

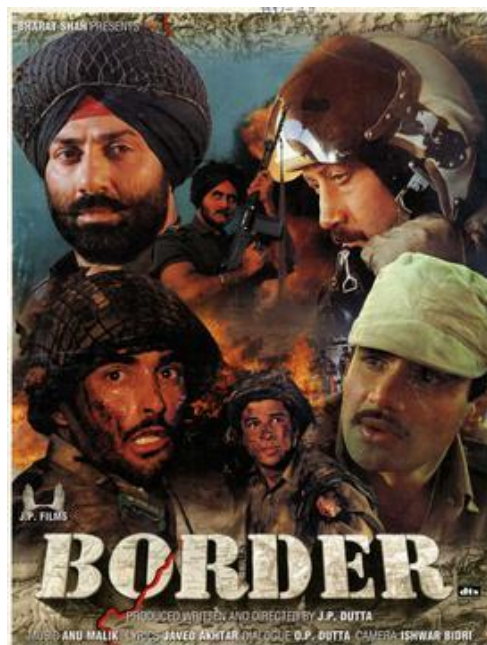
“Birth of Nation” in Hindi War Films of Chetan Anand and J.P. Dutta

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Introduction:

War with its inherent scope for action, conflict, pathos and heroism presents itself as an attractive subject-matter to the filmmaker. Although Hindi cinema has not perfected the genre of war film, Chetan Anand's *Haqeeqat*, *Hindustan Ki Kasam* and J.P. Dutta's *Border* & *Loc* based around war can be considered as war films¹. Before Chetan Anand made *Haqeeqat* in 1964, war films in our country were alien as a genre unlike Hollywood where war films have been an integral part right from the days of the silent cinema such as King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) or *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). But Bollywood never had to make a proper war film till the making of *Haqeeqat*. This was mainly because up until the 1962 Sino-Indian War, India had not been directly involved in a war. We did send our soldiers to fight for the British in World War II, but the '62 war with China was the second war that independent India faced after the skirmish with Pakistan earlier in 1947-48².



¹ *Haqeeqat* (Hindi हकीकत, Urdu: حقیقت, *Reality*) is a 1964 Hindi war-film directed by Chetan Anand and was based on the 1962 Sino-Indian War, *Hindustan Ki Kasam* (English: The Oath of Hindustan) is a 1973 war movie based on Operation Cactus Lilly in the Indo-pak war of 1971 directed by Chetan Anand *Border* is a 1997, Indian War film based on the Battle of Longewala during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, produced and directed by J. P. Dutta (top 10 films on Indo- Pak conflict, times of india, 30 march 2011)

² Quoted in *Haqeeqat* film review by Karan Bali

Therefore it is the moment of war that creates the necessity of a war films. War films became common in subsequent years a significant shift in the way Indian nation was imagined militarily and politically post 1962. In 1962, India was a humiliated and defeated nation in Sino- India conflict while In 1971 Indo-Pak conflict, India was not a mere winner in the war, but was the midwife in the birth of a new nation.³ These were interesting times as The 1950s have the reputation of a Nehruvian decade where ideals of nation building ruled the broader consensus but now victory in Indo –Pak war of 1971 gave reason to people to rejoice and revel in the glory of war. Filmmakers were also not untouched and they resorted to making war films whose subject revolved primarily around war.

³ The reference here is to the formation of an independent Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) in 1971.

War films for filmmakers such as J.P. Dutta and Chetan Anand became an important means through which they explored the significance of the conflict and its aftermath of war. For my paper I have taken a look at some of the war films made by Chetan Anand and J.P. Dutta. A common finding in my seminar paper has been that purpose of the war film is not the same in 1990s as it was in 1960s. I argue that war films of Chetan Anand significantly varies from J.P. Dutta in terms of scope and scale in exploring the trope of nation and nationhood and in addressing the question of women and their role in family and nation as a whole. While Chetan Anand's (film referred here is *Haqeeqat*) approach and purpose was patriotic and self-explanatory, to help the audience get behind the war and set aside their doubts and fears for the country participation as in case of Sino-Indian conflict while in case of J.P. Dutta (film referred here is *Border*) it is the Dutta's pride in the Indian Army and its accomplishments on the battlefield is what gets reflected and a major outcome in his film is the narrow, abusive nationalism and propagation of hatred for enemy state through its rhetoric wielding character. In J P Dutta film *Border* Jingoism and hyper nationalism gives rise to cultural nationalism based around religion majority and imaginary earth mother. Finally I argue that "War" in the war film genre is more than a subject matter, it is a melting pot of culturally and historically shaped visual forms, affective experiences, and collective memories and myths. War movies also leave room for pride, dignity, the recognition of Indian military power and even nostalgia for the war years. They are an important means by which people explore the meanings of the various conflicts India had with its close neighbors.

Textual analysis of *Haqeeqat*, *Hindustan Ki Kasam* & *Border*.

Haqeeqat is based on the Chinese aggression of 1962 (20 October to 21 November year 1962). This was a war fought exclusively for the reasons of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. The war began as a cartographic battle provoked by the China's Pictorial Map which included large parts of India in Chinese territory⁴. So this movie highlights geography, which is one of the most important elements in the formation of a nation and the idea of national sovereignty being crucial to the process of nation-formation, is closely linked to the idea of territorial integrity. So if cartographic sovereignty is violated then respective countries is brought to war [rewrite this sentence]. In *Haqeeqat*, the Chinese soldier shouting into the bullhorn, "Yeh jagah hamara ha!" (this land is ours), highlights the enemy's expansionist ambitions and makes clear India's compulsions. With this scene, the film justifies India's defensive posture in the war of 1962. Maj. Iftekar (Balraj Sahani) explains to his troops, who are skeptical about the purpose of the war, the need to defend the motherland. To make his reasoning convincing, he invokes the image of apacifist India, which has always attracted hordes of invaders. However, when pushed into a "do or die" situation, it is the duty of the Army to live up to their rich military tradition the nation has produced. The film thus

⁴ Cartographic conflict arose due to dispute over widely separated Aksai chin and Arunachal Pradesh border regions. Aksai Chin, claimed by India belonged to Kashmir and by China to be part of Xinjiang, that contains an important road link that connects the Chinese regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. China's construction of this road was one of the triggers of the Cartographic conflict.

makes nationhood an indisputable expression of territorial integrity because its sovereignty is fully, flatly and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory" (Anderson 23).



The other important cinematic tool that Chetan Anand uses in his films are documentary footage. In *Hindustan ki Kasam*, Chetan Anand uses a narrative strategy of using original shots of war scenes in the style of a documentary what Roland Barthes called the "having-been-there" quality of the photographic image, which enhances the visual and emotional tone of the film and it also allows the primacy of "having-been-there" or its narrative equivalent, i.e., the first person account in war discourse. The documentary footage not only authenticates the content of the film but the photographic images of the war reflect the ideological dissemination of India as a strong nation with valiant men. The use and integration of documentary material into cinematically staged events. That includes footage of real battles and images of rituals of military life. Thus edited version of both documentary and fictional footage creates a dense visual memory. It provides viewers to establish a relationship to the historical events and they become an emotional participant in these documentary images. Overall discursive nature of visual memory creates mode of remembrance, promoting a sense of community that develops through the cinematic staging of a shared memory.



Family vs Nation debate in Hindi war films

Althusser lists the family as one of the State Ideological Apparatuses. In war films like *Haqeeqat*, *Hindustan ki kasam*, *Border*, the family embodies representation of the nation. In these films family, which is generally considered as a private space, is shown as a training ground for its members. It is in the family that one learns the values and behavioral patterns expected of people in public spaces. One of the scenes in the film amply shows this. The *Mise-en-scène*⁵ consists of the house of a lower middle-class family (the class from which most of the troops hail). There is a young man in the family who insists on joining the army like his brother and father before him. The camera lingers over the garlanded picture of the father in uniform.⁶

A close analysis of the scene confirms that family is replacing the nation and love for the nation is merely an extension of love for the family. There are several scenes in these films where love and cause of the nation often comes in the way of the family and the protagonist readily accepts the nation as his first and foremost priority. One good example is seen in J.P. Dutta's *Border* in which cook Havildar Bhagheeram (played by Kulbhushan Kharbanda) calls his regiment like a "family". For him the idea of adopted family is manifested in the regiment he is serving.

Family vs. nation contradiction is also seen in the scene in which Subedar Mathura Das (Sudesh Berry) who wishes to return to his ailing wife is reprimanded for expressing joy at being granted leave but his joy is short-lived because he becomes a subject of ridicule of his Company commander and his companions when he shows concern for his cancer-stricken wife and children. His joy at the prospect of returning home is shown to be childish as well as cowardly just because he wants to attend his ailing wife. So it is quite obvious that Mathura Das can only redeem himself by returning to his unit and dying a martyr's death, leaving behind a widow and a pair of fatherless children. So a close examination of the scene makes it quite clear that familial duties become subservient to national duties in Hindi war films. Films like *Border* and *Haqeeqat* explore the inherent contradictions towards duty to the family and duty to the nation and in this struggle it is the nation that always gets the priority. The family-nation relationship is very crucial to the understanding of ideological and metaphorical structures that validate participation in war and puts nation above everything else.

Films like *Haqeeqat* negotiate the family vs. nation dilemma through the characters of the father (Jayant) and the son (Dharmendra), who also share the official relationship that exists between a Brigadier and a Captain. In the film, the Brigadier-Captain relationship overshadows the privacy of the father-son relationship. The father's public identity as a Brigadier clashes with his private identity as a father so his image of a soldier comes in a way of being a good father. So In

⁵ *Mise-en-scène* is an expression used to describe the design aspect of a theatre or film production, which essentially means "visual theme" or "telling a story. It is also commonly used to refer to multiple single scenes within the film to represent the film. (quoted in Brian Henderson, "The Long Take," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), page 315.

⁶ Quoted in Gita Viswanath 'Visualizing the Nation: A Study of War Films', (page 130)

order to be a good soldier, he must be prepared to sacrifice his son whenever nation calls upon to do so. That is why the Brigadier father orders his Captain son not to leave his post even in the face of imminent death.

The trope of the family is further explored in *Hindustan ki Kasam* (In the name of India), another war film by Chetan Anand, set against the 1971 Indo-Pak war (2 December to 13 December). The film focuses on a family that has a long martial tradition. Most of the males in the family have been officers in the air force. Wing commander Rajiv Batra (Balraj Sahni) and Squadron Leader Rajesh Batra (Parikshit Sahni) are the sons of an army officer who died a martyr's death in the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Their cousin, Usmaan separated during partition, is now a pilot in Pakistan Air Force. Usmaan shoots down Rajiv's plane in the war. When he visits the Batra family, he realizes that he has killed his own cousin. His remorse intensifies the futility of war, especially between two nations, such as India and Pakistan that were carved out of a single entity. The use of the metaphor of a split family is deliberately used for drawing reference to the partition of the subcontinent.

Locating Women in war films of Chetan Anand and J.P. Dutta

In most of Hindi war films like *Haqeeqat*, *Hindustan ki kasam* and *Border*, women's perceptions and point of view are often controlled by the narrative used by the filmmakers as the filmmakers' point of view that mainly comes from larger discourse of mainstream patriarchy. War filmic language and narratives construct the tropes of patriarchy, masculinity and femininity. We often find idealization of the nation as a mother in war films on the one hand, and the valorization of women's subservience to national goals on the other. This accounts for the paradoxical construction of womanhood in war discourse. The portrayal of the mother as one who must perform her primary duty of producing brave sons for the battlefield belongs to the tradition of the "nationalist mother" image, which has a long history in literature and cinema.⁷

Women are generally represented as victims in war films, and her militancy is acceptable only if it is in the interest of the nation. For example, the heroine of the film (played by Priya Rajwansh) is a spy on a mission to Pakistan. The female spy in war narratives is resonant of the sexualized and manipulative character associated with the Mata Hari image.

Women are the most vulnerable group in war like situation. In the film *Haqeeqat* the violation of female body by the enemy soldier becomes an important trope and metaphor symbolizing the violation of territory. This also highlights the fact that land and women are conventionally seen as possessions of men during the times of war. The rape of Aangmo (Priya Rajwansh), a Ladakhi girl (with whom the hero Capt. Bahadur falls in love), by an enemy soldier in the film *Haqeeqat* is a reminder of this fact. The Hindi film's abiding interest in morality and sexual purity of the heroine forces Aangmo to die a martyr's death. The closing shot in the film showing bodies of the two lovers lying dead beside each other indicates the triumph of love. Such an ending helps to cover the shame and loss of face at the defeat in war. The 1962 indo-China war is etched in the Indian collective unconscious as a national shame, as India had to concede parts of its territory to China. In combining the heroism of the soldiers fighting under severe

odds with the heroism of the heroine, the film claims “a moral victory” for India⁸.

Birth of cultural nationalism in *Border*



Since it is natural for the victorious nation to assume a condescending attitude towards the loser, one of the worst manifestations of such a narrow, abusive nationalism is the propagation of hatred for the other. *Border* highlights such a politics of hatred by vilifying the other. Major Chandpuri (Sunny Deol) denounces his Pakistani counterparts as “*Lahore ke gandhe nale ke keeda* (worms of the filthy gutters of Lahore).” This particular scene in the film establishes the supremacy of the Indian nation in the political and military arenas.

In the movie *Border* army is often showed as a homo-social universe that acts as a meeting point of male bonding and camaraderie. For example, in the film the cook calls his regiment a family to him. For him the idea of adopted family is manifested in the regiment he serves. This whole idea about the private lives interspersed with the army life is shown in the song *Sandese Aate Hai* (there’s a message) in which arrival of mail reveals the private lives of the soldier. The song and music evoked strong emotional responses from the audience which is further established by the fact that it became hit across all circuits.

Concluding Remarks:

Chetan Anand movies (movie referred here is *Haqeeqat*) were not only dedicated to the project of “nation building” but also paid homage to the Nehruvian ideals of *panchsheel*. These war movies explained and dramatized what had happened; presented examples of heroic soldiers who fought

valiantly for the nation and contributed to the bringing lost pride into the nation because of defeat in Indo-China war. War films of Chetan Anand plays a vital role in reclaiming and validating the actions of military men, and in promoting the idea that there had been positive aspects of the war experience, despite the defeat India suffered at the hands of China. The idea of war in war films often become *dharmayudhs* (just wars) in which the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil; in which war is glorified, heroism is celebrated and masculinity is made desirable to the audience.

War films of Chetan Anand did more, however, than provide entertainment and cultivate nostalgia for the lost experience of solidarity and sacrifice of soldiers to the glory of nation. They filled gaps in people’s knowledge, presented them with heroes they could admire, and promoted the idea of war among ordinary soldiers. War films of the 1960s were clear in their aims and ideological stance in giving a homage to Nehru ideals of *Panchsheel* and nation-building. On the other hand Hindi War films made by J.P. Dutta, like *Border* fails to confront the horrors of war. Rather, it revels in the glory of war and propagate the notion of war when it is due from enemy side. In short films like *border* are shown from the eyes of hyper nationalism and are markers of nationalistic sentiments and they do not engage with the reality of the horrors of war.

Therefore, my final arguments are built around the fact that the films of Chetan Anand and J.P.Dutta weave together a predominantly statist discourse in the Indian context in which a transition from secular to cultural nationalism is built around the perspective that the real enemy lies outside the nation, and the Indian army is resolutely fighting to preserve the territorial and cartographic space of the nation. This becomes quite evident from the perspective of audience also since Hindi war films quite easily appeal to the middle class audiences, who feel a sense of belonging to the nation while watching war films. Films like *Border* became a super hit across all circuits.

My final concluding remark is that war narratives in Hindi cinema especially in Chetan Anand and J.P.Dutta films are explanatory texts act as forms of political address and construct the idea of a unitary nation, wherein a strong centralized, patriarchal state may be critiqued or challenged only up to a certain point, beyond which its authority must necessarily be accepted. These films thus offer a nationalist utopia and they use mediated experience of war by giving war an image that makes it visible and tangible to cine-goers. In short different modes of aesthetic construction used by filmmaker helps in creating a perception in which war becomes visible and palpable to us and shapes our attitude towards war as a historical event and to make moral judgments about it.

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