopics', *The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film,* Vol.II, Issue I, (2014), pp 39-58. <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.2.1.04.pdf> [accessed 12th July 2017]. p 52.

strategies' as inclusions glorifying 'hyper-masculinity.'[451] She talks about this phenomenon as a cinematic tendency that overplays a character's physical transformation, in order to establish a more substantial connection between the sportsperson and the nation:

> (By) coupling fictionalized biographies with national history, biopics identify the hyper- masculine hero with the nation and render the hero's achievements symbolic of national successes.[452]

This connect between national honour and a sportsperson's training is observable in the way the film consistently interweaves a national context with Milkha's athletic achievements. His arduous training reflects a level of dedication and determination treated as super-human efforts taken to achieve glory for the country. I note that Milkha's participation in the Indo-Pak Sports meet is also supposed to be a testament of his patriotism and national duty. Simultaneously, Milkha's rejection of romantic overtures are depicted as his dedication towards the country. Observably, Milkha's 'hyper-masculinity' is further accentuated by Mehra's narrative decision to ensure that women in the film have no contribution to make to these patriotic endeavours. Kumar also criticizes the limited roles and voices extended to the female characters in the film, as it highlights the hero-driven tone of the narrative. This criticism extends to the way ideals of nationalism and patriotism are relegated to male-centric representations.

To address these limitations applied to women's contributions and experiences, I include the analysis of women-centric narratives *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* in the next chapter. In addition to Kumar's observations, I note an all-round critique of the many creative liberties taken in the film, particularly the references made to Pakistan and the final race. Journalist Garima Verma's review criticises Mehra's cinematic interpretation of the athlete's life as she rejects the factual deviations and their fictional re-imagination in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*.[453] Verma states:

> From surviving the horrors of Partition, making his way to India, trying to earn his daily bread through all sorts of means, legal or illegal, landing in jail, joining the

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[451]Ibid.p 54.
[452]Ibid.
[453]Garima Verma, 'Book Review:The real Milkha versus the fictional Milkha', *The Pioneer.com,* 18th August 2013, < https://www.dailypioneer.com/2013/book-reviews/the-real-milkha-versus-the-fictional-milkha.html > [accessed on 10th August 2017].

Army to, finally, becoming the celebrated athlete, Singh's life story is a perfect *filmi* material. Why would then anyone want to add more *masala* to it?[454]

Although, Verma pertinently questions the creative liberties taken to fictionalise and dramatize the story of Milkha's life, however, she does not delve into the content of these deviations specifically. I observe that she glances through the differences between the book and the film and this surficial perspective weakens her assertion that Milkha Singh's story is better understood through his autobiography and not through the fictional elements introduced in the film.[455] The autobiography details his relationship with his elder brother and sister in law who also survived Partition along with Ishri, however, the film only chooses to highlight Milkha's relationship with his sister Ishri. I find that the complete omission of the roles of his brother and sister in law in the film, does help to highlight Milkha's bond with his sister, but at the same time it still does not explain the limited scope accorded to Ishri's role. Therefore, I do not endorse Verma's rejection of the film as her perspective is more focussed on the creative liberties taken while fictionalising the story of Milkha's life, rather than on the deeper implications of the film's fictional treatment.

Following the release and subsequent success of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, the creative liberties taken did become an important subject of discussion among critics and audiences. In particular, Mehra was questioned for combining the memories of Partition with the Olympic race, which was the most critical and disappointing result of Milkha's career. In the excerpt below Mehra explains the inspiration behind the approach and treatment of Milkha's loss at the Olympics:

> In his autobiography, he talks about a recurring nightmare he had where his feet are not moving. So he basically is seeing this massacre happening but his feet refuse to move. As a story-teller, I linked these nightmares to the days of Partition, which were knowingly or unknowingly always there inside his head. The loss in Rome was a technical error, but then I wasn't making a film on athletics. It was about the spirit.[456]

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[454]Ibid.
[455]Ibid.
[456]Scott Foundas, 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag: Movie Review, Review of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, *Variety.com,* July 2013. <http://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/film-review-bhaag-milkha-bhaag-1200561203/> [accessed 11th August 2017].

I deduce that Mehra is trying to garner sympathy for Milkha's erroneous judgement by engaging with memories of the Olympic race. At the same time, Mehra's strategic use of traumatic memories as a justification for athletic wins or losses has also been viewed as 'manipulative' and 'melodramatic' by film critic Rajeev Masand.[457] Although, the dramatic and emotive value of the Olympic race sequence is heightened by the inclusion of Milkha's traumatic memories, however, Masand's inference of manipulation is not a shared critical reading of the film. There are perspectives supportive of Mehra's incorporation of Milkha's memories of Partition. For instance, film critic Lisa Tsering states,

> (This scene) triumphs in its depiction of a man coming to terms with the ugliest scenes from his childhood, witnessing his parents' slaughter during the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and the resultant genocide, and rebuilding his life to become an Indian icon.[458]

Even though both perspectives are situated at opposite ends of the spectrum, they offer significant inferences drawn from the representation and treatment of Partition memories. The extensive creative liberties taken with the timeline of events have contributed to similar polarised reactions the film received. For instance, the Rome Olympics took place after the Indo-Pak Sports meet, but by introducing Partition at the start of the film allows Mehra to highlight the importance of this historic moment and its memories in the film. The resurfacing of Partition memories and their influence on Milkha is established as an integral narrative device by the director. In this context it is noteworthy that Mehra does not consider *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* a biography or a biopic; instead, he describes it as a 'movie on Partition.'[459] Foregrounding of Partition is noticeable through the film and Mehra states the same in several interviews, the excerpt below provides an insight into his approach and treatment of the story.

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[457]Rajeev Masand, Film Review 'Drag Race Review of Bhaag Milkha Bhaag directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra' *RajeevMasand.com*, July 2013, <http://www.rajeevmasand.com/reviews/our-films/drag-race/> [accessed 13th August 2017].

[458]Lisa Tsering, 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag: Film Review directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' December 2013, *Hollywood Reporter* <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-film-review-584733> [accessed 15th August 2018].

[459]Indo-Asian News Service. 'Who to cast as Milkha, gave Rakeysh Mehra sleepless nights,', June 2013. *Ndtv.com*. <http://movies.ndtv.com/bollywood/who-to-cast-as-milkha-gave-rakeysh-mehra-sleepless-nights-633760> [2nd August 2017].

> *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is not a biopic that shows Milkha Singh's achievements. It depicts how a child who lost his family in the partition of India succeeded both in life and athletics by sheer will. That is the story we are trying to tell through the film.[460]

It elucidates Mehra's cinematic approach, which is focused on the 'human' elements of Milkha's story, in order to illuminate the person behind the façade of the celebrated athlete.[461] I surmise that this assertion by Mehra allows him to sidestep many questions related to biographical accuracy. Milkha's memories, his resilience and spirit are the focal point of the narrative. Therefore, it functions largely as an audio-visual memory archive of a Partition survivor. In Mehra's own words:

> He was from Multan, which is now in Pakistan. During the partition, He saw his mother being killed brutally before his eyes. His sisters and father were also killed. Women and children suffered a lot during that period. He himself narrowly escaped death. He himself was about to be killed but he narrowly escaped death. He lived with refugees and struggled to feed himself.'[462]

Pakistan is an integral part of Milkha's story as his birthplace and a reminder of the place where he lost his family. By recreating the horrific memories of the violent murders Milkha witnessed in Pakistan, Mehra presents a revelatory microcosm of the experiences of the millions of families at that time. It acts as a significant testimony of a survivor that simultaneously applauds their spirit of survival. In another interview, Mehra states that *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is 'a movie on the hatred of Partition, the hatred Milkha Singh had to live with. I was trying to heal those wounds more than trying to make a biopic.'[463] Mehra consistently emphasises that the film explores Partition and the impressions it left on the lives of survivors.

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[460]'*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* will release in Pakistan: Rakeysh Om Prakash Mehra', The Press Trust of India. 21ˢᵗ June 2013. *Indiatimes.com.* <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/Bhaag-Milkha-Bhaag-will-release-in-Pakistan Rakeysh-Om-Prakash-Mehra/articleshow/20681224.cms> [accessed 9ᵗʰ April 2017].

[461]Punjab 2000.com, 'An Exclusive interview with Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra the man behind 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag.' July 2013. '<https://punjab2000.com/an-exclusive-interview-with-rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-the-man-behind-bhaag-milkha-bhaag/. > [2nd August 2017].

[462]Ibid.

[463]Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra interviewed by Tatsam Mukherjee, India Today, 26ᵗʰ September 2016, 'Mirzya director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag was a movie on partition, not a biopic.' *Indiatoday.* <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/mirzya-special/story/rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-mirzya-director-bhaag-milkha-bhaag-interview-343189-2016-09-26.> [accessed 12ᵗʰ October 2017].

Simultaneously, Mehra's intention to 'heal the wounds' is contradictory to the representation of the acrimonious competition between Indian athlete Milkha and Pakistani athlete Abdul Khaliq.[464] This leaves the film open to readings that the film promotes 'Hindu nationalism' as much as it addresses Partition.[465] Milkha's return to Pakistan became a complex inclusion navigating problematic and sensitive Indo-Pak relations. Therefore, the treatment of the contest between the two principal athletes Milkha and Khaliq is especially significant for its depiction of strong nationalist and divisive strains. Scholar Cornelis Rijneveld observes that the idea of masculinity in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* is focused on championing and defending Indian honour by defeating the Pakistani athlete Khaliq.[466]

> The emasculation caused by Milkha's fleeing from the Punjab and his witnessing of his father's beheading is redeemed by his confrontational return to Pakistan. Here, Milkha vindicates himself through the track-and-field victory that his hyper-masculine endurance and self-sacrifice enables.[467]

Rijneveld's analysis notes how people in both countries are still in the grips of this rivalry and how eventually this latent residual grief and anger has manifested into either military skirmishes or played out in sports like cricket. Mehra replaces the border and the cricket field with the racetrack. Contrary to Mehra's well-intentioned purpose of 'healing wounds' and mitigating bitterness between the nations, the final race plays primarily to the gallery of hackneyed Bollywood Indo-Pak portrayals.[468] Film critic Sanjukta Sharma reiterates this melodramatic track in the film as:

> It is a marathon trudge from cradle to national glory following a win in Pakistan against a Pakistani athlete, who incidentally has an aggressive coach, the film's

[464]Ibid.

[465]Cornelis Rijneveld, 'Hindu heroes and Muslim others: an analysis of the portrayal of Partition in Kamal Haasan's *Hey Ram* (2000), Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013), and M. S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (1973)' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2015). p 42.

[466]Ibid.

[467]Preeti Kumar, 'Reconfiguring India: Narrating the Nation through Great Men Biopics', *The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication and Film*. Vol.II, Issue I, (2014), pp 39-58. <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.2.1.04.pdf> [accessed 12th July 2017].

[468]Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra interviewed by Tatsam Mukherjee, India Today, 26th September 2016, 'Mirzya director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag was a movie on partition, not a biopic.' *Indiatoday*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/mirzya-special/story/rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-mirzya-director-bhaag-milkha-bhaag-interview-343189-2016-09-26.> [accessed 12th October 2017].

only villain. [469]

Patriotism, nationhood and defending the honour of one's country are emphasised through this Indo-Pak rivalry. The threat Milkha's family faced as Sikhs who decided to stay back in the Islamic state of Pakistan, implied that the men who massacred his family were Muslims. All these facets contribute to the visual composition of this sequence, which presents the rivalry between Milkha and Khaliq in a noticeably unfavourable light. The presentation of the Pakistani coach and athlete as antagonists ends up posturing an inflated self-congratulatory reconstruction with jingoistic overtones. Finally culminating in a negative portrayal of the historical, political and social relationship between India and Pakistan in the years following Partition.

This portrayal affected the prospects of the film's release in Pakistan. Several media publications reported that the film would not release in Pakistan, because it contains scenes where protagonist Milkha Singh is refusing to go to Pakistan, as well as the representations of the Pakistani coach and athlete.[470] Initially, Mehra negated these reports, stating that the film's release was only delayed. However later the film could not secure a release due to the mentioned controversial aspects. The film's failure to reach the audience in Pakistan reiterates the obvious criticisms of the visible strains of anti-Pakistan rhetoric and exaggerated strains of Indian patriotism. I note certain commonalities among the criticism of prominent Hindi Film critics Mihir Fadnavis, Sanjukta Sharma, Mayank Shekhar, Rajeev Masand and Saibal Chaterjee.[471] They share the disappointment with the jingoistic treatment of Pakistan and the sanctified oversimplification of Milkha Singh's personality in the narrative.[472] At the same time, they acknowledge that the film's emotional and inspirational appeal overcomes its identifiable drawbacks.

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[469]Sanjukta Sharma, 'Film Review: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, A Milkha Singh burdened by memories from Partition—this biopic turns him into a nationalist hero. Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *Livemint.com.* (July, 2013). <http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/LkkUuKzOSsVPpaFMsTNqQL/Film-Review--Bhaag-Milkha-Bhaag.html> [accessed 12th July 2017].

[470]Bollywood Hungama News Network, 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag banned in Pakistan' in *Indian Express*, 19th June 2013. <http://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-banned-in-pakistan/> [accessed 16th October 2016].

[471]Sanjukta Sharma, 'Film Review: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, A Milkha Singh burdened by memories from Partition—this biopic turns him into a nationalist hero. Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra,' *Livemint.com.* (July, 2013). <http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/LkkUuKzOSsVPpaFMsTNqQL/Film-Review--Bhaag-Milkha-Bhaag.html> [accessed 12th July 2017].

[472]Rajeev Masand, Movie Review: *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* 'Drag Race' in RajeevMasand.com on 12th July 2013, <https://www.rajeevmasand.com/reviews/our-films/drag-race/> [accessed on 12th August 2019].

In addition, the unequivocal support and endorsement the film and filmmaker received from the athlete himself influenced the success as well as perception of the film. The 82-year-old Milkha Singh and his family gave their permission to make the film and wholeheartedly cooperated with the filmmakers during its scripting stage as well. Post the film's release, Milkha Singh's reaction after watching the film became a major draw for audiences and media alike. A special exchange between filmmaker Mehra and Milkha Singh garnered particular attention. It was publicly stated that athlete Milkha Singh did not take any monetary compensation for handing over the rights of his story, except for the gift of a one rupee note. This specially sourced currency note was printed in the year 1958 to commemorate the year when the athlete won his first gold medal in the Commonwealth Games for Independent India.[473]

As previously mentioned, Milkha Singh's reactions to the film and his interviews became important contributors to the film's promotion and publicity before and after its release. This is an excerpt from one of the many interviews and media interactions Milkha Singh participated in after the film's release. Here athlete Milkha Singh says:

> I became very emotional after watching certain scenes as they reminded me of my days of struggle. The film brought alive memories of the Partition when I did not have a job or enough food. I burst into tears to see my initial days unfold on the big screen.[474]

As a result, eventhough film critics and reviewers were critical of the way Partition, its memories and Indo-Pak relations were treated in the film, the filmmakers managed to highlight that the film is 'a celebration of the human spirit.'[475] This assertion consistently drew attention to the more intangible and emotive aspects of the narrative, which was also endorsed by the athlete, as he wanted the film to be an inspirational narrative with

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[473]IANS, New Delhi 'Milkha Singh charged Rs 1 for biopic *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* in HindustanTimes.com, on 5th Feb 2013, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/milkha-singh-charged-rs-1-for-biopic-bhaag-milkha-bhaag/story-qIjOpmsOIrOIi9TOe24SaK.html> [accessed on 12th August 2019].

[474]Press Trust of India, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* brought alive memories of the Partition: Milkha Singh,' *The Indian Express,* June 2013. <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-brought-alive-memories-of-the-partition-milkha-singh/1134685/1> [accessed 1st June 2018].

[475]Press Trust of India, '*Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* brought alive memories of the Partition: Milkha Singh,' *The Indian Express,* June 2013. <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/bhaag-milkha-bhaag-brought-alive-memories-of-the-partition-milkha-singh/1134685/1> [accessed 1st June 2018].

the capacity to motivate youngsters to choose athletics and win medals for the country. [476] These facets drew attention away from its narrative flaws and concentrated on its emotional impact. I suggest that the commercial success and overall acceptance the film received emphasises the mainstream platform it provides to the subject of Partition.

Although Mehra tries to do justice to this extremely multi-faceted life, in trying to present each stage and each significant chapter of Milkha Singh's life, he ends up incorporating too many elements. Mehra consistently emphasises his intension to contribute to Partition memorialisation and treating Partition as the nucleus of the story. He states, 'I was using Milkha Singh as a device to tell the story of lost childhoods during Partition.'[477] At the same time, the film is laden with socio-political commentaries, whether it's the display of masculine prowess, the limited scope accorded to female characters or the presence of religious and nationalist overtones. Also, the mainstream treatment of the same elements are criticised for overdramatization.

However, moving beyond the film's cinematic or narrative flaws I suggest that the film be read for its foregrounding of Partition. The film does not limit itself to representing events during the occurrence of Partition, but looks deeply at its long-term impressions and implications on survivors. Through Milkha Singh, Mehra gives the audience an intimate look into the world of survivors before and the one created by Partition. Instead of drawing attention to the macro context through political figures and decisions, the film is an important reconstruction touching upon individual lives. It is an attempt to represent, reconstruct and replicate the memories of that tumultuous time. The protagonist Milkha Singh, the film symbolizes an integral part of the Indian milieu that was directly affected and is still mindful and conscious of this tragic moment in Indian history. The film also addresses the subsequent generations, making a convincing case for discussing the convergence of memories and historic contexts. I therefore surmise that *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, extends the boundaries of mainstream Indian cinema and marks a

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[476]Indo-Asian News Service, New Delhi 'Milkha Singh charged Rs 1 for biopic *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* in HindustanTimes.com, on 5th Feb 2013, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/milkha-singh-charged-rs-1-for-biopic-bhaag-milkha-bhaag/story-qIjOpmsOIrOIi9TOe24SaK.html> [accessed on 12th August 2019].

[477]Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra interviewed by Tatsam Mukherjee, India Today, 26th September 2016, 'Mirzya director Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra: Bhaag Milkha Bhaag was a movie on partition, not a biopic.' *Indiatoday*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/mirzya-special/story/rakeysh-omprakash-mehra-mirzya-director-bhaag-milkha-bhaag-interview-343189-2016-09-26.> [accessed 12th October 2017].

significant approach and perspective toward the memorialisation of Partition in recent times.

Chapter 4   *Rajkahini* (2015) & *Begum Jaan* (2017):

'Re-telling' Women's Partition memories

> My mother and I went to the camps to give people blankets, quilts and other
> items. We heard stories that were extremely frightening. 'we killed the women
> of our families in order to ensure their honour was protected', 'My husband
> killed our daughters with his own hands with his sword,' or 'our daughters and
> daughters in law jumped into wells to kill themselves so that they would not
> lose their honour.' [478]

This epigraph provides a glimpse into Partition survivor and writer Ajeet Cour's memories recounting experiences of women during that time. Many such accounts, particularly of women, have been lost, ignored or forgotten over the years, preventing the historiography of this event from being a comprehensive reading. Scholars Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin criticise dominant national history discourses for its indifference toward the documentation of female perspectives.

> (They) challenge statist historiography, bringing questions of sexuality and violence
> to the forefront of Partition historiography and stressing how a lack of documentary
> archival records does not absolve the historian from seeking out traces of silences in
> the past and marking the enforced silences of the present.[479]

An impassive approach toward the enumeration of deaths and displacement figures is glaringly noticeable in official accounts that do not reflect the level of gendered violence systemically perpetuated during Partition. From a feminist perspective scholars Butalia, Menon and Bhasin criticise the conversion of these intense memories into statistical data. They note that the treatment of Partition 'as a time of extraordinary violence and shame, for men, women and the two new nations' has helped mask the ignorance and indifference

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[478]Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India: Penguin Random House, 2017), p 107.
[479]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery , Rupture , Resistance Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition', *Economic And Political Weekly*, 28.17 (1993), (pp 12–24). p 14.

toward its memorialisation as sensitivity.[480] This attitude has discouraged attempts to address or unravel its traumatic dimensions and especially those belonging to women and their experiences.[481] Scholar Pippa Virdee addresses the growing 'trend' explore 'history from below', is driven by the 'need' to understand the experiences of people and more specifically of what women endured during those years.[482] Her work poignantly and painstakingly traces the widespread violence and abuse women faced at that time.[483] Such efforts have gradually tried to remedy this lapse in Partition historiography and provided an impetus to record women's memories of Partition.

Simultaneously, scholars Paulomi Chakraborty and Rosemary Marangoly George advocate for a separate space for the analysis of Partition films exploring women's relationships with their families, communities as well as the nation.[484] According to this viewpoint, films addressing the extraordinary and problematic instances of violence perpetrated against women during the separation, highlight the context of Partition and tend to lead with strong female protagonists as distinct. It is observable that observe that Partition literature addressing and expressing women's traumatic experiences have either been adapted or inspired fiction and non-fiction films representing these aspects.[485] So far, this analysis has examined narratives that have dealt with Partition memories through representations channelized and centred around male characters. I have demonstrated in the previous chapters *Filmistaan* (2012), and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013) are male protagonist driven narratives that largely preclude women's perspectives as well as presence. This lopsided representational approach reflects mainstream Indian cinema's limited initiative toward the representation of women during and after Partition. In this chapter, I attempt to address this gap by analyzing two recent mainstream films exploring Partition through their women-centric narratives.

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[480]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 137). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]
[481]Paulomi Chakraborty, *Gender, Women and Partition,*(India: OUP, 2018), p 42.
[482]Pippa Virdee, Remembering partition: women, oral histories and the Partition of 1947', *Oral History Society,* 41 (2), (2013), pp 49-62, (p 50).
[483]Ibid. p 54.
[484]Ibid.
[485]Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1998), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1988), Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (2003), Bapsi Sidhwa's *1947 Earth* (1998), short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chugtai and many other have been adapted for cinema.

Rajkahini (2015) and its remake *Begum Jaan* (2017) highlight women's experiences and bring their perspectives to the fore through female ensemble casts as well as stories set in 1947. Bengali film *Rajkahini* is the original and *Begum Jaan* is its Hindi language adaptation.[486] Thus, the films share a common storyline and interestingly the same director, Srijit Mukherji. The films demonstrate myriad ways in which fictional frameworks are utilized to navigate women's Partition memories and the attached trauma. (Figures 109 and 110). They feature gender violence, displacement and their effect on women during as well as after Partition, making it integral to understand the 'vocabulary, tropes and aesthetics,' used to deal with these thematic considerations through this analysis.[487] *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* offer complex representations combining influences of Partition literature with survivor testimonies and memories.

Figure 109

Figure 110

Scholars E.Ann Kaplan, Ban Wang and Dorothy Barenscott reiterate the need for more in-depth analysis of representations of trauma with the ability to introduce survivor accounts into 'public discourse' and forums of 'collective knowledge.'[488] Although cinema has the capacity to disburse these memories, it's fictional representations of sensitive memories, especially those dealing with gender violence warrant closer scrutiny, since they enumerate

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[486]Bengali also known as Bangla is the native language spoken in the Bengal region of South Asia and amongst people from this region.

[487]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) < https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9> p 20 [accessed 12th November 2018] p 16.

[488]E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang,(eds), *Trauma and Cinema, Cross-Cultural Explorations,* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), p 47.

'the possible pitfalls and risks that may attend such tellings and re-tellings of trauma.'[489] This is relevant in the context of Indian cinema as depictions of communal riots, sexual violence and the projection of communities is vulnerable to censorship and right-wing protests.[490]Therefore, the reluctance to address the violence perpetuated during Partition is even more pronounced in mainstream cinema. In the course of their investigations, Bhasin, Menon and Butalia come across several problematic incidents of mass suicides by women propelled by the prevalence of a convoluted attachment with the purity of a woman's virtue:

> (women) offering themselves up for death, or simply being killed, in an attempt to protect the 'purity' and 'sanctity' of the religion. While most able-bodied men felt they could go out and fight, and kill if necessary, for the women, children and the old and weak, a martyr's death seemed to be the only option preferable to conversion to the 'other' religion.[491]

These incidents reveal a deep-rooted indoctrination of patriarchal values that decides a woman's status and level of acceptance within society. Women embracing death as a way of preserving their purity raises critical questions about 'female agency' and what guides these choices.[492] The analysis of *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* offers an insight into the female narrative agency, and their reaction to the ubiquitous threats of sexual violence is representative of what women faced during Partition.[493] The situation of the films in a brothel sets up multi-layered societal, gender, cultural and moral conflicts. Eventually, the fight for women's rights represents complex gender dynamics through violent and non-violent confrontations between men and women. The occurrence of Partition in the background intensifies these different encounters. Interestingly, even though the main characters are prostitutes, they are equally susceptible to prescribed societal notions of honour, dignity and respect which further complicates their presentation. Therefore, Mukherji's attempt is

[489]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 138). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016].
[490]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 140). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]
[491]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery , Rupture , Resistance Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition', *Economic And Political Weekly*, 28.17 (1993), pp 12–24, (p 14).
[492]Ibid. p 16.
[493]Dorothy Barenscott,'This is our Holocaust': Deepa Mehta's Earth and the Question of Partition Trauma', *UCLA Historical Journal,* 21(0), (2006), pp 60-79, (p 62).

significant as he seeks to establish that the intervention of Partition impacts their lives in equal measure, regardless of their placement at the fringes of society.

Women in the films are shown living in harmony until the unwelcome intervention by the State, in form of Partition enters their lives. The men personify destructive elements of 'breakage', drawing up of 'arbitrary borders', enforcing separation backed by a powerful male-dominated Government.[494] However, as the films progress the idyllic lives of the prostitutes unravel several problematic undertones that intersect with the violence and destruction wrought by Partition. In this way political ramifications of Partition are viewed through the prism of these women's memories, imagination and experiences. As a result, both films present an amalgamation of reconstructions of traumatic incidents, lingering memories as well as sharp socio-political commentaries.

Director Srijit Mukherji taps into different forms of Partition memorialisation: starting with documented facts of Partition's political process and references to well-known historical figures. After that the narratives move on to examining the traumatic memories of women directly affected by Partition. This two-fold approach highlights how inferences from memories need not be 'passed on in a monadic form', as it expands the representational, sociological and referential scope of Partition history.[495] Scholars Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering suggest that such varied and imaginative treatments of memories help in engaging audiences. It demonstrates the importance of developing 'a cross-temporal resonance, with memory' to address the future and using imagination while 'thinking of the past.'[496] It illuminates Mukherji's choice to reimagine Partition historicity through a female centric point of view that presents a contemporary audience with the resonating impact of Partition on both national and individual levels. Memory scholar Pierre Nora addresses this micro to macro connection through memories originating from a nation's historic moment to an individual's national identity.[497]

> Nationalist memory describes a geography of belonging, an identity forged in a
> specified landscape, inseparable from it. To study memory in the context of the

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[494]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) < https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9> p 20 [accessed 12th November 2018].
[495]Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering. *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice.* (Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2012). p 179.
[496]Ibid.
[497]Pierre Nora,*Between memory and history*: Les lieux de mémoire. *Representations* 26 (1989), pp7-24. (p 8).

nation, then, is to engage very directly with the relations between individual and collective memory, between the subject and the state, between time and space.[498]

These themes of 'belonging', 'identity' and 'nation' run through *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* and the narratives explore how they impact women. Although Partition narratives *Garam Hawa* (1973), *Tamas* (1988), *Mammo* (1994), *Earth 1947* (1998)*, Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Khamosh Pani* (2003)*, Pinjar* (2003) are replete with representations of women characters whose identities were affected and recreated due to Partition, however, this body of work excludes recent perspectives of commercial Hindi and regional cinema. This is where *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* become significant, for they reflect a specific evolution in the way recent commercial ventures contextualising Partition portray women.

This chapter carefully examines the treatment of Partition and its memories in the films through their women-centric narratives. The high production value and scale of the films place them in the category of mainstream films. I look at the presentation of Partition as a historical and political process. My analysis includes the many narrative similarities and dissimilarities between the two films as well as their subsequent reception. I discuss the different narrative influences of *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan,* which are indicative of their production structures and narrative progressions. The utilisation of *rasas* in memory portrayals, their interspersion through the many dramatic moments in the films are studied. I conclude this chapter with an evaluation of the critical and commercial reception of the films.

4.1 *Rajkahini & Begum Jaan*: Production structures & narrative influences

To begin with, I suggest that understanding the production and narrative construction of *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* is integral before delving deeper into the analysis. Srijit Mukherji is an award-winning director and considered one of the most successful directors of Bengali Cinema.[499] *Rajkahini* is his most elaborate production to date and the cast of the film reflects

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[498]Ibid.
[499]Bengal Cinema: refers to the films made in the state of West Bengal in India.

its scale.[500] This ensemble of Bengali actors and actresses includes: Rituparna Sengupta, Sudipta Chakraborty, Joya Ahsan, Sayani Ghosh, Abir Chatterjee, Jisshu Sengupta, to name a few.[501] In addition to this popular and acclaimed cast, *Rajkahini* stands out in Bengal cinema for its high production value amounting to 3.5 crores INR (35 million USD).[502] The film's subsequent success follows the footsteps of celebrated Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, the lone figure who took up Partition and its consequences in Bengal cinema in the 1960s. Therefore, *Rajkahini's* production design and thematic structure provide a rare insight into contemporary regional or Bengal cinema's approach toward Partition.

Rajkahini's critical and commercial success in Bengal as well as at prominent film festivals in India and abroad caught the attention of mainstream Hindi film producers. Subsequently, Hindi film director and producer Mahesh Bhatt approached Mukherji and suggested that this story 'be told to a bigger milieu of the audience.'[503] Remakes or adaptations of successful regional films in the Hindi language are regular occurrences.[504] It is a commercial practice that tries to replicate the regional success of a film on a national scale. Director Srijit Mukherji penned the story, screenplay and dialogues of both films. Although the basic storyline of the films is the same, he makes fundamental changes to the Hindi adaptation.

Begum Jaan's script was altered significantly to engage a primarily Hindi speaking north Indian demographic. The possibility of dubbing the film in Hindi was discussed, but Mukherji stated that 'with dubbing, the film gets divorced from its spirit.'[505] Therefore, *Rajkahini* was recreated for the Hindi speaking filmgoers in 2017 as *Begum Jaan* (A lady of high rank).[506] Mainstream Hindi film actress Vidya Balan essayed the lead role of Begum Jaan. The actress is best known for her off-beat film choices and ethnic sartorial look. The film's supporting cast includes acclaimed actors Naseeruddin Shah, Rajit Kapur, Ashish

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[500]Biswas Premankur interviewed Srijit Mukherji, director of *Rajkahini,* 'I don't believe in the term commercial cinema: Srijit Mukherji' in *IndianExpress.com*, 5th April 2015 <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/regional/i-dont-believe-in-the-term-commercial-cinema-srijit-mukherji/ > [accessed on 20th October 2017].

[501]Rafi Hossain interviewed Srijit Mukherji, 'Rajkahini: Drawing the line,' in *Dailystar.com,* <https://www.thedailystar.net/showbiz/cover-story/rajkahini-drawing-the-line-168484 >[accessed 21st October 2018].

[502]Ravi, 'List of Top 20 Highest Grossing Bengali Movies of All Time' in *Pycker.com*, on 26th June 2018, <https://pycker.com/articles/top-20-highest-grossing-bengali-movies-of-all-time> [accessed on 2nd April 2019].

[503]Ahana Bhattacharya interview of Srijit Mukherji, director of *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* 'My Two Begum Jaans Are Pareto-incomparable,' in *Koimoi.com.* March 20th 2017. <https://www.koimoi.com/bollywood-news/my-two-begum-jaans-are-pareto-incomparable-srijit-mukherjis-exclusive-interview/ > [accessed 18th October 2018].

[504]Ibid.

[505]Ibid.

[506]Biswas Premankur interviewed Srijit Mukherji, director of *Rajkahini,* 'I don't believe in the term commercial cinema: Srijit Mukherji' in *IndianExpress.com*, 5th April 2015 <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/regional/i-dont-believe-in-the-term-commercial-cinema-srijit-mukherji/ > [accessed on 20th October 2017].

Vidyarthi and Gauhar Khan, recognised for their unconventional filmography. The rest of the cast comprises of relatively unknown actresses, which was a deliberate strategy by Mukherji:

> Unlike the Bengali version, where apart from Begum Jaan all the other 10 girls' roles were played by established actresses, the Hindi version has many unknown faces. I didn't want pretty faces. I wanted faces that will carry stories.[507]

Mukherji's production strategies depict his distinctive approach toward filmmaking. Regional films are known for their limited resources, and in comparison, mainstream Hindi films have elaborate budgets. Deviating from formulaic commercial production approaches, Mukherji limits the budget of *Begum Jaan* to 19 crores INR (190 million USD), which for a commercial Hindi film can be considered a modest budget.[508] Secondly, this film was completed in a thirty-two-day schedule, unlike the common lengthy shoot schedules found among commercial Hindi films. I note that Mukherji follows more proficient and economically viable timelines, using the expertise gained through the production of over eleven successful Bengali films. In addition, he emphasises that *Begum Jaan* is an attempt to 'make a conscious effort to stay away from the original to do it afresh.' [509] Therefore, 'the Hindi adaptation is a fresh perspective, the treatment is different, the emotive content is different, only the plot is the same.'[510] To achieve this Mukherji:

> (he) rewrote the characters and deleted some sequences and added some. It was kind of an adaptive process. It is basically an adaptation and not really a remake. The backdrop of the girls has changed, girls speaking language(s) from different place(s) of North India. *Begum Jaan* has an immediate contemporary connect which *Rajkahini* doesn't.[511]

Titles of both films are used to distinguish between their premise and narrative focus clearly. *Rajkahini* narrates 'the story of the Raj' or tells a story of British colonial rule in India and

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[507]Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), New Delhi, Interview Srijit Mukherji, 'I want to show anger of Partition through *Begum Jaan*', 27th April 2017. <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/reviews/begum-jaan-review-all-sound-and-fury-signifying-nothing/article18016190.ece. > [accessed 12th November 2018].

[508]*Begum Jaan* for *BoxOfficeIndia.com* on 14th April 2017, <https://boxofficeindia.com/movie.php?movieid=3510> [accessed on 12th April 2018].

[509]Ibid.

[510]Ahana Bhattacharya interview of Srijit Mukherji, director of *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* 'My Two Begum Jaans Are Pareto-incomparable,' in *Koimoi.com.* March 20th 2017. <https://www.koimoi.com/bollywood-news/my-two-begum-jaans-are-pareto-incomparable-srijit-mukherjis-exclusive-interview/ > [accessed 18th October 2018].

[511]Srijit Mukherji interviewed for *Cinespeaks.com.* <http://cinespeaks.com/exclusive-interview-director-srijit-mukherji-talks-about-his-upcoming-film-begum-jaan/> [Accessed on 22nd October 2018].

Begum Jaan is focussed mainly on one woman and her perspective. According to Mukherji, '*Rajkahini* has a very macro feel to the title which describes the film so the focus of *Rajkahini* was much more board, it's a very macro historical canvas sort of a setting.'[512] The title *Begum Jaan* is named after the protagonist and presents a story concentrating primarily on that individual. He describes *Begum Jaan* in his own words as:

> (Is) a much more personal film hence I decided to name it after the person, whose spirit and presences gets through the film and it's a very intimate, personal kind of a film as opposed to (the) macro historical canvas (of *Rajkahini*) which is why the difference in the names.[513]

This shift from a macro-political context to a personal one is first of many significant narrative alterations that affect the overall context of the films. *Rajkahini* represents several detailed political interactions and follows their traumatic impact on women's lives. In contrast, *Begum Jaan* foregrounds the journey of women and creates a heroine-centric portrayal. The various distinctions and similarities between the two films strongly impress upon the depiction of Partition as well as women. To develop a well-rounded analysis, I delve deeper into the narrative commonalities and points of deviation between the films as well as their literary influences. I begin by providing the basic story outline shared by both films.

This fictional story is set in the year 1947 and follows the lives of a group of prostitutes and their madam Begum Jaan living in a brothel situated on the outskirts of a small town. Two government officials Mr Prafulla Sen (Hari Prasad in *Begum Jaan*) and Mr Muhammad Ilias representing Hindu and Muslim communities as well as Congress and Muslim League respectively are assigned to oversee the construction of the Indo-Pak border in that region. The films present the process of the creation of the 'Radcliffe Line' by the chief architect of the border, Sir Cyril Radcliffe. This line or border passes through Begum Jaan's brothel, dividing it into India and Pakistan. Subsequently, Begum Jaan is issued an eviction notice to vacate the brothel, for its demolition to be carried out for the construction of the border. Begum Jaan and all the women living and working for her, refuse to leave the brothel. This

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[512]*Drishti Pandey interview of Srijit Mukherji for *Super Cinema*, 'Begum Jaan' is a much more personal film hence I decided to name it after the person, whose spirit and presences gets through the film.' April 15, 2017, < http://supercinema.co.in/srijit-mukherji/> [accessed 18th October 2018].
[513]*Drishti Pandey interview of Srijit Mukherji for *Super Cinema*, 'Begum Jaan' is a much more personal film hence I decided to name it after the person, whose spirit and presences gets through the film.' April 15, 2017, < http://supercinema.co.in/srijit-mukherji/> [accessed 18th October 2018].

collective refusal leads to a confrontation between the women and the State representatives Sen and Ilias, who ultimately resort to the use of brute force against the women to evict them. The physical creation of the border due to Partition is taking place simultaneously in the films. In *Rajkahini* thw border depicts the division of Bengal into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal (in India); in *Begum Jaan* it represents the division of the northern Indian province of Punjab. Therefore, this seemingly innocuous geographical alteration has a much greater significance to the overall portrayal of Partition. It is also noteworthy that all State-sponsored roles, positions of power, wealth and education are held by men: Sen and Ilias are representatives of the governments of both countries, Congress and Muslim League; similarly, the police officers, Rajaji (Lord of the district) and the local teacher known as Master are all men. Such a male dominated power structure is indicative of a larger socio-cultural hierarchy that is both acceptable and commonplace in societies across the world. Mukherji attempts to reverse gender roles as inside the brothel Begum Jaan's word is the law. She presents a dominating female figure who constantly challenges the authority of the men. Her protest starts with her rejection of Sen and Ilias's eviction request and eventually her decision turns into a protest against the diktat of Partition. Showcasing this power struggle between the genders amid Partition unfolding brings themes of communal tensions, sexual violence, political agendas, survivor trauma, homosexuality and discrimination to the fore.

পৃথিবীর প্রত্যেক উদ্বাস্তুর জন্য
Dedicated to every refugee in this world
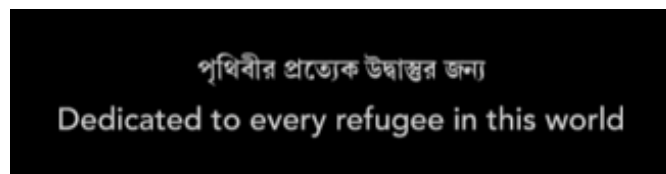
Figure 111

The setting shifts from Bengal to representing 'a group of women who come from various parts of North India, some from U.P, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and the kind of formal metaphor for the nation.'[514] As mentioned before this regional shift from Bengal to Punjab is significant. *Begum Jaan* is set in Punjab where large portions of the film were shot and *Rajkahini* tries to magnify the experience of Bengal during Partition. Soon after Partition, the Bangladesh Liberation War and genocide in 1971 preceded the conception of Bangladesh. The creation of East Pakistan during Partition was a significant development,

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[514]Drishti Pandey interview of Srijit Mukherji for *Super Cinema,* 'Begum Jaan' is a much more personal film hence I decided to name it after the person, whose spirit and presences gets through the film.' April 15, 2017,
< http://supercinema.co.in/srijit-mukherji/> [accessed 18th October 2018].

and *Rajkahini* is a critical representation of Bengal's experience. The refugee crisis in Bengal due to Partition is a sensitive subject and Mukherji dedicates *Rajkahini* to 'every refugee in this world' (Figure 111).[515] It is a direct reference to the refugee settlement known as 'Coopers Camp' at the border of West Bengal.[516] This camp comprises of refugees who fled from Pakistan (East Pakistan) to West Bengal in India during Partition. Although these developments have had far-reaching consequences for the entire subcontinent, yet Mukherji notes that they have not been politically represented or found space in the media. [517]

> It is probably beyond the comprehension of most people that refugees could exist from partition 60 years ago, but it is one of the bitterest present-day truths of India's split with Pakistan.[518]

The people in this camp survive mainly on government handouts or the paltry income they draw as daily wage workers. They still struggle to attain the legitimacy of Indian citizenship and have become stark reminders of the devastation Partition caused in Bengal. Mukherji's focus on refugees challenges the government's apathy towards the appalling condition of refugees and is simultaneously critical of its decision to Partition the country. By situating *Rajkahini* in Bengal, Mukherji identifies and criticises an underlying parochialism regarding the geographical context within which Partition is remembered:

> Also, in India, any dialogues on Partition is just about Punjab. It's as if nothing happened in Bengal. But the fact of the matter is that the Punjab Partition happened in one blow. But here in a trickle riot here, a skirmish there. As the courses of rivers changed people were left without a home, a nationality. But no one has dealt with that; it's as if we've been living in a no man's land of the mind for decades.[519]

The film sheds light on this disparity in Partition memorialisation that predominantly features experiences of those belonging in the northern regions of India. The refugee crisis in Bengal

[515]*Rajkahini* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Shree Venkatesh Films, 2015).
[516]Dan McDougall, *The Guardian.com,* 'The forgotten refugees who wait for justice after 60 years', 5th August 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/05/india.theobserver > [accessed on 10th August 2018].
[517]Satadru Ojha interviewed Srijit Mukherji, 'I don't believe in putting laurel leaves on my posters', *Indiatimes.com,* 27th January 2017. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms > [accessed 18th October 2018].
[518]Ibid.
[519]Satadru Ojha interviewed Srijit Mukherji, 'I don't believe in putting laurel leaves on my posters', *Indiatimes.com,* 27th January2017.<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms > [accessed 18th October 2018].

symbolises repercussions of Partition 'over which we've been in denial for decades.'[520] I observe that Mukherji makes a strong case for the cinematic lapse in Partition's historiography of Bengal through *Rajkahini*; then paradoxically he situates *Begum Jaan* in North India to reach a wider audience. Therefore, by his actions, he reinforces the same popular perceived link of Partition with Punjab instead of Bengal. The decision affects the content, treatment and reception of *Begum Jaan*, which I will explore in greater detail later in the chapter.

Apart from the geographic focus of *Rajkahini*, analysing the narrative influence of Partition literature is central to comprehending Mukherji's process of reimagination and recreation of Partition. He draws inspiration from stories of well-known Partition writers Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) and Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003). Although the influence of their works is observable in different forms in both films; however in *Rajkahini,* this inspiration is much more pronounced. Following the refugee dedication plate Mukherji inserts another plaque (Figure 112) acknowledging the adaptation of Saadat Hasan Manto's short story '*Khol Do'* (Open It) (1948).

Not all, but some characters are fictitious. Some events and places too.
The opening pre-title sequence is an adaptation of "*Khol Do*", a short story by Saadat Hasan Manto.

The rest, as they say, is history...
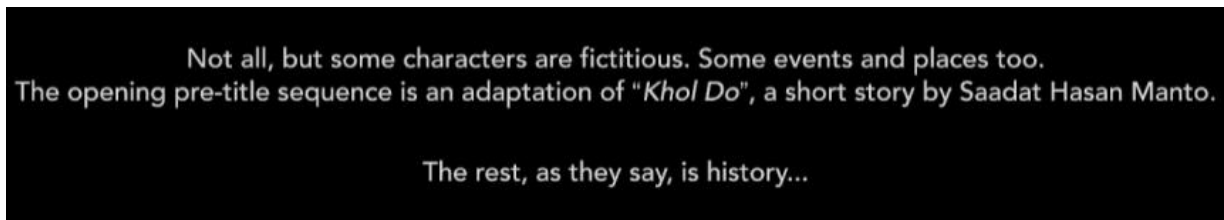
Figure 112

As stated in the plaque above (Figure 112), Mukherji's narrative framework for both films is an intriguing blend of fiction, Partition literature and official historical accounts. In his own words he acknowledges that both films mirror the strong impressions Partition literature left on him:

> The subject is very hard-hitting. Partition as an event demands that kind of treatment. While reading stories of Partition and its impact on human lives by Saadat Hasan

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[520]Terri Tomsky, 'Fifty Years On: Melancholic (Re) collections and Women's Voices from the Partition of India.' *Life Writing* 5.1 (2008), pp 61-78, (p 62) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms.> [accessed 18th October 2018].

Manto and Ismat Chughtai, I used to get angry and hurt. I wanted to show that in-your-face anger through Begum Jaan in these films.[521]

This approach explains his visual canvas for both films, the selection of incidents and stories he chooses to reconstruct. These are primarily designed for communicating feelings of anger and hurt and to achieve this this Mukherji recreates a refugee camp set in Bengal for Saadat Hasan Manto's short story '*Khol Do',* (Open It) (Figures 113 and 114). Depiction of refugee camps and their abhorrent conditions is a noticeable feature in many Partition narratives, including *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag.* These reconstructions use specific 'visual signifiers' that help communicate the 'chaos,' 'rupture' of regular life and displacement of millions that took place during Partition.[522] The presence of these visuals help establish Partition for audiences while reiterating the extent of its devastating impact.

Figure 113

Figure 114

Manto's story *Khol Do* (Open It) is reconstructed in *Rajkahini*. It takes place inside a makeshift hospital in the refugee camp where a distressed father comes to identify his missing daughter. His daughter is found near the camp after being brutally gang-raped. The girl is severely traumatised and doesn't respond to anyone including her father's presence or

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[521]Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), New Delhi, Interview Srijit Mukherji, 'I want to show anger of Partition through *Begum Jaan*', 27th April 2017. <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/reviews/begum-jaan-review-all-sound-and-fury-signifying-nothing/article18016190.ece. > [accessed 12th November 2018].
[522]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) in Carleton University Research Virtual Environment, <https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9>[accessed on 12th June 2016]. p 47.

words.[523] In addition to portraying the deplorable conditions of the camps and refugees it focusses on women who became victims of sexual violence during Partition (Figure 113 and 114). Manto's works have been subject to intense scrutiny and surrounded by controversies. The bold and intense portrayals in his stories recount horrors of Partition with a realism that compel readers to face the repulsive and often grotesque sides of humanity. Scholar Alok Bhalla observes that Manto's stories are 'marked by a sense of rage and hopelessness,' creating symbolic binaries that distinctly mark Partition literature and its subsequent inspired works.[524] However, the publication of Manto's Partition fiction in the early 1950s, was not well received.[525]

> It was negatively received not just by right-wingers in Pakistan and India but also by progressive cultural critics who thought him voyeuristic, pornographic, and irreligious.[526]

This criticism of Manto's work directly links to Mukherji's reconstructions of incidents depicting the brutal exploitation and violence faced by women during Partition in *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan*. Hence, it is important to discuss the other authorial inspirations that have guided characterisations and their depiction in the films. Mukherji pays tribute to Ismat Chughtai by naming three main characters in the film after famous characters written by her. Mukherji draws inspiration from Chughtai's bold and nuanced exploration of female sexuality. The incorporation of a lesbian relationship as well as his attempts at presenting complicated female characters can be seen as a direct inference to Chughtai. The protagonist Begum Jaan is named after one of the main character's in Chughtai's famous short story *Lihaf* (The Quilt). The influence of author Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* (Darkness) that was later adapted into an acclaimed tele-series by the same name in 1988 is also mentioned by Mukherji in his interviews. These difference sources have a combined impact on the way communal tensions and riots are represented in the films.

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[523]Drishti Pandey interviewed Srijit Mukherji for *News 18,* April 15th 2017, 'Begum Jaan' is a much more personal film hence I decided to name it after the person, whose spirit and presences gets through the film.'
<https://www.news18.com/news/movies/rajkahini-review-hard-hitting-narrative-makes-for-a-compelling-watch-1161680.html> [accessed on 18th October 2018].
[524]Alok Bhalla, *Partition dialogues: memories of a lost home,'* (USA:Oxford University Press, 2006), p 112.
[525]Ibid. p 142.
[526]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 141). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]

Mukherji draws on feminist studies by Jaya Chatterjee, Urvashi Butalia, Suvir Kaul and Mushirul Hasan and Haimanti Roy to develop an understanding of how women were treated during and after Partition by both nations.[527]Partition literature and feminist scholarship together highlight the ways in which women's 'chastity and reproductive abilities needed to be monitored and regulated to service her own kin group.' [528] They reiterate the ascription of women's status either as 'an icon to be defended or a spoil of war to be denigrated.' [529] These constructs became the social framework against which the heinous acts of women's abductions, rapes, forced conversions and mass suicides were committed during Partition.

Hence *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* explore the socio-historic practice of ascribing women with the status of 'symbols of honour', which in tragic irony makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation.[530] The films highlight this vulnerability of women 'particularly in times of crises, wars and environmental disasters.' [531] Mukherji takes these perceptions as well as their patriarchal connotations and presents a complex story based on the lives of prostitutes. A group that he considers 'the most marginal among the marginalised.'[532] In his own words he explains the idea came from, 'Talking about women who worked in a brothel. These women are never discussed; they are not part of any history books. This was the group I would (want to) focus on.'[533] Therefore, some of the women in the films are given backstories of rape survivors attacked during communal riots, preceding Partition. These traumatic memories challenge the prevalence of skewed patriarchal norms that tend to gloss over such problematic issues. In the next section, I present a detailed study of how these narrative influences impact their cinematic representations, the treatment of female characters and their sensitive memories.

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[527]Satadru Ojha interviewed Srijit Mukherji, *Times of India.com.* 'I don't believe in putting laurel leaves on my film posters.' <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms > [accessed on 20th October 2018].
[528]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 137). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]
[529]Ibid.
[530]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 150). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]
[531]Ibid.
[532]Satadru Ojha interviewed Srijit Mukherji, *Times of India.com.* 'I don't believe in putting laurel leaves on my film posters.' <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-dont-believe-in-putting-laurel-leaves-on-my-film-posters-Srijit-Mukherji/articleshow/48987815.cms > [accessed on 20th October 2018].
[533] Ibid.

4.2   Representation of trauma and gender violence

Within the context of Partition *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* present two distinct treatments of women and their experiences. Manto's short story *Khol Do* (Open It, 1948) offers a poignant introduction to women's traumatic experiences and memories of Partition. The story's reconstruction in *Rajkahini* helps the audience grasp what the girl, Shabnam endured, through the following excerpt recreated in the film:

> When the male doctor requests that an assistant open a window to let in some reviving air, the semiconscious girl who has been raped so often obeys the male command to 'open it' by slowly and painfully unknotting the drawstring to her salwar (drawstring pants) and pulling them down.[534]

This mechanical action by the semi-conscious Shabnam reveals the magnitude of sexual violence she endured.[535] 'The story concludes with a single sentence that captures the doctor's mortification: 'The doctor broke into a cold sweat.'[536] This memory becomes the back story for Shabnam's character in both films. Scholar Alok Bhalla says that Manto's story divides men and women into fixed categories, relegating men such as the victim's father, the doctor and the assistant into the category of indirect victims. They become inadvertent witnesses to the atrocities and are simultaneously ashamed at their helplessness as well as inability to protect their women. In the films, the inclusion of oral testimonies of State representatives Sen and Ilias, represent memories of men who have witnessed and survived mob violence.

Ilias recounts the attack on his family by a Hindu mob, who gang-raped his wife and burnt her alive in his presence. Sen's mother and wife narrowly escape rape and murder after a Muslim mob attacked his family. Their experiences highlight the emasculating impact of Partition violence on men who were unable to protect their families and particularly women. Bhalla discusses this category of men as victims and diametrically opposite to rioters

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[534]Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction Author(S)': *The University of Chicago Press*, 33 (1), (2007), pp 135–58, (p 141). <www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/518371> [accessed on 21st March 2016]

[535]Shomini Sen, IANS, *IBNLive.com,* 'Rajkahini' review: Hard-hitting narrative makes for a compelling watch, <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/rajkahini-review-hard-hitting-narrative-makes-for-a-compelling-watch1161680.html> [accessed 20th August 2017].

[536]Alok Bhalla, *Partition dialogues: memories of a lost home,'* (USA:Oxford University Press, 2006), p 122.

perpetrating ghastly crimes during Partition.[537] Even though Mukherji chose not to recreate the incidents of Ilias and Sen's families, their oral testimonies maintain the focus on women's experiences through these recounted memories. Mukherji depicts this category in a montage of riot visuals interspersed in both films reiterating the extent of violence perpetrated during Partition.

The third category, according to Bhalla, belongs to women, mainly projected as objects are either 'violated, enshrined' or safeguarded by men in his Partition stories.[538] However, both films simultaneously reinforce and debunk these classifications through their narratives. In a first, Mukherji takes Manto's short story and depicts Shabnam's father leaving her at Begum Jaan's brothel. This incident expresses the ignominy that sexual violence survivors faced during Partition and after. It is the result of a patriarchal mentality that rejects victims and ensures that the likelihood of being accepted by their families are virtually non-existent.[539] Partition literature and cinema reflect these social attitudes that provide few alternatives to trauma survivors other than suicide, murder, prostitution and conversion.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* (1992), the source material for the Partition film *Earth 1947* (1998), provides a similar end to the dramatic abduction of a Hindu maid Shanta by a violent Muslim mob. The film alludes that Shanta is found years later working as a prostitute and Mukherji implies the same for Shabnam by placing her in the brothel. This action precludes any possibility of rehabilitation, acceptance or even sensitivity toward her condition as a victim of a brutal sexual assault. The presentation of Shabnam's condition in the aftermath of trauma makes a strong statement, especially when she is placed in yet another exploitative setup, emphasising that the trauma does not end for her. Shabnam's first interaction with Begum Jaan is retained in both the films as it makes a significant statement in this context.

Upon her arrival, a traumatised Shabnam is repeatedly slapped by Begum Jaan to elicit a reaction from her. Finally, Shabnam lets out a long enraged painful scream, and Begum Jaan justifies her act of violence as something that needed to be done to force the girl to vent and reconnect with her emotions (Figure 115). This amateur shock therapy is Begum Jaan's way

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[537]Ibid. p 123.
[538]Ibid. p 102.
[539]Paulomi Chakraborty, 'The refugee woman: Partition of Bengal, women and the everyday of the nation.' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Routledge, 2010), p 52.

of starting Shabnam's healing process. Her treatment of Shabnam reflects a prior experience with victims of sexual violence as many of them have found their way into her brothel. This similarity is shown by highlighting the traumatic memories of another prostitute, Golaap. Mukherji retains Golaap's memories in both the films, only changing her name to Gulabo in *Begum Jaan,* as it is a more commonly found north Indian name.

Figure 115.

Golaap was raped during the communal riots that occurred across the country before Partition. Mukherji recreates the traumatic incident and presents it through flashbacks. In a bold scene Golaap's memories come to the fore while she is engaged in a sexual act with a customer. Her traumatic flashbacks are triggered when the man places his hand on her chest. The narrative suddenly goes into a flashback, wherein she is naked and tied to a bed placed in the middle of a street (Figure 116). An angry mob of men are seen running toward her and one of them armed with a knife. Extremely brief snippets of the horrific attack are shown, yet the brutality of the attack is communicated. Golaap has a large wound on her chest, a constant reminder of what happened to her during the riots. The subconscious impact of this attack, is depicted in the film through an incident where Golaap instinctively lashes out, starts screaming and kicking a customer away in the present because she is in the grips of the memories of her assault.

Figure 116

Partition film *Khamosh Pani* (2003) shows a similar intrusion of flashbacks in protagonist Ayesha's present. Her flashbacks are also triggered by seemingly innocuous references, gestures and places. Similar to Milkha Singh's traumatic memories in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*

(2013) that I have discussed in the previous chapter. All these films express the inability of survivors to forget the trauma they experienced. Therefore, alongside the presence of trauma, its lasting impact on survivors is an integral facet often addressed in films exploring Partition memories. In *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini,* towards the end of the films an emotionally fragile Begum Jaan talks about the care she provided for Gulabo/Golaap when she was brought to the brothel after her horrific assault. Begum Jaan recounts how she nursed her: 'back to life, massaged you all night during your pregnancy. The countless hours spent counselling and stopping you from committing suicide six times.'[540] These seemingly selfless and maternal actions of Begum Jaan are caustically negated by Gulabo/Golaap saying, 'fattening a cow for slaughter is not love.'[541]

This revealing exchange reminds the audience that Begum Jaan's care for victims is given primarily to ensure that they fulfil their roles as prostitutes. As Madam of the brothel Begum Jaan is first an astute businesswoman, and not the maternal figure or benefactor she believes herself to be. In both films Golaap's character points out that Begum Jaan's primary goal is to generate profit through the girls. Film *Begum Jaan's* poster (Figure 117) states 'My body, my house, my country, my rules,' but the women in the film are denied this sense of agency. Interestingly, Mukherji does not create such a poster for *Rajkahini* and maintains the focus on Partition, as compared to *Begum Jaan*, where he shifts the narrative focus to the protagonist.

Figure 117

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[540]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).
[541]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).

The character of the Master becomes an unexpected perpetrator of violence against Begum Jaan and Golaap/Gulabo in both the films. Initially only his social work and charitable efforts are highlighted but later he gains Golaap's trust and sells her to other men in a horrific act of retaliation against Begum Jaan for scorning his feelings. The Master tells Golaap that 'Prostitutes have customers, not husbands', and then leaves her to be raped by the men. [542] Mukherji takes an overdramatic approach to the depiction of sexual violence in the films. Starting with the reconstruction of Manto's story in *Rajkahini,* Golaap's trauma and betrayal and culminating in Shabnam's rape by Rajaji (Nawab). These incidents simultaneously expose the superficiality of Begum Jaan's bold spirit and bravado as its source is the support of the wealthy blue blood patron, the Rajaji (the Nawab) (Figure 118).

Begum Jaan addresses Rajaji as the King and her confidence stems from his patronage. Hence her carefully crafted confidence, the husky baritone and commanding presence seem a front to disguise her vulnerabilities. Begum Jaan's dependence on this benefaction is revealed by her compliance with Rajaji's assertion of his right to sleep with any 'new girl' in the brothel, who in this case is Shabnam. Although Begum Jaan requests Rajaji that Shabnam be spared due to her traumatised condition. However, when Rajaji reminds her that this is the main stipulation or price she must pay for his patronage, she agrees. Her acquiescence uncovers the extent of her dependency and next she is forcing Shabnam to endure another assault.

Figure 118

Face with eviction, Rajaji's support and promise to personally go to Delhi to sort out this matter take precedence over Shabnam's traumatised state. Shabnam's sacrifice is for a perceived 'greater good' of all the other women in the brothel. Thus, Shabnam's rape becomes a metaphor for Partition. The Governments were publicizing Partition as an

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[542]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017)

inevitability and as a move that was in the interest of the people. Mukherji orchestrates a rather macabre sequence that begins with a screaming Shabnam being dragged by her hair to be bathed, preened and pampered for her imminent assault by Rajaji (Figures 119 to 122) intercut with shots of the border being constructed. After a while Shabnam stops struggling and is a disturbing numbness accepting her fate takes its place.
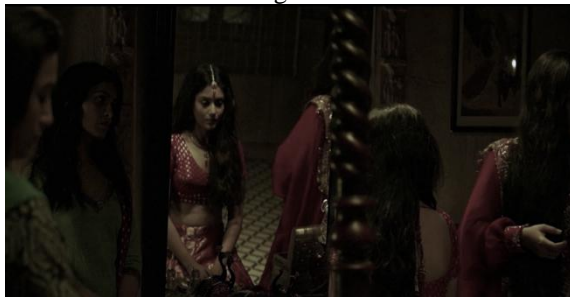

Figure 119

Figure 120

Figure 121

Figure 122

An added layer of morbidity in this sequence, is the presence of Begum Jaan in the room during Shabnam's assault and singing at Rajaji's request, as he casually says, 'My gramophone stopped working so I didn't bring it and you know without music, I can't do anything, so you'll have to sing.'[543] This affecting montage is set to a plaintive melody of a song with poignant lyrics describing a bride being given an emotional farewell by her family. The lyrics are praising the beauty of a bride and Shabnam is being dressed like one, however, in gruesome contrast everyone knows she will be raped by the nobleman. India is referred to as *Bharat Mata* (India's mother) or *Matrubhoomi* (Motherland) in Hindi, which are words with feminine denotations. The construction of the border during Shabnam's assault symbolises an assault on the motherland, which will eventually take a turn for the worst during and because of Partition.

This sequence reveals definite nationalist overtones through the depiction of sexual violence. The values of purity, virtue and chastity are symbolically attached to this feminine ascription of India. In contrast, men become the guardians of 'her' honour as well as her violaters..

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[543] *Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).

Trauma scholar Joya Uraizee points out that attempts to recapture or represent sexual violence may force the audience to look away, block those horrific images from their mind or simply numb them through overexposure, and on the other hand, the focus on the violation of a woman's body may come across as voyeuristic. [544] Incidents of sexual violence in both films are designed to generate a sense of shock. The reconstructions aim to communicate the debilitating horror of the experiences Shabnam, Gulabo and countless women endured during Partition. Joya Uraizee's criticism of director Deepa Mehta's representation of gendered violence in *Earth 1947,* is applicable to Mukherji's efforts too. For both the directors, women's bodies become 'emblematic of the national imaginary.' [545] They use strong visual metaphors to illustrate that attacks on women are simultaneously assaults on the motherland.

However, it reiterates these visualisations as efforts to constrict women's identities by turning them into symbols to be exalted or revered. Hence, for filmmakers choosing Partition as their subject and addressing women's experiences, it is indeed a tight rope to walk, since there is no ideal way to represent such sensitive content. The dearth of films portraying women's experiences of Partition has garnered more attention than the issues surrounding the representation of sexual violence in Partition narratives. Deepa Mehta provides a cogent defence of representations of the 'horrors and bestiality of mass violence' as a means to 'produce a dialogue to force people to think more deeply about the cost of such political divisions.'[546] She states that exposure to such abhorrent visuals has the capacity to engage the sympathy and compassion of audiences as well as show them the effects of a sectarian war.[547] In the same vein, I suggest that Mukherji's construction of Shabnam and Gulabo's traumatic memories may have the capacity to generate awareness about women's Partition experiences as well as help audiences connect with the devastating consequences of Partition.

In this context, it is noteworthy that both films are bold explorations of women's experiences. By situating the films in a brothel, the use of expletives, partial nudity and engagement in sexual activity become a part of the characters' environment. This aspect makes it difficult to

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[544]Joya Uraizee, 'Gazing at the Beast: Describing Mass Murder in Deepa Mehta's Earth' and Terry George's 'Hotel Rwanda.' *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies,* 28, Number 4. (2010), pp. 10-27, (p 11).
[545]Ibid. p 13.
[546]Joya Uraizee, 'Gazing at the Beast: Describing Mass Murder in Deepa Mehta's Earth' and Terry George's 'Hotel Rwanda.' *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies,* 28, Number 4. (2010), pp. 10-27, p 12.
[547]Ibid.

brand their presence and use solely as attempts to titillate or encourage voyeuristic pleasure among audiences. Therefore, it is ironic that in *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* it is depictions of women resisting and defending themselves against imminent sexual threats that make more problematic statements, rather than the presence of explicit content[548] For instance, in *Rajkahini* a twelve-year-old girl Laadli, daughter of one of the prostitute's Jameela living in Begum Jaan's brothel saves her mother from rape. When a police officer takes his pants off and advances toward Jameela intending to rape, Laadli shields her mother and starts stripping her clothes. Laadli stands stark naked in front of the ageing officer and suddenly he is engulfed with a sense of shame so strong that he starts retching and lets them go.

This scene is retained in *Begum Jaan* and is also recreated in a contemporary context. In *Begum Jaan* Mukherji decides to replace the reconstruction of Manto's short story '*Khol Do*', 'with a scene uncannily similar to the infamous Nirbhaya rape that took place in Delhi' in 2012.'[549] In this problematic sequence the attempt to molest a girl by a group of drunk young men is prevented by a much older woman, when she strips off her clothes, stands protectively in front of the young girl and offers herself to the men. The young men are shocked by this action and immediately start retreating. The scene could have ended at this point, but Mukherji takes this problematic idea to an extreme, by showing one of the men retching after seeing the older woman naked. Critics Lasyapriya Sundaram and Rajyasree Sen have sharply criticised this sequence for its convoluted messaging with respect to violence against women. In a subsequent interview Mukherji defends his decision of incorporating the Nirbhaya rape case reference, as he is trying to make a statement that 'violence against women, the domination of personal freedom and individual rights,' continues to challenge to Indian society today, as much as it did seventy years ago at the time of Partition.[550] This reference does establish violence against women as a theme 'of recurring violence against women,' in India and it tries to draw attention to 'the fighting back spirit' of women.[551]

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[549]Indo-Asian News Service(IANS), New Delhi, Interview with Srijit Mukherji, 'I want to show anger of Partition through *Begum Jaan*', 27th April 2017. <https://www.thestatesman.com/entertainment/interviews/i-wanted-to-show-anger-of-partition-through-begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-1493007798.html> [accessed 12th November 2018].

[550]Indo-Asian News Service(IANS), New Delhi, Interview with Srijit Mukherji, 'I want to show anger of Partition through *Begum Jaan*', 27th April 2017. <https://www.thestatesman.com/entertainment/interviews/i-wanted-to-show-anger-of-partition-through-begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-1493007798.html> [accessed 12th November 2018].

[551] Sahana Ghosh, '*Rajkahini* to *Begum Jaan* Srijit Mukherji channels women's fightback spirit,' IANS in *SocialNews.XYZ*, <https://www.socialnews.xyz/2016/07/14/rajkahini-to-begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-channels-womens-fightback-spirit/> [accessed 13th June 2017].

> At a time of violence against women, it is a very timely reminder that women always have had that fire in the belly and they can rise and fight back and answer back with equal aggression.[552]

However, the way the incidents unfold is objectionable for its dangerous oversimplification of rape and presenting an almost puerile defence against such an attack. Mukherji completely ignores the power dynamics that instigate violence against women, especially considering the defensive action Laadli and the older woman take. Their bold exposure is intended to shame the perpetrators, yet the spirit of this challenge is misplaced as it presumes that men will not attack a little girl or an older woman. It automatically ascribes the men intending to commit rape with a latent sense of decency or conscience. This is a troubling assumption that makes for a very surficial understanding of the power dynamics of gendered violence. Therefore, although the films comprise Mukherji's attempts to 'deal with issues that people normally shy away from talking about,' but they lack an in-depth understanding of the intricacies of gender politics or sexual violence. [553] This makes the thorough examination of the memory reconstructions in the films a significant addition to this analysis. The next section scrutinises the overall dramatic approach and treatment of pivotal moments and memories. Thereafter, I conclude the chapter with my analysis of the reception of the films.

4.3   Reconstructions, *rasas* & the journey of women

During my study of films based on Partition, their tendency to centre their stories around the disruption and devastation caused by this event in the lives of common people is observable. *Rajkahini* includes Partition's impact, surrounded by fictionally reconstructed meetings and conversations among its chief architects. By investigating and reconstructing the process of Partition, Mukherji tries to piece together a timeline of events give the audience a better understanding of the way Partition was carried out by those in power. *Rajkahini* depicts a conversation between the British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten and Sir Cyril Radcliffe (Figure 123 and 124); through this scene, the audience is privy to the

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[552]Ibid.
[553]Ahana Bhattacharya interview of Srijit Mukherji, director of *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* 'My Two Begum Jaans Are Pareto-incomparable,' in *Koimoi.com.* March 20th 2017. <https://www.koimoi.com/bollywood-news/my-two-begum-jaans-are-pareto-incomparable-srijit-mukherjis-exclusive-interview/ > [accessed 18th October 2018].

strategy of the British Government. The dialogues try to highlight the Viceroy's perspective on Partition: 'We are about to cut through a 5000-year-old civilization here Radcliffe, and the people are going to be very angry.' [554] The scene goes on to include Sir Radcliffe's misgivings:

This is my first visit to this country and I have no idea of its religions, customs, polity etc. I've had barely five weeks to study the topographical demography.'[555]

This sequence is designed to emphasise the lackadaisical attitude of those in power as they are shown discussing this major decision over cups of tea. He dramatically highlights the dire consequences of these casual exchanges by visually juxtaposing their meeting with visuals of Golaap's gruesome gang rape.

| Figure 123 | Figure 124 |

Mukherji comments on the lack of due consideration or thorough planning prior to the execution of this decision.

When Cyril Radcliffe drew the line dividing the country, he had no idea of the topography, demographics or socioeconomic divisions. The line passed through jungles, hills, rivers, sometimes villages and even houses. Here the house becomes a metaphor for the country.[556]

In this interview, Mukherji talks about this glaring flaw, which he represents through the site of the brothel which gets arbitrarily divided into India and Pakistan. He presents the construction of the border as a failure on the parts of the Indian and British Governments. Incorporating these scenes allows the audience a glimpse into the series of erroneous steps taken that resulted in the chaos of Partition. Snippets of the court proceedings add to his

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[554]*Rajkahini* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Shree Venkatesh Films, 2015).
[555]*Rajkahini* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Shree Venkatesh Films, 2015).
[556]Ahana Bhattacharya interview of Srijit Mukherji, director of *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* 'My Two Begum Jaans Are Pareto-incomparable,' in *Koimoi.com.* March 20th 2017. <https://www.koimoi.com/bollywood-news/my-two-begum-jaans-are-pareto-incomparable-srijit-mukherjis-exclusive-interview/ > [accessed 18th October 2018].

critical commentary. They display the arguments taking place between the National Congress and the Muslim League about which areas should remain in India and which in Pakistan (Figure 125).

Figure 125.

The narrative continues to intersperse crucial political events with the lives of the women. The roundtable conference of 17th August 1947 (Figure 126) is reconstructed as another significant deliberation over Partition, showing politicians arguing over which state, town or district should belong to which country. Again, revealing an unsavoury, bureaucratic side of independence that detracts from the perceived value and meaning of freedom among the Indian masses. I note that through these sequences the film comments on the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals who control the fate of millions.

Figure 126

In this context, the roles of political representatives Ilias and Sen/Hari Prasad in the films are crucial inclusions, for connecting the clinical decisions taken in meetings, courts and round table conferences with the lives of people. Through them, the films move from the decision-making process to the execution of Partition, highlighting the part played by the messengers and executors of States orders. In figure 126, Sen is minutely examining various maps of the Indian subcontinent. The maps are symbolic of the scientific or statistical side of this process, which is going to affect the people cataclysmically. Mukherji ensures that both films feature these different stages of the construction of parts of the Indo-Pak border.

Figure 127

Even though Ilias and Sen have suffered personally during the communal riots, they do not let it interfere with their duties. Therefore, Mukherji uses distinct shot compositions, as shown in figures 128 and 129 to emphasise duality in their characters. Distinct shot compositions are used, as shown in figures 128 and 129 to emphasise duality in their characters.

Figure 128

Figure 129

They are presented as 'two sides of the same coin', (Figures 128 and 129) emphasising that a cataclysmic moment like Partition can bring out the best and worst in people.[557] Internalising and propagating Hindu-Muslim divisive ideology makes it easier for them to convince people to view people from the other religion as their enemy. They mirror political and communal discord that existed between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League on a micro level before as well as after Partition. Their responsibilities include ensuring the construction of the border and that people migrate at any cost. In this particular conversation, they discuss what they have to tell people in the villages and small towns to guarantee that they willingly migrate.

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[557]Mallika Ahluwalia,*Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India: Penguin Random House, 2017). p vi.

Subsequently, they make inflammatory speeches (Figures 130 and 131) to ensure that people migrated out of fear and refuse to live together peacefully. There is an attempt to expose the level of political manipulation through these speeches, as visuals of riots immediately follow them. The narratives try to trace the spread of communal violence from its source to its targets, reiterating the violent repercussions of the spread of communal discord. Scholar Natasha Master discusses the reconstruction of the incidents of collective trauma as an integral part of Partition films. [558] This montage of hate speeches, followed by riot visuals and mass migrations, shifts the narrative continually from individual memories to national or collective memories. Master's identifies reconstructions of such collective memories as reflections of 'collective formation of trauma,' depicting the long-term effects on survivors and both nations.[559] Both films incorporate this montage to emphasise the vast extent of damage caused, which is as integral to comprehending the experience of Partition as are the testimonies of individual survivors and victims (Figures 130, 131, 132, 133 and 134).

Figure 130

Figure 131

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[558]Natasha Master, 'Representing the Unrepresentable: The Bollywood Partition Film,' (Doctoral thesis, Carleton University, 2009) < https://curve.carleton.ca/4e9725cf-2294-402e-a263-00cd7b8d49d9> p 20 [accessed 12th November 2018]. p 54.
[559]Ibid.

Figure 132.

Figure 133

Figure 134

Although this montage is common in both films, it is significant that the overall depiction and treatment of Partition differs considerably between them. *Rajkahini* presents a more detailed Partition timeline, in contrast *Begum Jaan* in Mukherji's own words is 'concentrating much more on the whorehouse and the relationships. It is a more personal take.'[560] The famous baritone of veteran Indian actor Amitabh Bachchan is used in *Begum Jaan* for the voice over that provides a condensed and concise narration of events. There is an accompanying montage, which includes shots of the refugee camps, the Viceroy's residence, arrival of Sir Radcliffe, court proceedings and the Round Table Conference. It excludes all the problematic conversations featured in *Rajkahini* and Mukherji replaces these with exchanges between

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[560]Devarshi Ghosh interviewed Srijit Mukherji, 'It's better to be a human rather than a baboon:' the message of Srijit Mukherji's latest film 'Uma'. *Scroll.in*, 24th May 2018. < https://www.socialnews.xyz/2016/07/14/rajkahini-to-begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-channels-womens-fightback-spirit/> [accessed on 11th November 2018].

local men in town discussing events transpiring after reading about in them in a newspaper (Figure 135).

Figure 135

The visuals of the refugee camps in *Rajkahini* are interspersed with footage of the Indian flag hoisting ceremony in the year 2014. The ceremony takes place daily at the Wagah-Attari Border in Punjab between the Indian Border Security Force and Pakistan Rangers. Here significantly women soldiers are performing this ceremony and shots of the women soldiers are cross cut with two girls playing in the refugee camp (Figures 136 to 139). This sequence comes before the reconstruction of Manto's short story and is an obvious depiction of before and after scenarios. It focuses on the empowerment of women over the years, especially seventy years after Partition.

Figure 136

Figure 137

Figure 138

Figure 139

However, in *Begum Jaan,* Mukherji replaces Manto's short story *Khol Do* (1948) and the flag hoisting ceremony visuals with the Nirbhaya rape case reference. This inclusion makes a different statement that women are as vulnerable to violence today as they were at the time of Partition. Therefore, *Begum Jaan* looks at seventy years of India's Independence inversely. The exclusion of the mentioned sequences in *Begum Jaan,* ensures that the narrative largely disengages itself from the core context of Partition and primarily concentrates on the journey

of the women in the brothel. However, before further elaborating on this distinction, I draw attention to a vital commonality in the dramatic and emotive aesthetic of the films.

The dramatic treatment of different incidents, memories and characterisations in the films follow many storytelling conventions found in mainstream cinema. The films attempt to present the quintessential battles between the sexes, by consistently projecting the male characters as villains. I observe that the male characters are complex amalgamations of the *bhayanak* (terror/ fear) and *bibhatsya* (disgust) *rasas*. Sen and Ilias are shown going to any lengths to execute the orders of the government. After police intervention fails, they seek the services of a depraved criminal and local goon, Kabir, to threaten and forcefully oust the women from their homes. The Master undergoes an unexpected villainous transformation from an educationist to a scorned and deceitful man. Rajaji exemplifies the exploitative mentality of those in power toward women. The overdramatization of the negativity of the male characters treatment, helps set up Begum Jaan and the other women as good and brave heroines. Towards the end the women emerge as warriors fighting against the tyranny of men.

This melodramatic gendered orchestration of *rasas,* symbolises Partition as a decision taken by a patriarchal government, affecting the safety and freedom of the women. The British and Indian political leaders are vilified in the films, for taking the decision to Partition the country. The dramatic visual juxtapositions of Golaap and Shabnam's assaults with their decision-making, hold them accountable for the crimes committed against women at that time. When Rajaji explains that he can no longer protect them from the impending eviction, Begum Jaan proclaims herself as the queen of her brothel or as she calls it 'her country.' [561] She refuses to leave the brothel and declares that 'I will protect my home and my memories myself. I won't go down without a fight.'[562] Subsequently, Begum Jaan and the women learn how to use a gun, so they can defend themselves against the imminent attack (Figure 140).

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[561]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).
[562]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).

Figure 140

It is noteworthy that the films show that the reason the women stay and fight alongside Begum Jaan is primarily because they don't have anywhere else to go. The brothel has become the only home they have known since their families rejected them. If they were to leave and go back, they know they would either be scorned or ostracised. I suggest that this conflict gives them a chance to assert their agency and fight for their freedom. Additionally, a romantic relationship between two women in the brothel acts as another assertion of their independence and gives a different dimension to the exploration of *shringara rasa*. It breaks away from the existing mould of Partition literature and cinema, which tend to 'undermine homosocial play' and offers a broader approach to female sexuality.[563]

Scholar Rani Neutill notes that 'the existence of desire that is outside male-female heterosexuality' is omitted in prominent Partition films *Earth 1947, Pinjar, Garam Hawa, Khamosh Pani.* This makes Mukherji's inclusion of a lesbian relationship both unexpected and controversial.[564] In *Rajkahini,* the two women Koli and Duli are given a distinct look that sets them apart from the rest of the women (Figures 141 and 142). Their way of dressing is stereotypically associated with lower caste women as they wear sarees without a blouse. Also, their speech and body language are specifically tailored to exhibit a sense of being 'raw, wild and free.'[565] However, this relationship is hardly given any screen time and is reduced to the exchange of a passionate kiss between them. I suggest that Mukherji implies that homosexuality is a baser or more primitive instinct of these rustic women at the margins of India's casteist society.

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[563]Rani Neutill, 'Bending bodies borders and desires in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India and Deepa Mehta's Earth', *South Asian Popular Culture,* 8:1, pp 73-87, (p 75). <DOI: 10.1080/14746681003633267> [accessed 14th November 2018].
[564]Ibid. p 77.
[565]Saayoni Ghosh interviewed for E-Times, 'I have bled for Srijit's dream project, Rajkahini: Saayoni Ghosh', *Indiatimes.com,* 12th January 2017. < https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/I-have-bled-for-Srijits-dream-project-Rajkahini-Saayoni-Ghosh/articleshow/49089950.cms > [accessed on 1st November 2018].

| Figure 141 | Figure 142 |

This is a controversial line of thought, therefore, while many critics hailed this 'unexpected lesbian scene' for it seemed to grow very naturally within the world created in the film, it is simultaneously criticised for the absence of an in-depth treatment.[566] The counterparts of Koli and Duli in *Begum Jaan* do not have this casteist approach but the trajectory of their story is the same. This portrayal is criticised by film critic Deepa Gauri for 'deliberately aimed at sensationalising,' and critic Shomini Sen marks this treatment as one used to elicit 'wolf-whistles from the male audience rather than being sensitive to women.'[567] Gauri calls out Mukherji for the unidimensional rendering of secondary characters and the limited scope offered to their sub-plots.[568] I agree with Sen and Gauri's reading that the declaration of 'my body, my rules,' could have been meaningfully established through careful treatment of the theme of homosexuality, instead this relationship seems contrived reduces this moment to a spontaneous aberration (Figures 141 and 142).

I note that *Veera rasa* or facets of courage are explored through the films in many instances and forms. Begum Jaan makes several audacious statements when Sen and Ilias come to the brothel to hand over the eviction notice to her. She says:

> What you're calling a whore house is my homeland. (Here) we don't have any Hindu-Muslim or high or low caste. Here it is our bodies, so we have the last word and our rules. We don't know India, Pakistan, Nehru, Jinnah because what happens in Delhi

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[566]Rohit Palit interview of Srijit Mukherji, for *RohitPalit.com,* 27th April 2017, 'I want to show anger of Partition through *Begum Jaan*', RohitPalit.com, <Available on https://rohitpalit.com/2015/10/rajkahini-review/ > [accessed 12th November 2018].

[567]Shomini Sen, 'Rajkahini' review: Hard-hitting narrative makes for a compelling watch, for *IBNLive.com,* 7th November 2015 < https://www.news18.com/news/movies/rajkahini-review-hard-hitting-narrative-makes-for-a-compelling-watch-1161680.htmll> [accessed 20th August 2018].

[568]Deepa Gauri, '*Begum Jaan* Movie Review: A bold but chequered tale', for *Khaleej Times,* 17th November 2015 , <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/citytimes/movie-reviews/begum-jaan-movie-review-a-bold-but-chequered-tale> [accessed 14th October 2018].

doesn't concern us. This place, this house, these by lanes is where we have lived for centuries and this is where we will stay. [569]

She rejects their notice and the situation escalates when the women threaten the officials and police officers with weapons (figure 143). The defiance of women is dramatically featured in many instances throughout the films. Mukherji deliberately moves away from the expected mainstream emotive portrayals of women centred on *shanta* (peace)*, shringara* (love, beauty) and *karuna* (compassion, sorrow), *rasas.*

Figure 143

The women in the film channelise their energies to to fight against the men collectively. The films repeatedly set up confrontations between male and female characters. At the same time, women are shown rescuing each other from men. However, the older woman's actions to save a young girl from assault, and the same act by Laadli to protect her mother, present problematic demonstrations of women empowerment. These narrative complexities reach a crescendo in at the end of the film during the final confrontation between the women and the men, which I discuss in detail later in the chapter. I note that Mukherji's cinematic treatment oscillates between extremes, which is an intrinsic quality of mainstream or commercial Indian cinema that Roberge discusses in his exposition of the Indian Film Theory.[570] The depictions of women's sexual assaults are designed to shock, the men largely end up as caricatures of antiheroes, and his emphasis on women empowerment is overplayed in both films. Mukherji takes a dramatic story and overdramatises it to evoke emotions, reiterating the utilisation of Indian mainstream cinema tropes to explore the context and memories of Partition. In addition, I observe that both films have an interesting approach to the exploration of memories in the narratives. However, the effort is more pronounced in the dramatic and emotive treatment of *Begum Jaan,* in comparison with *Rajkahini.*

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[569]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).
[570]Gaston Roberge, *The Indian Film Theory: Flames of Sholay, Notes, and Beyond*, (Kolkata:Sampark, 2010), p 21.

I connect the practise of storytelling in the films to the transference of womens memories and experiences across generations. Although both films have the grandmotherly figure Amma reading out stories of brave Indian kings and queens to the young girl Laadli, *Begum Jaan* deliberately includes the of stories of Indian women considered legends in Indian folklore and history. Starting with the legend of the brave queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmibai who singlehandedly faught against British occupation of her kingdom; followed by the tale of queen Razia Sultan who fought and protected her throne against the intrigues of her covetous brothers, as well as the story of the Rajput princess Meera who renounced everything to worship Lord Krishna and became a saint. In *Begum Jaan,* Mukherji draws a parallel between these women, and Begum Jaan by using actress Vidya Balan to represent these women, who is essaying the role of Begum Jaan in the film (Figures 144 to 147).
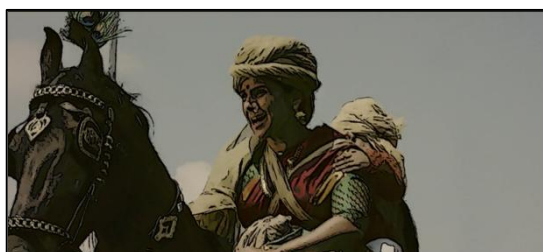

Figure 144

Figure 145

Figure 146
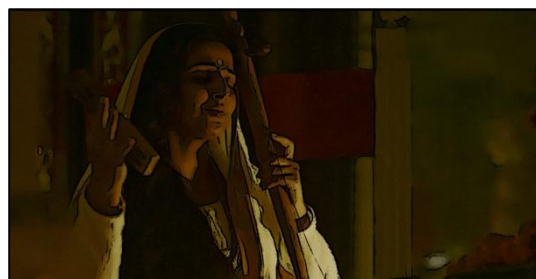
Figure 147

On the one hand, the treatment of these references become a reverential ode to the unlimited capacity and strength of women that can go from being a warrior to a saint. On the other it is representative of the perennial movement of stories that have become cultural memories over time, passing from one generation to the next. In *Rajkahini,* Mukherji refrains from multiple story references and relies on communicating these ideas through one story. It is the Bengali classic *'Rajkahini'* by Abanindranath Tagore chronicling 'tales of Rajput glory.'[571] The story of the Rajput Queen Padmavati is significant because this story reference is read out at the

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[571]Rituparna Roy. 'Chittor and Thoa Khalsa, 'Padmaavat' and 'Rajkahini': Expanding the Patriarchal Context for Jauhar,' *The Wire,* 21st Feb 2018, Available on: https://thewire.in/books/padmaavat-and-rajkahini-the-patriarchal-frame-of-reference-for-jauhar [accessed 9th November 2018].

end of both films. It is said that Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi enamoured by the beauty of queen Padmavati wanted to possess her and for this end he declared war on the kingdom of Chittor (in Rajasthan). The defeat of the King of Chittor, Rana Rawal Singh put the queen's honour at risk. In order to protect herself from falling into enemy hands Padmavati performs the act of '*jauhar* – immolating herself in a ceremonial pyre – along with thousands of other Rajput women.'[572] (Figure 148).

Figure 148

This act conferred the status of a divinity upon the queen and over time the practice of *Jauhar* came to be considered a pious and divine honour for all *Rajput* women. Mass self-immolations were performed by Rajput queens, princesses and other women to avoid 'capture, enslavement and rape by any foreign invaders, when facing certain defeat during a war.'[573] These women would wear their wedding dresses and even carry their children into the fire with them, to save them from slavery. The relevance of this practice extends to the time of Partition. In a documented incident during Partition, in the village Thoa Khalsa situated in the district of Rawalpindi in Punjab, a Muslim mob attack on the predominantly Sikh population saw almost a hundred women jumping into the village well with their children. This incident reiterates the focus on a woman's body as a sacred site. A patriarchal construct according to which, women must protect their honour and purity.[574]

For centuries Indian mythology, folk tales and ancient scriptures have circulated ideas of preserving and protecting a woman's purity.[575] These notions gave birth to the derivative practice of *Sati*, where a widowed woman was forced to commit suicide by stepping into the

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[572]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery , Rupture , Resistance Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition', *Economic And Political Weekly*, 28.17 (1993), pp 12–24. (p 16).
[573]Ibid.
[574]Ibid. p 20.
[575]Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture , Resistance Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition', *Economic And Political Weekly*, 28.17 (1993), pp 12–24. (p 22).

funeral pyre of her husband. The practices of *Jauhar* and *Sati* received religious and social sanction for many centuries. Hence, recognising both these practices as patriarchal, inhuman and abhorrent social evils, was an arduous and painstaking process that finally led to the abolition of these practices in the 1800s. [576]

Rajkahini and *Begum Jaan* provide a complex representation of the construct of *Jauhar* as a form of protest by Begum Jaan and the other women. The climactic sequence in the films is a long-drawn fight, between the women in the brothel and a large number of goons employed by the officials to force the women to vacate their home. Clearly outnumbered, many women are grievously injured and die during the fight. Eventually, Begum Jaan and the remaining women run out of ammunition and realise that they cannot win. However, instead of surrendering as the men expect, led by Begum Jaan the women start walking toward the burning house (Figure 149).

Figure 149

Figure 150

The threat of violation or being at the mercy of their enemies who are men is now unacceptable to them and they would rather face death than these alternatives. This act of entering the burning house is ideologically symbolic and visually representative of the act of

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[576]Ibid. p 24.

Jauhar (Figure 150). The grandmother, Amma is still inside the house and Begum Jaan requests that she read out the story of Queen Padmavati to all of them, in their final moments. It is noteworthy that the women here are considered immoral by society and regardless they decide to defy the autocratic summons of a powerful group of men. A common thread running through the stories of Rani Laxmibai, Razia Sultan, Meera bai and Padmavati, is that each of them faught against injustices perpetuated by a dominant patriarchal mindset in society. Hence, the final recitation of Rani Padmavati's story in the films is significant. The passage from the story is an evocation to the God of fire and plays to the visuals of the brothel burning. In *Begum Jaan,* Queen Padmavati is celebrated:

> Come and perish our body, our soul and this darkness. Queen Padmavati standing in front of the fire had only two options- the first surrendering to the enemy. Bowing before them and leading a life of slavery. Or sacrificing her life, embrace a glorious death like the way she had been living so far with her head held high, on her own terms like a queen. And Queen Padmavati chose the way that befits a queen. Standing on the verge of death Queen Padmavati jumped into the fire and let her self-esteem prevail. She made it immortal.[577]

Protagonist Begum Jaan wants to 'die like a queen' and therefore, emulates the revered Queen Padmavati. The ideals of honour, pride and self-respect are not ascribed to prostitutes, since these are connected with moralistic views of a woman's sexuality. The sanctity of a woman's body is essential, and directly related to her status as well as acceptance in society. This sequence problematically conveys that this supreme act of self-sacrifice may help them rise above their hypocritical segregation by the respectable or honourable sections of society. Inadvertently Mukherji reinforces the patriarchal constructs of women's purity, chastity, honour and self-respect by making suicide their final act of protest. Similarly in *Rajkahini,* the recitation of Abanindranath Tagore's work celebrates 'the Rajput sense of honour and glory.'[578] Even though the final words in *Rajkahini* do not exalt any one person the incantation to the God of fire expresses their desire to end their 'shame' and 'misery.'[579]

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[577]*Begum Jaan* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Vishesh Films and Shree Venkatesh Films, 2017).
[578]Rituparna Roy, 'Chittor and Thoa Khalsa, 'Padmaavat' and 'Rajkahini': Expanding The Patriarchal Context for Jauhar,' *The Wire,* 21st Feb 2018, <https://thewire.in/books/padmaavat-and-rajkahini-the-patriarchal-frame-of-reference-for-jauhar > [accessed on 9th November 2018].
[579]*Rajkahini* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Shree Venkatesh Films, 2015).

Dispel our fears, destroy our guilt and give us refuge. End shame and misery in your flames. You're the last hope, the last chain of great freedom![580]

By making death the only recourse, the films praise 'women's martyrdom in the face of imminent defeat/catastrophe, their preferring death to dishonour (whether by choice or by force).'[581] I observe that the sense of pride the protagonist Begum Jaan and the women show in themselves is defeated by their suicide. This act completely contradicts the difficult journeys of these women and particularly their tenacious spirit of survival. It also negates the women's motivation behind this act of dissent or rebellion, as they lose their sense of agency by their ascription to patriarchal notions of honour and dignity.

I note that instead of justifying character development or narrative logic, Mukherji is inclined toward creating a memorable spectacle. Therefore, the endings are dramatically designed to try and evoke a gamut of emotions among the audience. He constructs a theatrical ending that begins with an action sequence and ends with the shocking and surprising death of the lead female characters. I suggest that the adoption of mainstream conventions to emotionally engage the audience, draws attention away from Partition. It represents a power struggle between the men and the women, especially since for Begum Jaan it doesn't matter if her attackers are Hindu or Muslim, government representatives, criminals or anyone else. This outlook of the protagonist makes gender an integral focal point of the narrative instead of maintaining Partition as the catalyst of this conflict. Interestingly, Mukherji stretches the ending beyond the suicide.

In *Rajkahini,* he features the shocked reactions of all the men: Sen, Ilias, the policer officer, the Master, the goons and their leader Kabir. They witness this final demonstration by the women, afterward they are seen sitting in a state of shock and disbelief (Figure 151 and 152).

Figure 151

[580]*Rajkahini* dir. by Srijit Mukherji (Shree Venkatesh Films, 2015).
[581]Rituparna Roy, 'Chittor and Thoa Khalsa, 'Padmaavat' and 'Rajkahini': Expanding The Patriarchal Context for Jauhar,' *The Wire,* 21st Feb 2018, <https://thewire.in/books/padmaavat-and-rajkahini-the-patriarchal-frame-of-reference-for-jauhar > [Accessed on 9th November 2018].

Figure 152

Gradually, from the reactions of the men, the visuals move on to the fire ravaged house, with the Bengali song *Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhaata* playing in the background. The lyrics of the song are from a poem by the same name, written by Rabindranath Tagore.[582] This song is noteworthy for its nationalist and patriotic meanings since the first stanza of this poem is the Indian national anthem. In the film, except for the first stanza, the rest of the poem is used as lyrics for the song.[583]

Potono Abhbhudoy Bandhuro Ponthaa, Jugo Jugo Dhaabito Jaatri
Hey Chiro Saarothi, Tabo Ratha Chakrey Mukhorito Potho Dino Raatri
Daaruno Biplabo Maajhey,Tabo Shankhodhwoni Bajey
Sankato Dukkho Traataa
Jano Gano Potho Parichaayako,Jayo Hey Bhaarato Bhaagyo Bidhaataa
Jayo Hey, Jayo Hey, Jayo Hey,Jayo Jayo Jayo, Jayo Hey[584]

The way of life is sombre, as it moves through ups and downs.
But we, the pilgrims, have followed it through the ages. Oh! Eternal charioteer, the wheels of your chariot echo day and night in the path. In the midst of fierce revolution, your conch shell sounds. You save us from fear and misery. Oh! You who guide the people through tortuous path. Victory be to you, dispenser of the destiny of India!Victory to you, victory to you, victory to you.[585]

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[582]Shomini Sen, 'Bharat Bhagyo Bidhata' from 'Rajkahini' is a Tagore song and not an extended version of the national anthem, *IBNLive.com,* 23rd September 2015 in News18 <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/bharat-bhagyo-bidhata-from-rajkahini-is-a-tagore-song-and-not-an-extended-version-of-the-national-anthem-1108614.html> [accessed 10th July 2017].

[583]Ibid.

[584]NDTV Correspondent, 'The forgotten stanzas of Jana Gana Mana,' 16th August 2011, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/the-forgotten-stanzas-of-jana-gana-mana-464590> [accessed on 10th July 2017].

[585]Shomini Sen, 'Bharat Bhagyo Bidhata' from 'Rajkahini' is a Tagore song and not an extended version of the national anthem, *IBNLive.com,* 23rd September 2015 in News18 <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/bharat-bhagyo-bidhata-from-rajkahini-is-a-tagore-song-and-not-an-extended-version-of-the-national-anthem-1108614.html> [accessed 10th July 2017].

The above translation of one of the stanzas of the poem featured in the film talks about ideals of unity, compassion, faith, blessings and victory to the power protecting pilgrims from 'fear and misery.'[586] The use of this song creates an evocative sequence, supporting the melancholic visuals of half-burnt remnants of jewellery, books and soot covered bodies of the women. This audio visual treatment alludes to how this higher power has failed to protect its people and especially the women, which highlights the condition of women at that time. Therefore, this emotional orchestration of this audio-visual elements t maintains the national context of Partition.

In contrast, Mukherji relies on a more dramatic end for the men in *Begum Jaan*: The Congress representative Hari Prasad is seen drinking heavily and sobbing, Ilias the Muslim League representative commits suicide by shooting himself in the mouth, the police officer who attempted to assault Jameela and was stopped by her daughter Laadli, leaves his job and becomes an ascetic. During the skirmish Gulabo somehow escapes the men who bought her. She comes back and kills the Master, and is shot and killed in the process. Therefore, Mukherji does not present defeated or shocked men as in *Rajkahini,* instead he takes it to the other extreme. This definitely classifies as a melodramatic end, which I suggest is used to follow the storytelling pattern of mainstream Hindi films. However, through this ending the gender conflict is highlighted instead of the relevance of Partition. Even though a poignant melodious song *Wo Subah Kabhi to Ayegi* (The Morning will come) is used in *Begum Jaan* to convey hope for a brighter future, it does not signify the relevance of Partition. The lyrics of the song, *Wo Subah Kabhi to Ayegi* are a general appeal for home, but the lyrics of *Bharoto Bhagyo Bidhaata* are able to address national pathos and the implications of the division more effectively.

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[586]Shomini Sen, 'Bharat Bhagyo Bidhata' from 'Rajkahini' is a Tagore song and not an extended version of the national anthem, *IBNLive.com*, 23rd September 2015 in News18 <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/bharat-bhagyo-bidhata-from-rajkahini-is-a-tagore-song-and-not-an-extended-version-of-the-national-anthem-1108614.html> [accessed 10th July 2017].

Although *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan,* make repeated attempts to heighten emotions through the use of different *rasas* and reinforcing mainstream tropes in their distinct ways. Within this dramatic and emotive structure, the films forground women and their experiences in connection with Partition. The treatment used by the films to represent and reconstruct women's experiences during that period, raise pertinent questions about their reception. Understanding how the films were received, would help gauge the level of interest in the exploration of Partition and its related themes by mainstream Indian cinema. Therefore, in the next section I discuss the reception of both films.

4.4   Reception

So far, this chapter has discussed the contribution of *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* to Partition memorialization, as different perspectives stemming from the same storyline and helmed by the same director. In this section, I suggest that the many noticeable distinctions and similarities in their cinematic treatment simultaneously influence their reception. The production design of both films reflects the existing gap between the production scales of a regional film and that of a mainstream Hindi film. *Rajkahini's* production cost is 3.5 crores INR, equivalent to 35 million USD approximately.[587] Usually, the production design and scale of regional films is much smaller since their reach limits their investment and profit margins. In comparison, *Rajkahini's* budget is extensive, as Srijit Mukherji states that he approached and designed the production keeping production parameters of a commercial film in mind. Hence the film is front lined by many prominent actors and actresses of Bengal cinema as well as reconstructed using extensive sets and costumes.

The film's lead actress Rituparna Sengupta received a National award nomination in the best actress category for her portrayal. The bold representation of the violence and trauma endured by women during Partition drew both controversy and acclaim for the film. After its release in Bengal, the film notably doubled its investment at the box-office, earning a profit of 7 crores INR, equivalent to 70 million USD. The commercial gains of the film are

[587]Ravi, 'List of Top 20 Highest Grossing Bengali Movies of All Time,'in *Pycker.com,* 26th June 2018.
<https://pycker.com/articles/top-20-highest-grossing-bengali-movies-of-all-time> [accessed on 6th November 2018].

particularly noteworthy for an all-female cast.[588] In addition, the film garnered recognition at popular film awards and critical acclaim at film festivals:

> (The film was) chosen as an official selection at 16 International Film Festivals (IFF) including Indian Panorama at IFFI 2015, IFF of Kerala (Competition Section), IFF Mumbai and Imagine India IFF at Madrid. It was also screened at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne.[589]

Surprisingly the success and acclaim garnered by *Rajkahini* is not replicated by *Begum Jaan,* even though the budget of the film is much higher. *Begum Jaan* is made with an extensive budget of 19 crores INR (190 million dollars), which allowed Mukherji to make a 'technically better film' as well as places its marketing and exhibition within the purview of mainstream Hindi films.[590] *Begum Jaan* recovered its investment, making a net profit of 20 crores INR (200 million dollars) and approximately 28 crores INR (280 million USD) gross world-wide, however, the film was unable to engage pan-India audiences. Mukherji suggests that this inability may be attributed to the narrative being 'a polarizing movie about a dark subject, so it did not find a universal audience.'[591] He acknowledges that the film's subject is considered

> dark and disturbing. There was very little entertainment. There was no so-called relief after watching the movie. There was no pop-corn entertainment.[592]

This description of *Begum Jaan* is effectually applicable to the cinematic body of work based on Partition. Smaller budget independent or art-house films have more commonly tackled Partition, *Begum Jaan* is an anomaly in this category as its cast, production, marketing, exhibition and distribution are all produced on a commercial scale. It would be a simplistic summation that *Begum Jaan's* dark subject and less entertaining approach are the only reasons behind its failure. Instead, I draw attention to *Begum Jaan's* comparisons with several other Hindi films apart from *Rajkahini.*

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[588]Ibid.

[589]Ravi, 'List of Top 20 Highest Grossing Bengali Movies of All Time,'in *Pycker.com,* 26th June 2018. <https://pycker.com/articles/top-20-highest-grossing-bengali-movies-of-all-time> [accessed on 6th November 2018].
[590]Ibid.

[591]Devarshi Ghosh. Scroll Interview, 'It's better to be a human rather than a baboon:' the message of Srijit Mukherji's latest film 'Uma'. *Scroll.in*, 24th May 2018. Available on: https://scroll.in/reel/879721/its-better-to-be-a-human-rather-than-a-baboon-the-message-of-srijit-mukherjis-latest-film-uma [accessed 11th November 2018].

[592]Indo-Asian News Service, Delhi, Srijit Mukherji Interview, 'I Wanted to Show Anger of Partition through Begum Jaan: Srijit Mukherji', *TheIndianExpress.Com*, 27th April 2017<https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-vidya-balan-wanted-to-show-anger-of-partition-4624572/> [accessed 20 October 2018].

Rajkahini stands out in Bengali cinema for its bold exploration of Partition where portrayals of this part of history in recent times are virtually non-existent. In contrast, *Begum Jaan's* concentration on presenting women's oppression and empowerment drew comparisons with well-known classic Hindi women centric narratives such as *Mandi* (1983) and *Mirch Masala* (1987). The acclaimed film *Mirch Masala,* directed by Ketan Mehta is considered an iconic portrayal of women's defiance and revolt against exploitative patriarchal practices. Many critics have pointed out the similarities in treatment between *Begum Jaan* and the portrayal of women's characters in *Mirch Masala*:

> *Mirch Masala* was set in a small village in Rajasthan where many women work in a spice factory. An Indian man who is a representative of the British Raj acts as an autocrat in the village. He exploits many village women but one-woman Sonbai, played by the well-known actress Smita Patil refuses to bow to his demand to sleep with him.[593]

The collective act of defiance by the women of throwing red chilli powder into the eyes of the officer made a strong statement against the dominance of men and the British in colonial India. *Begum Jaan* also features a defiant group of women refusing to comply with the authoritarian dictates of government represented by men. Well-known art-house film director Shyam Benegal's *Mandi* also explores the lives of prostitutes in a brothel, enabling direct comparisons with *Begum Jaan*. Film critic Rajyasree Sen observes that:

> Mandi was a film about women trying to be independent, charting their own futures, banding together, and using their sexuality as a tool to ensure their freedom. It showed Azmi taking a decision to protect not just her business, but also the women who lived with her.[594]

The role of the madam in *Mandi*, (Rukmini Bai) played by veteran actress Shabana Azmi and her relationship with the girls in her brothel is at the centre of this drama. Mukherji's

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[593]Lasyapriya Sundaram, 'Srijit Mukherji: 'Begum Jaan' Is Not about a Brothel or Even about Partition', *Timesofindia.Indiatimes.Com* , 10th April 2017
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/srijit-mukherji-begum-jaan-is-not-about-a-brothel-or-
evenaboutpartition/etarticleshow/58082625.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cpps> [accessed 10 August 2018].
[594]Rajyasree Sen, 'Film Review: *Begum Jaan'* Is an Assault on the Senses', *Livemint.Com*, 18th April 2017,
<https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/MZ67CzgimvUf9KkZmS91CJ/Begum-Jaan-is-an-assault-on-the-senses.html>
[accessed on 4 January 2019].

presentation of a woman-centric story set in a similar context left it open to comparisons with the critically acclaimed *Mandi*. In particular, I note that the characterization and the relationships established among the characters have been criticized in *Begum Jaan*. In her review of *Begum Jaan,* film critic Rajyasree Sen notes the constant friction among the female characters in the film and that it detracts from the narrative:

> The women in *Begum Jaan* don't like each other. They spend the entire duration of the film, other than for one lesbian interlude, shrieking at and often slapping each other.[595]

This treatment of the relationship among the women defeats the idea of female solidarity that Mukherji is simultaneously trying to emphasise in the climax sequence of the film. Critic Suparna Sharma adds that the female characters are not well defined and nor is the conflict, which constantly fluctuates from rebelling against patriarchal domination to the instability Partition creates.[596] Even though Mukherji acknowledges the inspiration he draws from *Mirch Masala* and *Mandi,* he does not succeed in effectively connecting it with the North Indian context. The decision to contextually transform the narrative from a Bengali to a North Indian linguistic and geographic set up was more a commercially driven strategy adopted to enhance the film's reach.[597]

Addition of the first sequence where an old woman strips to prevent the rape of a young girl is criticized for 'Bollywoodizing sexual violence' and Partition.[598] Upon analysis of both films, I find that these changes made to *Begum Jaan's* narrative weakens the focus of the film on Partition and its memories. In contrast, Mukherji maintains Partition as the fundamental premise in *Rajkahini* and therefore film critics point out that 'the casting, the dialogues, the

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[595]Rajyasree Sen, 'Film Review: *Begum Jaan'* Is an Assault on the Senses', *Livemint.Com*, 18th April 2017, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/MZ67CzgimvUf9KkZmS91CJ/Begum-Jaan-is-an-assault-on-the-senses.html> [accessed on 4 January 2019].
[596]Suparna Sharma, '*Begum Jaan* Movie Review: Pout, Pose and Overact!', *Deccan Chronicle,* 15th April 2017. <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/movie-reviews/150417/begum-jaan-movie-review-pout-pose-overact.html> [accessed on 9th February 2018].
[597]Namrata Joshi, '*Begum Jaan'* review : All sound and fury signifying, *TheHindu.Com*, 14th April 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/reviews/begum-jaan-review-all-sound-and-fury-signifying-nothing/article18016190.ece> [accessed 10 August 2018].
[598]Shilpa Jamkhandikar, 'Movie Review: Begum Jaan,' *Reuters.com,* 14th April 2017, <https://in.reuters.com/article/movie-review-begum-jaan-idINKBN17G0MW> [accessed on 5th January 2019].

music – everything felt a lot more powerful and impactful in Srijit's Bengali version of *Begum Jaan*.'[599] Reiterating her observation film critic Reema Mukherjee states:

> *Rajkahini* strikes a chord right from the get-go…as a Bollywood remake, *Begum Jaan* fails to rebuild the same essence and portray the tragic experience countless families faced at the time of partition.[600]

Therefore, where *Rajkahini* draws its essence from Partition, *Begum Jaan* attempts to foreground *streeshakti* (woman power) instead.[601] I note that this narrative move inadvertently relegates Partition to the background and shifts the attention onto protagonist Begum Jaan. Critic Megha Marik calls out this practice of highlighting the role of the lead actress in an ensemble drama as a 'Bollywood trend',[602] which is guided by the commercial value attached to the actor or actress's ability to attract audiences to the theatre:

> But what is problematic with the film is that in order to stick to contemporary Bollywood trends, the film has centered all its focus around the leading lady, played by Vidya Balan. And thus, what was essentially a story of partition and the violence meted out towards women during partition, becomes a film which mostly centres around the power which is yielded by the '*malkin*' (owner) of the '*kotha*' (brothel), Begum Jaan. The narrative of the film makes the character of Begum Jaan the source of all limelight for the film, and Partition – the original 'hero' – takes a backseat.[603]

Marik criticizes this attempt by the filmmaker to address women's issues by using Partition as its backdrop. I suggest that *Rajkahini's* appeal and appreciation stem from the articulation of the experience of Bengal during Partition as well as justifying the ensemble cast; rather than focussing solely on the character of Begum Jaan. Therefore, ultimately his attempt to tailor *Begum Jaan* to appeal to a pan India audience detracts from the distinctiveness of the

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[599]Reema Mukherjee, 'Film Review:Begum Jaan-What went wrong with *Rajkahini's* Bollywood counterpart', *Firstpost.com,* 17th April 2017, < https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/begum-jaan-what-went-wrong-with-rajkahinis-bollywood-counterpart-3387480.html > [accessed on 28th July 2018].

[600]Ibid.

[601]Megha Marik, 'Film Review: Both *Rajkahini* And *Begum Jaan* Tell Us That Women's Honour Is More Important Than Their Lives', *Feminisminindia.Com*, 19th April 2017 <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/04/19/begum-jaan-film-review/> [accessed 4 January 2019].

[602]Megha Marik, 'Both Rajkahini And Begum Jaan Tell Us That Women's Honour Is More Important Than Their Lives', *Feminisminindia.Com*, 19th April 2017 <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/04/19/begum-jaan-film-review/> [accessed 4 January 2019].

[603]Ibid.

story. Apart from Mukherji's aim to reach out to a vast majority through *Begum Jaan*, his melodramatic treatment of many incidents and events have drawn sharp criticism for the film. Film critic Sukanya Verma calls out the film for its 'histrionics and misandry.'[604] She compares *Begum Jaan* with *Rajkahini* and finds the former lacking 'soul' and replete with 'raspy melodrama, laboured production design and cosmetic symbolism.'[605] Her critique is similar to film critic Rajeev Masand's observations, as he pans the film's 'loud' and 'shrill' treatment.'[606] Interestingly, Mukherji explains the film's melodramatic tone or approach as a reflection of Partition as it happened:

> What was subtle about the Partition? It was in your face. There was nothing understated about trains coming laden with dead, mutilated bodies. As far as I am concerned, the horrors could be communicated only with a scream, there is no way for it to be muted. The only way to get that out of my system was to go all out.[607]

I find Mukherji's defence is inadequate, more so since *Rajkahini* has repeatedly been hailed as the better version, due to its clear narrative focus, indicative of pertinent presentation issues with *Begum Jaan.* I have mentioned earlier that Mukherji's exclusion of Partition centric incidents as well as the new inclusions in *Begum Jaan* have adversely affected the overall narrative.Critic Suhani Singh rejects the digitized inclusions of 'prisma-styled Padmavati, Jhansi ki Rani, Meera and Razia Sultan' played by the lead actress Vidya Balan and criticises 'the move to weave in a contemporary sexual assault attack reeks of emotional manipulation and lacks coherence.'[608]

Subsequently, *Begum Jaan* faced bans in Pakistan and Bangladesh, owing to the acute sensitivity still palpably present in both the countries regarding the subject of Partition. The producer of *Begum Jaan* Mahesh Bhatt explains that 'Pakistan does not screen films that

[604]Sukanya Verma, Review of *Begum Jaan,* 'Even Vidya Balan cannot rescue *Begum Jaan*'s loud, empty feminism,' for *Rediff.com*, on 14th April 2017. < https://www.rediff.com/movies/review/review-even-vidya-balan-cannot-rescue-begum-jaan/20170414.htm> [accessed on 28th July 2018].
[605]Ibid.
[606]Rajeev Masand, Review of *Begum Jaan,* 'Feminist Statement Drowned by Noise,' for *News18.com,* on 21st April 2017. <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/begum-jaan-movie-review-feminist-statement-drowned-by-noise-1373603.html> [accessed on 28th July 2018].
[607]Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri, 'The Filmmaker Who Wanted to Make One Film for Each Letter of the Alphabet', *Film Companion*, 8th October 2018 <https://www.filmcompanion.in/srjit-mukherji-the-film-maker-who-wanted-to-make-one-film-for-each-letter-of-the-alphabet/> [accessed on 6th January 2019].
[608]Suhani Singh, Review of *Begum Jaan,* 'Vidya Balan and her band of fiery sisters can't save this melodrama', for *IndiaToday.com,* on 14th April 2017 < https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/reviews/story/begum-jaan-movie-review-vidyya-balan-srijit-mukherji-971453-2017-04-14> [accessed on 12th July 2018].

revolve around the Partition era.'[609]In conjunction, the regional film *Rajkahini* was also banned in spite of sharing a Bengali language connect with Bangladesh, as the film was considered too controversial.[610]However, this tendency to ban Indian films in Pakistan is circumspect to the Pakistan film board's perception that the Indian film may be carrying an unfavourable reference to their country, particularly in connection with Partition.

While films *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* and *Begum Jaan's* direct addressal of Partition and Indo-Pak relations affected their reception, mainstream films *PK* (2014) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) grazing the consequences of Partition without delving deeply into the subject, not only released in Pakistan and Bangladesh but were also well received.[611] This has been mainly attributed to *PK* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* concealment of the contextual and memorial references to Partition within their entertaining narratives. Both narratives are abundantly laced with entertaining moments that culminate into happy endings, thereby providing an expected mainstream Hindi film treatment that ensures a continued appeal among audiences. I observe that Indo-Pak relations, when approached with a certain kind of cinematic treatment extending to its history, may enable a wider reach and circulation of mainstream films, both in India and abroad.[612]

Even though Mukherji's attempts to represent women's memories, perspectives and experiences did not receive the kind of responses *Filmistaan, Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, PK* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* were able to generate. His efforts must be and are praised for taking on the challenges of reconstructing the politics surrounding Partition, the communal riots and the accounts of survivors. While *Begum Jaan's* failure has been assessed by critics as a lapse in the film's narrative design that 'missed out the emotional rigour and raw passion of the original', yet *Rajkahini's* success is optimistically indicative of memorialisation efforts being well received.[613] At the same time the many socio-political pressures Indian filmmakers

[609]Piya Hingorani, 'Begum Jaan Gets Banned in Pakistan after Naam Shabana, Jolly LLB 2 and Dangal', *IndiaToday.Com* <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/bollywood/story/begum-jaan-banned-pakistan-vidya-balan-naam-shabana-dangal-971210-2017-04-13> [accessed on 28th July 2018].
[610]Ibid.
[611]Indo-Asian News Service, Mumbai, '*PK* Team Ecstatic Over Historic Box Office Collections', *NdtvMovies.com*, 5th January 2015, < https://movies.ndtv.com/bollywood/pk-team-ecstatic-over-historic-box-office-collections-722832> [accessed on 18th September 2018]
[612]Himesh Mankad, '*Bajrangi Bhaijaan* Worldwide Box Office: Salman Khan starrer to enter 900 crore club emerges 2nd biggest grosser of all time', *Koimoi.com*, 25th March 2018, URL: <http://www.koimoi.com/box-office/bajrangi-bhaijaan-worldwide-box-office-salman-khan-starrer-to-enter-900-crore-club-emerges-2nd-biggest-grosser-of-all-time/> [Accessed on 18th August 2018].
[613]Indo-Asian News Service, Delhi, Srijit Mukherji Interview, 'I Wanted to Show Anger of Partition through Begum Jaan: Srijit Mukherji', *TheIndianExpress.Com*, 27th April 2017<https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/begum-jaan-srijit-mukherji-vidya-balan-wanted-to-show-anger-of-partition-4624572/> [accessed 20 October 2018].

constantly grapple with, in their attempts to discuss Partition and related women's perspectives, should not be ignored, while discussing these works. The attached sensitivities of these issues are mirrored by the difficulties surrounding the translation of these incidents and memories onscreen. I suggest that these aspects definitely discourage cinematic efforts and therefore, film critics are more appreciative of Mukherji's attempts to showcase women and their Partition experiences through his films. Film analyst Reema Mukherjee states:

> It is heartening to see a mainstream Bollywood movie rely on groups of women as its protagonists and make a statement about living on their own terms, with no regard to what their profession might be.[614]

I support this reading, as indeed it was a risk to choose a milieu of prostitutes to highlight women's issues, feature their testimonies and traumatic memories. Therefore, the films become cathartic expressions of Partition and succeed in bringing women to the forefront of its discussion. Even with their drawbacks and polarized responses, *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* comprise active attempts at memorializing Partition. Fiction is used to connect different narrative elements and address aspects of this history that are still shrouded in veils of shame and silence. In particular, the experiences of women at that time continue to warrant adequate exploration and search for avenues of expression. I highlight the way regional and mainstream cinemas have been both circumspect and reflect glaring inadequacies in their efforts to voice or feature women's memories of the division. Hence these parallel efforts allow an assessment of regional and mainstream cinema in the way they approach as well as treat this subject.

To conclude, *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* make important statements with regard to the depiction of women centric stories and memories. Their contribution to Partition historiography is noteworthy for highlighting the paucity of narratives exploring gender violence and featuring women at the fringes of Indian society. Even though the films are envisaged and presented from the shifting perspectives of the same director, they make valuable contributions highlighting Partition remembrances of women in regional and mainstream media. In addition, the presence of the films on popular online streaming

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[614]Reema Mukherjee, 'Begum Jaan-What went wrong with *Rajkahini's* Bollywood counterpart', *Firstpost.com,* 17th April 2017, < https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/begum-jaan-what-went-wrong-with-rajkahinis-bollywood-counterpart-3387480.html > [accessed on 28th July 2018].

platforms is significant, as it ensures a continued circulation of these narratives on a world-wide scale. The narratives have their flaws, still, their dissemination performs a larger function, of emphasizing the existence of voices on the periphery that are otherwise prone to getting lost or forgotten. Therefore, it is the continued presence of such myriad cinematic interpretations and representations that continue to keep women's memories alive within the national discourse.

Conclusion

Not forever does the bulbul sing,

In balmy shades of bowers,

Not forever lasts the spring,

Nor ever blossom the flowers,

Not forever reigneth joy,

Sets the sun on days of bliss,

Friendships not forever last,

Know not life, who know not this.[615]

These words from Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956), reflect the pathos of separation accompanied by a lingering nostalgia of the once unified subcontinent. Through the course of my research, I have demonstrated that Partition memorialisation tends to oscillate between these standpoints. Pertinently Indian cinematic creations, grapple under the shadows of Partition trauma and the existing anti-Pakistan political rhetoric. More recent commemorative Partition compilations are focussed on celebrating the resilient spirit of survivors alongside recording and acknowledges their losses and experiences.

> They lost their homes, livelihood and friendships. Many saw extreme violence and death. Many died. There were not enough refugee camps, not enough hospitals or medical care. Millions suffered. Yet the stoic fortitude and idealism of the refugees was remarkable. Many Partition survivors still say quietly, 'Yes we suffered, but at least we were alive.'[616]

Partition scholar Mallika Ahluwalia's perspective succeeds in looking at this history from the past, present and futuristic dimensions. Partition memorialisation forms a complex gamut that includes visible strains of trauma, nostalgia and resilience within its stories. There is a simultaneous awareness of the antipathy, mistrust and conflicts that have followed Indo-Pak relations since the separation. This multidimensionality is visible in the way this moment is addressed and explored in media and particularly in Indian cinema. Therefore, my analysis

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[615] Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan,* (India: Penguin, 2016). p 19.
[616] Mallika Ahluwalia, *Divided by Partition: United by Resilience*, (India: Penguin Random House, 2017). p 14.

highlights this susceptibility of Indian cinema to these divergent strains identifiable in its different memorialising efforts. My work encourages future studies and discussions into Partition memorialisation as well as the connected cinematic creations.

I chose to concentrate on the recent crucial recent period from the year 2012 to 2017, as it appropriately mirrors this state of flux in Indian cinema with regard to Partition memorialisation. I demonstrated how efforts toward commemorating the events of 1947 gained momentum, as this phase coincided with the seventy year anniversary of the division. By concentrating on its memorialisation by Indian cinema during this period, I observe the effect fluctuations in Indo-Pak relations affected the cinematic treatment of these memories. The identified four mainstream Indian films took up the challenging task of discussing and representing the memories as well as the many shattering consequences of the division. As mentioned before political changes have consistently influenced the way Indian media and particularly cinema react to certain themes or issues.

This body of work aids in developing an understanding of the process of remembering Partition and how its memories are communicated. The transmission of memories across generations and through cinema presented an intriguing dynamic that I scrutinised in this thesis. A study of oral memories of Partition, their flashbacks and representational features in mainstream Indian cinema, has not been attempted in Indian film or Partition scholarship thus far. Also, the methodology designed combines the analysis of memory representations using the Indian dramatic aesthetic. This framework comprises my original analytical contribution in the field of Indian cinema and Partition scholarship.

Drawing on Indian Film Theory helped in analysing the chosen mainstream films by studying their unique emotive and dramatic structures. I tailor my approach to acknowledge and recognise the presence of melodramatic, musical and other commercial elements present in these films. Being mindful of these aspects these drove a well-rounded approach, which was required considering the distinctive memorialisation efforts the selected filmography provides. The detailed examination of all these facets makes a significant contribution to the discussion of this history in mainstream Indian cinema. At the same time, the originality of this methodology has been its strength and raised significant challenges. For this memory analysis I incorporate and study all the different facets of Partition memories. For this

purpose I drew on memory studies of trauma and nostalgia as well as taking an in-depth look at the dramatic framework of commercial Indian cinema.

Indian cinema scholarship can still be considered in a nascent stage, particularly mainstream Indian cinema. This methodology opens up the discourse into the thematic and dramatic structures of mainstream films. It also allows an expansion of the boundaries of what may be considered Partition cinema, by including more innovative expressions of this history and its memories. The first case study film, *Filmistaan* (2012), challenges the perceived stringent bifurcations between mainstream and art-house cinemas as well as its place in Partition cinema. On the surface it is a modest budget film using unknown actors to pay an ardent tribute to mainstream Indian cinema. Popular actors are featured innovatively through their well-known dialogues and film snippets. The film's posters, its trailer and its content, are tailored to showcase the influence of mainstream cinema. I suggest that the most innovative feature of the film is that this influence of mainstream cinema is seen through the lens of the relations between India and Pakistan. This overt presentation of the popularity of iconic Indian films and actors is used to highlight the longevity of these creations that belies borders and highlight the connect Indian cinema enjoys within Pakistan. This link coupled with the reach of these films in Pakistan makes a strong case for examining Indo-Pak relations through the prism of commercial Indian cinema.

Filmistaan (2012) features oral testimonies and attests to the significance of inherited memories in an environment that is still reluctant to revisit that part of our shared national histories. This is especially significant in a context where the prevalence of right-wing rhetoric in both countries is deliberately trying to negate the existence of any commonalities or the possibilities of any positive dialogues. I have examined these facets and make a case for scrutinising films that have the capacity to present off-beat interpretations of the volatile and sensitive subject of Partition. The scholarship on Partition films has thus far been focussed on memory or historic reconstructions as well as Partition literature adaptations. By introducing and cementing the place of *Filmistaan* in this discussion, I open the doors for looking at contextual explorations of Partition.

Through *Filmistaan* I have suggested that the focus should be on the way a narrative addresses the context and consequences of a pivotal historic moment. *Filmistaan* looks at this history from the vantage point of a generation far removed from the original context. At the

same time, the film establishes direct connections between the past and present generations through inherited memories. The protagonist recounts the words and memories of his grandfather who used to live in Pakistan before Partition and in turn is introduced to the memories of another survivor of the division.

Memorialising Partition and actively contributing toward this effort is an important driving force among directors Nitin Kakkar, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and Srijit Mukherji. Their work can be considered integral contributions to Partition's cinematic historiography. Therefore, through my analysis I suggest that the significance of inherited memories should not be ignored, particularly since these memories can be seen as the inspiration or motivation among filmmakers behind the choice of this subject. I have noted the commonalities in the family background of directors, Nitin Kakkar and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, the directors of *Filmistaan* and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* respectively, belong to families who have experienced Partition. I have mentioned this link in the chapters, stating that their keenness to approach this subject came from a personal interest that was ignited from exposure to these memories.

In a similar movement, British-Indian director Gurinder Chadha traced the journey of her Sikh family from Rawalpindi in Pakistan to India in the BBC documentary 'India's Partition: The Forgotten Story'(2018). She listens to her aunts and mother as they recount their memories of the traumatic and arduous journey they made during Partition. The British-Indian film *Viceroy's House* (2017), became another commemorative effort by her as at the end of the film she dedicates it to 'all those who died and to all those who survived Partition.'[617] The dedication includes details of the ordeal her grandmother faced during Partition and further mentions herself, the granddaughter who is the director of the film. *Viceroy's House* was dubbed into Hindi and released as *Partition 1947* (2017) in India (Figure 153).

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[617]*Viceroy's House* dir by Gurinder Chaddha (Pathè and BBC Films, 2017).
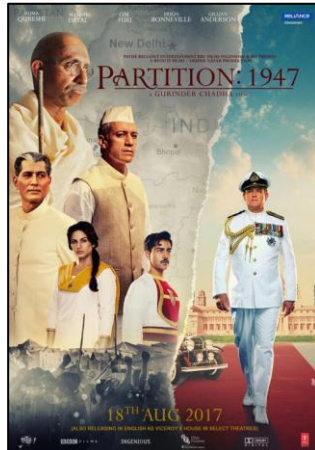
Figure 153

I do not assume that all films part of this cinema would be driven by the self-same personal need to commemorate. At the same time, it is noteworthy that prior scholarship has thus far connected inspiration for this subject largely only to Partition literature. There is a rich body of work that many prolific authors have contributed to that has and always will remain an important source of inspiration. It is equally important to acknowledge the influence of memories on different media, especially since the study of the link between memory and cinema is growing in academia, at the some time filmmakers drawing inspiration from memories introduces an intriguing phenomenon. It is observable that theories and approaches of memory scholars do not address the act of remembering in isolation, there is an awareness of a loss of memories. I suggest that nostalgia is an emotive expression of this loss. In *Filmistaan*, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* and *Begum Jaan* I have identified nostalgic strains that lament the loss of a time that was precious to them.

Chapter three, delved deep into the life and memories of athlete Milkha Singh. His personal memories reflect a yearning for the stability and happiness of childhood. This nostalgia stems from the disruption that the separation caused to his life. Deprived of his loved ones and the sense of security a child feels with his family, is wistfully recounted by Milkha Singh. Memory scholarship has expanded their study of nostalgia from materialistic expressions to emotive expressions of nostalgia. This takes the examination beyond kitsch cinematic reconstructions focussed on costumes, props and hairstyles to the lingering emotional strains of memories.

The emotionality attached to these memories is a central point of my thesis. Through chapters two, three and four, I highlight the way the case study films and in particular the reliance of Indian films on emotions as their primary means of expression. Emotions take different

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memory forms for expressing different facets of human experiences. *Filmistaan* looks at the past emotionally and then uses that as a premise to reimagine the present as well as the future. The protagonists question the permanent sense of division that has existed between people of the two countries since Partition. This allowed an examination of the implications of this history from an emotionally driven perspective, as does *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag,* where a survivor takes the audience through a journey of myriad experiences and memories. The same applies to trauma endured by the women in *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan.* Therefore, drawing on the prosthetic memory approach enabled an analysis that factored in the transmission of memories across generations as well as their potential to effect audiences emotionally.

Even though I have discussed the prosthetic potential of memories, I do not support the blanket assumption made by Landsberg that memories of sensitive historic contexts definitely connect with the audience empathetically. Throughout my thesis I use a circumspect approach, one that is mindful of the engagement prosthetic memories facilitate and their acknowledgement of the emotive potential of the said memories. The role played by technology in today's world is crucial in both the preservation and transmission of history and memories. I highlight and explore the digital functionality of memories in my analysis of the case study films. In *Filmistaan* this transference is facilitated through human interactions and shared viewings of commercial Indian films. Simultaneously, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* magnifies the significance of flashbacks and archival footage, which are used extensively in the film. *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* feature a series of flashbacks and incorporate reconstructions to explain the chronological sequence of events leading up to the division of India and Pakistan.

Chapter three and four present complex navigations through personal memories, documented history and reconstructions. Studying these multidimensional recollections and their intricate patterns has allowed me to reiterate several connections, those between personal and collective memory as well as their link with national or official frameworks of remembrance. In addition, the spread of memories across borders and their enhanced access through digitisation opens a plethora of possibilities for the future of memorialisation as well as channels of historiography.

Director Gurinder Chadha has talked about the need to document, preserve and pass on her inherited memories to her children. I have consistently demonstrated the impact of inherited

memories in my analysis. Chadha's films *Viceroy's House* and *Partition 1947* received mixed reactions from critics and the audience. Plagued by criticisms of historical ambiguities and ambivalences, the narrative largely treats Partition as a backdrop to a Hindu-Muslim love story. Her films also drew comparisons with historical films of David Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982) and Ketan Mehta's *Sardar* (1994).[618] (Figures 154 and 155).
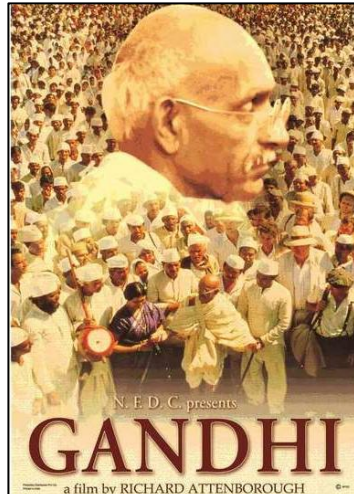

Figure 154

Figure 155

However, where these films foregrounded history, Chadha's fictional treatment drew criticism for her incongruous treatment of the nation's history in the narrative. The use of Partition as a backdrop or context for the main plot has often been used as a narrative device. However, by featuring historical figures and placing them within that context leaves them open to debates of accuracy. An analysis of historical accuracy complicates the analysis of fictional narratives. Therefore, the films I chose for this thesis foreground memories instead of drawing attention to the precision with which facts of history are presented.

Through the case studies I have closely examined the relationship between memory and history. It permits a more fluid reading of the depiction of history within the narratives as they try to highlight the impact of this historic decision on individual lives. While historians and films scholars agree that there is no ideal interpretation or representation of history, the connection with memories provides a different dimension. The growing propensity to highlight personal or individual stories is a tangible movement and has been transforming the

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[618]Gandhi (1992): Directed by Richard Attenborough the film is based on the life of Indian leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He led the Indian Freedom Struggle against British colonial rule and mobilised the Indian masses to protest against the British Imperial power through non-violence and non-cooperation.
Sardar (1993): Directed by Ketan Mehta the film presents an account of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's political life during the time India was gaining Independence.

essence of historical or period films across the world. My thesis draws attention to memory representations exploring the intrusion of an external or macro event into the lives of ordinary individuals.

Characters in all the four case study films are struggling in different ways with circumstances and situations that they have been placed in due to an external decision to divide a country. The interaction of macro and the micro give rise to multidimensional narratives that allow the audience to traverse personal and public spaces, worlds, memories and experiences simultaneously. Therefore, my study looks at the potential of cinema as a significant medium to unravel and unearth deep rooted memories. The fourth chapter is a crucial reflection of these aspects. Through the analysis of women's experiences in contemporary Indian cinema. Pursuing the female perspective in these two films simultaneously reveal attached overarching gender stereotypes. A nation or country is equated with the notion of a motherland, which needs to be protected by men in the form of soldiers. By extension the men in a family take on the role of protectors. As mentioned before, during incidents of mob violence or riots, women became receptacles of a family's honour or good name which needs to be defended using any means possible. In *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini* the desecration of the female body becomes a visual and symbolic metaphor for the division of the subcontinent. At the same time, the films also demonstratively project the female characters as martyres, who commit suicide in order to safeguard their honour from men. These persistent imageries and portrayals are further complicated with the depictions of gendered violence taking place during Partition.

The complexities of gender portrayals extend to the way the masculinity of Milkha Singh is presented as a patriotic symbol in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*. His athletic prowess is amplified throughout the film to showcase the ability to bring glory to the country. Milkha Singh winning races becomes a source of national pride. At the same time his being a soldier reiterates his status as a guardian, defender as well as champion for the nation. As I mention in the third chapter that the imagery of Milkha's training and winning at sports events are repeated to reiterate his significant national contribution. In contrast the women in the film are either victims or distractions; their stories obtain very limited screenspace, which is suggestively symptomatic of narratives dealing with nationalistic or patriotic fervour. Effectively demonstrating that the more proactive role and significance is still largely attached to predominantly male centric stories. This skewed lens of articulating the national

experience cements the need to intently scrutinise female narrations *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* to decipher their codes of meaning. In addition to studying the complex gender dimensions and dynamics in the two films, I draw particular attention to *Rajkahini* being a Bengali language film. This aspect expands my analysis to include a regional perspective.

The regional perspective allows me to challenge the prevalent favouring of a particular region and language in Partition cinema analysis. Examination of this body of work reveals the tendency of narratives to explore this event by situating it in North India. This effectively limit the language and cultural context of these narratives to Hindi, Urdu or Punjabi speaking milieus and places. Featuring the experience of Bengal adds a significant dimension from regional cinema to my readings. Studying the diversions between the Hindi and Bengali language versions of the same story, written and helmed by the same director makes another unique contribution to this analysis. The narrative decisions taken reveal the way content is tweaked keeping different audiences in mind. At the same time, the influence of literary sources and particularly of literature centred on Partition stands out in both narratives.

One pivotal literary influence are the works of author Saadat Hasan Manto. His works are in many ways considered elemental to comprehending the essence of this catastrophic event. Translated from Urdu into multiple languages, these stories boldly expose the devastation Partition caused at that time. Over the years, Manto's short stories have been consistently recreated on stage, for television and now for digital viewing platforms. Although his articulation of women's experiences is riveting and sensitive; it is equally unapologetic in its graphic descriptions of the senseless violence perpetuated against women at that time. His work presents a strong and vehement critique of communalism and the way it seeped itself into the core fabric of the subcontinent.

The inspiration *Filmistaan* drew from his writing guided the communal standpoints presented in the film. Manto centred many of his stories around women, especially lending a voice to experiences of prostitutes who lived on the fringes of polite society. *Rajkahini* and *Begum Jaan* are cinematic expressions of this feature of Manto's writing. Moreover, I have analysed the reconstruction of his short story in *Rajkahini,* and its exclusion from *Begum Jaan.* Interestingly, Manto worked as a scriptwriter for Hindi films in Bombay in the 1930s. Hence, his stories are composed with a definite flair for drama and with a sense of audio-visual aesthetics that virtually translate into screenplays.

Figure 156

Many of his short stories have been widely recreated for theatre, television and film. Especially the short stories: 'Khol Do' (1948),'Toba Tek Singh' (1955), 'Thanda Gosht' (Cold Flesh, 1950), 'Kaali Salwar' (Black Salwar, 1961), 'Dus Rupaye' (Ten Rupees, 1958), 'Aakhri Salute' (Last Salute, 1962), to name a few. In May 2017, Indian filmmaker Rahat Kazmi helmed the film Mantostaan, which is an amalgamation of four of Manto's short stories. Renowned actress turned director Nandita Das's film Manto (2018) a biography on the writer features some of his short stories (Figure 156). However, focus on the works of this Indo-Pakistani writer are not limited to India. In the year 2015, Pakistani director Sarmad Khoosat directed and acted in the biography Manto, which after garnering praise from critics and the audience was subsequently released as a TV Play in 2017. Irrespective of the acclaim, these efforts attest to the continuing relevance of Manto's writing and the context of Partition in India as well as in Pakistan. The presence of these works on online viewing platforms further cements their place among historiographic efforts towards Partition in both countries and ensures their dissemination on a global scale.

This continued presence and relevance of Manto, simultaneously highlights two countries still grappling with the aftermath of the separation. More than seventy years have passed, mainstream Indian cinema is functioning in an environment that remains laden with consequences of that cataclysmic decision taken in 1947. There are consistent attempts in Indian cinema to address these implications in myriad ways. To this end, I propose and encourage more nuanced readings of mainstream films, which look beyond the principal markings of commercial entertainers, to try and detect the different thematic or contextual references and inferences to this history. In this context, I mention several mainstream films

that corroborate this sustained interest and influence of Partition in Indian cinema, which has not waned over the years. Within the same period set for this analysis I found mainstream films *PK* (2014) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) exploring problematic issues ranging from Hindu-Muslim conflicts, the Kashmir issue, terrorism, discrimination and agenda driven political propaganda (Figures 157 and 158). It is noteworthy that while the films do not make any direct references, they clearly imply that origins of these various issues are traceable to Partition.
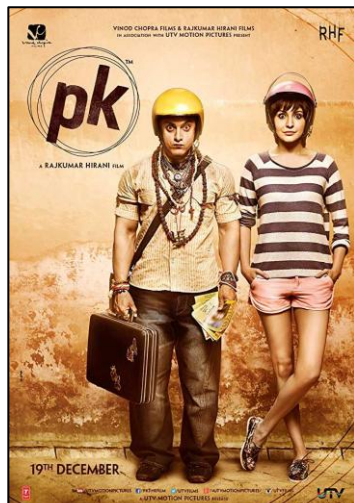

| Figure 157 | Figure 158 |

The film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan,* depicts a devout Hindu (Indian) Pawan Kumar Chaturvedi crossing over voluntarily into Pakistan to reunite a mute 6-year-old girl, Shahida with her family. In *PK* through the eyes of a stranded alien, director Rajkumar Hirani examines the complex religious fabric of India. The film's treatment of a love story between an Indian and Pakistani is a significant sub plot that revisits Partition. Both films present indirect or oblique references to this history. At the same time, these narratives provide a large canvas for controversial and sensitive themes, as well as attest to the steady increase in mainstream Indian cinema efforts toward this memorialisation. This is visible in the two most recent commercial ventures *Kalank* (2019) and *Bharat* (2019) (Figures 159 and 160).
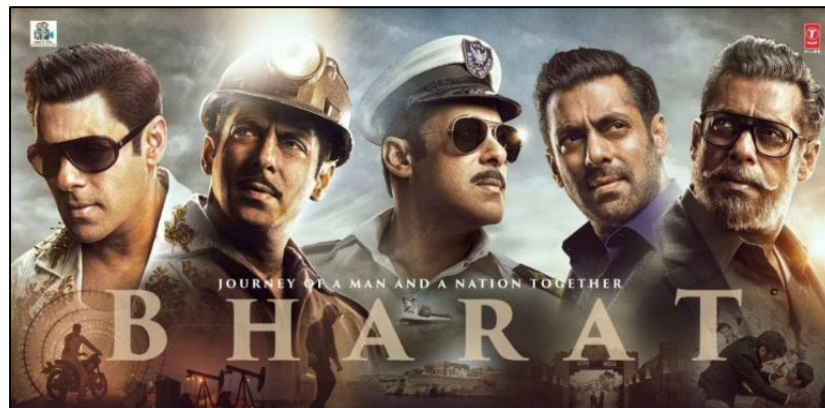
Figure 159

Figure 160

Kalank recreates the years close to Partition, in a fictitious town in Pakistan. It presents a tale of star-crossed lovers in the midst of an atmosphere brimming with Hindu-Muslim tensions. The film *Bharat* (2019) attempts to personify the journey of the Indian nation through the life of the protagonist named Bharat, which means India. *Bharat* adopts an approach similar to *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag's* narrative, as the life story of the protagonist Bharat starts with Partition and flashbacks of that experience recur in the film from time to time. *Bharat's* reconstruction allows the audience to get a glimpse of the pain and loss borne by millions of families during the separation; the rest of the film focusses on building Bharat as the face of India. In contrast, *Kalank* treats history as a backdrop for showcasing a love story. Their narratives are supported by popular actors, action-packed drama, stirring dialogues, interspersed with romance and song sequences, all of which are included to try and ensure their commercial success. The commercial failure of both the films raises questions as to the treatment, subsequent reception as well as their context.

My aim throughout this thesis has been to understand the ways in which contemporary Indian cinema continues to offer diverse theatrical treatments and perspectives to the memories of this complex episode. Simultaneously I have analysed the case study films mindful of the socio-political climate and its influence on the way these memories are reconstructed as well as received. This methodological and theoretical framework combines to form an original contribution to the discussion of Partition memories and their presence in contemporary cinematic creations. The chosen phase and films for this analysis redefine and expand the boundaries of Partition based or related cinema. As gleaned from recent memory scholarship, such a fluid approach is necessary for analysing the cinematic treatment of memories. I state that my work creates a space to further the discussion of Partition memorialisation efforts in contemporary films as well as the context within which they are created.

In this context it is integral to be aware that the socio-cultural and political phenomena surrounding Indo-Pak relations, are significant indicators of the future of Partition memorialisation in Indian cinema. How different communities and nationalities are portrayed raise many substantial questions. Would the future attempts at Partition memorialisation be concerned with reiterating the value of secularism, trust and negotiating peace? or would they be prone to towing jingoistic depictions and hardliner rhetoric? The communal chasm is here to stay, the mistrust around the corner is ready to spring through shadows and these reflections are starkly visible in cinema. Therefore the cinematic diversity among Partition memorialisation efforts and the explorations of its consequences are constantly grappling with considerations of how and what to represent.

It requires developing critical perspectives while looking at *Filmistaan's* promotion of Indo-Pak peace and cooperation that may come across as utopian, the nationalist overtones in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* as well as the sensitivities attached with the representations of gendered violence in *Begum Jaan* and *Rajkahini.* At the same time these contradictions create engaging and intriguing subjects for analysis. Their scrutiny reveals not only how filmmakers chose to express their view on Partition but also the accompanying contextual impact. Through chapter two I effectively demonstrate that favourable Indo-Pak relations in 2011-2012 are reflected in *Filmistaan's* thematic exploration of Partition, as the film was conceived and produced in those years. As we move further into an era riddled with Indo-Pak tensions and communal suspicions, it gradually reveals the patterns of internal and external influences on a nation's cinema. My analysis pertinently questions how conducive the reception of an

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optimistic outlook *Filmistaan* depicts or a film like it would face in the midst of an adverse diplomatic climate, as is visible in the country today. I venture that such positive cinematic perspectives are more unlikely to be made today or in the coming years. A deducible observation given the rise of more nationalist narratives that largely avoid taking a hopeful stand on Indo-Pak relations. Looking closely at the context, reach and reception of the case study films provides an insight into the multidimensional considerations embedded within the films and their environment.

Encouraging such analytical efforts is especially relevant today, as the proliferation of OTT platforms augments the global presence and availability of Indian films. This development has effectively redefined the geographical reach of contemporary cinema. My thesis presents an original and strong case for acknowledging and comprehending the enduring circulation of Partition memories and its consequences thorough this multi-layered body of work. It demonstrates that as we chronologically move forward, generations evolve into their independent ideas and we see these changes reflected in their media representations as well. Therefore, a close examination of mainstream Indian films for their interpretation of Partition history while located within diverse socio-political environments would help decode prevalent attitudes, mindsets and cultural perceptions. I recommend that the distinct structure of Indian films with their traditions of music, melodrama and cultural specificities be viewed as unique socio-political signifiers. Delving deeper into these complex cinematic entities would indicate new developments in Partition memorialisation, contribute to its historiography as well as reveal patterns of generational percolation. Hence, I hope my work marks the beginning of future discourses in this significant field of study.

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