iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 13 **Issue:** VI **Month of publication:** June 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2025.72194

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 13 Issue VI June 2025- Available at www.ijraset.com

Cinematic Reflections on the Partition of India: Analyzing Historical Trauma and Human Experience in Hindi Cinema

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Abstract: ***Cinema can serve as a novel means of comprehending and enhancing archival history, offering a fresh perspective on diverse historical events. Despite its role as a significant kind of entertainment, cinema also serves as a valuable medium for acquiring information, education and insight into many situations in our technologically advanced society. The Radcliffe line, which divided the Indian subcontinent based on religious lines, resulted in the creation of two new nations; Hindustan and Pakistan, and triggered a devastating humanitarian crisis. The depiction of the agony of Partition in many Hindi films vividly conveys the extent of the misery inflicted by it beyond the explanatory power of statistical statistics. The themes of communal animosity and aggression, the anguish of homelessness and lack of shelter, the feeling of bereavement, widespread human slaughter, coerced migrations, economic destitution, problems of uprooting and displacement as refugees and the complexities surrounding sexuality and gender dynamics have been effectively depicted in various Hindi films, theatrical productions and literary works.***

Psychological trauma and the long-term effects on individuals and communities have been central to the Partition narrative portrayed in Hindi cinema. Characters depicted in these films often grapple with deep-seated emotional scars, portraying the profound psychological toll of forced displacement and communal violence. Furthermore, the struggle to reconcile with newfound national identities and the ensuing cultural identity crisis are recurrent themes explored in cinematic representations of the Partition. The legacy of British colonial rule in exacerbating communal tensions is also critically examined, shedding light on the post-colonial power dynamics that continue to shape South Asian societies. This study examines a selection of Hindi films that represent different ideological and generic perspectives. It explores how Hindi cinema portrays the partition of a single country into two distinct states and the resulting scars.

Keywords: Psychological trauma, Humanitarian crisis, Ccommunal animosity, post-colonial power dynamics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Mountbatten plan of 1947 resulted in the partition of a single country into two separate and independent nations; Hindustan and Pakistan, by the implementation of the Redcliff line in August 1947. This not only resulted in a geographical split but it also caused a deep emotional rift among the people. The Muslim-majority provinces of British India, namely Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east, were divided along sectarian lines. The partition of India was a tragic event that was particularly painful, violent and prolonged due to its religious basis. Approximately one million people were brutally killed in widespread riots and a large number of individuals were terrorized and displaced, forced to flee in search of safety and shelter. The partition continues to be a deeply ingrained and unresolved issue in the collective consciousness of South Asia. The partition was a catastrophic event that abruptly severed the long-standing social cohesion and eradicated the bonds of love, fraternity and unity. This led to incidents of rape, kidnapping, mass killings and communal rioting significantly impacting the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of both nations.

Significant historical events such as partition, which have profound and enduring impacts, are commemorated in many ways even long after many decades have passed. The Partition of India served as a source of inspiration for numerous artistic and literary figures, who sought to portray this event via diverse forms of expression such as literature, cinema and play. Several prominent fiction writers including Bapsi Sidhwa, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chugtai and Amrita Pritam have effectively depicted the partition of India. An effective method for memorizing a significant event and comprehending the associated emotions is to recreate it, which can be accomplished skillfully through film or theatrical portrayals. The literary writings of these authors have been adapted for the stage and screen.

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The movie "Pinjar" is an adaptation of Amrita Pritam's novel. Similarly, "A Train to Pakistan" is based on Khushwant Singh's novel of the same name. "Tamas" is a film adaptation of Bheesham Sahni's novel. "Earth" is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel "Ice Candy Man". "Garm Hawa" is a cinematic interpretation of Ismat Chughtai's novel. Lastly, "Midnight's Children" is a film adaptation of Salman Rushdie's novel.

II. DISCUSSION

While literature and cinema may not be considered reliable historical sources in some respects, it is undeniable that literature serves as a reflection of society. It has the ability to effectively convey the events that occur inside a society and accurately portray its image. Furthermore, other historians also advocated for this perspective. Sujata Bose and Ayesha Jalal supported this perspective and stated, "The immense human tragedy of the partition and its ongoing consequences have been more effectively portrayed by sensitive creative writers and artists, such as Saddat Hasan Manto's short stories and Ritwik Ghatak's films, than by historians" (Bose and Jalal 34). Richard Bernstein, in his article in 'The New York Times', expressed the opinion that filmmakers have become our most influential yet least cautious historians. Filmmakers do not possess the expertise of historians; their primary focus is on creating films rather than documenting historical events. The medium of cinema has the ability to effectively portray intricate and challenging scenarios, rendering them comprehensible and captivating. Filmmakers have the ability to evoke emotions to a level of perfection that historians cannot achieve. Cinema has the ability to accurately depict events, allowing spectators to experience the emotional and intricate aspects of those events. Notable filmmakers who explored the issue of partition include Ritwik Ghatak, Gulzar, Bhisham Sahni, Govind Nihalani, Kaifi Azmi, Yash Chopra, M. S. Sathyu, C. P. Dwivedi and Kamal Hasan. Bengali cinema was the pioneer in producing films on the topic of partition. The depiction of partition through visual representations, characters and conversations in Bengali cinema started right after the division in the late 1940s, followed by Hindi and Punjabi cinema. Hindi cinema strives to retrieve the oral narratives and portray the history of division, which was not officially recorded but deeply experienced. Therefore, cinema serves as a repository of visual records. These movies effectively conveyed and portrayed the complexities of partition, making them worthy of being called 'real in reels'. The majority of partition-themed films are adaptations of literary works, such as novels and short stories. Another notable aspect of Hindi cinema is its attempt to depict the partition of the north-west region, namely. The majority of films are from Punjab, with the exception of a couple from Bengal. This occurred because renowned filmmakers like Gulzar, Govind Nihalani and B.R. Chopra relocated to India from Pakistan and personally experienced the division of West Pakistan.

Several Hindi films have been filmed depicting the division. Shaheed (1948), Chhalia (1960), Dharmputra (1961), Garm Hawa (1973), Gandhi (1982), Tamas (1988), 1947 Earth (1998), Train to Pakistan (1998), Hey Ram (2000), Refugee (2000), Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (2001), Pinjar (2003), Sadiyaan (2010), Sarabjit (2016), Veer Zara (2004), Viceroy House (2017) and Begum Jaan (2017) are Hindi films that depict the partition and independence of India. However, this list is not exhaustive. In Pakistan, the number of films made on the theme of partition is still limited, with only twelve films produced. Kartar Singh (1959), Jinnah (1998) and Khamosh Pani (2004) are examples of Pakistani films that depict the division. Satyen K Bordoli argues that the Indian film industry has not commemorated the Indian partition in the same way that the Jewish holocaust has been extensively documented through numerous films and documentaries covering a wide range of topics. Only a few of films in Bollywood have focused on the partition, and the seriousness of this subject has not been adequately addressed in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, countries that were greatly affected by this divide (Mehta 17). Gita Vishwanath argued that all Hindi cinema can be categorised as Partition cinema, as the central topic of these films revolves around the concepts of loss and rediscovery, or the separation of lovers (Pandey 31). The scarcity of films on partition may be attributed to the fact that the memories of India's partition were so distressing that many who lived through it deliberately refrained from recollecting or discussing it. The initial hush in Hindi cinema was also attributed to this factor. While Hindi films on partition were produced in the late 1940s, a significant increase in the number of partition-themed films has been noted after 1997, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of partition and independence. However, when compared to the vast number of films in the Hindi cinema business, these particular films are few and lacking. It is important to pay attention to them.

The inaugural Hindi or Bollywood film centred around the partition and Independence is Ramesh Sehgal's 'Shaheed', which was released in 1948. Subsequently, numerous other films on the same subject were produced. The majority of these films are adaptations of literary works by authors who focused on the topic of partition. The primary motif of partition films emphasizes the indelible recollection of partition brutality, subjugation of women, mass slaughter and communal unrest. Hindi cinema endeavors to portray that the division is synonymous with fire, carnage, corpses and communal animosity.

The study also argues that cinema and films provide an unmatched means to experience the anguish of partition. The reason for this is that film can serve as a fresh means of comprehending the partition and the trauma associated with it, as opposed to relying solely on statistical and archive data.

Hindi cinema endeavors to portray various facets of the divide. The Hindi films on partition aim to portray the themes of displacement from one's homeland, the loss of homes, the separation of lovers, the transformation of friends into enemies along communal lines, widespread violence, mass migration, the political circumstances that led to the partition, issues faced by women such as rape, abduction and forced conversions, as well as conversions driven by helplessness and the challenges faced by refugees. The film "Tamas" which was produced and directed by Govind Nihalani in 1973, is the first notable attempt of its kind. The movie is an intensive exploration of communal tensions that arise in a calm city, where mutual fraternity is destroyed by communal animosity supported by the Colonial Government. It is based on two novels and two novellas. This film illuminates the issue of communal violence. Humanity was disregarded, and individuals were solely identified based on their religious affiliations as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The British Government exploited religious orthodoxy and extremism as genuine factors that contributed to the split. It also attempts to illustrate that the impoverished were the ones who suffered the most from this upheaval, whereas important individuals were the least affected although they too experienced displacement. This movie also attempts to portray how individuals like 'Nathu', who were innocent, were manipulated as instruments to propagate animosity and communal unrest by certain fanatical individuals, with the assistance of the British Government.

The film "Garm Hawa" was directed by M. S. Sathyu's film, released in 1973, explores the sense of powerlessness experienced by Salim, a Muslim businessman who opted to make India his home rather than the newly formed Muslim nation. The movie effectively portrayed the economic circumstances and challenges encountered by the Muslims who chose not to leave India. Following the partition, Salim and his family faced hardships as they fought for their rights in a nation that was previously their own. This film attempts to portray the vulnerability experienced by Muslims in Hindustan and Hindus in Pakistan within a politically sensitive environment. It also highlights the victimization of minorities resulting from the partition and explores the profound impact it had on human lives, lifestyles, ideologies and particularly on business and economics.

The film "Dharamputra" (1962) portrays the psychological state of a Hindu extremist who harbours intense animosity towards Muslims until he discovers that he is, in fact, a Muslim himself. While the Radcliff line physically divided the regions, it was the community animosity and geographical split that caused a mass departure. However, it was the religious fundamentalism that truly stained the hearts with blood, leading to further division. This movie, along with another movie of similar nature, Sadiyaan, attempts to portray the romantic relationship between individuals of Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. This film attempts to portray the idea that an individual's religious beliefs are not determined by external factors or the rituals they engage in. The determination of an individual's religion is influenced by the hereditary factors of their parents, specifically their blood and DNA. However, to this day, no geneticist has discovered the specific gene responsible for determining a person's religion. These films attempt to raise the question: what is the true essence of religion? These films aim to portray how certain zealots and fundamentalists have manipulated religion to propagate hatred and disrupt unity, leading to violent divisions.

Several films effectively depicted the gruesome reality of the division of the subcontinent. During the partition, there was mass displacement of people, widespread destruction of homes and crops, numerous casualties, a significant number of women were abducted and a huge number were subjected to sexual violence. The Indian subcontinent became a site of extensive cremation. The portrayal of many partition issues has been shown in films such as "Train to Pakistan", "Hey Ram", "Gadar: Ek Prem Katha", "Viceroy House", "Jinnah", "Earth" and "Partition". The films portray the distressing cries of individuals, streets saturated with blood and lifeless bodies and vulnerable individuals desperately fleeing to preserve their lives, effectively allowing us to envision the actual events. The train massacre tragedy, with dying people and scattered corpses, portrayed in many films, vividly illustrated the brutal character of the split. The profound trauma experienced by Saket Ram in the film "Hey Ram" resulted in a profound shift in his beliefs, causing him to transition from a secular individual to a religious zealot. The portrayal of a visually impaired child, desperately searching for his grandfather among lifeless bodies, is profoundly poignant and serves as a poignant symbol of the collective trauma experienced during the division.

These films portrayed different aspects of division and aid in comprehending the intricacies associated with it. Upon careful examination of partition films, it becomes evident that several films attempted to emphasize the role of communal politics. Pakistani cinema strives to portray betrayals of Indian leaders, whereas Hindustani cinema does the opposite. According to Patrick Hogan, the movie Pinjar portrayed Hindustan or Hindus as the embodiment of kindness, represented by Rama and Pakistan or Muslims as the embodiment of evil, represented by Ravana (Sarkar 5).

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Another recurring topic in films about partition is the portrayal of women's difficulties, like as rape, abductions, prostitution, inter-religion marriages and forced conversions. These films portrayed the communalization and politicization of women's bodies during the partition. Films such as "Pinjar", "Train to Pakistan", "Gadar: Ek Prem Katha", "Earth", "Hey Ram", "Lahore", "Khamosh Pani" and others depicted the challenges faced by women during the partition and explored the topics of gender and sexuality. Urvashi Bhutalia contends that historians have mostly neglected the experiences of women during the partition, despite the fact that women bore the brunt of the suffering during such a tumultuous event (Bhutalia 13). These films explore themes such as the abduction of women by individuals of different religions in order to dishonor their fellow believers. They also depict the practice of 'jauhar', where women choose to end their lives by jumping into wells or rivers to protect their honour (as shown in "Tamas"). Additionally, the films portray instances of honour killings, where family members, such as brothers or fathers, themselves kill women from their own lineage (depicted in "Khamosh Pani" and "Earth"). Puroo of "Pinjar" symbolised the suffering and anguish experienced by all women who were taken during the split. This video portrays the rejection faced by women from their families after losing their virginity, highlighting the agony experienced by all women. Similarly, in the film Sakina of "Gadar" and Zainab of "Shaheed-e-Mohabat Buta Singh" portrayed the challenges faced by abducted women due to the recovery commission and recovery legislation. The Recovery Commissions and Women Recovery Act further exacerbated the harm inflicted upon women, adding insult to injury. Did it restore or displace women twice? The portrayal of this circumstance can be seen in the films "Shaheed-e-Mohabat Buta Singh", "Gadar", "Pinjar" and "Khamosh Pani". In the film "Khamosh Pani", the protagonist Ayesha tragically took her own life at the re-emergence of her true identity. Women who initially acquiesced to their situations and found contentment in their respective roles experienced a second division as a result of these actions.

The biopic of Jinnah, made by Jamil Dehalvi, a London-based independent film director, attributes the mass violence, rapes and abductions of Muslim women to Hindu Januniyat. In this film, Jinnah was depicted as an obstinate individual who held a steadfast opposition to Gandhian doctrine right from the outset. Due to his political rivalry and disagreement with Gandhian ideology, this individual, who was inclined towards secularism, contemplated the creation of a separate nation for Muslims in order to protect their interests. Due to this rationale, he consistently opposed the idea of a unified India and a shared nation for Hindus and Muslims, where the rights of both him and his Muslim counterparts would be subordinated to those of the Hindu majority. This movie portrays Edwina, Mountbatten and Nehru as responsible for the partition violence. There are three biographical films on Gandhi and the one that came out in 1982 was directed by Richard Attenborough and was a collaboration between India and Britain. This movie aimed to portray Gandhi as a resolute and influential figure who opposed any form of oppression on the impoverished masses, whether it originated from foreign or domestic sources. This movie also portrayed the power-hungry nature of political leaders as the main cause of communal division.

The impact of partition is more palpable than it is analyzable. The majority of the films on partition utilized authentic video footage depicting the bloodshed during the partition. The portrayal of the train massacre, victimization of women and communal riots has been depicted in every film that is based on the division. The films from the fifth, sixth and seventh decades made serious attempts to reflect the challenges faced by both countries following partition. However, most films from the twentieth century tend to portray Pakistan as a nation associated with terrorism. Several contemporary films on partition lack consistency in their approach to depicting the event. The reason for this is that early filmmakers were either direct victims of partition or had firsthand knowledge of it. As a result, their perspective was sincere. However, the same cannot be said about modern filmmakers, whose understanding of partition is indirect. Furthermore, their primary motivation is often commercial success.

III. CONCLUSION

The central motif of all partition films is the portrayal of partition violence, which is universally seen as a tragic event. The films portray the British strategy of 'Divide and Rule', religious extremism and the separatist politics of Indian leaders as factors that made the partition of India unavoidable. During the partition, religious intolerance surpassed human compassion and destroyed the bonds of brotherhood. When used judiciously, film can serve as an excellent resource for documenting the history of partition in contemporary times, especially when there is a focus on non-archival sources. Cinema has successfully externalised the agony caused by partition and transformed it into a worldwide perspective.

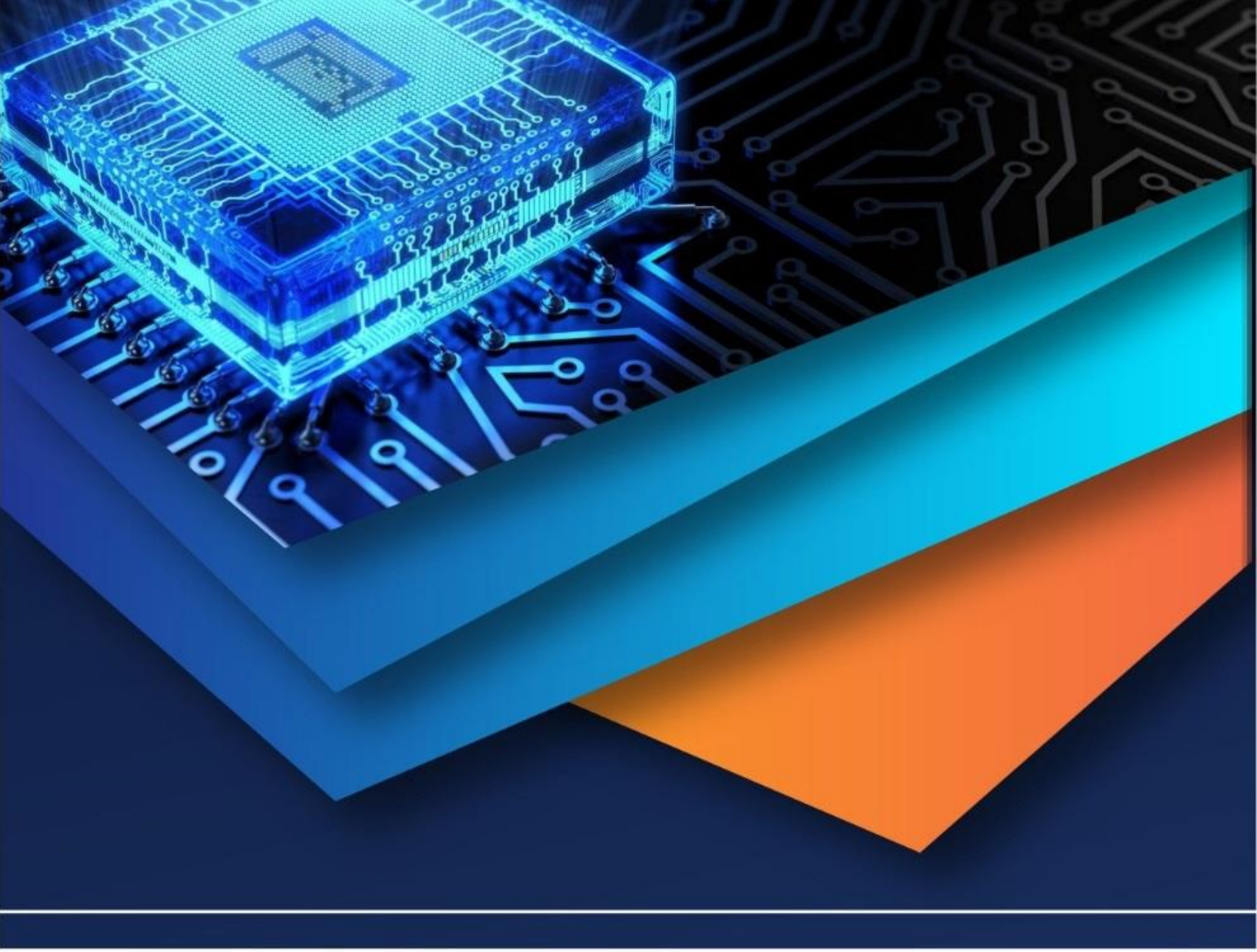
It is crucial to bear in mind that partition is a perpetual condition. It is fated to repeatedly come back. It is imperative to commit this information to memory in order to prevent its repetition in the realms of history, politics and aesthetics. There is a widely recognised adage that states, "Forgotten history repeats itself" thus emphasising the importance of not forgetting the partition. The cost we paid for achieving Independence was exceedingly costly and that cost was the division of our nation through Partition.

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Prior to commemorating our freedom, it is crucial that we do not overlook Partition as a day of mourning. Literature and movies can serve as significant tools in helping us remember history, as not everyone has the ability to study historical accounts or access archives. Furthermore, although statistics in archives and history are accessible to a limited number of individuals, cinema is accessible to a far wider audience. In such circumstances, films centred around the partition are essential as they have the potential to evoke the recollections of the events that occurred in 1947. Moreover, they could play a role in mitigating the likelihood of similar unfortunate occurrences in the future, albeit to a limited amount. It is important to remember the partition since events such as the communal disturbances of 1984, the Babri Masjid case of 1992, the Gujarat riots of 2002, the three Indo-Pak wars, the Kargil conflict and the Kashmir issue have posed significant threats to the unity and integrity of India. Indeed, the Kashmir question has been characterised by several individuals as the unresolved consequence of the division. The partition of Punjab and Bengal was a deeply agonising event, marked by intense suffering, burning flames, blood-soaked soil and piles of dead bodies. Its impact was unforgettable and the consequences of communal divisions during this partition were potentially catastrophic. The magnitude of this tragedy can only be truly grasped through the medium of films and cinema, which offer a comprehensive portrayal of the subject matter.

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