

Identity in Post-Colonial India: An Analysis of the Film *Garam Hawa*

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ABSTRACT

This article sheds some light to post-independent India from a very different point of view. The film *Garam Hawa* is interpreted from using the theories like Nationalism and Transnationalism to unravel how the so called Indian Identity was established even when Indian subcontinent was facing the consequences of Indo-Pak partition and related hatred and enmity. Love for humanity surpasses all other identities in this film and paves way for us to think beyond all narrow-minded perspectives to form a transnational world where people search for oneness and affinity than hatred and differences.

KEY WORDS: Nationalism, Transnationalism, patriarchy, homogenisation, harmony

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I. INTRODUCTION

Garam Hawa is a 1973 Hindi film directed by M. S. Sathyu that deals with the consequences of 1947 partition of Indian Subcontinent. The splitting of India led to violence, atrocities, abduction of women and children, and many other issues. The film *Garam Hawa* deals with the politics of the nation especially in relation with the issues faced by the minority Muslim community who decided not to go to Pakistan. This film was banned on the basis of communal dissention, but later the ban was lifted and went to win national award for its contribution to national integration. Kaifi Azmi, an Indian poet and his wife Shama Zaidi wrote the screenplay for the film.

The protagonist of the film is Salim Mirza, a Muslim Shoemaker, played by Balraj Sahani, a Hindu actor. The Partition of India forced the Muslims to flee to newly formed country Pakistan leaving their native land, property, relatives, friends and memories behind. Salim Mirza decided to stay back in India looking after his shoe factory. His decision to stay back made him to undergo a lot of problems and challenges. He could witness his own brother and family, his elder son etc. leaving to Pakistan. His daughter Amina had two affairs and in both the cases she was isolated by her lovers and finally commits suicide. Salim was always questioned even by his family and close ones for his decision to stay back. He was refused loans by the banks for the fear of he be leaving to Pakistan like other Muslims without paying the loan back.

Salim was an innocent man who loved his native land and refused to run away. But he becomes powerless in the new political situation that created enmity between Hindus and Muslims. He lost his own house and had to shift to a rented house with his old mother who had a strong affinity and attachment to the house. He was once arrested by the police with the charges of spying for Pakistan or espionage. The death of his daughter and the continuous hardships, and the fabrication by the society as a spy made him to decide to leave to Pakistan. But on the way to Rail Way station he encountered a massive protest against injustices and his younger son Sikander joined the protest. Salim also changes his decision to proceed to Pakistan and becomes part of the protesting people.

Analysis

Garam Hawa is the first effort that examines the Hindu-Muslim passions and their human costs on the minority community. The director's selection of a seasoned (non-Muslim) actor like Balraj Sahni to portray the central character and the device of love story to open up questions of nationalist politics are interesting (Chakravarty 249). George Orwell on his essay on Nationalism points out that because of Nationalism the world is tormented by innumerable delusions and hatreds which cut across one another in an extremely complex way... (Orwell 7). Nationalism is a narrow and controlled narrative that look for homogenous communities. The imagination and formation of India and Pakistan as separate nations on the basis of religion is something

constructed by those in power for their benefits. The film very clearly reveals how this attempt to make a homogenous community affect the poor people. Creation of contempt and hatred is part of this homogenisation. The people whom we find in the film leaving India to Pakistan were either forced to leave or afraid to stay back.

There were a few people like Salim Mirza who decided to stay back. They were physically, financially, mentally and socially tortured by the large community. They were portrayed as spies of Pakistan. Here we can see a kind of social hegemony or direct hegemony in which an order that is acceptable to all classes created. Social hegemony is the process of establishment and maintenance of an order that is acceptable to all classes while being under the control and serving the interests of the ruling classes (Prasad 10).

Those Muslims who were ready to leave Muslim League and join Congress party survived and those who were not ready suffered. A few opportunists either left to Pakistan or joined Congress. Halim Mirza, the brother of Salim Mirza was a Muslim League leader who publicly preached that he will stay in India till his death. He even expressed his concern and priority for the nation over his family. But he ran away with his family to Pakistan. His son Kazim was engaged to Mirza's daughter, Amina but had to leave to Pakistan. He came back to marry Amina but had been imprisoned and was expelled later for visiting India without a passport.

This incident reveals how one becomes an alien or foreign citizen even in one's own native place. The question of who is a native or *swadeshi* is relevant here. A span of few days made those who left India as foreigners in his own land. Kazim's National identity as Pakistani and his loss of identity as Indian within the span of a few days reveals that the notion of India is a construct. Tagore's ideas about nationalism is very much relevant in this context. He spoke about universal brotherhood and love. He challenged to look for the history of humanity than looking for commonality as a nation in his book *Nationalism* (Tagore 84). Those Muslims who decided to stay in India and those Hindus in Pakistan could hold the ideas of universal brotherhood and love.

Though there was communal division and disharmony, there were some who were hopeful and held the ideas of secularism. The dialogue in the movie by a Muslim, "Hindu brothers are very good" is an example for that. They believed that Mahatma Gandhi's sacrifice would not go in vain and Hindus and Muslims would come in harmony. But the poison of communal division and hatred was spread across and reached to every corner of the country. The Riksha driver who charges Mirza more for being a Muslim and his comments to leave to Pakistan to survive are the result of this hatred that spread across. The imagination of a Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan was constructed in the minds of the people and that led to fights and conflicts. The movie does not show the conflicts as such but it shows the other effects and consequences. The man who was not ready to rent a house because Mirza was a Muslim and another man who rented the house neglecting his religious background represent two sides of reality: one holding the identity based on religion and the other based on humanity.

The mother of Mirza who was in her old age had a special attachment to their house. She lived there for a quite long time with the memories of her husband for she was married in her childhood itself. She refused to leave to Pakistan and even to the rented house. After being compelled to be moved to the rented house, she selects a room on the top floor just to have a look at the old house. When she was ill Mirza took her to the old house instead of hospital and she dies there. Her affinity and attachment to the house can be considered as a metaphor that represents one's attachment to home land, people and even nation. The idea of locality and one's extreme attachment to that locality is very much significant. With the arrival of mass media especially electronic media people can imagine their community even being in another country. But it was not the case in 1970s. Those people who left India had very less chance of contacting their relatives due to lack of communication facilities and also because of the enmity existed between two countries. There was a scene in the film in which Mirza was accused of contacting his relatives in Pakistan. The hatred created was that much extreme.

The separation of lovers in two different occasions can be considered as a metaphor for the separation of two nations. There was a common past shared by both the nations but partition resulted in separation of them and the shared past became part of untold history. The focus suddenly shifted to enmity, competitions for power and othering of the minorities.

By 'nationalism' what George Orwell means is that first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad' (Orwell 1). In the case of India and Pakistan the sudden grouping of millions of people under two different umbrellas created a worse situation and that affected lakhs of people. The film *Garam Hawa* engages some aspects and the effects of that separation and grouping. The arrest of Mirza and Kasim is an example for that. The people had to run either side of the border to find and join the group to which they belonged or forced to belong. In that movement they had to sacrifice many things including the things that they valued the most. Amina was separated from her lover for he was forced to move and join the other group and as the result of the trauma she commits suicide. Salim Mirza was separated from his brother, son and his family because of this artificially constructed separated communities.

A nationalist will generally claim superiority not only in military power and political virtue, but in art, literature, sport, structure of the language, the physical beauty of the inhabitants, and perhaps even in climate, scenery and cooking (Orwell 7). Mirza's relatives sent him letters explaining the situation there. The letter

explained about the weather, food and many other minute things. According to the letter everything was better there. Once one takes a stand with a group one is forced to support and praise the side.

The film makers try to build a firmer foundation for the precarious sense of national identity of the Muslim community in India is also especially evident in India also evident in the evocative use made of architectural monuments from the Mughal era. Here both the interests of realism and of allegory are served. The settings in Agra, its sights and sounds make for an authentic atmosphere, even as a link is being made between individual lives and their historical dimension. But there is an ambivalence here, for a romantic link with the past may not be the best way to confront the problems of national identity in the present (Chakravarty 251).

The nationalism that was developed was patriarchal in nature. There are a lot of evidences for that in the film. Though Salim's wife wanted to leave India, everything develops around Salim and his decisions are carried out by others. His wife had to silently witness her son and family leaving to Pakistan, her daughter losing her lover and finally losing her life. Her opinions and interests were never considered. At last dejected Salim decides to leave to Pakistan but changes his mind when his younger son decides to join the protesting mob. His wife was sitting in the Riksha then and he just tell the driver to take her back to house without even asking her opinion. This is a clear example for the kind of nationalism that was developing.

Nationalism is an illusion, an attempt to find common emotional and historical values ensemble (Michnic 5). This is also very much evident in the film. When Indians tried to develop common emotional and historical values, they were forced to sacrifice many other valuable things. Communal harmony, diversity, belongingness etc. are a few things that Indians lost as part of Nation formation. They also got a new enemy in the form of Pakistan.

Nationalism is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality (Orwell 1). One of the reasons for Amina to lose her lover was that his lover's father found a girl who was the son of a Pakistan minister. There is an urge for power at the core of each one and they try to attain power in different ways.

This film can be also viewed from a transnational point of view. The ability to think beyond any kind of borders is not a new phenomenon and existed even when people had all reasons to think very narrowly due to the circumstances and context where they were living. This film also reveals reason for the borders between nations and peoples to exist and help one to have broader perspectives.

II. CONCLUSION

The film *Garam Hawa* engages with a lot of issues that are relevant even today. The attempt to homogenise the nation based on religion, culture or language is problematic as it excludes many others especially the minorities. The decision of a few people to stand for integrity even sacrificing their valuable things and even lives is an example when there is communal disharmony and other social injustices. This movie also welcomes to think beyond national borders to develop a society based on love and universal brotherhood. There is a common past which is shared by all and that is the past of humanity. This shared past as human beings can bind the nation together and even respect people from other nations.

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