

REPRESENTING BHARAT MATA IN POPULAR HINDI FILMS: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY OF NATIONALIST POLITICS OF DEATH

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Abstract- Death, which always poses threat to social order with all its uncertainty, can be rationalised teleologically. Historically, Religion has been assigned the role of mitigating the chaotic impact of death by rationalizing it. And if one death is an instance of 'bad' death, role of religion has become more essential. With modernity disappears this role of religions and newly emerged scientific-legal intuitions like state have endeavoured to satiate the rational vacuum created by scientism. In India, during the colonial period the emergence of the image of Mother India or Bharat Mata was a secular attempt to justify the sacrifices of lives of freedom fighters. This article will attempt to analysis the claimed secular nature of Bharat Mata through its illustration from colonial India's popular culture to its modern day representation in Hindi films. Also, the majoritarian politics of this representation of Bharat Mata as the justifying agent of death would also be analysed to comprehend the constitutional claim of India being a secular nation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The very idea of death creates an existential confusion of 'not being' and almost every single philosophical creed's attempt to decode this predicament proves its universality. The very definition of death is paradigmatically so varied that it is essential to delve into the pool of meanings associated with death, which in turn makes the whole discourse of death a bit more problematic metaphysically. Even natural scientists in general, and specifically medical practitioners factually find the quandary of declaring of the exact timing of death as technically problematic. To be more specific, the medical science has involved in a constant academic debate about what should be accounted as the exact point of demise: the brain death or the rhythmic stoppage of heart (Volk 2002). The problem of social scientists in general and particularly sociologists who deals with the subject of death is associated with different roles an individual occupies within various institutional setup what makes her/his demise challenging. Also, this challenge is not only manifested in functionality of the demised person but on the realm of definition. According to Shaym Ghosh, who has attempted to depict a pictorial description of this definitional problem of death experienced by the member of very early society, "(w)hen the first human being died – and one had to be the first – his survivors were left speechless, literally. They had no words or sign with which they could describe the strange happening. It was so unexpected: an erstwhile comrade of theirs lay before them, inert and immobile for no ostensible reason. He neither spoke nor moved, and there was no response from him to any sound or touch. What was more, his body was fast cooling down – until it reached an icy state. Eventually an unbearable stench issued from it, compelling those who stood around to remove it to a place far away, there to bury or burn it" (2002: 14). The quandary over medical affirmation of death and the anxiety and perplexity associated with this very

believable simulation of experiencing first human death state the logical confusion and structural anxiety associated with the event of death. The cultural symbolism of our surroundings also embody the mysticism and perplexity of death and this manifestation is obviously perceptible in our everyday reality.

Modernity with all its apparatus has tried to delimit, if not abolish, uncertainties of life. Civilization in general has the prime objective of taking control of the improbability of life by assigning logical consistency on structural levels of cognition. And, without any doubt, uncertain deaths in modern societies are considered as 'bad'. As, death can be argued to be the most indeterminate event of life, modernity has been trying to restrain the perilous effect of death on society by 'scientifically' rationalising the event of demise as well as the entire course of dying. This process of logical reasoning is not only confined with the event of death but to life in general. It can be argued that one needs to attach meanings to her/his existence and then only death would be significant. The logical consistency of existence makes sure the 'good' death. But, the categorisation of death into this binary of good and bad is not so simplistic. The inquiry associated with 'good' death essentially poses a question asking that it is 'good' for whom. Is it good for the dying and dead individual? Or is it good for the social institutions and society as a whole? The issue of 'goodness' associated with death or the issue of death in general consists of two situations: the first is the situation when a person is going through the process of dying and the second denotes the situation when the person is already dead, which includes the afterlife. However, there is another situation associated with death; this third condition focuses on the very event of death, in other words, 'the event making up the threshold between the situation of dying and the (endless) situation when the person in question is dead' (Sandman 2005). So, to evaluate the category of a death all these three different aspects, i.e. the process

of dying, the event of death itself, and believes on after-death are equally important. If one instance of death guarantees 'goodness' in all these three realms, then that death would perceptibly be observed as the desirably 'good' one. Correspondingly, if the dying person holds her/his composure and calmness in the face of the inevitable ending, if one dies in time, in a quick and painless process, and most importantly if the death does not interrupt the order of things for future generation may be because of the demised person's foresighted plans during her/his lifetime then that death is supposed to be the ideal 'good' one. Sometimes, two aspects of one death are so valued cumulatively as 'good' that it can equalize the unsettling impact of the other aspect. Occasionally, one aspect of all three aspects of death can be deemed so approvingly 'good' that it can negotiate two 'bad' aspects of death singlehandedly. For instance, when young soldiers dies on the frontline, they could not plan for their process of dying and which is mostly agonizing, their death is not at all timely that makes it indeed horrible, but still we regard them as heroes or martyrs because the said third aspect of death, i.e. sustaining the order for future generation is ostensibly guaranteed. Lastly, if a death fails to qualify in all of these three segments, then it is regarded as 'bad'. And to justify that 'bad' death social institutions, religion traditionally and scientifico-legal intuitions like state in modern society, take the center stage.

'Bad' Deaths or Martyrdom: Karma as the Rationale

Judgment is already too well known. Within a week it is to be pronounced. What is the consolation with the exception of the idea that I am going to sacrifice my life for a cause? A God-believing Hindu might be expecting to be reborn as a king, a Muslim or a Christian might dream of the luxuries to be enjoyed in paradise and the reward he is to get for his suffering and sacrifices. But, what am I to expect? I know the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed from under my feet, that will be the final moment – that will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul as interpreted in the metaphysical terminology, shall all be finished there. Nothing further. A short life of struggle with no such magnificent end shall in itself be the reward, if I have the courage to take it in that light.... I know in the present circumstances my faith in God would have made my life easier, my burden lighter, and my disbelief in Him has turned all the circumstances too dry, and the situation may assume too harsh a shape. A little bit of mysticism can make it poetical. But I do not want the help of any intoxication to meet my fate. I am a realist. I have been trying to overpower the instinct in me by the help of reason.^[1]

These words have been penned down by Bhagat Singh, an armed revolutionary and martyr who sacrificed his life to make India an independent nation,

days before his execution. He was hanged with two co-conspirators, Sukhdev and Rajguru, in March 1931 by the British on the charge of killing J. P. Saunders. Singh's death was an untimely death (he was executed when he was only 23 years old), but it is not at all regarded as a 'bad' death, and Singh's death became an ideal one for hundreds of other revolutionaries because of the composure and calmness displayed by him in the face of the inevitable ending. Furthermore, Bhagat Singh's deed, which led to his execution, had paved the path for a free nation and that also made his sacrificial death the epitome of a 'good' death. During the period of his incarceration and ongoing trial Singh has written copious articles and letters as a part of the plan to publicise their revolutionary creeds throughout India. The excerpt, mentioned above, is taken from one of his articles titled 'Why I am an Atheist' that confirms the idea that religion makes our experience of death and dying logically consistent in encountering the otherwise disturbing uncertain nature of death. Bhagat Singh's usage of the term 'intoxication' vis-à-vis religion is a noticeable reminder of Karl Marx who said, "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (1967: 250). Being an atheist, a self-proclaimed Marxist, and motivated by secular nationalist striving, Bhagat Singh's arguments and principles facing death not only offer us the opportunity to examine the function religion has in rationalising death but also it provides the chance to pose the question whether with modernity we require some other logical reasoning rather than the simple protective cognitive comfort provided by religion. But, from the writings of Bhagat Singh, who is certain about his upcoming death and who is also an atheist, it is quite clear that in responding towards death the religious 'opium' feels like a palliative medicine, and its effectiveness cannot be questioned in providing meaning to death, especially the 'bad' ones. For example, the Hindu (and Buddhist) idea of Karma provides this logical reasoning so coherent that helps to deal with death.

From the beginning of 20th Century, Indian popular culture is primarily dominated by Hindi film industry. All other forms of popular culture have been heavily influenced by the contents of Hindi films. From the very first film that has been produced in India, Raja Harishchandra, the dominance of Hindu philosophical doctrines in Indian cultural representation was unapologetically obvious. The mythical Hindi films like Raja Harishchandra (1913 and remade in 1917), Balak Dhruv (1974), or Jai Santoshi Maa (1974) offered the audiences the rationale of karma that effectively deals with the ambiguity of death and dying. Films like Madhumati (1958), Kudrat (1981), Neel Kamal (1968), Karz (1980, and remade in 2008 by the name Karzzzz), Karan Arjun (1995) or Om Shanti Om (2007) were not directly scripted on Hindu myths, however, all of these films have propagated the notion of karma in its manifestation on death to

rebirth. Though *Om Shanti Om* was made as latest as in 2007 but it was a parody film and the concept of karma was shown as one of the central themes of Hindi film industry during 1970s-80s. With modernity the function of religion rationalising everyday reality has faced a deep crisis because of the emerging scientism. Secular institutions like state have been required to come forward to fill the logical abyss produced by the absence of religion as the prime provider of rationale in profane existence of daily life. And as the event of death requires constant logical validation in order to control its disharmonizing impact on social order the logical inconsistency created by the absence of religious rationale has been required to be negotiated by some secular institutions, and in case of the filmic representation of death in Hindi films this role have been grabbed by the nation-state.

Bharat Mata and the Rationale of Death

Bhagat Singh is perhaps the most illustrious revolutionary of modern India, the quantity of Hindi films themed on his life and sacrifice corroborate his immense popularity. *Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh*, which was the first film based on his life and revolution, was directed by Jagdish Gautama and released in 1954. Without much delay, two other films on the same theme, i.e. K. N. Bansal's *Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (1963) and S. Ram Sharma's *Shaheed* (1965) were also released. Most recently in 2002, released three biopics based on Bhagat Singh's life: Rajkumar Santoshi's *The Legend of Bhagat Singh*, another film by the same name *Shaheed-E-Azam* directed by Sukumar Nair, and Guddu Dhanoa directed 23rd March 1931: *Shaheed*. Even the blockbuster hit *Rang De Basanti* (2006) by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra was also moderately thematically based on Bhagat Singh's nationalistic doctrines. Not only that, the title of the films *Rang De Basanti* is taken from a celebrated Punjabi song that is entirely enmeshed with the representation of the death of Bhagat Singh. Ram Prasad Bismil, who was a poet, revolutionary and comrade and co-conspirator of Bhagat Singh in Kakori conspiracy case in 1925, engraved the song.^[2] The song which is known as *Mohe Rang De Basanti Chalo Maiye Rang De*, can be translated as 'Oh Mother! Dye my fabrics in the colour of sacrifice'. *Basanti* in Punjabi signifies the saffron colour, which represents sacrifice and liberation. The practice of commemorating the death of a martyr with a song is not novel in the history of Indian movement for independence. Famous and respected Bengali freedom fighter Khudiram Bose was hanged by the British rulers in 1908 when he was only 18 years old (Pinney 2004: 117). Similar to Bhagat Singh's death his apparent 'bad' (untimely) death was also turned into a 'good' one by presenting its sacrificial value. A less known Bengali poet Pitambar Das had composed a Bengali song *Akbar Bidai De Maa* to commemorate Bose's sacrifice.^[3] The first two lines can be translated

as "Mother bid me goodbye, but I will be back soon; Indians will see me while I wear the noose with a smile on my face". This song, just like *Rang De Basanti*, has become entangled with the identity of Khudiram Bose. The sticking resemblance of these two songs, which is important for the purpose of this article, resides on the construction of an image of Indian nation as the Mother (*Bharat Mata*). This formation of mother-archetype in Indian freedom movement debatably got its motivation from the famous Bengali novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's nationalist novel *Anandamath*, which was published in 1882; also, the song *Bande Mataram* from this novel, which later became India's national song, was the slogan for freedom fighters.^[4] Translated from Sanskrit, the song is a ode to mother (India) as it says, "Mother, I salute you! Rich with your rushing streams, vivid with your orchard gleams, cool with your breezes of delight, deep pastures beckoning mother of might".^[5] For Bhagat Singh and



Image 1: Shaheed Bhagat Singh

Source: <http://reflectionsofindia.com/tag/bhagat-singh>
 other martyrs, the image of *Bharat Mata* provided them with a secular alternative for sacrificing their lives. The devotion to *Bharat Mata* expressed by Bhagat Singh, who epitomised aggressive atheism, has offered him a karmic rationale minus the religion. This notion of secular nationalistic Karma has pacified the anxiety in his process of dying. At the same time, one needs to ask the question whether Bhagat Singh had imagined this exact prototypical appearance of *Bharat Mata* in those years of his revolution or not, but popular media has personified the mother-archetype with the representation of Bhagat Singh, predominantly after his death. Ever since the first popular images of Bhagat Singh emerged in 1931, he had almost always been painted

wearing a trilby (Pinney 2004: 128). Although he was born in a Sikh family and turban was supposed to be associated with his appearance, his popular visual incarnation has nearly always been portrayed as an impersonator of the English sahib (gentleman) (ibid). Singh's scientific rational attitude influenced by western education, which was also related with his kind of atheism, had a direct manifestation in those portraits of him wearing trilby. Significantly, to balance this western tint of his appearance in most those paintings, images of Bharat Mata has also been juxtaposed on the same canvas. Not only in those pictures of Bhagat Singh, cartographed Bharat Mata was very frequent part of early 20th century Indian popular culture. Some of the artists who painted Bharat Mata with élan during that period were well-known and their works were not limited to nationalistic ideals, whereas majority of the artists were relatively unknown or completely unanimous (Ramaswamy 2010: 14). The image of Bharat Mata arguably for the first time appeared in a painting of one of the best painters India has ever produced, Abanindranath Tagore (ibid: 15). He painted that image in the historical context of nativist Swadeshi movement sparked off as a response against the ploy of dividing Bengal province into two parts by the British (ibid). After the execution, Bhagat Singh's images have increased in popular culture, from pamphlets, calendar arts to wall paintings, and more images by Rup Kishor Kapur appeared in public display than those by any other single (known) painter (Pinney 2004: 128). As informed by Kapur's Grandson it all started on "the day Bhagat Singh was hanged, he painted in a day [a picture] of Bhagat Singh beheaded, giving his head on a plate to Bharat Mata, who is weeping. He painted it and shouted Bande Mataram and he was taken by the police and was imprisoned for one or two years" (ibid). This painting called Sardar Bhagat Singh's Wonderful Presentation illustrates Bhagat Singh offering his head on a plate to a crowned Mother India and behind Bhagat Singh stand Rajguru and Shukhdev. This painting by Rup Kishor Kapur initiated other known and anonymous artists to try their own versions of this image (for example, see Image 1). However, because of this strong presence of Bharat Mata in popular culture, some serious question should be raised against the professed secular nature of Bharat Mata specifically, and Indian national movement in general. The images discussed above are filled with Hindu symbolisms. Almost all the images demonstrated Bharat Mata as similar to goddess Durga or Santoshi Maa, or a series of other goddess, sometimes with multiple hands and other Hindu symbols. These allegories along with general religious sentiment of the revolutionaries and swadeshis, barring some of them like Bhagat Singh, proved to be ideal for the projection of a new goddess, Bharat Mata, who is essentially Hindu but ostensibly secular. The superficial 'secular' portrayal had also proved to be effective in validating 'bad' deaths,

which religion alone could not manage to justify anymore. Representation of Bhagat Singh in popular culture had thus become a self-sacrifice for a mother nation, who is strikingly Hindu in her appearance, and his militant atheism had been silenced by the politics of non-representation. All those biopics on Bhagat Singh, mentioned above, also inexplicably silence about his self-proclaimed atheism. More treacherously those films have portrayed him as a believer, and sometimes the makers were so subtle about the representation that the audience can misunderstand Bhagat Singh as a religious believer.

Post-independent Bharat Mata on films as validating Death

Unlike those bio-pics on Bhagat Singh, where Bharat Mata was represented as the symbolic Indian nation, films of post-independent India have tried to personify the concept by embodying Bharat Mata as human beings. Mother India is perhaps the most significant and feted Hindi film of the decade just after Indian independence. Directed by Mehboob Khan and released in 1957 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Indian independence (Sinha 2006: 249), Mother India had seized instant attention of the cinema buffs throughout the world. It was later released after dubbing in numerous European languages like Spanish, French and Russian and it also managed to earn substantial revenue from Russia, Spain, Greece and other countries (Chatterjee 2002: 77-78). In India, Mother India was such a sensation that it had been continuing its shows in auditoriums till 1990s (ibid: 9). The title of the film was motivated by a contentious book by the same name, written by Katherine Mayo, an American author, in 1927, and in that book Mayo relentlessly condemned traditional cultural practices of India, its society, and religious philosophy, especially Hinduism (Sinha 2006: 248). Mother India starts with Radha, an old woman and respected as the 'mother', reminiscing her past during an inauguration of an irrigation canal. Without wasting any time, the film starts with an emblem of post-colonial Indian thrust towards modernisation, the canal. Modern India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in one of his immediate speeches after India's independence, announced, "dams are the temples of modern India" (Piper 2002: 161). Thus, Radha, the archetypical mother or symbolic Bharat Mata, while inaugurating the irrigation canal, which is a small variety of dam, installs the ideal of Nehruvian model of modernisation. Then Radha remembers her wedding with Shamu, for which Shamu's mother had to borrow money from the pawnbroker Sukhilala. This one incident of taking loan from Sukhilala, the sly landlord, has produced a chain of poverty related hardships for Radha and Shamu. The terms and conditions of that loan had been kept hidden from the illiterate gullible villagers at the beginning and then

the newlywed couple had to pay three quarters of their crops just as the interest on the credit. Sukhilala, the moneylender, in this film represents the privileged class that became powerful under the influence of colonial rulers, whose arrangements fashioned the hardship and poverty during India's colonial era. However, Shamu started working as manual labourer in order to earn some more money. One day, his both arms were crushed under a gigantic rock. The emerging sense of helplessness and dejection led Shamu to permanently leave the village abandoning Radha and their children. Soon Shamu's mother also died leaving Radha entirely solitary with the responsibility of three kids and with the burden of the loan. Predictably, Radha had to work very hard on the fields to cultivate crops with the help of two elder sons but that was not enough for their sustenance. To take advantage of the situation, Sukhilala had proposed Radha to marry him in order to get rid of her destitution, but she strongly refused. The 'mother' has to be incorruptible. For Radha, it is the aura of archetypical 'mother', which kept her resolute. Radha's predicaments became more stern on a stormy night when torrent and flood had shattered her house and the crops. To make it more awful, Radha's youngest son also died on that very night. The rainy tempest was so strong that it demolished the whole village. The residents had then decided to leave the village. Immediately, transcending the role of a biological mother and overcoming the grief of losing a child, Radha took the role of an ideal mother and convinced the inhabitants to stay back and reconstruct the village, which can be read as a metaphor for nation-building. The grief of losing of a child had proven to be the tipping point for Radha, as she comprehended that greater accomplishments ask for bigger sacrifices. The Image (Image-1) in which Bharat Mata receives the decapitated head of Bhagat Singh while crying is emotionally strikingly analogous to this representation of sacrificial motherhood of Radha. The plot of the film shifts very fast and now it shows Radha living with two of her surviving sons, Birju and Ramu, who had turned into young men. Ramu was depicted as a composed and dutiful son, who got married and had a harmonious life. But, Radha encountered difficulties due to her other son, Birju's temperament. Troubled since childhood because of the hardships faced by him caused by Sukhilala, he had turned into an perpetually furious, ill mannered persona. He had been portrayed continuously annoying girls of the village and specially Sukhilala's daughter, Rupa. On one occasion, Birju became so frantic due to some incitements that he attacked Sukhilala and Rupa and then robbed his mother Radha's bridal ornaments once pawned in Sukhilala's custody. Pursued by the villagers Birju ran away from the village and later turned into a fully fledged bandit with only revenge in mind. Radha once again surpassing the role of selfish biological mother aimed for greater virtue and assured Sukhilala that she would not let her son cause any more damage to his

family. Birju, who had become a leader of a gang of outlaws, decided to attack Sukhilala's family on Rupa's wedding day. He killed Sukhilala and then attempted to kidnap Rupa on his horse. It was Radha, his mother, who shot him and Birju died in her arms. The film ends with reddish water, which can be analysed a symbol for blood to denote sacrifice, flowing into the fields as Radha unbolts the gate of the irrigation canal. Rosie Thomas claims that *Mother India* is a 'complicit' text as Radha, though assigned an agency, maintains the status quo by killing Birju who could have been the agent of change (1989: 11-30). If we subscribe to this evaluation of Thomas, then Radha's role is not contradictory to the function of state, which also opts for status quo, and only assures gradual change with time. Radha's effort to rebuild the village after the storm was a continual process, and so is Nehruvian modernisation. The radical left ideology vouches for revolutionary change, some forms of violence is not prohibited also. But, state would not allow this unsettling atmosphere. Radha through killing, rather sacrificing, her son makes this point clear. That death has been reasonable by presenting Birju's actions as detrimental to the harmony of society. One 'bad' death can be accepted to preserve the equilibrium of society unharmed. So, *Mother India* could be observed as a metaphor of the trinity of mother, God, and a dynamic nation (Virdi 2008: 231) and religion and nation go hand in hand to rationalise 'bad' forms of death and to minimise its impact on social order.

Deewar (*The Wall*), released in 1975, was directed by Yash Chopra and scripted by Salim-Javed. The melodramatic plot of *Deewar* circulates around three central characters, Ravi, a textbook honest and valiant police officer, Vijay, who is Ravi's brother and an outlaw, and their mother Sumitra, who stands as a deewar between them. Vijay, who is the central character of the film, has been preoccupied from his childhood as he became the family's breadwinner after his father's disappearance. His father, Anand, was a trade union leader but was blackmailed to betray his union. Out of shame, Anand left the city leaving his family behind. Sumitra with her two sons moved to Mumbai (then Bombay). Vijay who has become a worker in Bombay ship dock does menial jobs and takes care of the family. Ravi is a bright student, and Vijay guarantees his education by continuously arranging the tuition fees. The growing requirement for money forces Vijay to join a dockyard gang of smugglers and quickly he climbs the ladder of success to become the leader of the gang. His brother, meanwhile, has joined the police force and has got the respect for being the honest officer. He tries to stop Vijay from his wrongdoings, but Vijay says he has travelled too far to return to a normal life. Vijay also blames the state agencies as those have failed to provide their family justice that in turn has created a criminal like him. In a famous conversation, an

arrogant Vijay asks to his brother, “aaj mere paas buildingeey hain, property hain, bank balance hain, bungla hain, gaadi hain ... kya hai, kya hai tumhare pass?” (today I have buildings, properties, cars... what do you have). Ravi answers, “mere paas Maa hain” (I have mother) keeping Vijay silent. Vijay, now alone, decides to marry his pregnant girl friend but finds her already murdered by his enemies. He decides to take his revenge by killing all of his enemies. Ravi tries to stop him again and in the end he succeeds, but only by killing his bother. The mother, who has been standing like a strong wall between them, stepped aside from being the deewar. When Ravi seeks the permission of his mother, Sumitra hands over the gun to Ravi saying, “bhagwan kare, goli chalate waqt tere haath na kape” (may god give you the strength to fire the bullet without any trembles). Just like Radha in Mother India, this is the moment where Sumitra rises over the role of a biological ‘selfish’ mother and appears as an ideal type image of national mother. After this Sumitra rushes to meet Vijay and says, “aurat apna farze nibha chuki, ab ma apne bete ka intazar karne ja rahi hai” (the woman has fulfilled her duty, now a mother would wait for her son). The harmonizing act between two selves of a mother finds its similarity in Mother India, where Birju dies in his mother’s arms just like Vijay in Deewar. To maintain the harmony in society the mother chooses one son over the other in both of these films, the chosen one is in both instances the obedient one, who is not antagonistic towards order rather a status-quoist.

Twenty First Century Bharat Mata on Silver Screen

The image of Bharat Mata, though modernised in terms of its representation, continues her appearance in Hindi films even in this present decade. Kahaani (The Story), directed by Sujoy Ghosh and released in 2012, is based on the nationalism with Bharat Mata imagery. The film, which is a crime thriller, starts with a terrorist attack on Kolkata subway railways, killing all passengers of a compartment by the use of poisonous gas. The story then moves two years ahead, and now concentrates on a pregnant woman Vidya Bagchi who arrives in Kolkata from London in search of her disappeared husband, Arnab Bagchi. Entire plot of Kahaani is staged on the backdrop of Durga puja in Kolkata. Durga is believed to be the goddess of power and Vidya Bagchi reaches Kolkata just before the puja. With the help of a committed police officer, Satyoki Sinha she reaches National Data Center office where her husband was supposed to be working but initial investigations shows that the office have no information about a person named Arnab Bagchi. Later Agnes D'Mello, the head of human resource department in National Data Center, finds out that a former employee, named Milan Damji, looked exactly similar to Arnab Bagchi. But before providing any more details Agnes D'Mello gets killed by a contract

killer. The name Milan Damji attracts the attention of Indian Intelligence Bureau, particularly the attention of two officials, the chief Bhaskaran, and his deputy Khan, who comes to Kolkata. He informs Vidya Bagchi that Milan Damji was an Intelligence Bureau agent, who turned into a terrorist, was accountable for the terrorist attack shown at the starting of the film and may be because of Damji’s resemblance with Arnab Bagchi’s physical and facial traits Arnab has got into trouble. In spite of constant dissuasions and life threatening experiences Vidya keeps on her search for her missing husband. And after some very jittery sequences Vidya gets hold of some documents that connects Bhaskaran, the chief of Intelligence Bureau, with the whole crime. Vidya offers a deal to hand over all those document in exchange of her husband, but Bhaskaran denies any connection with that terrorist act. Vidya soon gets an unknown call, which Khan suspects is from Milan Damji, threatening her to hand over all the documents. Vidya soon meets Damji, who informs that he has no clue about her husband’s whereabouts and tries to leave with the documents. Vidya, who has been throughout faking her pregnancy by using prosthetic belly, kills Damji and blends into the procession of Vijaya Dashami, the ritual where idols of goddess Durga are immersed into water. She leaves a letter and a pen-drive containing all documents that connects Bhaskaran to the crime. Satyoki concludes that no Vidya Bagchi or Arnab Bagchi ever existed and the whole ploy was to kill Milan Damji. In the last few moments of Kahaani, it is revealed that Vidya is a widow of Arup Basu who was an Intelligence Bureau officer and Milan Damji's colleague. In an attempt to stop Milan Damji from committing that gas attack in Kolkata subway railway, Arup was killed by the poisonous gas. Vidya who was pregnant at that time, lost her child in an accident caused by the sudden news of the demise of Arup. To take her revenge, Vidya with the help of a retired Intelligence Bureau officer organises the whole kahaani. The question of motherhood analysed before again comes into fore even in this present decade. The last few minutes of the film rapidly portray the character of Vidya both as a nationalistic resilient image of mother and as a biological mother who is emotionally vulnerable. Just like in Mother India, Vidya’s character also can be analysed as an earthly embodiment of a goddess, Durga, whose sticking similarity with the image of Bharat Mata has already been discussed at the beginning of this article. In the climax of the film, the appearance of Vidya is so strikingly similar to goddess Durga, and strangely Bharat Mata, that little has been left to imagination.

CONCLUSION

Both Birju and Vijay have tried to avenge the individuals who are behind all the hardships they have endured. Also, it can be argued that as long as the enemy is recognizable individual, the vengeance is

justified. For example, throughout 1970s, the decade known as the era of angry young man in Hindi film industry, Amitabh Bachchan, who played the role of Vijay in *Deewar*, personified the image. In all of those films he was able to blame it all – poverty, unemployment, and injustice – on a recognizable enemy (Kazmi 1996: 19), not the limitations and corruption of state mechanism as such. Even when, in *Deewar*, he asks his police officer bother to find out the reason behind his criminal origin, it is also about a person, not the social structure. It is then not surprising that he did only one explicitly political film in those angry years, *Inquilab* (ibid: 21). For individual enemy, the angry hero has only one agenda and that is to destroy someone for whom his life has been ruined, rather than posing the question on structural level. Also, the path towards this resolution in most of these films is not sanctioned legally and which would obviously create clash within social order. The way, in Hindu mythology, Krishna has taken his revenge on Kansa or lord Ram killed Ravan is not possible in modern time where state agencies dictate the terms of human actions. So, even a Vijay or a Birju has faced injustice, they are not allowed to punish the perpetrators on their own unsettling the social order. State would not encourage individual modes of revenge as that may give rise to chaos. But, is it so simple, after all Radha kills her son Birju with a firearm and which is being valorised because after all she becomes the epitomised mother? Is the state is not behaving selectively in terms on dealing with ‘bad’ death? To answer how the state deals with ‘bad’ death we again need to go back to the discussion on representation of Bhagat Singh in popular culture. Taking references from the example of immortalizing Bhagat Singh in those images (for example, the Image 1 discussed before) in colonial era, the importance of the figure of Mother India cannot be denied. Though Bhagat Singh, an atheist, was trying to get only the ‘material’ benefit, i.e. to spread revolutionary ideology, out of his ‘dry’ death, he could not help the romanticisation ascribed on his sacrifice by making the representations of his death ‘poetical’. His appeal to make the movement secular and less ‘poetical’ has gone unheeded after his death. Bharat Mata with her all emblems has turned the image of Bhagat Singh very Hindu subliminally, but ostensibly it has been all about romantic ‘secular’ nationalism that needs sacrifice. The portrayal of mother in both of the films discussed essentially epitomises these two objectives. Mother, in all of these three representations, is essentially unhappy, as she needs sacrifice. Sometimes, she could not refuse her son from offering his own life to her, sometimes she needs to take or grant permission to take her son’s life for greater common good of the nation. In twenty first century also, this representation of Bharat Mata in Indian popular culture still manages to justify death and killing, for nationalistic cause. But, the alarming trend of this nationalism is hidden in its over-representation

of Hindu symbolism, which does not follow India’s constitutional claim of being a secular nation. The death of Bhagat Singh and subsequent justification representing his death in Hindu imagery can be understood as a reflection of Hinduist domination of Indian freedom movement. Accordingly, in Indian scenario death is still not a secular event. When it is a manifestation of ‘bad’ death religious principles, mainly the idea of karma, provide the justification of death even if there is this trend of representing the death in secular nationalist tint ostensibly. Hinduism and nationalism go hand in hand in India to justify ‘bad’ death. And, this marriage between two powerful social institutions, i.e. religion and politics, justifying ‘bad’ forms of death has been proving successful, at least in popular culture, in India for two reasons. Firstly it is not possible for religion to legitimise death single-handedly after enlightenment, and as the principle of ‘secular’ nation in India is deeply rooted in religious, i.e. Hindu, fundamentalism it is also not possible to scientifically rationalise death. Secondly, the politics of mis-representation and non-representation of other religious groups in India ensure the dominance of Hindu symbolisms in Indian popular culture. Bharat Mata has been proving the juxtaposition of this two institutions as functional for more than a hundred years in general, and specifically in the case of rationalising death.

END NOTES

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