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The Representation of Agony during Partition as shown in M S Sathyu's film "Garm Hawa"

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Abstract

"Garm Hawa" (Scorching Winds/Hot Winds) is a 1973 Hindi Urdu drama film directed by M S Sathyu with veteran actor Balraj Sahni as the lead. It was written by Kaifi Azmi and Shama Zaidi, based on an unpublished short story by a famous Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai. This controversial film has won several national awards in 1974 including a National Integration award.

This political narrative deals with the plight of a North Indian Muslim businessman Salim Mirza and his family in 1947 in Agra. He is a patriot and a Muslim shoemaker, struggles to survive in this pathetic and critical condition of communal riots. He is in a dilemma either to live in India or to emigrate to Pakistan like his other family members. The Mirza family suffers for not doing anything wrong in this post-partition environment. They could neither manage their business nor got the job.

The social and marital relations are affected. Salim Mirza's elder son Baqar moves to Pakistan with his family. His daughter Amina is frustrated having two affairs with her cousins and committed suicide. The younger son Sikander doesn't want to run away from India, but fights against the odds for the betterment of the whole nation. They have two options – either to join Indian National Congress or to go to Pakistan. Salim lives in Agra at the end, joins a rally with his son Sikander, with his faith in new India.

Keywords : Partition, division, Hindustan, India, Pakistan, Nehru, Gandhi, Communal.

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The Partition of India is the most significant event of modern history. India is such a country, whose boundaries were intact from Maurya empire to Emperor Aurangzeb's rule, but they are divided on the basis of religion in 1947. Who is responsible for this ? Mahatma Gandhi says, "If two brothers want to live in peace, is it possible for a third party to separate them?"

Similarly, the Hindus and Mahomedans would have to blame our folly rather than the English, if we allowed them to put us as under.” (115 & 116, Hind Swaraj, M K Gandhi).

Partition is the divisions of two lands as ‘Pakistan’ and ‘Akhand Hindustan’ i e Undivided India. It is obvious that there is a regular partition and independent nations will have to co-operate with each other in a different ways. But we see the result today. At the time of partition, the pathetic scenes of murdering, raping and looting were common. Hindus were terrified in all over Punjab. Nehru wrote to Gandhiji reporting that “All this killing business has reached a stage of complete madness and vast populations are deserting their habitants and trekking to the west or to the east” (408-409, “Days of Darkness”, Nehru – A Tryst with Destiny”.

“Garm Hawa” (1974) film was directed by Mysore Shrinivas Sathyu, produced by Ishan Arya, M S Sathyu, Abu Siwani and screenplay is by Kaifi Azmi, Shama Zaidi from the unpublished story by a Marxist activist Ismat Chughtai. Photography is by Ishan Arya and music is given by Ustad Bahadur Khan. This tragic film is cast by Balraj Sahni as Salim Mirza, Gita Shauhat as Amina Mirza, Jalal Agha as Shamshad, Dinanath Zutski as Halim, Badar Begum as Salim’s mother, Abu Siwani as Baqar Mirza, Faroukh Shaikh as Sikandar Mirza and Jamal Hashmi as Kazim, A K Hangle as Ajmani Sir.

This film was given national award for best film on Integration and best screenplay India (1974), Filmfare award for best screenplay and best story writer, India. This controversial film was the first film to deal with the human consequences resulting from the 1947 partition of India. British Lord Mountbatten ordered split India into religious coalitions with the birth of a new country Pakistan serving as a refuge for Muslims and India remaining Hindi. In the beginning, the film was accepted by a commercial producer, but then pressure and fear led to al rapid withdrawal of this offer. Sathyu secured Film Financing Corporation for support and this film was completed in Agra. There were public protests too.

This film was banned as an “Instigation to communal dissension.” Sathyu was strong in his belief that he showed the film to journalists and leaders. Censorship board led to a reversal of ban and this film was appreciated as “a language of common identity” and to humanize the situation endured by Muslims in North India who wanted to remain in India. The tale of this hit film is a complex narrative and main focal point is Salim Mirza (Balraj Sahani in his final film before his death) Salim is a patriot, Muslim shoemaker and patriarch wants to live in India, his motherland.

An element of love story woven into this political narrative adds greater meaning to the story. Salim’s daughter Amina is betrothed to Kazim, are deeply in love with each other and are happy. Kazim goes to Pakistan during partition to find work but when he returns for marriage, without his father’s wish, is arrested for having no passport or informing to police. He is deported to Pakistan, where that Government is sending him to Canada for higher study, so he would never return. Amina is depressed for her love for Kazim, get attention and love of Shamshad whom she never liked.

These innocent helpless Indians are trapped between two worlds. Amina’s agony is reflection of her father Salim. He is powerless against the shift in attitudes and political climate as he finds himself unable to secure his economy or bank loans. This film was released for younger generation to know the bitter realilty of partition in 1947. The story is told of passion and dedication. The performances dialogues and photography were excellent. The generations will be aware of the pain and sorrow of the people. First Salim’s elder sister, Halim Mirza, his elder brother emigrate to Pakistan as he believes there is no future for Muslims in India.

Salim's elder son Baqar Mirza, then Salim's another sister went to Pakistan. Salim stays back in hope of a better time. 84 years old director Sathyu said, "This is a proper time to look back at the story." This communal sensitive subject needed to be handed carefully. This film never lost its relevance, but it has improved technically. Its marketing is huge today unlike in the 70s. Initial plan was to restore the film for a DVD release, then they decided to restore it for a theatrical release. As this film is a classic, it was not released in a proper way in 1973.

After working on audio and video, it is now technically at par with today's film. It took three and a half years and more than Rs 1 crore to restore the film. It unravels the freshness of partition even after 40 years of its first release. It is shown in theatres after 40 years of its first release and 65 years after the actual event occurred. It is a powerful film, doesn't lose its potent story-telling. The movie begins at the train station, as Salim is shown on the railway station to bid farewell to his sister. The choice is a life-changing consequences for Mirza family. This is a hot wind of change that the new nation is created. Salim is a sincere idealist, tangled up in a time of mistrust and opportunism.

The new borders refused the Mirza family from being Indians to represent a community of Muslims. They are helpless to be outsiders in their own home. Families are divided by borders. It is very pathetic to uproot memories and start new. It is a tale of identity told with warmth, insight and honesty. Partition is a controversial and delicate topic for filmmakers and from the eyes of a Muslim family. Sathyu translates Chughtai's this story of partition to a shared feeling between the family and the audience. Mirza family seem real, their circumstances felt, their small humiliations and bigger betrayals are believable. There employs use of Urdu and Hindi. Moreover, the script has the balance of humour and truth.

The cast breathes life into every character, even if the grandmother who can't leave her house or her memories or the hypocritical elder brother who professes loyalty for India, but leave for Pakistan. The film truly belongs to Sahni and Geeta as his daughter. Salim handles every trial with grace and dignity. Amina acts more through her body language than dialogue. This film marked the debut of Sathyu as a director and Farooque Shaikh and A K Hangal had debut roles. The film was shot by cinematographer Ishan Arya at proper locations with a second-hand Arriflex camera loaned to the crew by director's friend, Homi Sethna. The treatment of the film is reassuring. We feel every agonizing moment through excellent techniques. Two lovers are shown in the gardens at the Taj Mahel, sometimes camera is on the actor only. This film has depth and timelessness.

Salim has done nothing wrong, yet he is punished by post-partition environment in Agra. He is imprisoned in his hometown. He says, "They have taken everything. Only our faith will survive". He is strong but discouraged by the exodus of his family members into Pakistan. In the end, he too makes the journey to the train, but on the way Salim and his son Sikander encounter a massive protest rally which seeks to join Indians. Both join flag-waving mob. The final scene brings a sense of hope for Salim to accept his situation in a new way. This film is a milestone in Indian cinema and India's official entry to the Oscars in 1974.

Mumbai based distributor, Subhash Chheda restored it both audio and video segments in 2 years. Restoration is tricky and complex as people can't forget original one. Nothing has been added or deleted, but tried to enhance a complete theatrical experience to the modern viewer. This beautiful movie contains empathy, patriotism, pain, brotherhood and joy. It is a heart-warming tale of lost love, of broken-trust on one hand and of strong faith in secular fiber that

India is on the other hand. The wounds were fresh, it was not easy job to make the film on this sensitive subject. He got protests and bans to present India a touching chapter from its

communal empathy, but instigated communal discord, but later won award for National Integration. "Garm Hawa" deserves a tribute for all who believe in a secular India that makes this movie special. It is an exceptional film, where the process of border-making brings hot wind of a long partition swept through the inner world of familial ties, changing both those who remain in their ancestral homes and others who left for a new country. Salim's ultimate refusal for displacement results in the loss of his home and business.

This film tells us only a partial story and nothing about divided family in Pakistan and their Pakistani experience of Salim's brothers and sisters. M S Sathyu said in an interview, "The games these politicians play" and the "suffering it had caused" (Introduction page 13, "the Long Partition : The Making of Modern South Asia"). Politicians of high ideas and vision, have fought for freedom and nation, make decisions that caused such dispossession and suffering. Muslim exodus from India are refugees (Muhajirs - second rate citizens) in a new country.

The problem of homelessness occurred. Salim has to sell his ancestral house and hire a small house where vegetarians don't agree to give their house to non-vegetarians on rent. Here, he has to pay 1 year advance, where he could pay only 3 months. They have to adjust for the rooms to be shared. Grandma died in her husband's house where she came soon after marriage. For running factory, family women's jewellery were sold. There arose the problem of Unemployment. On the basis of religious discrimination, they are suffering and not getting job. Sikandar got selected for a job and then refused for a Hindu candidate.

There shows business relations among Hindus and Muslims. Salim runs the factory on strike day, so he didn't get orders blaming for not co-operating. Hindu youth feel that it is their right to get job here, as India is their country. Salim's brother-in-law suggested him either to go to Pakistan or join Congress party. Salim feels here that this age is not to leave native land, but leave world. His younger sister Akhtar begum asks for dowry to Salim, as they have selected another girl for her son Shamshad. After Kazim, Shamshad runs away with his father to Pakistan, so Amina commits suicide, failing in love for the second time. Baqar invites Sikander to Pakistan to assist him in his business.

Once Salim was in a market on by mistake they met with an accident with the fruit lorry and there created communal riots. Salim too is seriously injured. His shoe-factory was burnt. Having self-respect, he doesn't want to depend on his son's income, so he started working like a labourer. Ajmani sir helped Salim to free from prison and charged as a Pakistani spy. This is a limit of toleration. Salim's wife feels, it would be better if they have migrated before, so Amina would be alive.

Muslims rule over Hindus from 600 years. Forcible conversion to Muslims, destroyed temples, kidnapped women etc were very common. Every village had Hindu and Muslim family temple and mosque. They share festivals, traditions, customs, social system. They were safe and secure. Mogal Kings Jahangir and Shahjehan's mothers were Hinduss. Hindus are idol-worshippers whereas Muslims are not. Pakistan existed to solve Hindu-Muslim problems I e difference of opinions. Due to this political divisions, many people changed their home and country in a short time.

Punjab state is divided, where about 2 to 20 lacks of people were killed. About 75000 women were kidnapped and raped. Thousands of families are divided and houses were destroyed. About 4,00,000 East Bengalis migrated to India in 8 days. After 4 generations, the mind-set of people and hatred remains the intact. Not only Hindus and Muslims, but also Sikhs and Muslims slaughtered one another and created a horrific situation that left million dead, several millions displaced and innumerable wounded. Within a year of the bloodiest religious

cleansing in history, about seventeen million refugees had moved both ways between the two wings of Pakistan and India, is the largest transfer of populations in history.

This tragic bloodbath is the birth of two nations as independence and birth of two nations as independence and partition came simultaneously to the subcontinent. By transferring power, this left the deepest scars and hatred on their relations. It is the costliest price that the subcontinent could have paid for securing 'independence' from its imperial masters. This is a crucial events of the 20th century and a historical accident, has a profound impact on contemporary politics, society, culture, literature and historiography. It is an agony and traumatic times experienced until today.

Hindus' objection to cow-sacrifice and Muslims' objections to music before mosques have been engineered by mischief makers. Pakistan became an Islamic state. Bengali Muslims were economically and politically weaker than the Punjabis. Mahammad Ali Jinnah and M K Gandhi are both Kathiawadis/Gujaratis. After Partition Jinnah never returned to India. Born in Paneli near Gondal to a Khoja Muslim Business community, his father Jenabhai went to Karanchi in 1857 for trad/business. For peoples' conveniency Jenabhai kept his son Muslim name Mahammad Ali. His wife's name is Amibai.

Coming to the end, religious divisions are not possible b'cas Hindus and Moslems are spread out all over the country. Economic divisions of India will be self-sufficient, so will weaken her as one part , will have to depend on the other. Even after the genesis of Pakistan, two communities have to live and work together for the common ideals of citizenship and culture. Muslims were too weak to stand on their own feet and felt the need of political power to support them socially and economically. The reason of partition might be the religiosity among Muslims encountered opposition from the Non-Muslims or were hampered by the fact of the Muslims as a minority.

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