

## Cinematic ambivalence on borders: Ifs and buts of popular South Asia



Anakshi Pal\*

Dev Nath Pathak\*\*

### Abstract

*This paper is an exploration of borders through the lens of cinema to understand how it has been imagined or re-imagined in cinematic narratives. Cinema often echoes nationalist overtones in inscribing imaginations of borders into the popular psyche as cartographic divisions. Using a 'close-reading' of cinema as a contextually embedded text, full of ambivalences, this paper suggests that cinema also re-imagines borders as 'subversive sites' in juxtaposition to such nationalist narratives of borders as frozen, inviolable lines. It shows how the border might even be imagined as a process of 'othering', creating dichotomies and binaries like insiders/outsideers, citizens/foreigners, us/them. Borders are simultaneously interpreted as performative metaphors, whereby its invisibility is transformed into a spectacle making it concrete and invincible. Finally, the border is also read as a metaphor for the rift between nation-states and its peripheral citizens. In doing so, this paper stresses that cinematic imagination of borders can be seen as a categorical device in itself, albeit fraught with ambiguities, to jump over the barbed fence of dominant nation-state narratives and emerge at the idea of a 'fluid' border that is negotiated daily through the everyday acts of resistances of the borderland people.*

**Keywords:** borders, borderlands, cinema, cinematic borders, subversive sites

### Introduction

*'It is your last check-in point in this country!' ...soon everything would taste different. The land under our feet continued; divided by a thick iron chain. My sister put her leg across it. 'Look over here', she said to us, 'my right leg is in this country and my left leg in the other.'*  
*The border guards told her off.*  
*...Dozens of families waited in the rain. 'I can inhale home', some said.*  
*...I was five years old; standing by the check-in point; comparing both sides of the border.*  
*The autumn soil continued on the other side; with the same colour, the same texture. It rained on both sides of the chain.*  
 ~Choman Hardi, 1979<sup>i</sup>

In popular understandings, the border is generally imagined as a cartographic line on a map, that is fixed and frozen in time. Taking this as a point of departure, we argue that this is a unilinear, nation-state-centric approach towards borders. Such common sense understandings stem from a nationalist ideology in which the popular imagination is embedded. It almost outlaws any alternative imagination of borders

---

\*Doctoral Candidate, Department of Sociology, South Asian University: [anakshipal92@gmail.com](mailto:anakshipal92@gmail.com)

\*\*Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, South Asian University: [dev@soc.sau.ac.in](mailto:dev@soc.sau.ac.in)

that does not conform to this picture of a fixed, stable, linear divide. Nation-states inscribe borders into the national psyche as ‘sacred’<sup>ii</sup> lines that must not be violated. Any threat to the border is thus perceived as a threat to the nation-state, qua national sacred. Popular cinema, embedded in the nationalist ideology, often tends to demonstrate borders as war-prone zones or a ‘warzone’<sup>iii</sup> that is highly militarized and overly securitized. The idea of the border as ‘sacred’ is re-affirmed in these narratives. This paper decodes such hegemonic narratives to show how borders can be differently imagined. This is also much needed with the realization that modernity, thereof institutions, and instruments of communication such as cinema is fraught with ambiguities. The best way to understand this ambiguity is to recall Bauman’s (1990, 1991) famous propositions on it that allows us to see all that is grotesque, betwixt the classificatory binaries of the grand narratives. While professing binaries of sacred and profane, akin to the Durkheimian Sociology, modernity was unravelled as a storehouse of fragmented but equally significant strangers pertaining to micro-narratives<sup>iv</sup>. Through a close reading of cinematic narratives pertaining to the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders, as a contextual text, we locate ambiguities and argue that borders can be alternatively imagined as ‘sites of subversion’. The borderland people through their everyday acts of transgressions and border crossings in the reel life, create their own narratives of subversion. Such subversive acts transform borders from solid divides into negotiable sites.

Simultaneously, we pick at cinematic instances to demonstrate how borders become performative metaphors in these narratives. Borders become sites where the nation-state, spectacularly, demonstrates power and aggressiveness because it is where its power is the weakest and perpetually under threat<sup>v</sup>. This is what van Schendel (2007) referred to as the ‘Wagah Syndrome’ (p. 44). Insecurities of the nation-state with regard to its control over the peripheral border region become pronounced through the overflowing presence of the symbols of its sovereignty at borders. This finds more emphatic, and somewhat exaggerated articulations in the cinematic reconstructions. The state is thus shown as striving perpetually to maintain its presence/control felt through these performances and symbols. Finally, we propose to see borders as metaphors for the gulf between the nation-state and its people at the periphery. Hence, these become sites where the nation-state’s power is imposed over its people.

### **The Concept and The Content in A Cursory Glance**

Terms such as ‘frontier’, ‘border’ and ‘boundaries’, are often used interchangeably<sup>vi</sup>. This leads to conceptual confusion as each refers to a notion of inclusion/exclusion, insider/outsider. ‘Frontier’ generally refers to territorial expansions of nation-states into unclaimed areas, while ‘boundary’ refers to socio-cultural divisions<sup>vii</sup>. The latter is not restricted to the idea of a physical, material ‘border’ and as such is not synonymous with it (Tatum 2000). Lastly, the term ‘border’ has been defined as political divisions or as physical borders between two continents, nations or between two states within a nation<sup>viii</sup>. Political borders have often been referred to as ‘constructs’ and more so in the context of South Asia, as ‘political constructs’<sup>ix</sup>. It has been argued that borders are political imports to the region of South Asia, brought in by the British from the West. For instance, the drawing of the Durand Line and the McMahon line within a gap of 10 years, were direct results of the British East India Company’s efforts to secure their colonial holdings in the face of the threat imposed by Britain’s rivalry with Russia and China<sup>x</sup>. These frontiers were transformed into

fixed, rigid borders only with the Partition, in order to reaffirm the limits and expanses of the sovereignty of nation-states.

Hence, as borders were never innate characteristics of the South Asian political landscape, it is a tragedy that they have come to constitute lines of fixtures between ‘citizens’ and ‘foreigners’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is curious then, to understand how borders, as artificial imports to South Asia, came to dominate the general understanding as rigid, frozen divides. The creation of modern borders represents the collective effort by state elites<sup>xi</sup> to establish a universal system of definite territorial jurisdictions and to cartographically confirm their legal and political sovereignty. As such, borders are often seen as reflections of the actual power that nation-states exercise over their own societies. Simultaneously, borders also become sites of contestations between the state and its people. In fact, borders are often viewed as the results of worked out negotiations between the centre and the people living on the peripheries of the nation<sup>xii</sup>.

The term ‘border’ has been variously used to signify psychological divides<sup>xiii</sup> and to refer to a real or abstract territoriality that neither belongs to one side, nor to the other. In such formulations, ‘borders’ become conceptual devices for understanding the autonomy of certain ideas and spaces<sup>xiv</sup>. ‘Borders’ have further been seen as reflections of existing differences that perpetuate more differences by constructing new sets of ‘others’ instead of doing away with them (Newman 2006). In this paper, the term ‘border’ has been used as a fusion of these two accepted definitions- firstly, ‘border’ has been used in the sense of a cartographic divide between two countries; and secondly, with regard to socio-psychological divides between two cultural communities and nation-states. The purpose of this paper, however, is to problematize such definitions and arrive at meanings of borders that challenge these imaginations. It would strive to pitch the idea of borders as markers of unity as much as divisions by engaging with the cinematic constructions. This is essential to de-construct the grand hegemonic narrative of nation-states and throw light on ‘micro-narratives’<sup>xv</sup> of the everyday that imagine the border differently: “In daily life the border hardly plays a role at all, but there is always a hint of suspense, a slight tinge of uncertainty...a political storm may suddenly engulf this zone and involve it directly in border dynamics” (Baud and van Schendel 1997: 222). Hence, as interactive spaces, borders do not remain restricted to its cartographic definition but come alive through the ways in which it influences the borderland and is influenced by the borderland population<sup>xvi</sup>. This is the ambiguous sense in which the term ‘border’ is employed in this paper while rummaging through cinematic texts.

The select films chosen for discussion in this paper revolve around the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders, since cinema in India seems to have an explicit obsession with them, especially the Indo-Pakistan border. This is due to the history of a bloody Partition that both the countries share, together with the cultural affinities and community ties that go back over generations<sup>xvii</sup>. It is also owing to the series of wars that these nations have fought among them and still do, providing ample content for mainstream Hindi cinema to stick to the clichéd understanding of this border as a war prone zone. Conversely, portrayals of the Indo-Bangladesh border along West Bengal, have been relatively benign. Perhaps this is because the two Bengals were perceived for a long time as a culturally integrated community that shared the trauma of a forced Partition<sup>xviii</sup>. The Indo-Bangladesh border is also

comparatively porous in nature and cross-border migrations continue on a daily basis in trickles<sup>xix</sup>. As such, films on this border mostly speak on themes such as longings for a lost homeland or ‘desher bari’ (Basu Raychaudhury 2004), the nostalgic narratives and tragic struggles of refugees in West Bengal; or recently, of the Partition atrocities, illegal border crossings, border killings to stop illegal migration and trade across this border into India<sup>xx</sup>. The tales of borders that India shares with its other neighbours have been rarely explored and almost completely ignored. Hence, the selection has been restricted to films on these two specific borders only.

As cultural artefacts, films often create notions of a homogenized, unified and coherent national identity, simultaneously strengthening the mythical idea of a nation<sup>xxi</sup>. However, as noted previously, they also create spaces for counter narratives to such nationalist imagination on borders. The ambiguity of the cinematic constructions thus assumes significance in this paper. Although each film belongs to a specific genre, that is significant and might vary, for the purpose of this paper, the selection was restricted to a thematic approach.

One set of selected films foreground the border as a sacred cartographic line, a ‘war-prone zone’ and ‘warzone’, for example, *Border* (1997); *L.O.C. Kargil* (2003). The second set portrays overt or covert challenges to nationalist imaginations of borders as inviolable ‘sacred’ lines through the acts of physical or nostalgic transgressions, transforming borders into ‘subversive sites’. This includes *Komol Gandhaar* (1961)<sup>xxii</sup>; *Little Terrorist* (2004); *Ramchand Pakistani* (2008); *Filmistaan* (2012); *Rajkahini* (2015); *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015); *Shankhachil* (2016)). Third and last entails films which represent borders as ‘performative metaphors’, in which bordering is elucidated as a process of ‘othering’ through spectacular performances and symbolisms of the state and the military. This will have examples from *Filmistaan* (2012); *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015); *Rajkahini* (2015).

The central argument in this paper is built through methodological ‘close-reading’ (Kain 1998) of the contextually embedded cinematic content of these specified films. The interpretative unravelling of the narrative structure, the dialogues and the symbolisms present in these is central in this paper. Following this, a close scrutiny was made of the narrative and imaginative patterns, repetitions, similarities and differences that could give an idea about the broader imaginative themes surrounding borders in these films. Finally, the observations were interpreted using ‘inductive reasoning’, by arriving at conclusions based on the observations previously recorded. Consequently, certain major cinematic typologies of imaginations on borders in general, and the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders in particular, were derived from the observations.

It ought to be noted that we are aware of the limitations of reading cinematic texts, for they engender only approximate understandings of a prevalent reality such as borders. The aim of this paper however is to raise a discursive trope fraught with perceptive typologies, to fathom the ‘other’ non-statist narratives of borders in juxtaposition to nation-state centric meta-narratives. This is because, as Newman writes, “Borders should be studied not only from a top-down perspective, but also from the bottom up, with a focus on the individual border narratives and experiences, reflecting the ways in which borders impact upon the daily life practices of people living in and around the borderland and transboundary transition zones” ((2006: 143).

In what follows, we delve into a deeper analysis of cinema as an ambivalent socio-political text on borders.

### **Cinematic Borders: Hegemony of Nation and Narration**

To reiterate, states are powerful elite institutions that thrive by exercising hegemony. Following Gramsci (1971), ‘hegemony’ is the power to impose and legitimize dominance, without being challenged<sup>xxiii</sup>. It is this hegemony that allows nation-states to validate borders as ‘sacred’ lines of division. Thus, borders too are inscribed into the popular psyche as all-powerful and awe-inspiring, like the Durkheimian ‘sacred’<sup>xxiv</sup>. Acts of transgression translate to acts of profanity towards borders/nation-states. Such hegemonic ‘meta-narratives’<sup>xxv</sup> naturalize the myth of borders. They succeed because, as Lyotard (1979) had claimed, meta-narratives monopolize history and truth. The alternative ‘mini-narratives’ made up by everyday acts of subversion, hence, get labelled as extra-national and illegal. Violation of the sacred is, then, against the norms of the collective and invites legal sanctions.

Cinema, therefore, cannot be read in isolation, nor divorced from the hegemonic nationalist ideology. It is often an interface between the social and the political. Often cinema mirrors imaginations of the border as a militarized, war-prone zone. However, as Anjali Gera Roy and Chua Beng Huat (2012) point out, this is a one sided reading of cinema in India. As a quintessentially modern cultural artefact, cinema perfectly demonstrates the peculiar ambivalence of its time. It is determined not by order and decisiveness, but by chaos and indeterminacies. One can expect the cinematic engagement with border to bear ambivalence, as it is equally engaged and disengaged from the nation-state, transforming itself into a “free-floating signifier” (Ibid.: xxi). Thus, nationalist narratives of borders as ‘zones of exclusion’ co-exist with narratives of memory and nostalgia. This forbids the complete estrangement of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as foreigners to each other. Therefore, just like it portrays the border as militarized warzones in films such as *Border* (1997) and *L.O.C. Kargil* (2003), it also creates spaces for counter narratives that challenge this notion, re-imagining borders as ‘zones of contact’ and negotiated spaces in films like *Komol Gandhaar* (1961), *Little Terrorist* (2004), *Ramchand Pakistani* (2008), *Filmistaan* (2012) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015).

As socio-political texts on borders, cinematic narratives are dictated by the nature of bilateral ties between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Indo-Pakistan bilateral ties was sufficiently sour due to previous wars and continued to remain extremely tense, owing to the Kargil War of 1999 and the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001<sup>xxvi</sup>. Accordingly, and as nationalist sentiments would say, befittingly, the cinematic representations of borders echoed nationalist undertones, rather overtones. Cinema then portrayed the Indo-Pakistan border as a ‘sacred’ line of divide and a militarized, contested ‘warzone’. As if neatly timed, the films as *Border* (1997) and *L.O.C. Kargil* (2003) came to uphold the heightened sense of the fear of the ‘other’ across the borders. Simultaneously, demonstrating the ambivalent attitude there were films such as *Little Terrorist* (2004) and *Ramchand Pakistani* (2008), which showcased the daily travails of the borderland people who often become victims of such nationalist obsession of borders. However, these narratives of victimhood get transformed into narratives of subversion when people in the reel, the cinematic characters, exercise their agency to violate the sacred border by transgressing it, overtly or covertly. The cinematic play with borders

humorously parodies the nationalist imaginary of inviolable divides. *Filmistaan* (2012) and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015) have further encashed upon the historical and emotional links between India and Pakistan, while concurrently displaying issues such as terrorism, an international concern for India and Pakistan since mid-2000s<sup>xxvii</sup> with comical overtures.

On the other hand, the imagery of the border as a war-prone zone has been noticeably absent in cinematic imaginations of the Indo-Bangladesh border owing to the fact that bi-lateral relations between these two countries have been mostly amicable on the whole<sup>xxviii</sup>. The major trope through which this border has been imagined is that of the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent and the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, crises which led to an exodus of refugees coming into India (Luthra 1971). Films such as *Komol Gandhar* (1961) therefore emerged as narrative documents on the arbitrariness of this border resulting in poignant tragedies. Presently, the Indo-Bangladesh border, identified as one of the most porous borders<sup>xxix</sup>, has been heavily inflicted by issues like illegal border crossings and border killings by the military, especially by the Border Security Force (BSF) on the Indian side<sup>xxx</sup>. These issues have become central themes in films like *Shankhachil* (2016). Further, the global scenario, in the wake of the World Refugee Crisis of 2015<sup>xxxi</sup>, has brought back with it traumatic memories of Partition that is alive till date among the people of India and Bangladesh, inspiring such films as *Rajkahini* (2015) to become one of the most violent, brutal and poignant critiques of this border.

With this generic understanding, the subsequent parts of the paper will unravel a few emergent typologies of cinematic engagement with borders. Within each typology, we deal with the issues flagged thus far. Each typology, we envisage, provides an anchor through the cinematic terrain.

### **Janus-Faced Border: Warzone and Subversion**

As stated earlier, Border as a warzone demonstrates an over-securitized border along India and Pakistan with a clear military presence, in fact the only presence, and is the common projection in mainstream Hindi films of the nationalistic genre. Barbed wires and fences are common insignias in such films, separating one contentious zone from another. In these films, cinematic silence on the lives of borderland people becomes explicitly pronounced. For example, in *Border* (1997), a cinematic account of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War in the border region of Loungewala, in Punjab, glimpses of the borderland people are given only twice: in the first, they are framed under the lens of suspicion and turn out to be Pakistani spies; while in the second, they appear as the victims of a newly broken out war.

The entire narrative of these films is centred on the allegorical portrayal of the nation as the 'motherland'<sup>xxxii</sup> and the border as a 'sacred' marker of the national territory. Any attempt at profaning this sacred line would meet with the unmerciful vengeance and macho-aggressiveness of the Indian Army soldiers, who are shown as fiery protectors of the 'mother'/Nation. The border then also becomes a 'zone of exclusion' and the borderland an 'alienated borderland' (Martinez 1994). It is noteworthy to mention that the lives and familial sacrifices of the Indian soldier is a central focus in both these films. It almost feels as if the nation-state of India is bound to respect and harbour nationalist sentiments towards borders out of the guilt it experiences for the deaths of its soldiers who had sacrificed their lives at the border.

Such concrete nationalist sentiments lend a sense of corporeality to the nation-state and convert borders into its tangible markers, transforming nation-states from being simply ‘imagined’ communities<sup>xxxiii</sup> into phantom realities.

The absences of the everyday life narratives of borderland people, in such grand hegemonic narratives of mainstream Hindi films as *Border* (1997) and *L.O.C. Kargil* (2003) speak volumes. Acts of negotiating the impinging presence of the border on their everyday lives are muzzled in these films by loud nationalistic overtones. These are portrayed as acts of ‘profanity’ towards the border, which becomes almost synonymous with the entire nation-state as both the concepts collapse into each other. Yet, everyday life activities and performances of the borderland people, which might not make grand headlines, such as a war, are nevertheless “hidden transcripts of ‘everyday resistance’” (Gupta and Sharma 2004: 3013), that is to say, these are not overt challenges to nationalist imagination of the border, but rather, covert resistances to the way it has been constructed by the nation-state. These de-construct borders as merely ‘warzones’ and re-create it as a site for subversion of the nation-state’s authority.

As paradoxical terrains, borders do not remain limited as a stable phenomenon. They become equally potent unstable regions, fraught with uncertainties because of the possibilities of (il)legal flow of people, money and goods. This constantly disturbs and disrupts the authority and power of the nation-state at borders, while simultaneously stabilizing it<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Therefore, the border emerges in such contexts of ‘illegal’ border crossings as a ‘zone of transition’ and as a ‘site of subversion’, challenging the authoritative sacredness of the nation-state defined border. The short, and yet sharp, film *Little Terrorist* (2004) revolves around a Pakistani Muslim boy named Jamal (Julfuqar Ali). While playing cricket in a minefield along the India-Pakistan border, he sneaks beneath the barbed wires to fetch the ball, which had ignorantly landed in another nation. As he crawls upon the sand and grabs the ball, the alarm sets off and the Indian army showers bullets on him, as though flowers greeting the little guest. The soldiers meanwhile trace an invisible ‘terrorist’. The benign humor continues as the village schoolmaster, a Hindu Brahmin named Bhola (Sushil Sharma), spots the little boy and misleads the Indian soldiers to set them off Jamal’s track. He then comes to his aid and gives him refuge. Jamal tags along with Bhola, realizing that he might be his only hope of being rescued. As an initiation in the act of subversion, the conversation unfolds:

*Bhola: You must be crazy to cross over during the day*

*Jamal: We were playing cricket...*

*Bhola: Cricket? Under that old scrub tree?*

*Jamal: Yes*

*Bhola: The withered tree, with wickets drawn on it?*

*Jamal: Yes*

*Bhola: That’s amazing- I used to play cricket there with my friends, when all this was one village, before Pakistan was made...*

These covert acts of subversion are frequently showcased in films, either in the form of nostalgic narratives or as a direct outcry against the futility of such arbitrary borders. These everyday border crossings constitute a routine survival strategy for borderland people, whose

“...actions may not explicitly be a critique of the nation but they also do not encompass the nation. As subalterns, they are perhaps 'incapable' of 'imagining' a nation. It may thus be more useful to see these acts as representing an unconcern for state and national anxieties...” (Gupta and Sharma 2004: 3013-3014).

However, romantic imageries of subversive acts are fraught with brutalities suffered by the borderland people of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Reports indicate over a million deaths at the Indo-Pakistan border, identified as one of the most dangerous borders in the world<sup>xxxv</sup> coupled with the rising numbers of arbitrary arrests of fisherfolks who become prisoners for casual transgressions of maritime borders between India and Pakistan<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Similarly, border killings along the Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal have also reached gigantic proportions with over 900 deaths of Bangladeshi citizens in the hand of the BSF till 2010 (*Human Rights Watch*, December 9, 2010).

In contrast to such playful and nostalgic subversions of the border are such conscious ones as portrayed in the Bengali film *Shankhachil* (2016) or *Boundless*. In *Shankhachil*, a joint production by India and Bangladesh, Muntasir Chowdhury Badal (Prasenjit Chatterjee), a Bengali Muslim residing in a borderland village in Bangladesh, comes to Taaki in India to seek medical help for his daughter, Rupsa (Shajbati), who is suffering from a congenital heart defect. As their daughter undergoes treatment, Muntasir and his wife, Laila Chowdhury (Kusum Sikder) take the false aliases of Bengali Hindus. They change their names to Badal Chowdhury and Leela Chowdhury, in order to hide their identities as illegal immigrants into India. Simply by altering their names, Badal and Laila transgress socio-cultural boundaries and become assimilated into the larger cultural society of India. Further, in this film, Rupsa's fascination for the bird 'Shankhachil' becomes a metaphor for the fascination of boundlessness and liberation from borders and state-imposed boundaries.

Rupsa does not survive. It is her coffin-bound dead body that leaves India in a boat, marked by the Indian national flag, under the supervision of the same Indian soldier with whom she had struck an unusual friendship. As the boat reaches the maritime border with Bangladesh, the coffin is handed over to the Bangladeshi Army and crosses the border in another boat marked with the Bangladeshi national flag. The figure of this Indian soldier, who exchanges balloons for pickles with a girl from Bangladesh through barbed fences, symbolizes the interactions between the two communities that are given freedom of flight but always under the omnipresent lens of the states and their security forces. In this sense, *Shankhachil* (2016) cannot be interpreted simply as a linear narrative of subversion. The opening scenes of the film begin by showing a line of illegal migrants sneaking over the border into India. But this act of subversion has its encounter with the state as the Border Security Force (BSF) guns down a child, leaving his lifeless corpse to hang over the barbed fence. The reel here meets the real, for as previously indicated, atrocities by the military on both sides of the border have continued to strain bi-lateral ties. There are similar instances within the film that reflect the dominating presence of the state and the BSF at the Indo-Bangladesh border. The hegemonic definition of the border as 'sacred', which can be transgressed but only at one's own cost, is a theme that constantly gets reiterated upon the psyche of the audience. For example, Badal and Laila regard their transgression of the sacred boundaries of their religion as a sin, which costs them their daughter's life. This sentiment is also reflected in the dialogue between Anisur and

Hemanta Bagchi (Badal's neighbour and Principal in the school where he used to work) while they walk behind Rupsa's coffin, as it is carried to the burial ground:

*Anisur (in an accusing tone to Hemanta Bagchi): Listen- it all happened because of you and your over-fondness for India! Why don't you go live in that land?!*

*Hemanta Bagchi (in a tone of resignation): Where should I go leaving behind my own country...*

Thus, the commission of subversive acts of transgressing the border and boundaries, as a transition into another culture and community, is portrayed as inviting political, social and religio-cultural sanctions. As such, this film emerges as yet another version where the nationalist ideology behind the cartographic border is reproduced and legitimized despite its allusions to the artificiality of the Indo-Bangladesh border and the idea of boundlessness.

In addition to such overt and conscious acts of subversion, there are those unconscious subversions that express their disregard towards the border with as much intensity. This is portrayed in the film *Ramchand Pakistani* (2008) through the figure of a seven-year-old Pakistani boy named Ramchand (Syed Fazal Hussain), belonging to a Hindu Dalit family, living in the Thar Desert, along the border in Pakistan. Ramchand walks into India just like that, unconsciously, too preoccupied in his childish anger towards his mother, Champa (Nandita Das), to notice such cartographic demarcations. In fact, his innocent unawareness does not register any border as there is no such demarcating line on the land, per se, as on a map. He walks through the stone markers that bear the name of India. Pursuing the trail of his son, who he had seen walking towards the border, an apprehensive Shankar (Rashid Farooqui), also steps across the border into India. They both get arrested and spend five long years in an Indian prison before being released. The film claims to be based on true events and proclaims to be set in January 2002, against the backdrop of the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, which resulted in the tightening of security along the Indo-Pakistan border. It makes a parody of such over-securitization<sup>xxxvii</sup> of borders that cannot even disregard a casual trespassing by a little boy from Pakistan into India.

Subversive undertones in such films transform borders from war-prone zones or 'zones of exclusion', that keep the enemy out, into 'zones of inclusion', fraught with ambiguous distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The border, therefore, equally unites while dividing<sup>xxxviii</sup>. In this context, consider Ritwik Ghatak's (1961) film, *Komol Gandhaar*, where the physical boundary dividing the two Bengals is at once dismissed as superfluous by the contemplative 'gaze'<sup>xxxix</sup> of the erstwhile East-Pakistani refugees in West Bengal, Anusuya (Supriya Devi) and Bhriгу (Abanish Bannerjee). Behind their gazes hide their narratives of tragedy, as a border fractured their lives, which are now fraught with nostalgic longings for a lost homeland or 'desh bari'. Through their gazes, which are covert subversions of a kind, Anusuya and Bhriгу transgress the border to seek out their houses on the other side, foregrounding the tragedy of a displaced people and a divided community. This gives one a sense of the violence associated with the Indo-Bangladesh border owing to the fact that it played havoc with the lives, shared cultures and memories of peoples belonging to one linguistic community.

The masterful lens of Ritwik Ghatak captures the borderscape between India and the erstwhile East Pakistan with a railway track running in between, trapped in the tragedy and pathos of a single community split into two. Ghatak's protagonists, Anusuya and Bhriгу, stand gazing at this borderscape of memories, lamenting how a border that used to unite the two Bengals now divides them instead. Their gaze is hardly an idle, innocent gaze. It is transformed into a subversive gaze that critically debunks the forceful imposition of borders on cultural communities such as theirs-

*Anusuya: ...over there is the East... This is Padma... Over there somewhere is my 'desher bari' (home)...I feel as if we have become like outsiders, don't you think so?...  
Bhriгу: My home is also on the other side. See, those huts that can be seen from here-so close, yet so far away. I will never be able to go back ever again. It is a foreign land now. When you told me your home is somewhere over there...I was also trying to seek out our house. It was there, exactly there! ...It suddenly occurred to me that these old railway tracks were a sign of union. Today they have become a symbol of separation-right at this juncture, the country has been split into two.*

These portrayals of conscious and unconscious or overt and covert transgressions of the border, subvert the powerful exclusionary politics of the nation-states. These must be interpreted as acts of resistance against the hegemonic power of the nation-states that penetrate and influence the daily lives of the people living at the peripheries<sup>xl</sup>.

### **The Border as a Performative Metaphor**

Cinema delivers us a portrayal of border as a process of 'othering', and the politics of securing borders in the popular psyche as sacrosanct through performances. This process and thereof props acquire performative significance<sup>xli</sup>. The 'processes of bordering' operate through the creation of binaries, separating and uniting 'us'/'them', 'insiders'/'outsiders' and 'citizens'/'foreigners'. The process of bordering results in the creation of an 'other'. This is apparently done through performances and the employment of symbolism by the nation-state and its military at the borders, which is almost spectacular in nature. The mythology of the border, then, gets transformed into a spectacle through decorated and symbolic shows of aggressiveness at borders (Barthes (1957) 2009)<sup>xlii</sup>. For instance, the film *Rajkahini* (2015) begins with the flag hoisting ceremony at the Wagah border in Punjab, between India and Pakistan<sup>xliii</sup>. The ceremony is a formal choreographed military performance, full of theatrics laced in bewitching passion as soldiers on both sides put up a show of aggressive pomp aimed at the 'other' nation. The spectacular nature of this performance and show of power by the nation-states at a significant site, the Wagah border, transforms the border into an arena of performative spectacle<sup>xliv</sup>. It also sends a strong symbolic message to the spectators by raising the state and its institutions above the level of the ordinary and mundane. Therefore, nation-states and their borders, because of being extraordinary, become sacred and inviolable, almost like a totem in a primitive worldview.

Bordering processes therefore highlight clear lines of separation between binaries, legitimizing one at the cost of disregarding the other. However, everyday performances by borderland people frequently soften such divisions. In *Filmistaan* (2012), for instance, a passionate Bollywood-buff Sunny (Sharib Hashmi) is mistakenly kidnapped by a Pakistan based terrorist group from the Indo-Pakistan border region in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. In the house where the kidnappers keep him confined, along the border in Pakistan, Sunny finds his friend and aid in Aftaab

(Inaamulhaq). Owing to the passionate fascination for acting and Bollywood<sup>xlv</sup>, their friendship overcomes all mental borders and thus they find companions in each other. As an aside, it is mentionable that Aftaab is shown to be a dealer in pirated films. He almost smuggles these films with him every time he crosses the border. This kind of exchange of cultural artefacts in the cultural underworld of sort, Nandy (2005) suggests, disregards national-territorial laws. The cultural smugglers, fortunately, transgress nation-state, the institution of borders and keep the possibility of ‘another South Asia’<sup>xlvi</sup> alive. After a couple of failed attempts, they succeed in the end, and the captive protagonist escapes across the border into India amidst gunshots of the abductors as well as the fatal surveillance of the Border Security Force. Curiously, both the legitimate army and illegitimate militia require strict borders to flex their respective muscles. Combatting both the stakeholders at the borders, the two friends muster a common interest in Bollywood to overcome the divides. The unusual friendship disturbs and disrupts the accepted binaries that popular imaginations of the Indo-Pakistan border built into the psyche of the masses. Consequently, the border also emerges as a metaphor for a safe place to run to and a refuge.

Again, in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (2015), Pawan Kumar Chaturvedi (Salman Khan), also known as Bajrangi Bhaijaan, risks his life and crosses the border into Pakistan to bring a lost Pakistani Muslim girl home. Shahida/Munni (Harshaali Malhotra) finds her parents but Bajrangi is held captive by the Pakistani police. In a dramatic turnover in the story, the Senior Pakistani Police Officer, Hamid Khan (Rajesh Sharma), realizes that holding him captive in prison would only bring shame upon Pakistan. As such, he gives a cue to Bajrangi’s friend and aide in Pakistan, a journalist named Chand Nawab (Nawazuddin Siddiqui). By putting a video online, Chand Nawab appeals to the masses of both nations to gather at the Narowal Border Checkpost and ensure that Bajrangi Bhaijaan is allowed to return to his country unhindered. The next day, thousands of people on both sides flock towards the border checkposts. The Pakistani Army initially puts up a show of resistance but in the final twist, they surrender and feign resistance, as they give a cue to the masses to literally break down the checkpost. In the final climactic moment of the film, the gathered crowd literally runs over the border, forcing it open as the armed Pakistani soldiers stand by. This dramatic gesture is a performative subversion that overtly confronts the resistance put up by the actors of the nation-states. As Bajrangi Bhaijaan crosses over into India amidst loud cheers and incessant claps from the people, Shahida, who is portrayed in the film as mute, stands behind the barbed wire trying to call out to him one last time. She miraculously finds her voice and they both run towards each other to meet in the middle of the Indian and Pakistani Checkposts, metaphorically symbolising the border-based performance in unity rather than in separation.

Apart from a performative spectacle dictated by nationalist ideologies, the border can also be understood as a metaphor for the gulf between a nation-state, securely placed at the centre and the people at the periphery. It becomes a site for the unequal displays of power by both parties. For instance, in *Rajkahini* (2015), this rift is portrayed remarkably well. The story unfolds during a turbulent time in 1946 with India soon to be partitioned by the Radcliffe Line. Against this backdrop is set a brothel, run by the fierce and head-strong Begum Jaan (Rituparna Sengupta), housing eleven women whose lives and bodies are sites of the violent atrocities perpetrated by the patriarchies of two religious communities at war.

Subsequently, the Indian Independence Act of 1947 is passed by the British, splitting the country into two. As the task of setting up border checkpoints between West Bengal in India and Pakistan commences, the local representatives from the two nations - Prophullo Mohan Sen (Saswata Chatterjee) for India and Mohammad Illias (Koushik Sen) for Pakistan - discover that the Radcliffe Line literally runs through the middle of Begum Jaan's brothel. The irony of such arbitrary cartographic divides is turned into a joke as Begum Jaan and all the members of her brothel, break out in a laughter of mocking dismissal at the ridiculous idea of the India-Pakistan border, that literally proposes to cut the brothel house and community into two:

*Prophullo (to Begum Jaan): ...we have come with a Notice of Eviction.*

*Begum Jaan: What Notice?*

*Illias: Let me explain. You all have to empty the house as several border checkpoints have to be set up here because through the middle of this house will run the Hindustan-Pakistan border...*

*Begum Jaan: Wait wait wait! So, you are suggesting that the people who are standing on that side of this courtyard...are in Hindustan and on this side..., is Pakistan?!*

*Illias (in a tone of hesitation): Ummm...Yes...*

*(Begum Jaan and all other members of the brothel break out in a long mocking laughter of disbelief at such a ridiculous idea.)*

*Begum Jaan (still laughing): Wow, Badaa Sahib! Your Radcliff Sahib turned out to be quite amazing! When he did butcher the nation into two, couldn't he have done a better job than this! ...our Rahim Chacha butchers a goat better than this...*

*Begum Jaan: The place that you are calling a brothel, is my 'desh' (homeland), my Nation. Here, there is no Hindu or Muslim, no upper caste or lower caste. There are only our bodies here to sell, hence, the only wishes here, are also ours...I've no idea which Hindustan or Pakistan, you all are talking about...that's just rubbish for me! Because what someone sitting in Delhi decides, is of no use to me! ...Anyone who tries to evict us from here, will have his body (pauses)- what is that word?- partition(ed) by me!*

The brothel, here, is also a metaphor for the nation or the community. The border, for Begum Jaan and her brothel is not 'sacred', unlike the state representatives. The equation here is reversed: for the people belonging to a community/the brothel, the border is a symbol of profanity, as it threatens to sever communal bonds, friendships and memories. Begum Jaan and the inhabitants of her brothel clearly declare their resistances against the dictates of the two powerful nation-states. Their declaration of resistance is an outcry of protest against the forceful imposition of nation-states and cartographic borders on peoples.

Persistent attempts, both legal and illegal, violent and torturous fail to oust Begum Jaan from her brothel for she regards it as her home, her Nation. In the climax, after putting up a fierce and relentless battle, Begum Jaan and the women resign into their beloved home/nation/the brothel, which is set alight. This act of violence, too, does not yield as Begum Jaan, together with the survivors and the dead, submit to their fates inside the burning brothel by shutting the door at the faces of the dictats of the nation-states. Their act of resignation in this moment is transformed metaphorically and symbolically into subaltern act of power, that is more profound in its resistance and submission to violence than that of the nation-states, in their perpetration of it.

The border, thus, becomes a political metaphor for the confrontations of the powers of nation-states and its subalterns. This metaphorical border, as such, creates two nation-states: one that emerges from the grand ideologies of powerful national elites and the other that arises out of the narratives of the subaltern. Thus, it becomes a performative spectacle by both, acts of domination and acts of resistance.

### **Conclusion- Re-Imagining the Border**

Through the trope of cinema, this paper has tried to bring to the fore the diverse ways in which the Indo-Pakistan and the Indo-Bangladesh borders and borderlands have been imagined. As such, it has arrived at certain perceptive typologies to re-think borders as subversive sites: as a process of ‘othering’; and a performative metaphor. Such re-imaginings become important in a context where the world is witnessing an expansion in state powers. Borders thus increasingly become sites of display of the power of dominant and financially strong nation-states, who fortify their territories by over securitization of borders. The resonance of such an approach was felt particularly strongly when the world encountered a refugee crisis of tumultuous proportions, with over 59.5 million displaced people all over the world during 2015 (*The Sunday Times of India*, 6 September 2015). Keeping aside the many limitations that this paper might have, we stress that the need of the hour is to re-define and re-imagine borders as it would lead them to be accepted as unstable, flexible markers constantly in the process of being negotiated and de-constructed.

### **References**

- Adams, B., (2011, January 23). India’s Shoot-to-Kill Policy on the Bangladesh Border. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/jan/23/india-bangladesh-border-shoot-to-kill-policy> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2017].
- Alcoff, L. M., (2007). Mignolo’s Epistemology of Coloniality. *The New Centennial Review*, [online] Volume 7(3), pp. 79-101.
- Anon (2016), Extremism Damaging India, Pak Ties: Pak Foreign Secy (December 2016). *Kashmir Observer*, [online]
- Anderson, B., ((1983) 2006). *Imagined Community- Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, J. and O’Dowd, L., (1999). Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality: Contradictory Meanings, Changing Significance. *Regional Studies*, [online] Volume 33(7), pp. 593-604.
- Appelrouth, S. and Desfor Edles, L., (2011). *Sociological Theory in the Contemporary Era*. United States of America: Sage, pp. 428-442.
- Ashcroft, B., (2012). Bollywood, Postcolonial Transformation, and Modernity. In: A. Gera Roy and C. Beng Huat, eds., *Travels of Bollywood Cinema*. India: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-18.

Baeg Im, H., (1991 Spring-Summer). Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony In Gramsci. *Asian Perspective*, [online] Volume 15(1), pp. 123-156.

Banerjee, P., (2010). *Borders, Histories, Existences*. India: Sage Publications, pp. xxiii-xlii.

Barthes, R., ((1957) 2009). The World of Wrestling. *Mythologies*. London: Vintage, pp. 3-14.

Basu Raychaudhury, A., (2004 December 25-31). Nostalgia of 'Desh', Memories of Partition. *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] Volume 39(52), pp. 5653-5660.

Baud, Michiel and Schendel, W. van., (1997). Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands. *Journal of World History*, [online] Volume 8(2), pp. 211-242.

Bauman, Z., (1990). Modernity and Ambivalence. *Theory, Culture and Society*, Volume 7, pp. 143-169.

Bauman, Z., (1991). *Modernity and Ambivalence*. UK: Polity Press.

Brambilla, C., (2009). Borders: Paradoxical Structures Between Essentialization and Creativity. *World Futures*, Volume 65(8), pp. 582-588.

Bregent-Heald, D., (n.d.). Introduction. *American Cinema, Mexico and Canada during the Progressive Era*. Pp. 1-15. Publication Information Unavailable.

Carroll, A., (2006). "Accidental Allegories" Meet "The Performative Documentary": Boystown, Señorita Extraviada, and the Border-Brothel→Maquiladora Paradigm. *Signs*, [online] Volume 31(2), pp. 357-396.

Cederlof, G., (2012). Making of a Borderland. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume XLVII(6), pp. 36-38.

Chatterjee, P., (2012). INDIAN CINEMA: Then and Now. *India International Centre Quarterly*, [online] Volume 39(2), pp. 45-53.

Cunningham, H., (2009). Mobilities and Enclosures After Seattle: Politicizing Borders in a "Borderless" World. *Dialectical Anthropology*, [online] Vol. 33(2), pp. 143-156.

Desfor Edles, L. and Appelrouth, S., (2010). *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. United States of America: Pine Forge Press, pp. 29-30, 94-152.

Embry, M., (1998). Visions of The Borderlands: Cinema and The Metaphor of Latinidad. *Dispositio*, [online] Volume 23(50), pp. 59-76.

Gabriel, K., (1998, April 11-17). Manning the Border: Gender and War in 'Border'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] Volume 33(15), pp. 828-832.

- Geelani, G., (2016, October 15). Mangoes and Biryani Will Replace Bullets and Mortar. *Kashmir Observer*, [online] Available at: <https://kashmirobsvber.net/2016/features/india-pakistan-ties-mangoes-and-biryani-will-replace-bullets-and-mortar-11097> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2017].
- Gera Roy, A. and Beng Huat, C., (2012). The Bollywood Turn in South Asian Cinema: National, Transnational, or Global?. In: A. Gera Roy and C. Beng Huat, eds., *Travels of Bollywood Cinema*. India: Oxford University Press, pp. ix-xxxxi.
- Ghosh, A., (2012). Bollywood, Tollywood, Dollywood: Re-visiting Cross-border Flows and the Beat of the 1970s in the Context of Globalization. In: A. Gera Roy and C. Beng Huat, eds., *Travels of Bollywood Cinema*. India: Oxford University Press, pp. 98-122.
- Grassiani, E. and Swinkels, M., (2014). Introduction: Engaging with Borders. *Etnofoor*, [online] Volume 26(1), pp. 7-12.
- Gupta, C. and Sharma, M., (2004, July 3-9). Blurred Borders: Coastal Conflicts between India and Pakistan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] Volume 39(27), pp. 3005-3015.
- Habib, H., (2016, October 16). BSF Chief Promises to Bring Down Border Casualties to Zero. *The Hindu*, [online] Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/BSF-chief-promises-to-bring-down-border-casualties-to-zero/article12540187.ece> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2017].
- Hardi, C. (1979). *At the Border*, [online] Available at: <http://genius.com/Choman-hardi-at-the-border-1979-annotated> [Accessed 1 Dec. 2016].
- Human Rights Watch, (2010, December 9). *India/Bangladesh Indiscriminate Killings, Abuse by Border Officers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/09/india/bangladesh-indiscriminate-killings-abuse-border-officers> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2017].
- Jacobs, F., (2012, July 3). Peacocks at Sunset. *The New York Times*, [online] Available at: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/03/peacocks-at-sunset/> [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017].
- Kain, P., (1998). How to Do a Close Reading. Available at: <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2017].
- Kolosov, V. A., (2015). Theoretical Approaches in the Study of Borders. In: S. V. Sevastianov, J. P. Laine and A. A. Kireev, eds., *Introduction to Border Studies*. Vladivostok: Dalnauka, pp. 33-59.
- Laine, J. P., (2015). A Historical View on the Study of Borders. In: S. V. Sevastianov, J. P. Laine and A. A. Kireev, eds., *Introduction to Border Studies*. Vladivostok: Dalnauka, pp. 14-32.

Law, A., (2013, November 6). Wagah-like Retreat Ceremony on India-Bangladesh Border. *The Hindu*, [online] Available at: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/wagahlike-retreat-ceremony-on-indiabangladesh-border/article5322459.ece> [Accessed 29 Apr. 2017].

Lyotard, J., ((1979) 1984). *The Postmodern Condition- A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by G. Bennington and B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Manto, S. H., (2012). The Dog of Tithwal. In: Aatish Taseer (translator), *Manto- Selected Short Stories*. India: Random House. pp. 11-22.

Manto, S. H., (2012). Toba Tek Singh. In: A. Taseer (translator), *Manto- Selected Short Stories*. India: Random House, pp. 1-10.

Maoldúin, R. Ó., (2008). Crossing Borders in the 21st Century. *Archaeology Ireland*, [online] Volume 22(4), pp. 26-29.

Mignolo, W. D., (2007, March 1). Delinking. *Cultural Studies*, [online] Volume 21(2), pp. 449-514.

Mignolo, W. D., (2009). Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom. *Theory, Culture and Society*, [online] Volume 26(7-8), pp. 1-23.

Mignolo, W. D., (2011). Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience. *Transversal*, [online].

Murayama, M., (2006). Borders, Migration and Sub-Regional Cooperation in Eastern South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 1351-1359.

Nandy, A., (2005). The Idea of South Asia: A Personal Note on Post-Bandung Blues. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 6(4), pp. 541-545.

Nelson, D., (2009, July 8). Pakistani President Asif Zardari Admits Creating Terrorist Groups. *The Telegraph*, [online] Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/5779916/Pakistani-president-Asif-Zardari-admits-creating-terrorist-groups.html> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2017].

Oommen, T. K., (1982, March). Foreigners, Refugees and Outsiders in the Indian Context. *Sociological Bulletin*, [online] Volume 31(1), pp. 41-64.

Pande, V., (2017, April 15). Borderlands, Empires and Nations- Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan Borderlands (c 1815-1930). *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] Vol. 52 (15): 69-78

Pathak, D. N. and Perera, S., eds., (2017). *Culture and Politics in South Asia: Performative Communication*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Delhi: Routledge.

Pathak, D. N., ed., (2017). *Another South Asia*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Delhi: Primus.

- Perera, S., (2016). *Warzone Tourism in Sri Lanka- Tales from Darker Places in Paradise*. India: Sage Publications.
- Pradhan, G., Kumar, A. and Chakravorty, M., (2015). Bordering Tranquility. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume L(51), pp. 92-94.
- Rajghatta, C., (2015, September 6). New country for refugees?. *Sunday Times of India*.
- Samaddar, R., (1999). *The Marginal Nation- Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*. India: Sage Publications.
- Schendel, W. van., (2002, February). Stateless in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, [online] Volume 61(1), pp. 115-147.
- Schendel, W. van., (2007). The Wagah Syndrome: Territorial Roots of Contemporary Violence in South Asia. In: A. Basu and S. Roy, eds., *Violence and Democracy in India*. Calcutta: Seagull Books, pp. 36-82.
- Sengupta, A., (2012). Some Stories from the Bengal Borderland: Making and Unmaking of an International Boundary. In: A. Sengupta and H. Chatterjee, *Bengal Borders and Travelling Lives*.
- Sevastianov, S. V., Laine J. P. and Kireev, A. A., (2015). Preface. In: S. V. Sevastianov, J. P. Laine and A. A. Kireev, eds., *Introduction to Border Studies*. Vladivostok: Dalnauka. pp. 5-11.
- Shakya, M., (2017, April 15). Reading Parijat and B P Koirala- Belonging and Borders in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Nepali Novels. *Economic and Political Weekly*, [online] Volume 52(15), pp. 53-60.
- Subberwal, R., (2009). Hegemony. In: *Dictionary of Sociology*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill. p. H2.
- Subberwal, R., (2009). Religion and Magic. In: *Dictionary of Sociology*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill. p. R7.
- Szczepanski, M. S., (1998). Cultural Borderlands in Sociological Perspective (The Case of Upper Silesia). *Polish Sociological Review*, [online] (121), pp. 69-82.
- Tatum, C., (2000). On the Border: From the Abstract to the Specific. *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, [online] Volume 4, pp. 93-103.
- Walker, P., (2011, June 24). The World's Most Dangerous Borders. *Foreign Policy*, [online] Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/24/the-worlds-most-dangerous-borders/> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2017].

### Filmography

Bajrangi Bhaijaan. (2015) Director: Kabir Khan.

Border. (1997) Director: J. P. Dutta.

Filmistaan. (2012) Director: Nitin Kakkar.

Komol Gandhaar. (1961) Director: Ritwik Ghatak.

L.O.C. Kargil. (2003) Director: J. P. Dutta.

Little Terrorist. (2014) Director: Ashvin Kumar.

Rajkahini. (2015) Director: Srijit Mukherji.

Ramchand Pakistani. (2008) Director: Mehreen Jabbar.

Shankhachil. (2016) Director: Goutam Ghosh

<sup>i</sup> This is a part of the autobiographical poem, *At the Border*, by Choman Hardi. Set at the border of Iran and Northern Iraq, it is dated 1979- the year Choman Hardi returned with her family to Kurdistan, their homeland.

<sup>ii</sup> We use the term ‘sacred’ here, in the Durkheimian sense, where it stood for the all-powerful and awe-inspiring, superior in dignity and status to the profane. The *sacred* and the *profane*, Durkheim (1912) noted were determined by the collective consciousness (Cited in Desfor Edles and Appelrouth 2010: 134-152). In this scheme, everything mundane was trashed as ‘bad sacred’. However, perhaps the mundane cannot be pushed aside if one is keen about a holistic comprehension of modernity.

<sup>iii</sup> We borrow the term “warzone” from Sasanka Perera’s (2016) work on warzone tourism in Sri Lanka, where it has been used as a category to refer to “a place where war was once active in the recent past and has acutely touched, scarred and impacted the landscape and the populace” (p. 3).

<sup>iv</sup> Along this line, it is fascinating to engage with Lyotard (1979) and Bauman (1990, 1991) to arrive at the legitimacy of diverse narratives. Needless to say, this is only one line of engagement with the discontents of modernity. The canvas could be much exhaustive if many other strands could be factored in. Suffice to say, this selective engagement serves the purpose of this paper.

<sup>v</sup> See, van Schendel 2007. Alternatively, it is paradoxical that the nation-state’s control might be the strongest at the border because of it being located farthest away from the centre (Anderson and O’Dowd 2010). While we acknowledge this paradoxical probability, we seek to argue that borders as symbolic and performative sites, stink of the nation-state’s insecurities about its peripheries.

<sup>vi</sup> See for instance, Baud and van Schendel 1997; Grassiani and Swinkels 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> See, Baud and van Schendel 1997; Newman 2006.

<sup>ix</sup> See for instance, Baud and van Schendel 1997; Samaddar 1999; Murayama 2006; Banerjee 2010; Cederlof 2012.

<sup>x</sup> See Banerjee 2010; Pande 2017.

<sup>xi</sup> The term ‘elite’ has been used here to refer to those institutions/people who have the means and the power to define what borders should be. They have the capacity to use coercive force and legal sanctions if their definitions are challenged. The nation-state, in this case, is an ‘elite’ institution as it has the power to force its definition of the ‘border’ over its people, especially those residing in the borderlands, even in the face of direct challenges to such political constructions.

<sup>xii</sup> See Baud and van Schendel 1997; Pande 2017.

<sup>xiii</sup> See, Banerjee 2010; Grassiani and Swinkels 2014; Sevastianov et. al. 2015.

<sup>xiv</sup> Decolonization Theorists, such as Walter D. Mignolo (2007: 478) use the notion of the ‘border’ in the context of ‘border thinking’, to refer to the practice of thinking and theorizing from the exteriority or outside the ‘colonial matrix of power’. Such practice is grounded in the lived experience of those who have been excluded from the process of knowledge production. As such, the idea of ‘border’ implies an exterior created by the interior.

<sup>xv</sup> See Lyotard 1979; and also, Appelrouth and Desfor Edles 2011: 428-442.

<sup>xvi</sup> See, Samaddar 1999; Gupta and Sharma 2004; Newman 2006; Pande 2017.

<sup>xvii</sup> See, Extremism Damaging India, Pak Ties: Pak Foreign Secy. *Kashmir Observer*. 2016, December 28; and also, Geelani, G. 2016, October 15. Mangoes and Biriyanis Will Replace Bullets and Mortar. *Kashmir Observer*.

<sup>xviii</sup> See, India and Bangladesh to Boost Bilateral Ties. *Bangladesh Live News*. 2017, May 1.

<sup>xix</sup> See, Oommen 1982; Samaddar 1999.

<sup>xx</sup> See for instance, BSF Chief Promises to Bring Down Border Casualties to Zero. *The Hindu*. 2016, October 18.

<sup>xxi</sup> See, Gera Roy and Beng Huat 2012.

<sup>xxii</sup> Here, a clarification is required with regard to the selection of the film, *Komol Gandhaar* (1961) by Ritwik Ghatak in a similar vein as the other films that belong to a different era altogether. The theme of subversion is the commonality among these films which makes their selection under one umbrella possible. This makes the selection of films belonging to very different time periods less problematic and more plausible.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Antonio Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks* (1971) noted that the Revolution predicted by Marx, did not happen in Europe, despite the possibilities being ripe, owing to the ‘hegemony’ of the ruling classes over the subaltern masses. This hegemony involved socializing the masses into their own ideas so that they come to see their dominance as legitimate and justified, without challenging it, thereby reproducing their own domination and exploitation (Cited in, Desfor Edles and Appelrouth 2010: 29-30). See also, Baeg Im 1991; Subberwal 2009: H2.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See, Durkheim, Emile. (1912) 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The United States of America: Free Press; See also, Subberwal 2009: R7; Desfor Edles and Appelrouth 2010: 134-152.

<sup>xxv</sup> See Lyotard (1979), where he claims that meta-narratives’ or grand narratives, give rise to totalizing knowledge systems, on the basis of which truth claims are made. These fail to recognize the multiplicity of truths arising from micro-narratives. See also, Appelrouth and Desfor Edles 2011: 428-442. In using the concepts of ‘hegemony’ and ‘meta-narrative’, we recognize the theoretical clashes between the two, however, they provide perfect theoretical tools for analysing the imaginative scenario around borders.

<sup>xxvi</sup> See, ‘Extremism Damaging India, Pak Ties: Pak Foreign Secy’ *Kashmir Observer*. 2016, December 28; and also, Geelani, G. (2016, October 15). Mangoes and Biryani Will Replace Bullets and Mortar. *Kashmir Observer*.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See, Nelson, D. (2009, July 8). Pakistani President Asif Zardari Admits Creating Terrorist Groups. *The Telegraph*.

<sup>xxviii</sup> See, India and Bangladesh to Boost Bilateral Ties. *Bangladesh Live News*. 2017, May 1.

<sup>xxix</sup> See Oommen 1982; Samaddar 1999; and also, Banerjee 2010.

<sup>xxx</sup> See Adams, B. (2011, January 23). India’s Shoot-to-Kill Policy on the Bangladesh Border. *The Guardian*.

<sup>xxxi</sup> See Rajghatta, C. (2015, September 6) New country for refugees?. *Sunday Times of India*.

<sup>xxxii</sup> See for instance, Gabriel (1998) for a detailed discussion on the gendered symbolisms in *Border* (1997); and Carroll (2006) for a reading on allegorical representations of borders.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Benedict Anderson ((1983) 2006) has suggested that nation-states are “imagined political communities” (p. 6) as its citizens, in the absence of direct face-to-face contact, imagine the existence of a larger national community or the nation. Nationalism then becomes the process of inventing nations, which are conceived as formations of “deep, horizontal comradeships” (p. 7). This sense of fraternity is what makes it possible to sacrifice one’s own life for nations.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> See Samaddar 1999; and also, Newman 2006.

<sup>xxxv</sup> See, Walker, P. (24 June 2011). The World’s Most Dangerous Borders. *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> See Gupta and Sharma (2004) for a detailed study on the arbitrary imprisonments and travails of fisherfolks along the Indo-Pakistan border.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> For a detailed analysis on the over-securitization of borders, see Cunningham 2009.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> See for instance, Baud and van Schendel 1997; Samaddar 1999; Gupta and Sharma 2004; Banerjee 2010.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The notion of the ‘gaze’ is used by Sasanka Perera (2016) with reference to John Urry’s (2002) work on the tourist’s gaze, to highlight the discursive significance of the sight with which the southern Sinhala tourists contemplated a war ravaged North, in Sri Lanka.

<sup>xl</sup> For instance, see Gupta and Sharma 2004.

<sup>xli</sup> As to how cinematic materials, as well as other mediated cultural expressions, acquire performative significance, is elucidated in Pathak and Perera (2017).

<sup>xlii</sup> We draw here from Roland Barthes’ fascinating essay, ‘The World of Wrestling’ ((1957) 2009), where he re-reads wrestling as a spectacle and the performance of the wrestlers as spectacular.

<sup>xliii</sup> Since November 2013, a Wagah Border-like ceremony, called the Joint Retreat Ceremony, is also being held at Petrapole-Benapole Border between India and Bangladesh. It however lacks the show of aggressiveness present in the Wagah Border ceremony (*The Hindu*, November 6, 2013).

<sup>xliv</sup> See, van Schendel 2007; and, Jacobs, F. 2012, July 3. ‘Peacocks at Sunset’ *The New York Times*.

<sup>xlv</sup> The term “Bollywood” has been defined by Anjali Gera Roy and Chua Beng Huat (2012) as, “...a portmanteau of Bombay and Hollywood, coined by the English language media in India to define ‘India’s popular film industry based in Mumbai- a blend of Bombay...and Hollywood’...” (p. ix). Bollywood has become a universally accepted term, although the Bombay film industry has expressed

---

its objection towards its use on the grounds that the Bombay cinema has developed independently of the American popular film and is greatly different from it. To avoid this terminological war, we have used the term “Hindi cinema” throughout this paper. Only in this place, we use “Bollywood” as it is also used in the film (*Filmistaan* (2012)).

<sup>xlvi</sup> For an elaborate discussion on ‘Another South Asia’, see Pathak (2017).