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FILMING THE LINE OF CONTROL: CINEMA IN THE WAKE OF PARTITION  
LITERATURE

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**Abstract:**

The stark issue of the partition of India and Pakistan has ever been a lingering and lasting pain for the citizens of both the countries. Talking on the rudimentary grounds, only boundaries were divided but factually speaking even the hearts were divided eventually leading to the divide between the two cultures. Alike literature, Cinema is also considered the mirror of Indian society, aptly reflecting the socio-cultural and political conditions of the times in which it is set. It deftly describes the pains and sufferings of the prevalent and rampant cultural differences. During these unprecedented times, movies in both the countries, India and Pakistan have been made on this burning topic and many are still in the pipeline. Many writers and authors have also portrayed these cultural differences beautifully in their literary works. The present paper critically analyses the three novelists along with the adapted movies based on their works. Those writers and their works are Khushwant Singh's '*Train to Pakistan*', Amrita Pritam's '*Pinjar*' and Bhisham Sahni's '*Tamas*'. The film makers have skilfully cast the stories of these novels on the Silver Screen with their original titles. *Train to Pakistan* as a

cinematic presentation beautifully presents the cultural conditions of the small village named Mano Majra, stationed on the border of India and Pakistan. On the same lines, the movie *Pinjar* describes the pathetic conditions of a girl Puro who becomes the brutal victim of the aforesaid cultural differences. Similarly, *Tamas* describes the conditions of the two cultural communities at the time of Partition.

**Keywords:** Partition, Cultural Differences , Cinema, Partition Novels

“The Political partition of India caused one of the greatest human conclusions of history.”

-By

Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1983:03)

Reminiscing the incidence of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1947, when the British Parliament introduced the constitutional bill of 'The Independence of India' pragmatically formulated on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1947 resulted into the consequential spilt of

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the Indian peninsula into two self governing regions: India and Pakistan. This unwanted and imposed partition of the Indian Sub-continent consequence into one of the greatest tragedies of the world history. A number of people were killed, kidnapped, displaced and robbed. Women were abducted and raped. This brutal trauma of the partition imprinted deep marks of agony on the minds of people. This partition of India and Pakistan gave a never lasting agony for the citizens of both the countries. Speaking on the superficial lines, only boundaries were divided but in reality hearts were divided and with those two cultures were also divided. Thu, even after achieving the much awaited Independence after sweating out immense blood and toil, the year 1947 proved to be the year of less joy and more tragedy. Gita Vishwanath and Salma Malik have rightly quoted Mushirul Hassan regarding the two parallel events making a history of the sub-continent.

“No other country in the twentieth century has seen two such contrary movements taking place at the same time. If one was popular nationalist movement..., the other was the counter movement of Partition, marked by violence, cruelty, blood-shed, displacement and massacres.”  
(2009: 61)

Generally speaking, literature of any genre is commonly considered as the mirror of the predominant society since it reflects the crude reality of society without a makeover. Panning the historical ages, we have cherished literature as a fundamental platform that has always been the chief resource of providing the raw material for cinema. Categorically speaking, cinema also serves the same purpose as literature does but the only common difference is that it is comparatively faster than literature. Like literature cinema not only reflects society but also acts as a reflector to the society in which it is set. In the contemporary times, we can see that cinema has become a popular medium of communication and entertainment. Cinema, as the theorists define is a creative experiment of literature. Ages down the lane, cinema has reflected the pain and suffering of the people caused by partition in very effective ways. Even after many decades of partition movies are made on this ever burning topic in different languages. Even today, in the technologically sound world where numerous themes are available right at the click of a button, we can observe that the writers of cinema choose this ever burning theme to depict their feelings through the powerful weapon of their pens and directors produce this suffering through the lens of camera.

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Literature lovers, these days, have by their side umpteen novels, short stories and prose writings on partition in different languages: R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), K. Abbas's *The World is my Village* (1984), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Line* (1988) 2, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Shiv K. Kumar's *A River with Three Banks*, Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*.

We, as readers, are quite aware that partition became the most alluring theme for directors just within the first two years of Independence. We have many examples of films based on partition just as the film *Lahore* (1949) is the first film on the silver screen that showed the glimpses. After that the theme of partition was repeated on cinema screen in the form of many films like *Azadi Ke Baad* (1951), *Kashmeer* (1951), *Kartaar Singh* (1959), *Dharamputra* (1961), M.S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (1973), *Tamas* (1987), *Train to Pakistan* (1998) *1947 Earth* (1998), *Shaheede Mohobbat: Boota Singh* (1999), *Refugee* (2000), *Gadar* (2001), *Pinjar* (2003), *Partition* (2007), *Midnight's Children* (2012-released in Cannada), *Bharat* (2019).

The present paper proposed to discuss these movies sharing the common titles of the novels on which they are based on: *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam, *Tamas* by Bhishm Sahni

**Train to Pakistan: A Cinematic Review:**

Khushwant Singh, one of the Pakistani migrants, was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1915 in Hadali British India now in Pakistan. He was a renowned novelist, lawyer, journalist, politician, historian and critic. After the Independence he joined Indian Foreign Service in 1947. He was encouraged to pursue a literary career after the experience of journalism in All India Radio in 1951. He started his journey with 'Pen and Paper' and attached himself to *Yojana*, *The Illustrated Weekly*, *The National Herald* and *The Hindustan Times* and worked in the department of mass communication of UNESCO at Paris in 1956. He served as the Member of Parliament in upper house from 1980 to 1986. He was conferred the Padam Bhusan in 1974 but he returned the award in 1984 being grieved with the Sikh riots in Amritsar. In 2007 he was awarded the Padam Vibhushan.

*Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh is accepted to be the first comprehensive treatment of the Partition in Indian English literature.

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Khushwant Singh was the sufferer, himself and also a close observant of this tragic event. In the current novel, he depicts the impact of Partition on a village named Mano Majra set on the border of India and Pakistan. The peace and harmony of this village was disturbed by the arrival of train from Pakistan which carried dead bodies of innocent people. This arrival of train brought an abrupt end to a long communal harmony of the village. Singh also created the plot of love and romance as Juggat Singh alias Jugga, a local robber, fell in love with a Muslim girl, Nooran. To save the life of his beloved, Jugga sacrificed his own life and fought with the people of his community.

The film *Train to Pakistan* directed by Pamela Rooks rolled out as a film nearly four decades after the publication of the novel and almost five decades after this particular horrendous incident of partition had happened. No one had ever imagined in one's wild dreams to display it on the silver screen until a long time but at last in the year 1998 Pamela Rooks decided to showcase the pains and pangs and the sufferings of the partition on the silver screen. She not only took the plot but characterized them with fine dialogue delivery in the movie. She became successful in displaying the events held in the novel in a fine and exact way.

The adept characterization and cinematography portrayed on the screen aptly swayed away the watchers to the actual time of the Independence as the picturisation is so exact and real that the people actually experienced the the same agony as the people felt at that time. Many famous artists from Bollywood essayed different roles in this movie: Nirmal Pandey, Rajat Kapoor, Mohan Agashe, Smriti Mishra, Divya Dutta, Mangal Dhillon, M.S. Sathya, Suresh Jindal and others.

**Pinjar: Mourning of the Nation**

Amrita Pritam, the leading 20<sup>th</sup> century poetess of Punjabi language, was born on 31<sup>st</sup> August in 1919 in Gujranwala, British India (now in Punjab, Pakistan). She wrote in Punjabi and Hindi. She was the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi award for her long poem 'Sunehade' (Messages) in 1956. For her famous work 'Kagaz Te Canvas' she received one of India's highest literary awards Bhartiya Jyanpith in 1982. She was honored with many awards as she got Padam Shri in 1969, Padam Vibhushan in 2004 and the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship to the Immortals of literature. She left this world forever in 2004.

*Pinjar* is the story of love and hate. It unfolds the complexities and intricacies of the inner recesses of the human mind. This is the tale of an abducted woman

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neglected by her own family. The novel *Pinjar* was written in Punjabi but later on it was translated into English titled *The Skeleton* by eminent writer of that time Khushwant Singh. This novel was published in the year 1950 soon after the partition and describes the suffering of women's abduction, dislocation and loss of identity her debut novel is a saga of pain and pangs experienced by women at the time of partition. A girl named Pooro became the victim of the religious and communal conflicts during partition. She faced love and hate of her own family members and at last left herself in the hand of fate and chance.

*Pinjar* directed by Dr. Chandra Prakash Dwevedi is a full length commercial film describes religious slits, age old customs and traditions and their bad effect on the life of people. This wonderful movie was released in 2003 after many years of publication. This movie beautifully reflects the dogmatic beliefs based on religious boundaries and its worst effect on generation mostly female. Many famous artists played different roles in this movie: Urmilla Matondkar, Manoj Bajpai, Sanjay Suri, Priyanshu Chatterjee, Isha Koopikar, Lilette Dubey, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Farida Jalal, Alok Nath, Sima Biswas and others.

**Tamas: An untold Saga of the Partition**

Bhishm Sahni, the younger brother of popular film actor Balraj Sahni, was born on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1915 in Rawalpindi, British India. He is a famous writer, playwright and actor of Hindi language. He got master's degree in English literature from Government College Lahore and Ph.D. from Punjab University, Chandigarh in 1958. He was an active member of the Indian National Congress at the time of partition and he organized relief work for refugees at that time. In 1975 he got Sahitya Akademi award for his novel '*Tamas*'. He was awarded the Padam Bhushan in 1998 and Sahitya Akademi Fellowship in 2002. In 2003, he departed away from this world.

*Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni is considered to be one of the most touching and important literary documents on Partition. In it he has defined in detail the actual events of that time. Cultural differences, class conflicts, communal riots are so beautifully presented in the book that they seem to be exact and real. In those times the atmosphere was coloured with the pangs of misery and agony to that an extent that only on the basis of the rumors doing the rounds, the religious fanatics used to burn the whole town and turned the whole atmosphere from bad to worst.

*Tamas*, a successful film by Govind Nihlani is one of the best movies on partition. It not only enriched the original

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theme but also modified it on contemporary lines. In this movie incidents are presented well so that they seem more real. Many famous artists have played roles in this movie: Deepa Sahi, Om Puri, Bhisham Sahni, Virendra Saxena, A.K.Hangal, Manohar Sinh, Dina Pathak, Uttara Bookar, Surekha Sikri, Pankaj Kapoor, Amrish Puri, Harish Patel, K.K. Raina, Ram Gopal Bajaj, Barry John, Karen Smith and Saeed Jaffrey and others. Partition has, no doubt, rendered unforgettable pains to the people of both the countries. The more they try to forget it, the more it becomes the cause of suffering. Writers, time and again have tried their best to present that sorrowful event in the form of words and directors after a long time converted that written material into audio-visual medium. *Train to Pakistan* as a novel and as a movie have both , represented the border conditions of that time so beautifully and the effect of those events on the people and like as the novel and movie *Pinjar* describes the condition of women who were the most sufferers at that

time. *Tamas* focuses on the communal violence and the effect of rumor on the people. It also underlines the stark reality of life that at the end of the day it is only the poor who become the victims of society at large.

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