

Muslim Identity and Representation in Deepa Mehta's *Earth* and Abhishek Kapur's *Kai Po Che*

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In India, Hindi cinema engages in a discourse of postcolonial representation that is sometimes illuminating, other times frustrating, but always interesting. These films serve as cultural texts that, as Kavita Daiya points out, “constitute a dominant public sphere account which inscribes, mediates and prescribes particular normative conceptions of ethnic coupledness, gendered citizenship, nationalism and secularism” (Daiya 152). Daiya is referring particularly to partition narratives but her analysis can be extended to other forms of representation as well. Specifically, the history of Muslim representation in Hindi cinema has too often oscillated between the hopelessness of peripheralized experiences or utopian imaginings of peace and non-violent belongings. Two varied representations demonstrate parallel genres of mainstream Hindi cinema (or Bollywood) and serious films, piquantly called “art films” in an earlier time.¹

As Madhava Prasad, Kavita Daiya and others have demonstrated, Hindi film history has had a tangible role in the national cultural agenda often aligning with the political agenda of a secular republic. As Daiya writes: “The inclusion of minorities, particularly of Muslims, in the national discourse and political participation was a major part of that project”; “Bollywood cinema often reproduces dominant gendered and heteronormative discourses of Hindu-Muslim difference, citizenship and patriotism in the Indian public sphere, the heterogeneous cinematic texts ... to de-ethnicize citizenship and reinvent a way of being secular and national—a way of transcending the Hindu-Muslim ethnic difference as always already a site of conflict” (175). Coupled with the immense popularity of Hindi films and actors in Pakistan and other parts of the Muslim world it meant that Hindi filmmakers had a financial interest in appealing to populations across regional and religious borders. This convergence of interests between the film industry and the ruling democratic political establishment means that over the hundred-plus years of Hindi cinema it is possible to plot the changing pattern of the Muslim representations.

This essay looks at two films that may broadly fall under two different genres of Hindi film—popular and parallel—to understand this complexity of Muslim representation. *Kai Po Che* and *1947 Earth*, discussed in this essay, denote a shift, a subtle yet definite ideological move in the representation of Muslim stories and narratives. In this essay, we will engage in a comparative analysis on two axes: the individual novel and its film adaptation and the narrative techniques of the two films. Some of the screen adaptations of the novels’ storylines are demonstrative of the historicity of Muslim and minority representation in Hindi films.

As Frederic Jameson points out in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, aesthetic production has become largely integrated into commodity production; with the necessarily economic nature of films and filmmaking, we argue that while having seemingly different perspectives of representation, the two films in question share similarities in their portrayal of Muslim lives and narratives. To understand the two films under discussion in this essay, it is important to understand the specific historical moment of their making against the history of Muslim representation over the years.

As we try to understand this complex history, a few definite patterns emerge: 1) There is an absence, or an erasure, of the everyday Muslim and his/her experiences. A quick look at the films from different periods testifies to this phenomenon. 2) The partition transformed the Hindi film industry (this has been well acknowledged and studied by Gantt, Daiya *et al*). The Muslim character in Hindi films has been depicted via a number of avatars that may be categorized into three different periods. The first, in the 1920s and 1930s, saw many historical narratives like *Anarkali*, *Mehbooba*, and *Shah Jehan*. These were period films that focused on the royal Mughal past, often glamorized as a nostalgic lost era. A change occurred as the Muslim social was born in the 1950s and 1960s; films such as *Pakeezah*, *Chaudvin ka Chand*, *Mere Mehbooba* immortalized characters that reflected a feudal Muslim identity also safely ensconced within a nationalist rhetoric. The Muslim social was the counterpart to the Hindu social where the feudal (often aristocratic and landed) structure is the protagonist as the plot reinforces, rebels or accommodates the often hegemonic feudal norms. The Muslim social in turn gave rise to a distinct image of the Hindustani Muslim, often depicted as the “good” Muslim as opposed to the “suspect” Muslim who is from the “other side of the border”. This kind of description was precisely how the film industry treads the Indo-Pak divide where the protagonist or the hero never referred to Pakistan by name but as a liminality-“us paar” or from the other side: a constructed “other” across an arbitrary border.

In an online blog, *Tinpahar*, Parub Banerjee surveys films with Muslim representation throughout the decades of Hindi cinema. She argues that these films portray the delineation between public and private spaces. The public space was shared; Rahim Chacha, the Muslim villager of the blockbuster *Sholay*, epitomized this patriotic, paternal image, the loving old man who goes to the mosque everyday and is heartbroken, yet happy, to have a child be sacrificed for the greater collective good of the village. While Hindi movies, especially in the few decades after independence, promoted a nationalist (albeit inclusive) narrative, the burden of a demonstrative patriotism has often been carried on the Muslim shoulder in mainstream cinema. In her analysis, Kavita Daiya has aptly illustrated the very active collaboration and understanding between the stakeholders of the state and cinema to allow the state to “actively intervene in and shape the national culture through a cinematic production of socially progressive movies” (155) through organizations such as the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). This led to what Madhava Prasad calls “middle-class cinema” epitomized by Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Chatterjee in the 1970s and early 1980s. Prasad also demonstrates how the “social” as a category declined with the rise of middle-class cinema. To summarize this very brief historical trajectory of Hindi films: the first phase began with historical films (the selective historicization in those films is a subject for another paper) which included the Hindu epics, Hindu Maharajas, Muslim Mughal and other dynasties, courtesans and so on. In the 1950s and 1960s the industry gave solid, even radically

progressive narratives like Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Sujata*, *Saraswati Chandra* and others in what Madhava Prasad calls the socialist period in Hindi films. Then came middle-class cinema with directors Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Chatterjee, where Amitabh Bachchan first made his mark. Ironically, as Prasad also notes, it is the industrial hero persona of Amitabh Bachchan that eclipsed the middle-class phenomenon. Amitabh Bachchan's portrayals of the angry young man frustrated with national institutes but wanting to reform from within (system *agar badlna hai to system main ghus kar hi ho sakta hai to*)² along with an ever-present nationalist rhetoric reflect the equally turbulent intermittent emotions of frustration, foreboding and faith in the institutions and systems of democracy in the country. Daiya argues that "rather than displacing religious ethnicity as a hegemonic ground for determining identity and belonging, these melodramas ambivalently reproduce the power of ethnicity as a defining category for postcolonial identity, even as their utopian imaginings seek to problematize its effect on the lived experiences of minoritized citizenship and national belonging" (Daiya 156). I think that Daiya's notion of "ambivalence" is especially true with respect to Muslim representations because while one cannot argue against the progressive and inclusive thrust of some of these films, it often reinforces the idea of Indian citizenship for the Muslim minority as dependent on majority accommodation, not as an independent, unassailable, and legitimate right.

Director Mrinal Sen captures the crisis of representation in a film about the making of film. *Akaler Sandhaney (In Search of Famine)* is a self-reflexive critique of the pitfalls of "parallel cinema,"³ as differentiated from commercial or mainstream cinema (categories that as we mention above are largely arbitrary). The film tells the story of a radical filmmaker from Kolkata who goes to a nearby village to make a film about a catastrophic famine in that area. The narrative weaves together the real and fictional to tell the story of the filmmaking, as the focus converges on the director and becomes a narrative of the documentary itself. The film attempts to deconstruct the apparent radicalism of the director as he comes into conflict with the villagers (Sen and Bandhopadhyay). His desire to speak "for" the villagers, his assumptions about the history of the place, and the cinematic techniques that he employs to present what is really his perspective, are all ruthlessly exposed as his project falls apart.

In the narrative, it is easy to see that the director's intellectual grasp of the conditions of the famine does not extend to an awareness of his politics of command and control. His domination of the discourse and its dissemination is depicted as a replication of the very hegemonic politics that the director's film is supposed to indict. The fictional film cannot be completed and, as if to emphasize his failure, Sen closes with the "radical" director and his crew recreating the famine in a studio in Mumbai—a retreat from actual historical and social processes to the complete fabrication of reality (Featherstone 107). What results is a narrative twice-removed, enacted without approval by the subjects of the representation. As Simon Featherstone points out, "in postcolonialism [the crisis] is a truism that touches upon the crucial issues of representation, and upon the economic and ideological control of production and reproduction of narratives of 'other' cultures" (48). Sen's film conveys the conflict of representation in the tradition of parallel cinema, a cinematic movement many of whose objectives he shares. The chasm between reality and representation in art, literature, or cinema can never be erased, but a self-conscious awareness can reveal or at the very least acknowledge the gap.

The two films that concern us here use real-life incidents to construct a historical narrative of two tragedies: the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 and the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat in which more than a thousand people, a majority of them Muslim, died. The objective of the two filmmakers is symptomatic of their respective genres—one, a popular mainstream narrative and the other, a more serious critical film. The following analyses of representation in the two films will untangle the processes by which each of them narrates a subtext of commodification of minority aesthetics and representation.

There are many similarities in these two films: both films are a) based on works of literature, b) have Muslim representation as a central theme, and c) are in keeping with their original textual source. In addition, the film belongs to different genres of mainstream entertainment (in the case of *Kai Po Che*) and serious cinema (for *1947 Earth*). These two films were made in the post-1991 period of economic liberalization, an important historical moment both in the national narrative and, perhaps consequently, in the Hindi film narrative. There are also differences we need to lay out in the beginning: Deepa Mehta's film is set during the moment of partition of the sub-continent when the new nation of Pakistan was born, leading to what scholars have termed the largest displacement of people across any border in the world; Abhishek Kapoor's film is set in the aftermath of the Gujarat communal riots in 2002 in which more than a thousand people, a majority of them Muslim, lost their lives. Religious riots have been a part of the narrative of the country since partition; they have also consequently inhabited our film narratives. The particularly horrific ones that come to mind are the 1984 Sikh riots, 1992 Bombay riots, and 2002 Gujarat riots, and the popular films that are engaged with these events are *Kaya Taran* (2004), *Hawayein* (2003), *Bombay* (1995), *Black Friday* (2004), *Parzania* (2007), *Firaq* (2008), and *Final Solution* (2003).

It is true, as Daiya and others have also pointed out, that nationalism has been a regular feature of Bollywood films in the nineties. A hard-hitting film like *Earth* critiques that nationalism by portraying the complex realities of 1947 through the life of the people who were directly impacted by the drawing of these borders and who, it is important to mention, were neither consulted or considered as stakeholders of such a decision. And yet, as an adaptation of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, it is hard to deny that the critique stops short of calling it out and asking questions about the legitimacy of actions and rhetoric since 1947. By centering the narrative around the character of the *Ice-Candy Man* the book and the film center on an individual failing rather than a colossal injustice—a consequence of colonialism. *1947 Earth* revolves around religious and political lines—literally, as an arbitrary border is drawn, a political travesty based on religious lines. Deepa Mehta's *Earth* revolves around the story of four young people in Lahore, three men and a young woman who is an *Ayah* or nanny in the only Parsi family in the village. The men are also not of much means; they are employed respectively as a masseur, an ice-candy man, and a gardener, and they while away their time with the vivacious and pretty *Ayah* who teases and tantalizes them with her endearing femininity. *Earth* traces the relationship between these three men as the partition horror unfolds before their eyes. Their individual friendships and political alignments and religious beliefs all come in conflict with each other as the friends negotiate the transformation of their geography overnight. There is a buzz about the partition as the village boys discuss Nehru's speech and Jinnah's demands, and the possibility of a geographic divide looms

large. The setting is Lahore city but the imagery is not very different from that of a village—a large tree, fields, feudal homes, peasants, nannies, masseurs and ice-candy men. The depiction is reflective of erstwhile Lahore—an overgrown town/village that imagined itself as a city; a city with a regal past and a cosmopolitan present. The cosmopolitanism is visible in the first part of the film when Hindu and Muslim families lived as neighbors, their cosmopolitanism coming down the ranks with the servant classes working across religions. Here cosmopolitanism is used as an antithesis to nationalist drives that espouse identification with a single culture or place rather than as a fitted narrative across religion and class stratification. The *Ayah* works for a Parsi family whose guests are both Hindu and Muslim families of equal stature in the city, until the broken moment of the partition, when the same Hindu Punjabi, Sikh neighbors make their farewell visits to the Parsi home. As is true of any mass displacements, the affluent Hindu and Sikh families—especially the ones who left early—made it across the border and often left the refugee camps to settle in different Indian cities because of their pre-partition connections. But in the film, Lahore disintegrates into a bloody chaos that exposes its provincial and communal self beneath the thin veneer of cosmopolitanism. Lahore's identity as the young, new city is also shattered in the narrative.

Films like *Earth* and *Kai Po Che* often critique nationalism by portraying the complexities of the communal riots. But one needs to understand that this communal violence cannot be organized into broad homogenized categories of Hindu and Muslim. These identities are sometimes ambiguous, sometimes fragmented, and during some periods and contexts integrated. Caste, class and religious conflicts and violence ignite the notion of “other” which perhaps always existed in this small world of Lahore and its stratified classes. Indeed the moments of partition exposed some of these anxieties and in the process created some other conflictual identities.

Ultimately, *Earth* is a story of betrayal by the different actors in the story. The Ice-Candy Man betrays the little Parsi girl by making her give away the nanny's whereabouts; the little girl's naïve and innocent betrayal of her *Ayah* or nanny, the Ice-Candy man's betrayal of his lady love to the religious bigots, and the irrational and inexplicable behavior of all the actors in the larger setting of an epic drama of the nation's partition into two nations as well as the horrific bloodshed remain an indelible and traumatic part of the subcontinent's history. *Earth* comments but briefly on the futility of a neutral position in politically turbulent times in the character of the only Parsi family that decide to stay back in Lahore when non-Muslims were migrating to India in droves. “This neutral position is not good,” the wife tells her pensive husband as everyday reports of neighbors leaving the city pour in. But the film leaves it at that; there is a horrid sense of helplessness felt by the family as the *Ayah* is taken away from her Parsi home. The novel and the film are narrated in the voice of the young girl (now grown up) who is tricked into giving her *Ayah*'s hiding-place away to the Ice-Candy Man, and the narrative becomes her testimonial as eye witness to the central story. Does that absolve the Parsi neutrality that was the cause of guilt and discomfort for the *Ayah*'s mistress? The narrative is non-judgmental but there is a sense that helplessness was pervasive across the social structure.

While the times were bad for all concerned there is a hint of the class differences as more affluent and influential Hindus begin to migrate and the peasants and laborers who are forced to stay behind are either killed or forced to change their religious identity. The

horrific train that comes from Gurdaspur with only corpses (that include the Ice-Candy Man's family) becomes the last straw and all hell breaks loose. The *Ayah* who believes that her home with the Parsi family is a safe haven is no longer secure. She and the masseur man (a Muslim) decide to run away but it is not meant to be as he is killed that night. The film is silent on whether the Ice-Candy man had anything to do with his death or whether the Hindu mobs in the streets of Lahore were responsible for the killing. The silence is consequential, because it leaves open the question of whether the killing was a lover's revenge that took refuge in the political climate of partition, or religious bigotry by the Hindu mobs. The ambivalence that Daiya points to is very visible in scenes such as these; the film does not tell us if the *Ayah* is killed by the Ice-Candy Man or taken by him as his wife/betrothed. Urvashi Butalia's volume of edited essays, *Partition: The Long Shadow*, chronicles the varied memories of partition and the equally varied ways of remembering and forgetting associated with this horrific event on both sides of the border. *Earth* is one of those varied and varying narratives that are a testimony to the 'long shadow' that the legacy of Partition has left behind for the people of the Indian sub-continent.

The biggest betrayal, the film seemed to say, was of course the partition itself and the arbitrary drawing of borders affecting the people of the entire subcontinent. The fragility of the bonds of friendship between the major actors becomes a horrific reminder of the shadow of religious and political identities that eclipse others. Daiya also insightfully points to a less noticed trend in the Hindi film nationalist rhetoric—a conscious attempt to delink nationalism from ethnicity in films such as *Main Hoon Na* (2001) where the villain is a Hindu. As she points out, the film articulates the desire for peace with a hostile neighbor, and critiques of a militant anti-Pakistan stance come from no other than the highest officers of the army. But that came much after *Earth*, in the new millennium, and in some ways points to the success of the conscious nationalist narrative woven by Hindi filmmakers, the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and various stakeholders in the industry. The Indian-Muslim, this carefully constructed narrative seems to say, is mainstreamed as Indian without a hyphen and can now be either hero or villain. Arguments for peace with Pakistan are no longer a sign of unheroic submissiveness or lack of patriotism—in fact quite the opposite, as the Sunil Shetty character in the aforementioned film demonstrates.

Unlike *Earth*, Abhishek Kapoor's *Kai Po Che* (herein after KPC) finds the demons of difference within national borders, where the "other" is a minority in our midst that thus disrupts the secular narrative that we have carefully constructed over the years. Set in the backdrop of a religiously divided city, *Kai Po Che* is about three young Hindu boys—Ishan, Govind and Omi—who try their fortune selling sports equipment and offering cricket coaching. Along with them is a young Muslim prodigy, Ali Hashmi, who shows talent as a cricket batsman. This shared passion for cricket appropriates the popular notion of cricket being the subcontinental religion, thereby masking their religious differences. They share a neoliberal ideology: 1) they believe in and practice private enterprise; 2) they keep nationalist pride alive through love for cricket, and 3) they exhibit consciously neutral, apolitical behavior. The textual depiction of characters by Chetan Bhagat in his book *The Three Mistakes of my Life*, of which KPC is an adaptation, illustrates this neoliberal ideology fairly well. As we can see, for Ishan, Ali is a talented cricketer but for others, including his friends, Ali is a Muslim. Where other

youths mock Ali as *Lehenga-chaap* (referring to his distinctive Muslim attire) and refuse to look beyond his community, Ishan sees only his talent. Ishan tries to get the best training for Ali from the Australian cricketer Fred, and sees Ali as a national treasure of the country. Ishan sacrifices his life in the film to save Ali, a Muslim boy, a measure of his love for cricket over religious or caste identity. Similarly, for Ali, his nationalist identity is above his individual identity: "I am an Indian. I want to play for India. Not for anyone else" (Bhagat 178). National identity is also foregrounded; when the coach says, "Four balls, no more. 'And you better hope Australia wins so I remain in a good mood to keep my promise', Ishan's smile froze. 'I can't do that. I can't wish against India'" (140-142). Similarly when Govind says: "It's ok, Mama. Politics confuses me" (116), there is a clear attempt to separate politics from the complications of everyday life. In the film as in the novel, all three, especially Govind, are wary of "party politics" and try hard to maintain a balance among politics, religion, friendship and the game of cricket.

Govind wants to make money and thinks big. Ishan is all about nurturing Ali, the batsman with a rare gift. Omi knows his limited capabilities and just wants to be with his friends. However, nothing comes easy in a turbulent city. To realize their goals, they face religious politics, an earthquake, riots, unacceptable love, and above all, their own mistakes. The triple-whammy that hits the three friends is a devastating earthquake (2001), the attack on a train near Godhra station (2002) and the riots in Gujarat. The film and novel both depict the train burning near Godhra station as a reason for widespread Hindu retaliation against Muslims, and it is with this frenzied violence that Govind's story climaxes. "'The mob had Muslims. They had an argument with the Hindu *kar sevaks* and burnt everyone—women, children,' the tea vendor said" (215). "'The mob that burnt the Jamalpur bus, Hindu or Muslim?' I said" (219). "'There are a lot of people. And there's a lot of obsession. That's the problem', Ish said. 'But religion and politics are pretty big. And them together, even bigger,' I added" (175). Religion and politics and the tension they create figure prominently in the story. Omi's family are politically involved and militant Hindu nationalists; among their pet causes is the row over the temple at Ayodhya.

If *Earth* moves from the individual and personal in the text to foregrounding the political in the film, as evidenced by the change of title from *Ice-Candy Man* to *1947 Earth*, *Kai Po Che* resists foregrounding the political and instead lets the shadow of the riots be a silent presence throughout the film. The changes from book to film make *Kai Po Che* a more powerful indictment of Gujarat's polarized society than the book was, but a lesser indictment of the reasons and implications of riots. These indictments are tortuous in the text. Characters are compelled to embrace the communal madness and the film forces us to engage with the possibility of violence as something within ourselves. Crossing linguistic and cultural borders is not the choice of these characters but it is there. The 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom is not the central idea of the film but is a persistent presence in the narrative, sometimes explicit, at other times hanging heavy in the silences of the narration. The film and novel both posit subservient circumstantial representation of a staunch religious identity.

The archive of representations of the Hindu-Muslim riots includes films, documentaries, novels, theater and much more. *Kai Po Che* connects this representation with their lives and sentiments. And this is perhaps what is most striking in the screenplay of *KPC*: a fictive representation of un-representable violence with the imagery

of more truths, more lies, distanced sufferings, simple failures, competition, redemption and ultimate apathy.

The film's title, *Kai Po Che*, is originally a Gujarati phrase that means "I have cut the kite" which refers to the Gujarati festival Uttarayan (also known as Makar Sankranti) where people compete to cut off each others' kite yelling "Kai Po Che." In a way, the film portrays the same hostility but with much more horrendous consequences. Does *KPC* by using the title minimize that trauma, or is the title merely using the war cry to signify the horrific consequences of the disproportionate and often the irrational that subsumes the individual? After a close reading of Chetan Bhagat's novel and the film it appears that the novel and screenplay conveniently gloss over the implication of the state establishment and the failure of the state machinery. Unlike another film on the same topic, *Parzania*, *KPC* hovers dangerously close to being an apology for the riots and death.

Both Chetan Bhagat's book and Abhishek Kapoor's film give fair treatment to the externalities that influence the tension between Hindus and Muslims; the abrupt aggression, the hatred and unspoken rivalry. The instances of this can be seen in the text, where Bhagat points to the soft discrimination against Muslims after the earthquake: "Technically, anyone could seek refuge. However, a Muslim family would rarely go there for help. Even if they did, camp managers handed out the rations but emphasized that everyone in the camp was a Hindu" (116). '*Humare log*' or "our people" is often used and its meaning points to the pervasive religious divide of the time. Each of the three friends in *Kai Po Che* represents a recognizable prototype—the capitalist (Rajkumar Yadav as Govind Patel), the political (Amit Sadh as Omkar Shastri) and the emotional (Sushant Singh Rajput as Ishaan Bhatt).

The film also draws parallels between the general and the specific and the political and the personal. The drama surrounding a local cricket match is intercut with drama around elections, where a Hindu nationalist is running against the Muslim nationalist. The drama surrounding an India-Australia test match is parallel with the drama around a brother-sister fight, their subsequent making up, and the estrangement and reunion of friends. Finally there is a parallel between riots and earthquake with Vidya's (Ishan's sister's) pregnancy scare. This cross-hatched text ensures that there is a fine sketch of the nation's upheaval, enlisting religious representation within Govind's story. The representation of the pogrom becomes incidental to the larger narrative. Ishan's character calls on the majority community to take responsibility for the protection of the minority. In trying to tear down stereotypes, Bhagat fortifies others through his characters. When Australia comes knocking on Ali's door, Ali refuses to play for their team, saying he loves India much more. We appreciate Ali not because of what he is but because of Ali's love for India. However, the film's climax is more layered and challenging than the novel's, partly because of how it makes Omi a participant in the riots. In the book, he retains his innocence; he ends up taking a blow for Ali. The film, on the other hand, demonstrates how "good" people or "apolitical" people can be engulfed by tides that they do not fully understand.

KPC is about three everyday middle-class boys, living ordinary lives, who think of regular ways of making their lives economically productive. This touching regularity is possibly what connects *Three Mistakes of My Life* and *KPC* to middle-class viewers, and what has made it commercially successful. And it is this regularity and commonness of

the characters, their beliefs and their responses to the destruction that surrounds them, that makes *KPC* a troubling reflection of the way the film memorializes Gujarat 2002.

The reconstructions of the pogrom are disturbing and reassuring at the same time. The middle-class, liberal, and secular engagement with the pogrom have progressed along the same trajectory. We can talk about justice, resilience and then development. *KPC* does not make us forget 2002; rather it allows us a disturbingly honest glimpse into the middle-class mind which wants to remember the pogrom through stories of entrepreneurial success, good roads, coffee shops, the stadiums and cricket. This allows the filmgoer to keep his/her faith in the secular policies of our nation, in capital, and in laws, enabling the continuous mending of the fractured nation. Abhishek Kapoor connects a mainstream audience with the horrific injustice of the riots—but at what cost? Films made after the Gujarat riots questioning the secularism, liberalism and reconciliation in a democratic society provide pause to the triumphalist narrative of our democratic institutions. In this attempt to reconciliation after the tragedy, a turn of events is wired at the very beginning when shamefaced Omi (Amit Sadh) is released from prison. He is barely able to look at Govind (Raj Kumar Yadav), who has come to pick him up, and the film enters the flashback mode, taking us back to Ahmadabad in early 2000, about the time when a conversation in the nation has taken a place around religion. Put together, these narratives, while reflecting the fractured social fabric of our nation, point to real and tangible ways to strengthen and consolidate a democratic setup in a diverse society. It is thus the settlement of wound that has begun to heal; but the atrocities leave behind scars that are difficult to conceal. *Parzania*, a hard hitting documentary about the same event, deals with the aftermath of the riots without alluding to the lead up to it. *KPC* on the other hand evades the post-riot consequences but instead focuses more on the individual stories in the backdrop of riots.

The film never depicts the riots as an act of state-sponsored violence as it is widely perceived to be. It rather attributes the riots to the isolated decision of one Hindu local leader; therefore exonerating the party and its leaders of responsibility. *KPC* deals safely with an onscreen adaptation of reasons and implications behind the 2002 pogrom. It is paradigmatic of how secular law and capital work to keep the affects of nation alive. The law recognizes Omi as lawless and thus in need of incarceration and reformation. In the eyes of the audience, the legal machinery has played its role, and faith in the law is restored despite the thousands killed. The film tries to be a successful performance of the legal process and displaces concerns about state accountability. Legal culpability is privatized and is focused on Omi.

The film, despite the harrowing experience of riots, tries to end on a positive note, something which Chetan Bhagat changes as the screenplay writer. Omi, in jail for the murder of Ishan, is released and joins Govind who is now married to Ishan's sister and has named his son after his deceased friend. While they all are sitting down to watch the match, Ali plays his first international innings for India. The success of Ali as a cricketer is ultimately depicted as being something over which he has very little control, other than having the talent that, arguably, is also not really in his control.

The troubling questions that film leaves one with are: 1) would the success of Ali be possible without the benevolence of Ishan? Should the success of a person, let alone a Muslim, be contingent on the benevolence of any particular community? 2) Whose death does the film mourn? It is Ishan's: the Hindu who was killed trying to help Muslims and

keep secularism alive. The film zooms in on the secular credentials of the Indian cricket team, and the fact that a talented Muslim now plays for India, despite experiencing the pogrom and witnessing death and destruction. We are happy that Govind is married to Ishan's sister Vidya and has a son. There are success stories worthy of celebration, we are told. The nationalist narrative is once again reinforced with Omi handing the Indian flag to Govind's child during the final scenes.

In the neo-liberal, nationalist narrative, the script of private enterprise, responsibility and accumulative aspiration will ultimately make us immune to such interruptions and make the nation unshakeable. "The mob chased him... My heart beat in the same irregular way as it did on the day of the earthquake. Nature caused that disaster, man made this one. I don't know which is more dangerous" (221). Similarly, in film there is there is an over-insistence on transcending communal barriers, however briefly and imperfectly, through the national obsession of cricket.

Hence, the aftermath of large-scale enactment of riots "channelizes" itself to blame displacement (Paul Brass, 2004) on the government and its political leaders who further draw attention to the difficulties of "governance" in societies where intercommunal animosities are allegedly rampant. And later they themselves become implicated in a political discourse that, as Baxi puts it, concerns itself with the "agonies of governance," rather than with the "sufferings" of the victims of mis-governance, and thereby normalizes the violence (qtd. in Brass).

In the end, the two films are also indicative of the two genres of literature that they adapt their screenplay from. Chetan Bhagat's populist work of fiction *Three Mistakes of my Life* becomes in its film avatar a well-told, superbly crafted and neatly packaged tale—a tad too neatly—with all the questions finding answers and peace and hope in the end. Deepa Mehta's *1947 Earth*, adapted from Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, reflects the turmoil, the frustrations, and the lack of faith in people and institutions in the literary text, with nothing to redeem the actions of any of the characters in the end. It compels us to confront the irrational but cold-blooded choices that ordinary men like the Ice-Candy Man are capable of, and the arbitrariness of political decisions that trample the lives of millions. There is no comfort but caution as the fragmented narrative points to the fragments of human relationships dissolved into identity politics. For the purpose of historical artifact and archive, *Earth* will perhaps serve as a testimony of caution against the catastrophic consequences of a singular identity politics.

The form of the two films and their narratives reveals a "political unconscious" in their representations of the Muslim voice. While Deepa Mehta's film depicts the horrific pains of the birth of two nations, Kapoor's film uses the nation as recourse to restoration of sanity and even reconciliation. But as representations of Muslim identities, Madhava Prasad's reminder is useful: "These texts are works of ideology, not mirrors of reality. The changing realities are, no doubt, one of the conditions that make these films possible and necessary, not in order to reflect these conditions, but to construct ideological resolutions for the contradictions that accompany these changes" (Prasad 237).

Notes

1. In the 1970s and 1980s Hindi films were categorized as “mainstream” and “art or parallel” cinema. The categorization was in many ways arbitrary but came to be associated with particular actors/directors and the kind of films they made.
2. “If you want to change the system, you have to be a part of it and delve into it deep” became a defining sentence for movie-goers of our generation growing up in the late 1980s and 1990s perhaps because it reflected so well the contradictory emotions of frustrations and faith in the democratic system of the nation.
3. Parallel cinema is a movement in Indian cinema that originated in the Bengal in 1950s as an alternative to the mainstream cinema. It concentrates on contemporary socio-political problems of the country. These films are made for the elite audiences and they are expected to change their thought processes.

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