

Orientalism and Colonial Legacies in Bollywood's Film *Earth* (1999)

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Abstract

Bollywood is considered to be one of the significant cinemas in the world. As the Indian Sub-continent remained a British colony, its society is filled with colonial characteristics, not only in terms of society but also in terms of cinema, culture, linguistics, and literature. The partition of the Indian Sub-continent is considered one of the most important themes in twentieth-century cinema. Earth is a romantic drama-film about the partition of the Indian Sub-continent. This film depicts the period of 1947, focusing on the lives of the individuals who lived during that time. This study examines not just British occupiers' oriental representation to the colonized locals but also colonial cultural legacies in Indian Sub-continent society as depicted in the film. Edward Said's postcolonial theory, which includes the key notion of orientalism, has been applied to the film in order to analyze it.

Keywords: Orientalism, Colonial Legacies, Post Colonialism, Bollywood, Film Studies, Cinematography

Introduction

In art history, literature, and cultural studies, orientalism is the copying or portrayal of features of the Eastern world. Western writers, designers, and painters are usually the ones who create these portrayals. Much academic debate has begun to use the term 'orientalism' to refer to a general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. According to Said, the West portrays these cultures as stagnant and underdeveloped; creating a picture of oriental culture that can be researched, depicted, and reproduced in the service of imperial authority. The assumption that Western culture is advanced, logical, flexible, and superior, writes Said, is implicit in this deception. This term relates to the Orient in comparison to the Occident; the East and the West, respectively. It facilitates the West's political, economic, cultural, and social dominance, according to Edward Said, not just during colonial times, but also today (Said, 2014, p. 364). Furthermore, Said described orientalism as a theoretical idea of representation: The orient is a stage on which the entire East is circumscribed to make the Eastern world less frightening to the West and that colonialism is caused by developing world, particularly the West (Said, 2014, p. 363). Stephen Howe agreed with Said in his book *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (2000) that the exploitation of developing countries and the transfer of wealth and labour from one country to another established Western nations and empires (Howe, 2002, p. 73). The Indian Sub-continent, which was a British colony for nearly a century, is included when we talk of the East. The British colonizer has a scornful attitude towards the colonized, and these ideas are reflected in films about the division of the Indian Sub-continent. *Earth* (1999) is one of those films, made on the theme of the partition of Indian Sub-continent. It is the reason that it is bearing the traces of colonialism and portrays the colonizer's attitude with the natives. This study explores the traces of colonialism with a focus on orientalism in the society as depicted in the cinema. It is the reason that the natives of the Indian Sub-continent went through bad attitude of the colonizers, creating a sort of oriental approach. This research gap needs to be addressed as most of the researchers have analysed this film regarding violence, feminism and terrorism during the partition days. This research addresses the colonial and oriental approach of the colonisers towards the colonised natives pre and post-partition. According to the concept of orientalism by Edward Said, this research is analysing both text and images of the film *Earth* (1999) by using content analysis.

Earth (1999) is a romantic-drama film directed by Indo-Canadian film director Deepa Mehta, with British co-directors Alastair Fothergill and Mark Linfield. The director Deepa Mehta is from the origin of India therefore most of her films revolve around this landscape. The film's central topic is inspired on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*. Firstly, it was published in the United Kingdom in 1988 with the title of *Ice Candy Man* (Sidhwa, 2016). It was later released in the United States in 1991 and in India in 1992 with the title *Cracking India* (Williams, 2019). The BBC Natural History Unit and Greenlight Media collaborated on the production, with Discovery contributing some financing. The film is set in the city of Lahore, Pakistan, and takes place in the year 1947, when the Indian Sub-continent was partitioned into India and Pakistan. The film's main plot follows the life of Lenny, a juvenile polio patient. She is a member of a Parsi family. In comparison to Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, Parsis, being a small minority on both sides of the border, are safe. Shanta, her caretaker, adores her and treats her with great care. Being Parsi, they have good terms with all the people of varied religions therefore we see some lunch or dinner parties at their home. In these parties, the British citizen Mr. Rogers is always showing an oriental approach towards the natives of Indian Sub-continent. The Parsis are avoiding the migration while the Muslims are flocking to Pakistan, whereas Hindus and Sikhs are fleeing from Pakistan to India. Lenny's life has been influenced by the partition of the Indian Sub-continent, as no one cares about her any longer. Shanta, her maid, is likewise distressed, being attacked at any moment. One day, their home is being searched for Shanta.

The Indian Sub-continent's society, being a British colony, bears traces of colonialism. The film *Earth* (1999) based on the novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, an eye-witness of the partition times, portrays the last days of the colonial period of British rule. The story of the film depicts the attitude of the colonizers towards the native Easterns. Despite the fact that the country gained independence, colonial legacies still remain in the community, not only in the society but also in linguistics, literature and cinema. Moreover; in the infrastructure too, the colonialism has its glimpses. This research focuses on both orientalism and colonial legacies. The colonists' pre-partition oriental attitude towards the Eastern natives as depicted in the film was studied using Edward Said's idea of orientalism. The post-partition colonial legacies were also addressed in the society of the Indian Sub-continent as portrayed in the film. All such legacies became the part of the Indian Sub-continent's society after the arrival of the colonizers and stayed here even after their departure. Content analysis was used to examine the data in both text and image form. This strategy established a compelling argument for obtaining reliable findings from film data.

Literature Review

Said's works focus on Orientalism in European literature, particularly French literature, rather than visual art or orientalist painting. As the West has expanded to encompass the United States, Edward Said argues that the continuation of orientalism into the present may be found in influential images, particularly through American cinema. Many blockbuster feature films, such as the *Indiana Jones*, *The Mummy*, and *Disney's Aladdin* films, depict imaginative Eastern geographies. Oversimplified depictions of Arabs in Orientalist, comedy, and action films create a stationed, oppressive atmosphere. The audience's unchanging perception of these people leads to narrow-mindedness opinions. *The Sheik* (1921), *Flame of Araby* (1951), *Samson Against the Sheik* (1962), *Harum Scarum* (1965), *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Aladin* (1992), *True Lies* (1994), *The Mummy* (1999), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *The Dictator* (2012), and others are among the most famous films depicting the Orient. In all of these films, the Orient is shown as masculine, despotic, barbaric, exotic, mystical, and sexual, while Arabs are portrayed as aggressive, wealthy sheiks obsessed with white-skinned Western women and too naive to understand the value of money. If not as lovers, Arabs are portrayed as terrorists and hijackers willing to die in Allah's name (Mankhy, 2013). On the other hand, in Hollywood films, the protagonists are frequently white Americans who play the role of a hero, rescue a white woman from the arms of a nasty Arab or protecting the globe from a terrorist assault. The protagonists in the film are almost always from the West, whereas the antagonists are almost always from the East. The image of the orient in the film has remained, however this representation does not always reflect reality (Sharp, 2008). *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) feature orientalist tropes and fundamental cultural misrepresentations, according to a scholar of University of Central Florida, Ms. Kimiko Akita in an article,

Orientalism and the Binary of Fact and Fiction in 'Memoirs of a Geisha'. She says that Japanese culture and Geisha are foreign, backward, irrational, filthy, profane, promiscuous, strange, and enigmatic (Iacobelli, 2011). In terms of Indian society, until the 1820s, when the influence of "anglicists" such as Thomas Babington Macaulay and John Stuart Mill led to the promotion of a Western-style education, Company rule in India favoured Orientalism as a method for developing and maintaining positive relations with the Indians (Banerjee-Dube, 2015). The concept of orientalism is infused into the majority of Bollywood films about the partition of the Indian Sub-continent. This article focuses on one of the films on the subject. *Earth* (1999) has a number of orientalism-related topics. Deepa Mehta frames the film, according to Barendscott, in the perspective of demonstrating how stereotypes are circulated and assigned outside and within the fabric of pre- and post-Partition society. *Earth* shows viewers how meaning and worth are created unevenly amid times of violence, trauma, and inexplicable upheaval (Barendscott, 2006). In the light of this article, we see that the author Barendscott is talking about violence and trauma but it's post-partition violence created among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Films like *Pinjar* (2003), *Train to Pakistan* (1998), and *Earth* (1999), according to Urvashi Butalia, depict the plight of women who are victims of gendered violence. They don't have the right to pick their partner or to refuse a man. Either they work according to the men's whims and preferences, or they pay the price (Butalia, 2016). Ms. Butalia is expressing her concerns about the violence against the women. According to Sadan Jha, *Earth* is a harrowing look at the high price Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women pay for men's crimes (Jha, 2018). This study is also highlighting the violence against the women with a feminist approach. According to Mihika Sengupta, this film highlights the predicament of women who are victims of gendered violence. They don't have the right to pick their mate. They have no legal authority to refuse a man's request. Either they work according to men's whims and fancies or they pay the price (Sengupta & Rathaur, 2018). Ms. Mihika Sengupta also comes with a feminism, discussing the women violence during the days of the partition. The common themes in most post-Partition filmmaking in the films of both India and Pakistan released after 1947 include separation within a single family, or between lovers - both of which could be viewed as metaphors for the split of land and people during Partition, Mamta points out (Mamta, 2017). Though Ms. Mamta has touched the theme of separation but she stayed focus on family matters. According to Pavlina Radia about one another film *Heaven on Earth* by Deepa Mehta, this film points to the complex postcolonial dynamics. In her films, sociocultural paradigms are persistently re-negotiated across cultural, ethnic, class, and gender boundaries rather than strictly "maintained" or "exaggerated" (Radia, 2016). Ms. Pavlina Radia though touched the concept of postcolonialism but its another film of Deepa Mehta. It shows that the films directed by Deepa Mehta are having the glimpses of colonialism and the film *Earth* is carrying many themes of colonialism because it is made on the theme of Indian Sub-continent's partition. After reading all of these studies, we can observe that the majority of the academics focus on community violence and people being killed during the partition. With a feminist approach, the female academics concentrated on violence against women. The male academics mostly focused on political disagreements and leadership dispute over Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu divides. As a result, there is a research deficit regarding colonisers' attitudes and actions, which is the root of all violence and conflict. This study examines colonisers' attitudes toward Indian Subcontinent natives using an oriental perspective to postcolonialism. Furthermore, this study assesses the characteristics of postcolonialism that have become a part of society as colonial legacies that conquerors have imposed on the locals.

Research Approach and Data Collection

This is a study that is qualitative. This article focuses on content film analysis for the text and the images from the multiple scenes of the film. The content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data. In order to obtain reliable results, the postcolonial theory was used. Though postcolonial theory is vast, this study concentrates on Edward Said's concept of orientalism. The concept of orientalism was used in the film *Earth* (1999) to explore components of orientalism, as well as colonial legacies, from the society of the Indian Sub-continent as depicted in the film. The data has been collected from the concerned film, both in the form of text and images.

Results and Discussion

The film is set in the city of Lahore, Pakistan, and takes place in 1947, just after the partition of the Indian Sub-continent into India and Pakistan. It is for this reason that the film has themes of post colonialism, as the Indian Sub-continent was formerly a British colony. The film's main plot follows the life of Lenny, from a Parsi family muddled on the Indian Sub-continent's divide. Her parents are wealthy, so they lavish attention on her and even hire a maid to look after her. Shanta is her name, and she adores her. She spends the majority of her time in the park with the maid and her friends of various faiths. Due to the fact that the film is set during the partition of the Indian Sub-continent, postcolonial undertones are prominent. The majority of these components are found in colonial legacies such as representation, linguistics, and in the colonized nation's culture.

The film begins with a camera focus on the earth, which clearly shows fresh and damp clay. It expresses the film's central theme, which is the planet Earth. We are introduced to only a few characters in the film's early moments. As the film progresses, we observe a gathering of few friends at Lenny's house in the opening moments. As previously stated, Lenny's parents Mr. Rustam Sethna and Mrs. Bunty Sethna are wealthy and of the Parsi faith, therefore they get along well with people of all faiths. In this scenario, we witness a British family headed by Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Rogers, as well as an Indian Sikh family headed by Mr. and Mrs. Singh, who operate a diary business. Everyone is seated at the same table for dinner. It's 1947, and they're telling jokes to each other. One of the jokes includes a slight denunciation of the British, which Mr. Rogers dislikes, and he shows how to point every arrow against the British. Mr. Singh responds by claiming that they will soon be free and will run the Indian Sub-continent themselves, as well as threatening Mr. Rogers to leave India because they are encroaching on natives' rights.



Figure: 1 (Discussion between Mr. Rogers and Mr. Singh)

Even though Lenny's parents try to tone things down because the exchange of angry words has heated things up, Mr. Rogers intervenes (Figure: 1). "*If we quit India today, you bloody will cut one another's throats. Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs will be Jacky for power* (Mehta, 1999)." Mr. Rogers says in the full shot above. While analysing this dialogue by content analysis, this debate exemplifies orientalism by demonstrating how the Eastern people were pressured to listen and behave. Moreover; the natives were considered inferiors; unable to rule and run the country with harmony. Later, Mr. Rogers turns his attention to the Parsi family and inquires about their choice, but Mr. Rustam responds that they will remain impartial on government matters regardless of who is in power. He commends them for being impartial, while addressing Mr. Singh once more about the disparities between Muslims and non-Muslims, stating that the Muslims desire a separate homeland Pakistan, to which Mr. Singh responds that we can resolve our differences without partition. With a reference to Tara Singh, the Sikh leader of Indian Sub-continent, Mr. Rogers mocks him. Mr. Singh claims to be proud of his leader, but Mr. Rogers calls him, "*Tara Singh is Sikh's bloody bunch of murdering fanatics* (Mehta, 1999)." Mr. Rogers' dialogue is another example of orientalism in which he insults the native inhabitants of the Indian Sub-continent in his role as a ruler and colonizer. This attitude and

language plainly demonstrates how the Western people treat the Eastern people. “Orientalism is a critical concept to explain the West’s prevalent, scornful depiction and portrayal of ‘The East,’” according to Edward Said (Said, 2014, p. 373). Mr. Singh and Mr. Rogers are in a head-to-head battle on this issue (Figure: 2). This scene relates to the Orient in comparison to the Occident; the East and the West, respectively. It shows the West’s political, economic, cultural, and social dominance, according to Edward Said (Said, 2014, p. 364).



Figure: 2 (Dual between Mr. Rogers and Mr. Singh)

Mr. Singh is enraged, and he forces Mr. Rogers to apologize. These are clear examples of orientalism, in which the Indian Sub-continent’s natives and heroes are mocked. After a heated exchange of words, Lenny’s father, Mr. Rustam Sethna, a government official tries to calm things down. He praises the British for developing infrastructure in the Indian Sub-continent, such as roads, buildings, and an exceptional postal system, a clear indication of colonial legacies in the Indian Sub-continent’s society. Mrs. Bunty Sethna, Lenny’s mother, also praises the British, particularly for providing English as one of the world’s sweetest and the most beautiful languages to the people of the Indian Sub-continent. It is another evidence of the Sub-continent’s colonial heritage as English language also indicates towards colonialism. In this long sequence of the film, the entire conversation between these characters is clear, indicating colonialism. Few of the characters are opposed to British imperialism and colonialism, while others support it with an oriental perspective and the dominance of colonial legacies in the society (Figure: 3).



Figure: 3 (Discussion on a dining table)

Few scenes later, we see a group of friends gathered in a park, discussing their lives as well as the politics of the Indian Sub-continent. In the park, we see a vendor selling something near the park’s main gate. Despite the fact that he rides a bicycle, he also has a gramophone on which a song is playing. In the close-up shot, we can see the gramophone (Figure: 4).



Figure: 4 (A Gramophone in the Park)

After applying film analysis, we come across another illustration of the Indian Sub-continent's colonial legacy. Later, Lenny's mother teaches her dance to keep her moving because she has polio in one leg. We observe her playing the gramophone in the corner of their room in this close-up shot (Figure: 5).



Figure: 5 (A Gramophone at the home of Lenny)

The gramophone is also a colonial instrument, as it became a part of Indian Sub-continent culture as a colonial cultural legacy, after the British arrived in the Sub-continent. According to Michael Kinnear's book *Discography of Hindustani and Carnatic Music* (1985), the gramophone firm recorded the voice of an Indian person for the first time in 1899, and the first gramophone disc was cut in Calcutta in 1902 (Kinnear, 2020). Such legacies dominated over the culture of the Indian Sub-continent and it killed the old folk singers who happened to sing in the streets. Lenny is attached to all of Shanta's pals that meet in the park, but she especially adores Ice-candy Man Dil Nawaz because he gives her Ice-candies and forces her to ride his bicycle. Shanta respects all of her friends and enjoys Hassan, the masseur, as well as Dil Nawaz. The fundamental theme of the film is covered by this triangular love among Shanta, Hassan and Dil Nawaz, although none of the characters express their love.

Later, we see Lenny sitting outside a tennis court with Shanta and Dil Nawaz. Dil Nawaz is actually keeping a few parrots in a cage and waiting for the British females to stop playing. Dil Nawaz begins to denounce the birds loudly in bad English as they conclude their game. He acts to cut the throats of all the birds. The British ladies are drawn to his loud criticism and Dil Nawaz is prevented from murdering the birds. They pay the total prize for all and request Dil Nawaz to release those. Dil Nawaz pockets the cash, and releases those. He doesn't want to kill the birds; instead, he wants to make a lot of money from the settlers, so he puts on this show. The view of a Tennis court can be seen in (Figure: 6) in a long shot.



Figure: 6 (Dil Nawaz is setting free the birds)

Tennis was not a sport popular in the Indian Sub-continent; hence this scenario on the tennis court alludes to colonial times. The game was brought to India by British army and civilian officers in the 1880s. Regular competitions like the 'Punjab Lawn Tennis Championship' began in 1885 in Lahore, Pakistan (Tennis in India, 2020). It's yet another illustration of the Indian Sub-continent's colonial legacy in sports. Tennis never stayed the sports of the locals and this legacy took away the natives from many sports of the local people and it dominated over their culture to be a part of it.

In the film, we witness Mr. Rustam Sethna, Lenny's father, driving an automobile. Throughout the film, this automobile (Figure: 7) is in the hands of Lenny's father.



Figure: 7 (Motorcar of Mr. Rustam Sethna)

As there were no motor cars in the Indian Sub-continent prior to the arrival of the British colonizers, the motor car is a colonial symbol. In 1897, the first automobile was driven on an Indian road. Until 1930, India imported only a small number of automobiles. In India, a nascent automobile sector arose in the 1940s, and Hindustan Motors was founded later (Gupta, 2012). Before the arrival of the British colonisers, the local people always relied on their local ways of transportation like horses, camels, horse-carts etc. Such legacies dominated over the culture of the Indian Sub-continent and it helped to kill simple and less-polluted cultural transportation of the natives as well divided the locals among various classes.

When the news of the partition of the Indian Sub-continent spread a few days later, Lenny's parents feel apprehensive and terrified as well. In those days, Lenny's father brings something packed. Her mother places it on the bedside table. Lenny is fascinated about the object, so she opens it, revealing a revolver in the close-up shot (Figure: 8).



Figure: 8 (A revolver, brought by the father of Lenny)

The presence of a pistol in the box astounds and terrifies her. The Webley Revolver, also known as the Webley Top-Break Revolver or the Webley Self-Extracting Revolver, is the revolver featured in the film. From 1887 to 1963, it was the standard issue service handgun for the British Empire and Commonwealth's armed forces (Strickland, 2014). As automatic guns had never existed in the Indian Sub-continent before the arrival of the British; the introduction of this revolver in the film in 1947 denotes colonial legacy, encompassing the weapons in Indian Sub-continent society. All such weapons become the part of society as the riots break out. Everyone is feeling insecure during the British rule and the government is unable to protect the people.

The days of the Indian Sub-continent's partition grows nearer. Belonging to varying religions, the worries of all friends gather in the park are beginning to grow. They're all based in Lahore, but their families live in different regions. The partition map doesn't show which areas will be part of which country. They occasionally take a lunch break at any hotel.



Figure: 9 (Lenny and Shanta at the hotel)

In (Figure: 9), we observe Lenny in a hotel with her maid Shanta and Hassan in a medium shot. All of the park's friends are eating their lunch in this scene. When Shanta places her lunch order, Hassan asks Lenny what she wants. In a little neighbourhood hotel, Lenny demands custard, which is never available. All of her friends laugh at her choice, and when one of them inquires about the dish, Lenny says it's a type of English pudding. That friend abuses the meal, and then teases Lenny saying that Parsi has now become British as well. All of his friends chastise him for reprimanding the baby. While analysing the above image, we can see confused expressions of Lenny. This demand for English pudding is a colonial legacy in the Indian Sub-continent's culture and cuisine. English pudding is never a native dish, and Lenny is aware of this because she comes from a wealthy family having good relations

with the British. The visitors from the United Kingdom pay them a visit, and such English dishes are prepared in their home. This shift in native people's culture is an example of orientalism, in which the colonizers' culture dominates the colonized people's culture. As the story progresses, tensions between ethnic and religious groups begin to rise. As rumours of the partition of the Indian sub-continent become more credible, the atmosphere becomes more tensed. The friendship gatherings are becoming increasingly rare. The news of the assassinations, murders, and forced evictions is broadcast on the radio.



Figure: 10 (An old radio, broadcasting the news)

We see a radio in (Figure: 10) in a close shot, clearly a colonial legacy in the Indian Sub-continent's society, as broadcasting began in June 1923 during the British Raj. Bombay and other radio clubs were the first to launch their shows. The private Indian Broadcasting Company Ltd (IBC) was granted permission to operate two radio stations on July 23, 1927. The Bombay radio station debuted on July 23, 1927, and the Calcutta radio station debuted on August 26, 1927 (Radio, 2019). As the film nears its conclusion, the British government announces the partition of the Indian Sub-continent, resulting in a massacre of people on both sides of the new border.

Lahore, as the heartland of Pakistan's Muslim majority, has been particularly hard hit by the killings and massacres. The stores are set on fire; individuals are slaughtered, and more are tortured to death on the streets. All the streets and the roads are full with the dead bodies. Many shops and markets can be seen in these long shots in (Figure: 11 and 12) revealing further colonial legacies.



Figure: 11 (Advertisements on the wall)

In (Figure: 11), we find a shattered shop with something written in English on it, though the sentence is unclear. However, the marks of English language are plainly visible, as English is considered a colonial legacy in the Indian sub-continent's society. A board for Kundan Lal Sweet House is put on the wall over the corner of the street in (Figure: 12).



Figure: 12 (A board of a shop in the bazaar)

Though the sweets are Indian, the board, in English language, is an example of colonialism. The British dominance began in the early 17th century with the first Indian business expedition in 1601, and the company finally came to govern India from 1757 to 1858. This rule was thereafter changed to the Crown until 1947, when the Indian Sub-continent was partitioned. This centuries-long domination resulted in the Indian Sub-continent adopting English as its official language, not just until independence, but also after partition and freedom (Rangan, 2015). This domination of the colonizers linguistically over the natives, yet exist after the independence. This linguistic domination made the local languages to be pressed by English language and it divides the people of the Indian Sub-continent into different classes.

Conclusion

The violence of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus is always present in films about the partition. In the vast majority of these films, the victims are largely women on both sides. Women's violence, cross-community killings, and people's suffering during migration and their stay in refugee camps have all been highlighted by authors and scholars. Few writers have discussed the political disputes and colonizers' benefits on the *other's* soil. Due to a dearth of research, this research paper focuses on the colonizers' attitudes toward the natives of the Indian Sub-continent in order to highlight their oriental perspective. In addition, this study focused on the conquerors' imposition of colonial aspects on the locals in the form of colonial legacies. As the Indian Sub-continent was a British colony for more than three centuries, the colonizers continued to leave legacies in the Indian Subcontinent's society. It is for this reason that these legacies have been part of not just society, but also linguistics, literature, and film, and this study piece has looked into those legacies in film.

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