

## A POSTMODERNISM PERSPECTIVE IN THE CINEMATIC VERSION OF 1947 EARTH

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### ABSTRACT

Modernism is the literary text written after World War I and breaking the traditional rules of writing practiced by the authors before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas Post-modernism is a philosophical movement and a radical break against Modernism. It is the use of earlier styles and combining different styles and media to form a new style and showing general distrust of theories. *1947 EARTH* is an epic film directed by Deepa Mehta and is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man*. Bapsi Sidhwa is a prominent figure in post-colonialism and post-modernism. The film *1947 EARTH* is a post-modern and post-colonial story of the main character Lenny who witnesses partition with her personal experiences. The film is set in the context of historical events depicting the situation of the country before and after the independence. It is a story of a child narrative by Lenny Sethi and her perspective of the political and social turmoil caused by the partition of India. This paper attempts to analyze the elements of post-modernism and visual exploration in *1947 EARTH*.

**Keywords:** *1947 EARTH*, modernism, post-modernism, post-colonialism.

### Introduction; Movie as a Viewpoint

Post-modernism is a literary and cultural movement that came after the second world war in the later twentieth century. The word "post" means to come after that implies that post-modernism literature has come after or developed after the modernist form of literature. It is a reaction to the rational, scientific and historical aspects of the modern age. It is concerned with imprecision and unreliability of language and with epistemology, the study of what knowledge is. So, post-modernism is a response or resistance to modernism. It is not based on logical thinking and is based on subjectivity. Post-modernism approach does not have any literary style and has a modern outlook of the same technique. In literature the post-modernist writer incorporates absurd or meaningless ways of contemporary existence. It also favors consciously 'depthless works of fables, pastiche or aleatory disconnection' (1)

### The Post-Modern Approach in Literature

Vaclav Havel speaks on postmodernism thus:

"The distinguishing features of such transitional periods are a mixing and blending of cultures and a plurality or parallelism of intellectual and spiritual worlds. These are the periods when all consistent value systems collapse, when cultures distant in time and space are discovered or rediscovered. They are periods when there is a tendency to quote, to imitate and to amplify rather than to state with authority or integrate. New meaning is gradually born from the encounter or the intersection, of many different elements.

This state of mind or the human world is called post modernism. For me a symbol of that state is a Bedouin Bounted on a camel and clad in traditional robes under which he is wearing Jeans, with a transistor radio in his hands and an ad for Coca-Cola on the Camel's back". (2)

The post-modern approach in literature encompasses various literary styles such as parody, ambiguity, fragmentation, and stylistic techniques like magical realism, pastiche, metafiction, and

intertextuality. This approach is one formed by pluralistic views that help the readers to have a picture of their future and influence them to engage in a world of imagination far from their current reality. The postmodernist era believed in the diversity of views rather than imposing one version of the truth. Postmodernism celebrates multiplicity and is used by philosophers and thinkers to develop new concepts or reinterpret existing ones.

#### **Discussion on Post-Modern Elements in Deepa Mehta's 1947 Earth**

Bapsi Sidhwa is a prominent post-colonial and post-modern feminist writer from Pakistan. Her text truthfully portrays the effects of social and religious conflicts on society and especially on women through the child's narrative voice and interpretation. *Ice Candy Man* has its unique style by keeping Indian history as fact and the use of varied postmodern techniques made it classified as a postmodern narrative. Sidhwa has written novels depicting the bloody riots and mass migration highlighting the subjugation of women as she herself was a witness to partition.

*1947 Earth* (1999) is a romance drama film directed by Deepa Mehta based on Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man*. The film received the Best Film Award at Asian Film Festival. Mehta in collaboration with Sidhwa has produced many films like *Water, Fire, and Earth*. The film threads the story of a young girl Lenny who is stuck by polio and witnesses the time before, after, and during the independence of the Indian subcontinent.

Modernism and post-modernism are the key ideologies within the context of literature, art, architecture, philosophy, and social sciences as two philosophies, periods, theories, movements, worldviews, and different forms. Mehta's movie depicts the complex postmodern world in a postmodern style. The film with its amazing cast and melodious music gives a picture of India before and after its independence from British colonization. Mehta's adaptation to visual words has helped us to reimagine the events that led India to gain independence and then partition while keeping the original essence of the novel.

The novel and the film use different artistic styles, metafiction, and intertextuality to break the tradition of the Indian English novel. As the text uses linguistic techniques, words, and language, in movies it is the graphics, sound, and acting skills. While one makes use of language, the other employs pictorial narration:

"First, because film operates in real time, it is more limited. Novels end only when they feel like it. Film is, in general, restricted to what Shakespeare called "the short two hours' traffic of our stage." Popular novels have been a vast reservoir of material for commercial films over the years." (3)

The Yale critic J. Hillis Miller in his book *Illustration* points:

"A picture and a text juxtaposed will always have different meanings or logoi. They will conflict irreconcilably with one another, since they are different signs... Neither the meaning of a picture nor the meaning of a sentence is by any means translatable. The picture means itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet, not even at some vanishing-point where the sun has set." (4)

The film starts in Lahore showing the time exactly before the partition. Lenny Sethi a young girl who is stuck by polio narrates the story through a voice-over by adult Lenny. She belongs to a Parsi community that remains neutral with the rising religious disturbances between the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. Mehta in her film gives an essence of ecofeminism. Ecofeminists are the people who believe that women and nature suffer at the hands of the patriarchal system in society.

"In ecofeminism, Nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature- Psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature- and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory." (5)

The central figure of the film is Shanta who is a caretaker of Lenny. Shanta is a Hindu and is adored by a small group of friends from different religions who spend their time together in a

park. Amongst the group, Dil Navaz and Massuer are in love with Shanta. However, once a consolidated group of friends branches as tragedy arise.

The film with the help of historical facts has depicted the greatest event in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both the novel and film with the portrayal of a group of friends from different ethnic communities have depicted the individual sufferings and objectification of women in the name of religion. As Fredric Jameson in his work, *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism* comments:

“All third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I call national allegories...even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic-necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third culture and society.” (6)

Mehta in her film along with Lenny's worst encounters during the partition has also depicted sensitive issues like child marriage and gender discrimination. The story of Papoo, a small girl who is drugged and married to an old dwarf by her parents. Mehta with the use of amazing songs and lights highlights the anti-women practices in India. Mehta's film has given prime importance to the child's point of view. In a scene, where we see Lenny with her cousin interacting with another child from her terrace who is a victim of partition.

“Your mother was raped? When Hindus attacked our place, I got buried under dead bodies. That's why I was saved... Later I saw my mother without clothes in a Masjid” (7).

The scene where Mehta shows a train carrying dead bodies and Dil Nawaz finds her sister murdered in the same train is a turning point in the film. Suddenly the peace and harmony between Shanta and her admirers eventually start turning into hatred. The existence of human nature is highlighted in a scene where Dil Nawaz proposes Shanta to marry and speaks

“Shanta baby...yeh sirf Hindu aur Musalman ki baatnahinhai; yeh tohkuch hum sab ke beech andarhai, Hindu Musalman Sikh hum sab haramzadehain, sab jaanwarhain, chidiyagahrke us sher ki tarahjis se Lenny Baby itnadartihai...jo pada rehtahai is intejarmeinkekabpinjrakhule aur jab pinjrakhultahaitoh Allah hi maalikhai. (Director Deepa Mehta 1947 *EARTH*, 1999).

“Mehta's own belief in the elemental view of the universe or elemental forces of human nature is exemplified by the very titles of her films like *Fire*, *Earth*, and *Water*.” (8).

Many scenes in the film without being partial to any religion clearly criticize the national leaders for not giving an interest in the partition of united India.

Films with the help of various tools and cinematic devices can leave an everlasting impact on audiences more than what is visually depicted on the screen. The film reflects the social and psychological conditions of characters who are directly or indirectly victims of partition.

The costumes which Lenny, Shanta, and other characters are wearing show a resemblance of Parsis with that of English people and the impact of colonialism. The impact of colonialism is also seen in a scene where Lenny's aunt calls Parsis bum-lickers and her mother explains that they are not bum-lickers they are like chameleons who change colour according to the requirement. The neutral position of Parsis is portrayed through this scene.

The psychology and resistance of Indian people towards colonizers are quite notable in many scenes where Col Bharucha blames English people for bringing polio to India. The film has beautifully depicted the aftermath of the partition abduction, rapes, mass killings, loot, mass migration, and conversion.

“In an attempt to personalise the history of Partition, it ignores the greatest achievement of the twentieth century India that was attained in the form of political freedom after years of struggle and sacrifice by its countrymen.” (Sarkar 284).

With the abduction of Shanta by Dil Nawaz portrays the domination and oppression of women by the male-dominant system. The complete film is from the feminist point of view showing the sufferings and trauma of women. People who were once staying together as friends and brothers suddenly change to disgrace and violence. This colossal shift took millions of lives and women became the main victim of it as being the weaker link. The neutral position of Parsis and their unstable condition traumatized them and had an unpleasant psychological impact on their minds. The announcement of partition was a difficult time for all the communities.

## CONCLUSION

The entire film *1947 EARTH* is a chronicle of India and is based on post-modern elements. All the events are related to history, politics, and religion and have historical dimensions. As Foucault remarks: “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.” (9). The personal life of Lenny is linked with all the major events that happened before and during the partition of India. As a postmodern film, it shows the diversity of India and its culture. With the help of all the historical facts, Sidhwa and Mehta have used their most powerful images to bring out the post-modern features in the film. The interplay between the personal aspect of suffering to that of India and its situation with the use of amazing cinematography makes it a postmodern novel and film.

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