

## Representation of Bengal Partition in Goutam Ghose's film *Sankhachil* (2016)

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### Abstract

The partition of Bengal was the most important event during the rule of Lord Curzon. It was carried out mainly for the convenience of administration. Bengal in those days was the biggest province of India extending over 1,89,000 square miles with a population of 80 million. It was comprising of Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, and was under the central of one lieutenant Governor. After Lord Curzon took charge as Governor General of India the discussion over the partition began due to the following issues like vastness of province, limited sources of communication, difference of language, and need of the limited time to maintain the province. Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal and formed two new provinces of manageable size – East and West Bengal. But this partition caused various types of miseries in the lives of the people who lived in those places. They became homeless, helpless and financially unstable due to the loss of their homeland. Gautam Ghose's *Sankhachil* is the film that gives a clear view of the partition of Bengal. The paper attempts to point out the suffering of a family who are unable to cross the border due to their identity, which has become the marker of their destiny. Due to their different identity, they have to face the prisoned life with less hope for the future. The paper also depicts that the border is the creation of human beings; it is applicable only for them, not for the natural creatures like birds that can fly above the border of two regions negotiating the partition.

**Keywords:** Partition, identity, negotiation, issue of border, financial instability.

Partition has consequently produced a very indelible and catastrophic impact on the course of post-Independence history of India especially of the two most affected provinces, Punjab and Bengal. This partition was politically motivated and forced upon the people of these two provinces. The issue of National self-determination is often associated with it. So far as Bengal is concerned, partition creates a long term communal animosity between Hindus and Muslims. The departure of the British from India on 15th August 1947 brought no unmixed joy of freedom, but gave rise to partition, communal riots, severe bloodshed, displacements, molestations, dire poverty, and hunger.

In many Bengali and Hindi films, we find the use of partition theme. Partition created a political as well as cultural havoc, the burns of which are still felt. And the tears have been well documented in diverse narratives as films, novels, short stories, memories and autobiographies. Partition is an important theme of Goutam Ghoses film *Sankhachil*. Satyajit Ray presents this partition theme in the film *Ghare Baire*. The movie set in 1905, the period in which Great Britain, represented by Lord Curzon, decided the partition of Bengal in order to separate the Hindus and Muslims. The populace mobilized against the project in the Nationalist movement known as Swadeshi, which called for a Boycott of foreign made goods, and in an insurrection which was subsequently suppressed. Ritwik Ghataks *Subarnareaha* represents the theme of partition. *Subarnareaha* is the part of the trilogy that includes the films like *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Ghandar* (1961), *Subarnareaha* (1962), dealing with the aftermath of the partition of India in 1947 and the refugees are coping with it. The Hindi film *Partition: 1947* directed by Gurinder Chandha tells us the untold story behind partition. Goutam ghoses *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *Sankhachil* show the same theme. In all those films, the life of East-Bengal refugees disrupted from their own motherland has been explored.

The partition of India in 1947 not only separated a country into two on the basis of religion but also change the fate of both the Nation. Cities and towns were ransacked, women were raped and it was a period of extreme disorder and tumult. The proclamation of India's partition in 1947 played out differently in Bengal and Punjab. Partition did not convey the same thing to Punjab

and Bengal- the two provinces that got separated on the Eastern and Western borders of India. Most ordinary citizens found it hard to accept the fact of partition and their lives changed when they become refugees. The division of Punjab was sudden, destructive and convulsive. On the other hand, the partition of Bengal in the East was a slower process. The displacement took place in a motion and trauma took a super sensual and psychological turn as like as Punjab. Debjani Sengupta said, “The partition of 1947 meant a redrawn map, new borders and massive population migration across the borders of the Independent nation states of India and Pakistan. Millions of people, Hindus and Muslims, crossed the newly defined boundaries. In West Bengal, an estimated thirty lakhs Hindu refugees entered by 1960 while seven lakhs Muslims left for East Pakistan (3).

Jaya Chatterjee tells that “There is a gapping void at the heart of subject because one does not know why people who had lived cheek by jowl for so long fell upon each other in 1947 and its aftermath, with a ferocity that has few parallels in history” (311). At the same time Urbashi Butalia began to remember through interviews the stories of the smaller, invisible players of the events. Butalia’s argument was that “we cannot begin to understand what partition is about, unless we look at how people remember it” (13). In a series of public lectures and essays in major news papers, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar gave confidence to those Hindus who would become part of Pakistan in the event of partition that in a divided Bengal those Hindus who might be left in East Bengal should have this satisfaction that West Bengal as a separate province would be there as a safe home for Hindu culture and economic interests.

The film *Sankhachil* is an example that gives a lot of reference regarding the partition and its effects on people and nation. *Sankhachil* is directed by Goutam Ghose who is one of the famous directors of Bengali film and also Hindi film. *Sankhachil* focuses on the sufferings of the people of west Bengal and Bangladesh after the partition. The story of the film based on Sanjib Chattapadhyay’s novel *Sankhachil*. This film gets National Oscar awards and also other awards. In this film, there is a beautiful relationship between a father and a daughter.

Goutam Ghose was born at Faridpur in Bangladesh on 24th July in 1950. Now he lives in Kolkata. Many of his films based on the life of the people of the border area of the two countries-

India and Bangladesh. In *Sankhachil*, we find this situation. Though Bengal was divided by the British rulers, but the language, culture and heritage were not divided now. It is an Indian-Bangladeshi joint venture Bengali language historical drama film of 2016. This film named after the bird Brahminy kite which is used by many Bengali poets like Jivanananda Dash. In Jivanananda Dash's "Rupasi Bangla," we find the name of this bird. In Bengali culture, this bird is a symbol of something good, a benevolent spirit.

In this film, there is only one main character and the story is based on the girl-Rupsa. Shajbati, a Bangladeshi child-actress, plays the role of the little and sweet girl Rupsa. Prosenjit Chatterjee plays the role of Rupsa's father Muntasir Chowdhury Badal and Kusum Sikdar plays the role of Rupsa's mother Laila. The role of other characters like the head teacher of the village school, Mr. Hemanta Bagchi and the Indian B.S.F soldier Arjun Singh Rana and Sutirtho Babu of Kolkata and also the other villagers of Rupsa's village is very important. Rupsa, the main character of this film, is a girl of eleven or twelve years old. She is the only daughter of Muntasir Chowdhury Badal and Laila Chowdhury. And that is why she is very fondling to her parents. Her father calls her beloved daughter with the sweet name Champokeswari. The name has a link with the allegorical fairy girl. All day Rupsha enjoys the beauty of nature and smiles.

When Rupsa comes first in this film, she is roaming in the open nature of her village as she is the daughter of nature. She is very innocent and she enjoys the rural beauty of nature. And she looks all the small insects and other things and animals in nature with a magnifying glass. It expresses her inquisitive mind. Rupsa's house is situated beside the Ichhamati river. Rupsa and her parents live very happily and they have a small dream. But the main crisis begins when Rupsa becomes ill and after the diagnosis, the doctor declares that she is suffering from cardiac problems and she needs immediate surgery. The doctor also declares that in Bangladesh she does not get the proper treatment. She will get proper treatment in Taki Hospital. But the Taki Hospital is situated in India. And they need to cross the river Ichhamati. That creates a big crisis. Abdullah Al-Manee argues that many people need to go to another country for better treatment. Many Bangladeshi people also come to India for better treatment. But sometimes, they used legal way and sometimes the illegal way. The process of making passport takes long time and it is also a complex process. For this, many people take the risk and they enter in India without any

passport. (Al-Manee n. pag.). Rupsa's father who is a village school teacher of the border area, comes to India by crossing the river Ichhamati with his wife Laila Chowdhury and their ill girl. This is the main story of this film. But behind this small story, the film shows us the division of Bangalees, the quarrel between two communities and the unscrupulous mentality of mankind.

Now all the people of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh carry the injury of partition of 1947. This film represents the injury of the people after partition. Ramiz says that now the people of the border area cannot forget the sad pictures of partition. For the whole life, they are carrying the sufferings (Ramij n.pag.). Rupsa's father is also a writer. He writes some essay about partition. In this film, he decides to write an essay named "Ved Bibhed". One day, when he searches some old letters of his ancestors, he finds a letter which describes the sufferings of the people after partition. Countless Muslim people came to Bangladesh leaving their motherland. The Bangalees were divided into two parts. Rupsa's father says "Samagro Banglee jati duiti nirdisto bhage bhag hoiya gelo (the whole Bangalees are divided into two groups)" (Ghosh 2016). Caste system and hatred of one religion for the other religion came to the fore. Muntasir's grandfather could not leave his motherland after the partition. All day, he cried and sang- "Amay gahite bolona, bolona (Dont request me to sing)" (Ghosh 2016). He decided to die in his own birth place. It expresses his deep love for his motherland. When Muntasir reads the letter, Rupsa says- "Baba ami desh kothao jabona, kokhono na (father, I will never leave this country, never.)" (Ghose 2016). These words come from the core of her heart. She loves her country very much.

But the situation changes when Rupsa becomes seriously ill. Rupsa's father and mother go to Taki Hospital (which is situated in India) to admit Rupsa for better treatment. But in India, they cannot use their Muslim identity. They stayed in Sutirtha Babus house as his relative. Here, they stayed not with the Muslim identity, but with Hindu identity. Rupsa's mother decorates herself like a Hindu house wife. But everyday she secretly prayed. Badal Chowdhury and Lila Chowdhury become the names of Rupsa's parents. If they do not use the Hindu identity, they have to face many problems. This is the result of partition. And in India, Sutirtha Babu collects false identity cards for Rupsa's parents who accepted all these obstacles only for curing their daughter. Here, all are the victims of situation. Rupsa is a very simple girl and she always tells the truth. But at the moment of crisis, she has to tell lie. She tells the doctor and nurses that she is

an Indian and Sutirtha Babu is her grandfather. These situation will never come if there are no partition. Rupsa and her parents are suffering from identity crisis.

At the end, Rupsa becomes more ill and the Taki Hospital transfers her in another Hospital in Kolkata. Here Dr. Aryan Dasgupta declares that without an operation Rupsa will not cure. And the day of operation comes. But Rupsa died at the operation theatre. Their utmost endeavour failed. Rupsa cannot tolerate the process of operation.

She is very little. At the end, when Muntasir fills up the form of formalities, he exposes all the truth that he is not an Indian. They come from Bangladesh and they are Muslim. They stayed in India and use a false identity. At this situation their only aim was to cure their one and only daughter. So, they crossed the border of Bangladesh and tried their best to cure their only child. But we find a tragic end. Any parents cannot tolerate the pain. At the end, Rupsa's father does not think about their future and the Police arrest them and they accept the jail life. It expresses their helplessness. When the Police Officer arrests them and they go to jail with the Police Officer, Rupsas father is in illusion thinking that her daughter calls him asking him to see the sankhachil flying in the sky. Sankhachil is a bird that can fly and cross the border without any permission. No rules of the human world can stop the birds. And Rupsa always wants to break the partition between two religions, between human beings. She believes in the idea that we are all human beings and this is our identity. At the beginning, when she looks all the things with a magnifying glass, it indicates that she wants to come out of the microcosm to the macrocosm. This indicates the greatness of her mind. Any partition does not matter, if we expand our mind from the small world to the big universe.

The film portrays the mental suffering and injury of the people after partition. But we also find another picture of partition. At the very beginning of this film, there is a village in the border area where the Indian and the Bangladeshi people live together very happily. Debmalya Chakrabartty says in a movie review that "at the beginning of the film, some Indian people are caught by the border guards of the Bangladesh. One kind B.S.F officer frees them and says that from many years ago, they cross the river Ichhamati. Now any rules cannot control them. The officer shows the reporter the real picture of the border area which has a similarity with the

Oyagha border. Here one side of a road is India and another side of the road is Bangladesh” (n.pag.). The British rulers divided the two lands with the pillar, but their love and fellow feelings between the people of the two nations subvert the binary, the partition. Shomini Sen says that “politics may divide people on the basis of religion, boundaries may set them apart, but humanity surpasses such boundaries” (n.pag.). In the case of Rupsa, we find this picture. Rupsa is very friendly and free-minded in nature. Here, we find a good friendship between the Indian B.S.F guard Arjun Singh Rana (who is a Rajasthani man) and Rupsa. The B.S.F guard tells Rupsa that she is very sweet and he has a little daughter like her. As he is a B.S.F guard, he stays in the border area. But his little daughter lives in Rajasthan with her Mother and other family members. That is why, he misses his daughter. In this film, when Rupsa first meets the B.S.F guard, they become good friend. In the Panitar fair, they first meet. Rupsa calls him Dostu and the B.S.F guard calls her Mitthi. When Rupsa was admitted to the Taki Hospital, the guard goes to the hospital to see her. It indicates that the good relation between human beings can subvert all the partition in the border. Though the B.S.F guard is an Indian, he has a generous mind. Our first identity is that we all are human beings. Mahfuz Bin Mujib has said in his review that “the B.S.F Captain answer to the reporters (who are coming from different site) that we do not kill the people of the border arrears, but the politics kills us” (n.pag.).

In this film, we find some beautiful natural scenery of the Ichhamati river. Ichhamati is a river which flows between the border of the two country- India and Bangladesh. This river has divided two countries. So, the distance between two countries is very little. But the problem is that because of the partition, any person cannot cross the border without the passport. All the people of the border area of the two countries use the water of the river and take the air of the place. The birds are flying and crossing the border freely. But the people cannot cross the border without permission. Only the partition divides the two countries. The border is a flux, but not a fixed border. There is no particular partition pillar in the Ichhamati river. Any people of India or Bangladesh cannot say that some part of the river is India’s or some part of Bangladesh’s.

The film portrays a sense of nostalgia for the past and feelings for homeliness. Here, the violent suffering of the characters from the post-partition trauma is highlighted. The dialogue of this film is very simple, but the theme and the narration touch watchers’ mind. Especially, the emotion

and the feelings of all the characters are very deep. The innocent smile of the little girl Rupsa also touches watchers' mind. The cinematography is very beautifully represented in this film. The theme of partition is beautifully presented in this film

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