



Thematic and Semiotics analysis of Deepa Mehta's film Earth: 1947

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Abstract: Deepa Mehta is an International figure engaged in the direction of Hindi films. She has made a niche for herself in the field of film direction. This research paper is an endeavour to undertake in-depth analysis of her film Earth-1947. This film is based on the pangs of the partition of India. The film narrates how a peaceful part of land faces turbulent times with a political announcement about the partition of India. The film narrates the saga of bloodshed in the streets of Lahore after the announcement of the independence of India. Fast friends become sworn enemies. The partition perturbed the lives of millions of people. It is true that all human beings have same colour of blood but they get alienated on the awakening of numerous differences among them. The cinematographic beauty of the film underlines the highest level of direction.

Keywords: Partition, Turbulent times, Partition, Enemies, Direction.

1. Theme:

The theme of the film matches appropriately with unfaithful historical events which were ever known in the history of partition of India. 'Earth: 1947' directed by Deepa Mehta is based on the novel "Cracking India" by Bapsi Sidhwa. "Earth" in reference to the content of the film represents an amount of landmass over which the conflict of occupying the proportion of land occurs. Film depicts the condition of those individuals who remained peaceful before partition and are now unable to search proper shelter for themselves. Film depicts the horrific situation of partition through the eyes of a lame eight year old girl. Referring to various instances where arguments arising among friends as to who might live in Pakistan occur. Burning of houses of Hindus, killings of Muslims in train and the protest by Sikhs to reclaim Lahore as their land to live entails that the men who were bonded by friendship are now demanding their own rights. The film showcases that Shanta's role is equivalent to Earth which pulls people by gravitational force. The film depicts violence arisen in the aftermath of India's independence in Lahore. From every corner of the street the killing of people in their houses; such riots-like situations give birth to more politics of appeasement. Earth foretold a history which is unknown to the people of recent times. The displacement of people from their own lands and enforcement in letting them to become refugees is the cruellest act. The act of dividing Lahore from India proved to be a futile decision which perturbed the lives of millions. Public dreams get shackled into the broken pieces and it would take a lot of time to overcome their hurtful losses. After India's independence, film exhibits violence through the swirl of viscous events that traumatized the lives of many innocents. Engulfed by the horrifying scenes of bloodshed, this fiction elopes the values of mankind when it comes to the state of one's acquisition and prophecy. Weak political discussions are the composition of the slow arbitrary government that carved out Pakistan from India and snatched out the lives of many unknown innocents. Separation of people from their own state is like separating the soul from the body. A body without spirit is regarded as dead body in a similar way separating the people from their own inhabitant oozes out life from it. Betrayal of trust and deceitful attitude of people is also shown in this narrative.

2. Plot:

The opening scene begins with Lenny who comes from a wealthy Parsee family. Lenny narrates the entire story that starts with her dialogue "I was eight year old, living in Lahore in March of 1947, when the British Empire in India started to collapse. Along with talks of India's independence from Britain came rumblings about its division into countries, Pakistan and India. Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who had lived together as one entity for centuries, suddenly started to clamour for pieces of India for themselves. The arbitrary line of division the British would draw to carve up India in August of 1947 would scar the continent forever."

The film deals with emotional instability upon the uprooting of people from their own land. Mr Singh, a Sikh neighbour and Mr. Rogers, a British Inspector General of Police, who have come to dine with Lenny parents, enter into a quarrel. Bitter words are exchanged between them about ruling by Britishers and self-rule. The quarrel turns aggressive



in Lenny's home. The film exhibits arguments taking place among Dil Nawaz, Ice Candy Man (Aamir Khan), Hasan, (Rahul Khanna) and Sher Singh over the partition of India. It also throws light on the friendship among people belonging to different religions. For Lenny, Dil Nawaz is her best friend. Dil Nawaz tries to add humour in the film by reciting some poetic lines and acts like God's messenger. The film focuses mostly on Lenny's caretaker and her name is Shanta (Nandita Dass). She is a Hindu woman upon whom two main characters Hasan and Dil Nawaz shower their love. Shanta's body is compared to 'Earth' at whom the entire love (war) is fought. Dil Nawaz teaches Shanta how to fly a kite and celebrates spring festival Baisakhi with her and Lenny baby. Seeing his ground breaking skills and passion for flying kites, Lenny gets smitten by him. Rising differences over getting a separate country for Muslims is also seen in the film whereas Lenny feels uncomfortable after listening to their talks. She insists them not to talk about these matters. She is unable to resist the tension arising out of communal disharmony. Nehru's decision along with Jinnah to carve out Pakistan from India propagates riots among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Lenny sees turbulence arising among the different mobs of three different religions. Since Lenny belongs to a Parsee community, her family is unable to predict what might happen to them as they are treated as a minority. Lenny's parents are worried that partition is harming their business. Insecurities of Lenny's family along with their Sikh friend portrays that Lahore is not their land.

Human commotion and mind-twisting thoughts of Dil Nawaz, Hari, Shanta and Lenny's parents are also illustrated in the film. As for Hari, living in Lahore will be the deadliest circumstances as he belongs to Hindu religion. Thus he converts himself as a Muslim and accepts Islam. They also foretell that Lahore supports Muslims much more than any minority group. Hence, the partition of India in 1947 led to the division of not only land but also of the people. Many districts including Gurdaspur and Pathankot came into the Indian territories whereas Lahore which was the cluster of people belonging to different religion went on to become Pakistani estate. Sher Singh and many of the Hindu characters take different turns in protecting themselves. Many characters including Hasan, Shanta, Sher Singh and Lenny's parents try to anticipate the unpredictable events which might affect their lives forever. A few hurtful instances take place. A ten year old girl marries old dwarf man due to fear and terror prevalent in the society. Dil Nawaz reacts violently when he sees a train full of dead bodies of Muslims and his own sisters have been murdered brutally. Dil Nawaz sets himself to take a revenge for his sisters' murder. He wants revenge from the people who are innocent. The most cunning way in which he betrays Lenny by addressing a Muslim mob to snatch Shanta from the house showcases that he doesn't have any heart. Dil Nawaz feels jealous as Shanta loves Hasan instead of him. He leads the mob that kills Hasan after knowing that he is planning to go to Amritsar with Shanta. The tragic ending of lovers Shanta and Hasan speaks of any pre-partitioned times Romeo and Juliet who fight against the world to resurrect faith in their love bond. Islamic radicalization is exhibited in the ending scene where Lenny's family faces horrific harassment by the Muslim mob. At the end, Lenny talks about her regrets that she herself betrayed Shanta Dass and after that incident she never heard about her again. The concluding instances elucidate that riot-propagating people have no religion besides taking revenge for their lost ones is their priority. Jealousy and brutality have no religion and they care least for humanity.

3. Code, Signs & Symbol:

Earth stands as the symbol of partition of India. Dil Nawaz gets possessive about Shanta due to the sweet gestures of Hasan towards her. In a scene, Dil teaches Shanta to fly kites by holding her hands. It symbolises love and care. Gift of gold coin to Shanta is symbol of love of Dil Nawaz for her as the gold is precious and a costly item and must be given to someone very special. On the contrary, broken heart of Dil Nawaz symbolises lost love. Hasan's comforting nature towards Shanta and his embracing touch at her shows that two birds are getting nested in threads of love. Fire in the houses of Hindus signifies anger and anguishment of one religion towards the other. Colours like red, yellow and terracotta are signs of mixed emotions of the characters. The symbol of the film is as strong as it tells that it is the holding of a particular landmass for which the entire group of people has been divided and people become enemies of even their own friends. Earth is also symbolised with Shanta's fate. She is the lady of down-to-earth nature on whom the entire story takes many folds and treats her as property. Muslims celebrating 'Basant festival' symbolise that culture and festivals know no boundaries and have no religion. Scenes like tearing of the doll and breaking of the plate by Lenny symbolise her deepest anguishment at the separation of India and Pakistan.

4. Metaphor:

All human beings have same colour of blood but they get alienated on the awakening of numerous differences among them. 'Earth: 1947' depicts that humanity is above religion and those who degrade humanity and fidelity in name of religion create devastating circumstances for their own selves. People who were friends before the partition of India became sworn enemies and forget their moral values. Dil Nawaz who considers himself to be a man of joyous nature turns aggressive due to riots and loss of his family members. Lenny compares Mrs. Singh with buffaloes and Mr. Singh compares British IG with a White monkey. Dil Nawaz tells Shanta that kite must be treated like a lover. Dil Nawaz



compares Lenny to moon by saying that ‘Kash tere chehre pe chechak ke daag hote chand to tu hai sitare bhi sath hote.’ Parsees are compared with chameleons and sugar in milk by Lenny’s mother. Parrots in cage symbolise loss of freedom and once they are set free by Dil Nawaz, they are free birds. At the dining table one of the friends of Dil Nawaz compares Sikhs with sword. He says that Sikhs are like a sword for Hindu and they can be used against Muslims in the war

5. Cinematography:

Cinematography of ‘Earth: 1947’ has successfully been completed because of the hard bearing efforts of Mr. Giles Nutgens. While making Earth, he uses camera angles like established camera shot and master shot. Major part of the film is shot by using mid shot camera angles. In the scene where a train is coming from Gurdaspur to Lahore station, he uses established camera shot so that viewers are able to get the view of the full scene. For shooting the climax scene, he uses a dolly zoom camera angle to feature the fierce and forceful presence of Muslim mob facing Lenny's family. In this shot, he also featured Dil Nawaz to showcase his rising dominance. Mr. Giles has shot most of the conversation among Dil Nawaz, Shanta and Lenny by using the low angle camera shot. For filming the eating style of people in the film, he uses the master shoot. There is a scene in the film in which Dil, Hasan, Shanta, Sher Singh along with Lenny are seen eating food together. This is the scene, where Mr. Giles took the help of the master shot to capture the togetherness of old time friends whose friendship soar through the passing times. Cinematographer brilliantly shot the theatrical sequences in the film. With the use of colours, lightning and props cinematographer creates unnatural mise-en-scene in the film.

6. Locale:

The film has been shot around the cities of Pakistan. The focal point of its shooting took place in Lahore where certain surroundings and houses formed in British colonies are picturised. A few scenes of railway junction from Gurdaspur to Lahore are captured in the film. The houses of rich aristocrats like Lenny’s house are also showcased in the film. The small eating outlet of Nawaz, Shanta, Hasan, and Sher Singh is also displayed in the film. Clean and lush green gardens of Lahore add beauty to the film. Hindu and Sikh colonies are also portrayed in the film. The verandas of Muslim built houses in Lahore are also pictured along with the men embracing their love for kite flying. Streets of Lahore where the bloodshed of all hindus, Muslim and Sikhs is picturised and riots among them turn violent. Apart from Atari darwaaza, Lahori Darwaza , Mochi Darwaaza , Shalmi where people belonging to different religion live. Scenes at railway station are very hurting where train arrives with dead bodies of people and brings about change in the character of Dil Nawaz.

7. Message:

Message of the film remains strong and congruent to the fact that the division of estate is the division of people. The British rule over India led to the massive furore and tragically rising conflicts. Even after the rule of British many years ago, the country remained socially distressed in straightening its own political affairs. Fragmenting the society over differences on religion, caste and gender etc. is the most ridiculed thought which was possessed by the leaders of that time. The stains of blood at the surface of every corner, the traumatising of those people who witness these riots is the most harming incident which anyone may come across. Dil Nawaz takes revenge of his brutal killing of his sisters. The beauty of a peaceful city Lahore whose ambience used to boom with fragrance of friendship becomes the place where hatred, contempt and the clouds of gloominess at the time of partition. The partition of Lahore from Indians territory was far most devastating result of any estate lives of whose people has been put at risk. Many socially born evils like child marriages are also exhibited in the film that brought the audience back to the reality of events that took place in the platitude of former Indian estate. The predicament possessed as threat to the people living in Lahore was the signal that people who were unaware about the whereabouts of city should seek shelter to a safer place. After the partition how dreadfully things changed for each and every individual preaches one thing that separation of the land from people tends to divide them and create irreparable damage in their lives. Since Lahore was getting the acknowledgment of becoming a Muslim city, the snatching up of Shanta from Lenny’s home is quite disturbing because it showcases that at the times of emergency, trustworthy people become deceitful. Director beautifully depicts the vulnerable role of females in the society. The questions that after partition will Lahore come under Indian Territory or in Pakistan? The lesson of dividing the people on basis of religion does not predict any stability to the government. Some wounds remain inhalable. Unity and integrity among the people of different communities is of foremost importance. It is self-evident from the partition of land does not lead to any fruitful consequences. The film which unfolds many covered facts of film and tells people briefly about the impact of those hurtful incidents which took the souls out from many individuals. It creates a huge impact on the audience as it tells the importance of living in the society which upholds strong fundamentalism and supports the basic right of every individual. This classical narrative



questions the British who rule for more than two hundred years and left the people with pains of miseries and conflicts which remain unhealed even after so many years.

8. Conclusion:

The in-depth study of the film shows the depiction of the saga of bloodshed at the time of partition of India. The film presents a vivid description of the stains of blood at the face of humanity. Through this film Deepa Mehta underlines the fact that division of land is not necessarily the division of the hearts of people. It may, at times, spread communal riots but humanity wins in the end. Such riots-like situations appease political leaders the most as filthy politics cares little about the human values. Witnessing communal riots is the most harming incident which anyone may come across. The film unfolds many facts of the partition of India and tells people briefly about the impact of those upsetting incidents which took the souls out of many individuals. Division of people on the basis of religion does not guarantee stability on any piece of land. The partition of India had far most devastating impact on those people the lives of who has been put at risk. Many socially born evils like child marriages are also exhibited in the film that brought the audience back to the reality of events that took place in the platitude of former Indian estate. Though there is not much variety of shots yet the use of colours, lightning and props cinematographer creates unnatural mise-en-scene in the film. Thematically the film is of superb quality.

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