

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,