

# Bollywood Songs: Reflection of Wounded Nation in the Post-Independence

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### Abstract

*The present paper examines how the Bombay-based Hindi film cinema culturally obliges to respond to the national crisis in the post-independence era. The paper will deal with Bollywood lyrics in general and how they highlight the crisis of the nation one after the other, for instance, brutal partition, Indo-China War, Indo-Pak War, White-Revolution, and Green-Revolution. Along with, the brief discussion will be on the lampooned religious identities and religious tensions shown in Bollywood songs in the aftermath of partition of India/Pakistan. Songs were often based on communal harmony, and the paper will briefly examine how the Muslim characters were shown sane and sensible in the Bollywood films. The project analyzes Hindi film lyrics through the compilations of Harmandir Singh Hamraz's Hindi Film Geet-Kosh and Mir, Ali Husain., and Raza Mir's Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry (as primary texts). The project undertakes the study of various other articles and books related to the area of research. The paper will conclude by discussing the emergence of White-Revolution and Green-Revolution during the 1960s.*

**Keywords:** Partition, Religion, Indo-China War, Indo-Pak War, White-Revolution, Green-Revolution.

### Introduction

Bollywood songs were introduced in the movies ever since the advent of the Hindi film cinema. Song-writing was always a significant part of cinema. “The deployment of songs to propel a narrative has a long and varied tradition in India” (Husain and Raza 114). Several of the country’s famous art forms had employed this technique for an extended period. For instance, songs were used in dance, nautankis, fairs, and also used while explaining the narratives of Ramayana and Mahabharata, etc. It was an indispensable component of the Hindi cinema since the Hindi films (talkies) triggered off in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is not a matter of surprise that the cinematic medium found easy to introduce songs in theatrical performances. By the time Alam Ara (the first walkie-talkie film) hit the box-office, songs had already occupied a front seat to entertain the masses. “The history of Hindi film lyrics predates the talkies” (114). The manifestation of lyrics to romanticize the narrative had already been prominent in South India.

Fearless film producers in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh disregarded the British censorship by utilizing the poetry of Subramanya Bharati, the banned rebellious poet, in their feature films. During post-partition, several patriotic lyricists such as Pradeep, Pandit Narendra Sharma, and Qamar Jalalabadi regularly penned songs on independence. Gramophone records helped in promoting the songs beyond the film theatres. British censors, being hypersensitive, banned almost all the songs which were a threat to their reputation and it was a usual practice of the time. Independence liberated the producers and directors from the restrictions placed by the censor boards on patriotic pieces. One of the songs from the 1947 movie Ahimsa (Nonviolence) plays as: 'Azaad hum hain aaj se, jailon ke taale tod do' (we are free from today, let us break the locks of jails).

Bollywood lyrics, in the next two decades, offered a critique on the discourses such as India/Pakistan partition, religion, Indo-China War, Indo-Pak War, Green-Revolution, and White-Revolution. Songs serve as an alternative history. They are parallel critique on the Indo-Pak partition offering counter-history. The brutal partition painted a miserable picture of the victims who were assaulted by the callous forces. Sahir Ludhianvi portrayed the cruelty of some heartless souls in the 1961 movie Dharmaputra and emphasized the trauma of poor Indians. The post-independence happened to be intensified with multiple problems. Poverty and deprivation were at the center as compared to the other problems of a common man. The lyrics 'Saathi haath badhaana' in the movie Phir Subah Hogi featured the hardship of penniless peasants. The song displayed the revolutionary hands reaching out in a union for a common goal. Moreover, it sketched the future of deprived Indians. Partition was considered as a matter of great concern for everyone.

It displaced, dislocated and alienated millions as it was the colossal wave of migration in the human history. It inspired several writers across the country to pen down large narratives on the bloody riots and massacres happened during the partition. Progressive writers' poems were also influenced by the bloody partition stories. Faiz Ahmad Faiz's 'Subh-e-Azadi' (Husain and Raza 61) carried the

laments of the people who suffered during the bloody-riots as partition triggered riots. Sahir's poem 'Mufaahimat' (Compromise) echoed partition woes as well. Kaifi Azmi's poem 'Farz' correlated the partition period with the narrative of Mahabharata when Krishna urged Arjuna to fight with his kith and kin. All the above poems exemplified those people who got carried away during the partition and were responsible for mass casualties. Overall, the aftermath of partitions dismantled the Indian culture and brought more terrorism and less peace with the neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Pakistan was formed by Muslim nationalism instantly after the partition. The over-whelming religion precipitated to propose the Hindu-Muslim unity in that phase. There were occasions in the Hindi cinema when the religion occupied most of the films' narrative. The movies precisely carrying the theme of religion became the highest grossing movies at the box-office at certain times. The movie Dhool Ka Phool was released a decade after the partition, and the whole narrative was based on religious tensions. The writer intended to install humanity over religion and tried to re-enact the lampooned religious practices: 'Tu Hindu banega na Musalmaan banega, insaan ki aulaad hai; insaan banega' (Hamraaz 922). Abdul Chacha (role played by Manmohan Krishan) sang the song when he happened to find an abandoned child of Mahesh (Rajendra Kumar) and Meena (Mala Sinha). Both Mahesh and Meena belong to Hindu religion in the film. Sahir, through the voice of Mohammed Rafi, produced an all-time anthem for Hindus and Muslims who strove for Hindu-Muslim unity. Therefore, communal harmony became a trademark in most of the Hindi movies produced during that period. The other aspect is to be understood that Abdul Chacha was a Muslim by religion and Muslim characters were routinely shown as sane and sensible. Many Hindi songs, especially those written by the progressive writers, strove to create an image of a secular Muslim. There was a considerable amount of tokenism too, with shorter appearances of Muslim characters in the Hindi films showing the diversity in the country. There were movies depicting an

idealized Muslim world, for example, Chaudvin Ka Chand (1960), Mere Mehboob (1963), and Bahu Begum (1967), etc. Hindi popular cinema was ascertained as socially united force and the National awards instituted by the Indian government for the particular movie comprised one that was given for promoting national integration and communal harmony.

The sino-indian war also finds a mention in the Hindi cinema of the early 60s in the 1964 movie Haqeeqat (Truth). This war was fought between China and India in the year 1962. One of the major reasons for war was a disagreement in drawing the Tibetan Himalayan boundary, but there were other reasons as well. There had already been a chain of brutal incidents at the Himalayan border following the 1959 Tibetan rebellion when India provided refuge to Dalai Lama. China attempted to occupy some of the Indian regions beyond 'Dehra Compass' and further, established a military camp at Chip Chap River (flows from Aksai Chin of China to Jammu and Kashmir of India). Provoked by their movement, the Indian Army retaliated with the 'Forward Policy.' According to the policy, India established small military stations at some distance behind the Chinese forces to stop their supplies and compel them to go back to China. This move by the Indians annoyed the Chinese troops. Moreover, there was discord over the control of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh borderline areas. The Indians claimed the Aksai Chin in their possession as it touched several major parts of 'Kashmir.'

The Chinese were emotive in gaining control over the whole Aksai Chin region as it was a significant part of 'Xinjiang,' had main road link that joined Tibet and Xinjiang. The construction of this main road by Chinese army added fuel to the fire. China proclaimed further that it would take up the entire Tibet. Indian government forwarded a letter of disapproval advancing negotiations on the matter of Tibet. In the early 1950s, the equation was entirely different from China. India agreed upon five 'Principles of Peaceful Co-existence' with China and both the countries desired to promote trade and commerce and their culture as well as in the Tibetan region. It is to be observed that under these five principles, Indian

government accepted the Chinese jurisdiction over Tibet. This was the period when the Prime minister of India, Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru was in good terms with China before this agitation from both sides. Nehru publicly proposed the slogan as well 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai' (Indians and Chinese are brothers). Gradually, the circumstances changed altogether in the late 50s. China perceived India as a threat since the latter occupied some parts of Tibet. Chinese troops attacked on Oct 20, 1962. The war ended after a month on Nov 20, 1962, with the interruption of the United Nations in between and China announced a ceasefire. Nehru was harshly criticized by the Indians for having encouraged pacifism with China and not able to prepare for war beforehand. He never expected the Chinese aggression. Indians were highly suspicious of China and its army after the war. The movie Haqeeqat (1964) unveiled the haunting memories of Indo-China war. Kaifi Azmi highlighted the miseries of the people settled alongside the Indo-China border. He represented the intensely hostile mood of the leading character in the movie:

'Khench do apne khoon se zameen par lakeer  
Is taraf aane paaye na Raavan koi;  
Tod do haath gar haath uthne lagen,  
Chhoone paaye na Sita ka daaman koi;  
Raam ho tum, tumhin Lakshman saathiyoo,  
Ab tumhaare havaale watan saathiyoo'" (Husain and Raza 68, 69).

Balraj Sahni (as Major Ranjeet Singh) raised the flag and persuaded his soldiers through the song to assault the Chinese troop during the Indo-China war. The song calls for attention as Kaifi magnifies a moment by taking references from an ancient Indian epic The Ramayana. Along with, he shows the pervasiveness of the Hindu religion as well. One year after the war, the great legendary Indian singer, Lata Mangeshkar also sang a song 'Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon' in the backdrop of Indo-China war. It is said that this particular song was sung in the presence of Nehru in June 1963. The 2017 Hindi film Tubelight was also set in 1962 during the Indo-China war.

Nehru's era came to an end with his demise by a heart attack in May 1964. Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru as Prime Minister the following month. The next year, Indo-Pak war of 1965 triggered

off after Pakistan's 'Operation Gibraltar.' The operation was planned to spread the battalions into Jammu and Kashmir. It was meant to occupy the larger territory of Kashmir and revolt against the Indian rule. This time the Indian military responded with a powerful attack on Pakistan under the leadership of Lal Bahadur Shastri. The combat caused countless casualties on both sides. It also unmasked the poor standards of Pakistan's military training. The war ended with the intervention of United Nations as a ceasefire was announced after seventeen days and the hostilities were officially concluded with the 'Tashkent Agreement' in January 1966.

During this war, Shastri created the slogan 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan.' The ever-inspiring slogan underlined the necessity to raise India's food production and to boost the soldiers to defend the motherland. Shastri's contribution was immense in increasing the production and supply of milk across the country. He promoted the White-Revolution, a nationwide movement to boost the production of milk. He formed the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) in 1965 at Anand. The following year 'Operation Flood' was initiated by NDDB. It was the world's largest dairy development initiative. The operation generated a milk grid across the country which could link rural producers with urban consumers. The backbone of this operation was rural milk producers. People were encouraged to raise the production of milk and milk-products. This campaign was successful due to a highly developed milk procurement network.

The government witnessed frustrations of the Indians due to the "failure of two successive monsoons in 1965 and 1966" (Manwani 157). There was a lack of agricultural- productivity as well. Earlier, India relied on imported food grains. A nationwide campaign was started to raise the standards and productivity of agriculture in India. The steps were taken to improve the agricultural production with the help of refined agronomics and modern technology. The utilization of high-yielding varieties of seeds, the use of fertilizers and new methods of irrigation led to the movement known as Green-Revolution. Shastri had already

sowed the seeds of the Green-Revolution during his leadership. He passed away in 1966. This movement was carried on by his successor, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the next Prime Minister of India. Green-Revolution was at its peak in the late 1960s. This particular moment manifested song:

'Mere desh ki dharti sona ugle ugle here moti mere desh ki dharti'

This song was from the 1967 movie *Upkar*. The song painted the picture of fertile lands of India. By the next decade, India became agriculturally self-sufficient to feed its people. The biggest success was high-yielding varieties of Wheat. The country, later on, became one of the largest rice producers in the world. Sahir Ludhianvi, in the movie *Aadmi Aur Insaan* (1969), expressed how the people were delighted at the triumph of Green-Revolution. He geared up optimism among the Indians through this song:

"Bharey Huey Khaliyaan Zamaana Dekhega,  
Kal Ka Hindustaan Zamaana Dekhega"

(Manwani 157).

## Conclusion

The paper delves into the nuances of Bollywood songs and examines how the Indian cinema was culturally obliged to respond, represent, and react to the multiple problems of the nation. Lyricists actively responded to the social, political and economic issues of the post-independence period. Their songs represented the harsh realities of the subjugated Indians. Discourses such as the trauma of partition, Indo-China war, Indo-Pak War, White-Revolution, and Green-Revolution had a considerable impact on Indian mainstream popular Hindi cinema. It is observed that these lyricists did not offer pure entertainment as such to the audience in the trajectory of the Hindi cinema. The focus of Bollywood songs was more often the realistic problems and sensitive issues of the time rather than eulogizing alaaah (almighty), husn (beautiful women), or jaam (wine)

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