

Girl from across the border

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Abducting, marrying, stealing or looting the rivaling community's women is not an alien concept in the feudal society. It has transformed into rituals and cultural norms as means of production have transmuted over time. The same expressions and prejudice is being reflected in movies where a girl from the rival country falls in love with a boy from their own.

Benedict Anderson (1991) and Ernest Gellner (1983) have said that nations are ideological constructions or "imagined communities". The artificial nature of cartographic borders and homogeneous national identity, mixed with deeply anchored feudal male chauvinism still exhibits itself time to time in each and every aspect of sub-continental life. Media and art are no exception, especially so for cross-border relations, perceptions and prejudices.

Cinema, as a fundamental part of sub-continental daily life, can serve as jagged social gauge to interrogate this hypothesis. Generally both Bollywood and Lollywood make us believe that love subdues all societal and class oriented inequalities; it transcends beyond the known time space and given social scenarios and chauvinisms. 'But when it comes to cross-border love, the wilting Pakistani girl melts into the arms of her Indian savior' as concluded by Amber Rahim Shamsi [1]. Though she has completely ignored the Pakistani films made in response, in which an Indian Hindu or Sikh girl is always doomed to be trapped by the muscular beauty of a Pakistani Muslim hero. Feudal male chauvinism blended with pseudo nationalistic chauvinism has many shades which find space in every aspect of life, including drama and movies. It's highly probable that neither Indian nor Pakistani audience would ever welcome a movie if genders are reversed. The Pakistani boy winning over an Indian girl, or an Indian male winning over a Muslim Pakistani girl, is perceived as hurting the pride of the other nation's males. In Bollywood movies Indian male lead charms his way into the affections of the Pakistani female lead and vice versa. Sixty-three years of separation have put people on both sides of border in the hands of bigoted media machinery in the name of the 'nation building process'.

India's film industry has played vital role in shaping perceptions about Pakistan among the Indian audience. Although concepts of Akhand Bharat (One united India comprising the whole South Asia) and Hindu Dharm remained favorite topics of some early film makers like Prithvi Raaj Kapoor and Manoj Kumar, but anti-Pakistan tones were quite low. Until the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, a clause of censorship rules restricted producers to use the jargon 'enemy nation'. Later this clause was nullified by authorities and hence there was no stop and 'you-have-to-hate-Pakistan-if-you-love-India juggernaut' [2]. A new trend in Bollywood started and eventually touched its peak - using rough communal and hate-based dialogues against Pakistan [3]. Gadar, Henna, Bombay, Border, Hindustan ki Qasam, Roja, Qayamat, Asambhav, LOC Kargil, Lakshiya, Hi Ram, Uzar, Train to Pakistan and Mission Kashmir are some of the movies which earned hate from across the border but lot more appreciation in local cinemas. Karen Gabriel articulates about J. P. Dutta's above mentioned movie Border that 'Dutta's films are not an innocent rendition of history; rather they constitute a rewriting of history, with the ideological purpose of valorizing a certain construct of Indian-ness' [4]. Henna was the first movie released in 1991 which clearly used terms and signs

to explicitly portray Pakistan as 'enemy state'. Violence, revenge, pride and hate can be smelled as main ingredients of the recipes used by Indian movie makers. Patriotic movies of early years, after independence, generally portrayed colonial powers and capitalist system as 'enemy of nationhood' but that trend was changed later with more aggression, violence, blood and gore.

In Pakistan's Lollywood, it was the establishment and the state who tried to use celluloid as a 'nation building' agent. Zia's martial law era (1977-88) was the worst time for media, especially for the film industry. Military dictator promulgated the Motion Picture Ordinance in 1979 which further restrained any artistic expression to challenge the so-called Islamic values and foreign policy as defined by military regime [5]. The urban middle class found an escape in pirated copies of Indian and Hollywood movies available on video tapes while the masses were served with highly censored non-political action movies. These Rambo-type movies were a distorted expression of rebellion against the military establishment as the creative talent was suffocated in the name of religion. The government also tried to produce some movies about the 'ideology' of Pakistan but made sure that Jinnah's speeches about secular basis of country could not be shown at all or at least censored [6].

A by-product of these so-called 'nation building' was obviously anti-neighbor movies, as the national identity in both India and Pakistan is largely conceived as based on enmity towards the archrival - especially in Pakistan [7]. This deep-rooted antagonism further manifests in distorted artistic expressions and symbols when it rubs elbows with male chauvinism and a sense of superiority. Abducting, marrying, stealing or looting the rivaling community's women is not an alien concept in the feudal society. It has transformed into rituals and cultural norms as means of production have transmuted over time. The same expressions and prejudice is being reflected in movies where a girl from the rival country falls in love with a boy from their own.

Let's first have a brief look on some selected Indian movies of this type. Although the list of films about cross-communal love and marriages is rather long (e.g. Bombay, Dahek: A Burning Passion, Shaheed e Mohabbat Boota Singh, Lahore, Firaag, Train to Pakistan), the common factor is that the girl belongs to a Muslim family but boy is follower of Hindu or Sikh creed.

Gadar: Ek Prem Katha - 2001

After the partition of India in 1947, thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were forced to flee, leaving their wealth and belongings behind. During this turmoil, Tara Singh a Truck Driver, rescues a young Muslim woman named Sakina, both fall in love with each other and get married. When things calm down, Sakina decides to travel across the border to Pakistan where her father is now a politician. When Sakina does not return, Tara goes to look for her, and finds out that her father is refusing to let her return, and would like her to marry a Muslim. Tara is beaten, but he persists. When this matter starts to generate nationwide attention, Sakina's parents put forth a number of conditions that Tara must fulfill to let Sakina be his wife, some of which are that he change his religion to Islam; join the Pakistani army and battle the Indians; change his name to a suitable Islamic name; and yell out as loud as he can "Victory to Pakistan", and "Death to India".

Veer-Zaara - 2004

Veer Pratap Singh, a pilot in the Indian Air Force one day meets a beautiful Pakistani heiress, Zaara Hayaat Khan, as she travels to a small Indian village to scatter the ashes of one of her family's loyal servants. Veer has family in the village, and while most Indians show no affection for Pakistanis, his aunt and uncle are willing to take Zaara in for the night. It isn't long before Veer finds himself falling for her; however, Veer learns that Zaara is engaged to a Pakistani Muslim. A friend of Zaara contacts Veer and tells him that Zaara wants out of her engagement and has strong feelings for him,

but when he comes to her rescue, matters take a turn for the worse and Veer winds up in jail. Twenty years later, Veer is still behind bars, and finds that his case is being given a new trial, but while he has a new chance at freedom, he discovers his lawyer will be going up against a state attorney who has never lost a case.

Henna - 1991

The story revolves around the mistaken straying (due to a car accident which also caused him to suffer amnesia) of Indian male Chander Prakash into the Pakistani side of Kashmir from his own home in Srinagar, India. Already suffering from amnesia, with him falls in love a Pakistani Muslim girl Heena, amidst the controversial Indian-Pakistani tension on Kashmir which leads him to be suspected by the Pakistani police of being an Indian spy. The story is inspired by the book *Eye of the Needle*.

Pakistani filmmakers' depictions are no different, only the religion and nationality of the characters are reversed. Anti-Indian movies and anti-Hindu symbols are a common spice also of many movies, e.g. *Musalman*, *Ghar kab Aoo Gay*, *Larki Punjaban*, *Tere Pyar Mein*, *International Gurelly* etc.

Lakhon mein Aik - 1967

A Hindu Brahmin leaves his daughter, Shakuntala, with his Muslim friend amidst the communal riots of 1947 while he ascertains how things are across the border promising to return for her. Meanwhile, a Muslim hears of his family's slaughter on the other side. Unknown to him, his son has survived, lost his memory and is being brought up by a kindly Pathan. He defends Shakuntala from a mob and becomes her foster father while waiting for her father to come back for her. Shakuntala grows up and falls in love with the Pathan's son, a truck driver (Ejaz Durrani). The truck driver gets his memory back and is reunited with his father. However, he has forgotten his love for Shakuntala. Nevertheless, he falls in love with her again. Shakuntala's father returns having spent years in a mental asylum in India. He takes Shakuntala back with him to India. In India, Shakuntala is married off to a Hindu man. When he finds out about her past, he decides to call her lover to the border to kill him but Shakuntala goes to the border to warn him and takes the bullet meant for him.

Larki Punjaban - 2003

During the communal riots of 1947, a young Muslim man finds a young Sikh girl who had been separated from her family. Risking the anger of the mobs, he brings her home and offers her sanctuary. Soon both fall in love with each other. She converts to Islam and they get married.

After some 50 years she contacts her sister, pretending to be a long lost Muslim friend and invites her and the family to travel to Lahore for religious pilgrimage. Her family travels over to Lahore, the sisters lived together as friends, not knowing about their real relationship. During their stay as the guests of the Muslim family, history begins to repeat itself. Preetam, daughter of the visiting Sikh family starts to get friendly with the son of the host Muslim family. When the Sikh family discovers that a relationship was blossoming, they quickly return to India. However, the young couple keeps in touch on the telephone and the Internet and their love for each other grows.

Preetam's family realizing the potential problems sends her off to Malaysia to marry her fiancée. The Muslim guy's family watching his despair persuades him to travel to Malaysia to complete his education. Both lovers meet there in Malaysia and decide to face the wrath of their families.

Tere Pyaar Main - 2000

Preity is a young Sikh girl who moves to Pakistan for pilgrimage with her father falls in love with a

Pakistani boy - Ali. However, the star-crossed lovers have to deal with a clash of cultures, religions and disapproving parents. Ali travels to India to meet his lover but is being abducted by Indian army and branded a Pakistani spy. Later, Ali flees from Indian army's custody and must fight off the entire Indian Army to bring his girl back to Pakistan.

Ironically many liberal and progressive filmmakers also fell in with one or other sort of chauvinistic ideas including progressive director of blockbuster Pakistani movie Kartar Singh Saifuddin Saif, renowned actress turned activist Nandita Das in her movie *Firaaq* and Khuswant Singh in *Train to Pakistan*.

Riaz ul Hassan

P.S.

* From Viewpoint:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/fullstory.php?t=Girl%20from%20across%20the%20border&f=full-5-july-23.php&y=2010&m=july>

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Footnotes

[1] Shamsi AR, Couldn't she just find a nice Indian boy? *Dawn Blog* 2010 April 03; Available from: URL: <http://blog.dawn.com/2010/04/03/couldn%E2%80%99t-she-just-find-a-nice-indian-boy/>

[2] From 70's subtle war films to 90's more aggressive war films. 2008 Jan. 25; Available from: URL: <http://www.bollywoodmantra.com/news/from-70-s-subtle-war-films-to-90-s-more-aggressive-war-films/2109/>

[3] Baldauf S. Films of Pakistan and India wage war by celluloid. *The Christian Science Monitor* 2001 August 21; Available from: URL: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0821/p1s4-wosc.html>

[4] Gabriel K. Manning the Border: gender and war in 'Border'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 1998 April 11-17; 33(1): 828-832

[5] Talbot I. *Inventing the nation: India and Pakistan*. London: Arnold; 2000. p. 202-204

[6] Gazdar M. *Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997*. Karachi: Oxford; 1997. p. 149-156.

[7] Ahmed K. Hindrances to cooperation. *South Asian Journal* 2003 Aug-Sep; 1(1) and Katyal KK. India's South Asian neighbourhood. *South Asian Journal* 2003 Aug-Sep; 1(1)