



THE CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEE AND MIGRANT TRAUMA : A STUDY ON HAIDER AND TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Randhir Kumar Rajak¹, Dr Laxman Yadav²

Research Scholar¹, Assistant Professor²

Email-rkrchekpost@gmail.com¹, Email: laxman.psgc12@gmail.com²

Department of English^{1 2}

Mobile number -7979024843¹, Contact : 9508673846²

GMRD College Mohanpur, Samastipur²

Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga^{1 2}, Bihar, India

Abstract: This paper explores the representation of refugee and migrant trauma on film through an analysis of the adaptations Haider (2014) and Train to Pakistan (1998). Both films enact displacement through political violence—Haider through the conflict in Kashmir and Train to Pakistan through the Partition of India. Through the analysis of these adaptations, this paper demonstrates how trauma, memory, loss and statelessness are portrayed through cinematic techniques. Migration is a complex social process that subjects to physical and social stressors and may result in mental health problem. The punishing journey and multiple stressors faced by the refugee, both accompanied and unaccompanied during the pre-migration and migration. Being a refugee is an unenviable position, it is a state where you live absolutely at the mercies of people continually handing out freebies, and if they don't you are doomed. Important is migration and refugees contribute positively to society but they can't reach their potential unless they are in good physical and mental health, and also their aim should be good for that country. Through a comparative analysis, this research shows how both films function as historical and psychological reflections of forced migration and contribute to the discourse on refugee experiences in South Asian cinema.

Key words: Refugee Trauma, Migrant Trauma, Forced Displacement, Partition of India, Kashmir Conflict, Trauma Theory, Cinematic Representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is caused by unrest in host countries due to war, community unrest, and violence. There are more reasons behind migration. It might be drought, fires, dangerous conditions, earthquakes, cave bears, hostile neighbors, diseases, lack of food, forcing foods, etc. Migrant people sometimes don't have their identity and roof on top. They are called refugees because they don't have their identity. Refugee and migrant trauma is often associated with displacement, loss of identity, and psychological distress.

“Refugees are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, with the same hopes and ambitions as us—except that a twist of fate has bound their lives to a global refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale” (Hosseini).

Hosseini, Khaled. World Refugee Day Statement. UNHCR, 20 June 2018, www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/6/5b29bb3d4.html.

Migrant have to face two different cultures and ways of life “old” and “new”. Refugees have to face lots of difficulties to stay in different country. Many of the refugees or Migrants have to face language barriers, and it took years to learn native language. So that’s why we called migrant or refugees uprooted because “ Once uprooted from home, refugees and immigrants often settle in place where they are dislocated by exclusion and lack of opportunities”.

Shafer, Leah, and Bari Walsh. “Migration, Separation, and Trauma: What Educators Should Know About the Often-Painful Experiences of Newly Arriving Children — and How to Help.” Harvard Graduate School of Education, 19 July 2018, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/07/migration-separation-and-trauma>.

2. WHAT IS TRAUMA?

“Psychological trauma is a response to an event that a person finds highly stressful, such as an experience in a war zone, a natural disaster, or an accident. Trauma can cause a wide range of physical and emotional symptoms. Not everyone who experiences a stressful event will develop trauma. There are also various types of trauma. Some people will develop symptoms that resolve after a few weeks, while others will experience longer-term effects. With treatment, people can address the root cause of the trauma and find constructive ways to manage their symptoms.”

Medically reviewed by Lori Lawrenz, PsyD — Written by Jayne Leonard — Updated on February 12, 2025

Immigrants are people who desire to live in another country. They enter that country through legal channels and generally seek to become a citizen of the new country. They generally are a positive contribution to the new country. Refugees are people involuntarily forced from their homes, often losing everything. Refugees move because they have to. They are escaping war, persecution, or other extreme hardship that causes them to fear for their safety and livelihood if they remain in their home country. Immigrants move because they are seeking new opportunities – economic, emotional, cultural, educational, and so on. They are not facing the kind of extreme hardship that refugees do. They have choices in their home countries, although sometimes the choices are not great.

Films have also explored the trauma of refugees and migrants, including the psychological and physical wounds they carry. Haider (2014) and Train to Pakistan (1998) both depict forced displacement and violence, and the lasting trauma they cause to individuals and communities. Though set in different historical moments, both films are potent stories of migration and exile that illustrate the human cost of political and communal conflict. Haider (2014) — Vishal Bhardwaj’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet, ” set during the Kashmir conflict — explores the individual and collective traumas that individuals experience in times of political upheaval, through a portrayal of enforced disappearances, militarization, and the psychological effects on the local population. “Haider” is not explicitly about refugees, but rather about internal displacement and the sense of loss and identity crisis that accompany such experiences. Train to Pakistan (1998), directed by Pamela Rooks, based on Khushwant Singh’s novel of the same name; set during the partition of India in 1947, when communal violence and mass migrations ensued; poignant portrait of trauma experienced by refugees forced to leave their ancestral homes, identity struggles, and atmosphere of mistrust and fear.

Train to Pakistan, based on Khushwant Singh’s novel, takes place during the Partition of India in 1947 which saw one of the largest forced migrations in history. The film captures the chaos, communal violence and suffering of people forced to leave their homeland. The trauma is reflected in the characters’ struggle to survive the horrors of partition where loyalties and identities are tested in the aftermath of unimaginable violence.

On the other hand, Haider takes place during the insurgency in Kashmir in the 1990s, a time of political instability, military occupation, and enforced disappearances. When the protagonist Haider returns to his homeland, he finds his father missing and his world turned upside down by conflict. The film explores the psychological displacement of individuals who are physically present in their homeland, but feel alienated because of war and violence. Unlike Train to Pakistan, which deals with physical displacement, in Haider, the trauma is more internalized, where individuals confront existential crises and loss of identity.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Film has been used as a medium to represent historical trauma, particularly in the context of forced migration and displacement. This study uses a qualitative research approach to investigate the representation of refugee and migrant trauma in *Haider* (2014) and *Train to Pakistan* (1998). The research draws on film analysis, thematic analysis, historical contextualization and comparative analysis to examine how these films depict the psychological and physical effects of forced displacement.

4. FILM ANALYSIS METHOD

A close reading of both films to examine their cinematic techniques and narrative structures, analyzing narrative structure: *Train to Pakistan* has a linear, historically informed plot that shows the immediate effects of Partition on individuals; *Haider* has a fragmented, non-linear structure reminiscent of its protagonist's psychological instability.

Visual Composition: How do the film's cinematography, mise-en-scene, and color palettes represent trauma? The cold, desaturated colors of *Haider* are contrasted with the earthy colors of *Train to Pakistan*, reflecting the film's opposite approaches to depicting grief and loss.

Sound and Music: Both films use silence, background scores, and diegetic sound to convey the intensity of trauma. While *Haider* uses dramatic pauses and Kashmiri folk music to convey a sense of nostalgia and pain, *Train to Pakistan* uses ambient village sounds combined with the rumbling of trains to signify impending doom.

4.1. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis identifies recurring motifs and concerns around trauma, displacement and memory. Key themes are:

Displacement and exile: both films' characters are forced migrants who lose their homeland and identity. **Psychological Trauma and PTSD** Both films explore emotional trauma, paranoia and survivor's guilt providing a window into the long-term impact of forced migration. **Memory and Identity** The protagonists' struggle to negotiate past and present reflects the way trauma fragments individual and collective identities. **Revenge and cycles of violence** Both stories point to the way that unprocessed trauma can lead to more violence and raise the question of whether historical wounds can ever be closed. **Historical and Political Contextualization** to be historically accurate, the research also includes historical analysis of the Partition of India (1947) and the Kashmir conflict (1990s) to contextualize how:

Train to Pakistan is a satirical take on the communal tensions and mass displacements of Partition but *Haider* also sharply criticizes the political violence and human rights violations in Kashmir, exposing state-imposed trauma. Both films take a humanistic approach to history, focusing on the emotional and social consequences rather than just the political ones. The article illustrates how both *Haider* and *Train to Pakistan* deploy cinema to represent refugee and migrant trauma. While *Train to Pakistan* is concerned with the external violence and forced migration of Partition, *Haider* explores the psychological and political trauma of Kashmiri displacement. Both films employ powerful visual storytelling, historical references, and symbolic imagery to draw attention to the suffering of refugees and migrants.

5. DISCUSSION

Both *Haider* and *Train to Pakistan* are searing indictments of refugee and migrant trauma, highlighting the way that displacement isn't just about physical movement but about a profound and life-changing experience.

The purpose of this study is to examine how cinema represents refugee and migrant trauma through the analysis of the films *Haider* (2014) and *Train to Pakistan* (1998). This study will:

Psychological and Emotional Trauma: How does forced migration, exile, and displacement affect people and communities in both films?

Analyze Filmic Representation: Evaluate how visual storytelling, dialogues, and character development depicts the lived experiences of refugees and migrants. **Highlight historical and political context:** How do the films

represent real historical events—Partition in *Train to Pakistan* and the Kashmir conflict in *Haider*. Bridge Literature, History, and Film Studies Examine how these films render historical and literary narratives into film language. By doing so, this research paper contributes to larger conversations about forced migration, post-colonial trauma and cinema as an archive of collective memory.

6. RESEARCH GAP

There are several studies on refugee and migrant trauma in literature and history but existing research on cinematic representation, particularly South Asian films like *Haider* and *Train to Pakistan*, remains limited. Here are some of the key gaps in the research:

Little attention to representation of trauma in Indian cinema Most studies of refugee trauma in cinema focus on Western films (*The Pianist*, *The Kite Runner*), but South Asian films are understudied. Lack of comparison between historical and contemporary conflicts: existing studies either focus on Partition or Kashmir in isolation and do not compare their cinematic representations side by side. Insufficient attention paid to psychological depth: *Haider* has been read as a Shakespearean adaptation but not as a psychological study of refugee trauma. Critical Role of Filmic Techniques Most of the research has been on the narrative, but how cinematography, music, and traumatic-scène convey trauma is under-researched. Trauma in refugee stories: Women's trauma, particularly sexual violence, displacement and agency, is left largely unexplored in both films.

7. RESULT

This study explores how the films *Haider* (2014) and *Train to Pakistan* (1998) represent refugee and migrant trauma through cinematic techniques, characterisation and narrative structure. Through film analysis, secondary literature and audience reception this paper examines how both films represent forced displacement and its psychological impact.

7.1. KEY FINDINGS

He gets the 1990s Kashmir conflict right, focusing on internal displacement, enforced disappearances and militarization's impact on civilians. *Train to Pakistan* is an historically rooted account of the 1947 Partition, highlighting communal violence, forced migrations and the breakdown of interfaith harmony. Both films draw on historical fact to create an emotional truth that makes the refugee trauma personal rather than abstract.

Visual Storytelling:

Haider uses muted colors and cold, snowy landscapes to represent oppression and loss. *Train to Pakistan* uses stark contrasting images of a peaceful village life and chaotic violence to show how Partition upturned normality.

Sound and Silence:

Haider punctuates the angst with Kashmiri folk songs and jarring silences. *Train to Pakistan* passes through riots, then silently underlines weight of death and displacement. He depicts the protagonist's psychological breakdown as a symbol of Kashmiri's suffering, reflecting the statelessness and existential crisis.

Train to Pakistan charts the shock and moral dilemmas of the refugees' first days on the move and the effects of forced migration on identity and relationships. Both films bring to the fore the trauma of women, with characters like Ghazala (*Haider*) and Nooran (*Train to Pakistan*) bringing out the vulnerability of displaced women. *Haider*'s Kashmiris are caught between two political hammers, he says, suffering military repression and displacement. *Train to Pakistan* evokes mass killings and "ghost trains" to convey how refugees were reduced to numbers during Partition. *Haider* generated much debate for its uncompromising take on Kashmir, garnering critical praise but also attracting political heat in India. *Train to Pakistan* was praised for its emotional resonance and historical accuracy, though some critics said it downplayed the violence of Partition compared to the novel. Both films contribute to the collective memory of displacement and the trauma of refugees.

The analysis confirms that both *Haider* and *Train to Pakistan* effectively use the cinematic language to represent refugee and migrant trauma. While *Haider* focuses on the internal displacement within Kashmir, *Train to Pakistan* explores the horrors of cross-border migration. Both films depict trauma not only as physical

displacement but also as an emotional and psychological burden. By giving refugees a human face and a voice, these films challenge dominant political discourses and help to keep the historical trauma of displacement alive.

8. CONCLUSION

The representation of refugee and migrant trauma in *Haider* (2014) and *Train to Pakistan* (1998) highlights the lasting emotional, psychological, and social effects of displacement, political conflict, and forced migration. Though set in different historical and geopolitical contexts, both films effectively utilize narrative, symbolism, and character development to convey the suffering and resilience of displaced people. *Haider* is set in the conflict-ridden Kashmir of the 1990s and examines the trauma of political violence, enforced disappearances and the loss of identity. Through the story of *Haider*, the film documents the psychological trauma of those caught between state and militant forces. The film also examines the role of power structures in perpetuating the refugee crisis within a nation's own borders. *Train to Pakistan* is a searing indictment of forced migration and communal violence set during the partition of India in 1947. In this engrossing film, we witness how history shattered entire communities, turned neighbours into enemies and forced individuals to make terrible choices in order to survive. Trauma of migration is presented in this context not only through physical suffering but also through moral dilemmas and loss of human relationships. Both films rely on effective visual storytelling, music, and dialogue to create empathy in viewers. They challenge mainstream narratives by placing refugees and migrants' lived experiences at the centre, rather than focusing on political or historical facts. By doing so they contribute to a wider conversation on the effects of forced migration, underlining the importance of humane policies and social consciousness about displaced communities.

We have seen how 'Haider' and 'Train to Pakistan' are cinematic reflections on the devastating consequences of conflict-induced displacement. Through their different stories, both films shed light on the trauma of refugees and migrants, a trauma that goes beyond the mere displacement of bodies and touches the very essence of identity. 'Train to Pakistan' demonstrates the harsh reality of Partition, stressing the sudden and violent dislocation of communities, while 'Haider' explores more recent, but no less painful, experiences of displacement within the context of the Kashmir conflict. By placing these stories within their specific historical and socio-political contexts, these films offer an important perspective through which to understand the lasting legacies of violence and the human cost of displacement. Ultimately, these cinematic representations serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need. Ultimately, both *Haider* and *Train to Pakistan* serve as potent cinematic vehicles that capture and interpret the trauma of refugees and migrants, highlighting the fact that beyond political borders and ethnic divides, the common human experience of loss, resilience, and survival links displaced peoples across time and space.

REFERENCES

- Bhardwaj, Vishal, director. *Haider*. VB Pictures, 2014.
- Hosseini, Khaled. "World Refugee Day Statement." UNHCR, 20 June 2018, www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/6/5b29bb3d4.html.
- Rooks, Pamela, director. *Train to Pakistan*. Eagle Films, 1998.
- Shafer, Leah, and Bari Walsh. "Migration, Separation, and Trauma: What Educators Should Know About the Often-Painful Experiences of Newly Arriving Children—and How to Help." Harvard Graduate School of Education, 19 July 2018, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/07/migration-separation-and-trauma>.
- Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Grove Press, 1956.

- Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, Simon & Schuster, 2012.
- Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. “Allegories of Partition: Ghatak’s Meghe Dhaka Tara and Bhardwaj’s Haider.” South Asian Popular Culture, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 235–250.
- Krishnan, Sanjay. “Cinematic Memory and Partition Violence: Revisiting Train to Pakistan.” Journal of South Asian Film Studies, vol. 5, no. 1, 2010, pp. 78–94.
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi. “Maps and Mother Goddesses in Modern India.” Imago Mundi, vol. 53, no. 1, 2001, pp. 97–114.
- Leonard, Jayne. “Understanding PTSD and Refugee Trauma.” Reviewed by Lori Lawrenz, PsyD, Medical News Today, 12 Feb. 2025, www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/ptsd-refugee-trauma.

