ADAPTING HISTORY IN FICTION AND FILM: THE PRE-PARTITION TURMOIL AND ANGLO-INDIAN PREDICAMENT IN *BHOWANI JUNCTION*

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The ongoing study assesses the presence of numerous partition narratives in literature and film, as a literary and historical *mise en abyme* a reflection of the original, frame within a frame, or a picture within a picture. Together, all these wide arrays of narratives and voices create the master narrative of Partition, and the 'truth' lies somewhere in between. Since these narratives also lay claim to being partially historic in nature, they provide a historiographic insight into the event of the Indian Partition in 1947, using the medium of literature and film. *Bhowani Junction* (1954), a novel by John Masters also provides a frame story, where, within the larger frame of Partition narrative, the characters tell their British and Anglo-Indian version of the events, providing three different perspectives to the narrative. With John Masters' own claim of the novel being fictional as well as historical, the work immediately situates itself within the parameters of historiographic metafiction, a theoretical concept proposed by Linda Hutcheon. The historiographic *mise en abyme* is also created in the novel by weaving multiple partition stories within the main plot, using flashbacks and flashforwards. While the search for 'ultimate truth' is beyond the scope of this study, it particularly seeks to explore how

certain aesthetic adaptations of sensitive and grim historical accounts are reduced to romanticized tales. John Masters' novel *Bhowani Junction* (1954) and its Hollywood adaptation under the same title, directed in 1956 by George Cukor, are taken into account in order to evaluate their treatment of the Anglo-Indian plight in the backdrop of Indian Partition, using the aesthetic mediums of literature and film.

Keywords: *Bhowani Junction,* historiography*, mise en abyme,* metafiction, partition 1947, Anglo-Indian

Backdrop

A significant resource in the study of Partition narratives is John Masters' novel *Bhowani Junction* (1954).[1] The novel was first published by Michael Joseph (London,) in 1954 and reprinted later by Penguin Books in 1960.[2] Upon John Masters' death in 1983, Alfred E. Clark published an article in *The New York Times*, chalking out the vital details of the former's life. British by ancestry, Lieutenant Colonel John Masters, an officer of the British army, was born in Calcutta, India and was the fifth generation of his family to be working for Britain in India. Tracing his colonial legacy, Alfred E. Clark comments that he "grew up amid the echoes of the world Rudyard Kipling had immortalized".[3] He served in Burma, Iran and Iraq for Britain, and also worked in the British-Indian army. Masters moved to America after the Second World War and sought American citizenship in 1954 precisely the year in which he published *Bhowani Junction*. The novel was soon adapted into a film in 1956.[4] Owing to his wide variety of experiences, John Masters was in an incredibly unique position of having an intimate knowledge of the British army, the Mutiny, the Indian freedom movement, the plight of Anglo-Indians, Indian culture and language, and the political upheaval of that time. These experiences are well narrated in several of his writings about the Indian partition in 1947, including *Bhowani Junction* (1954).

British colonialism and the subsequent Indian Partition is one of the most attractive historical sagas and there is absolutely no dearth of novels written about the event. The late twentieth century in particular has witnessed a literary and aesthetic explosion of artistic works on the subject from all three entities involved in the event of Partition, i.e. India, Pakistan and Britain; which in Kathleen J. Cassity's words, "invok[ed] a variety of perspectives ranging from staunch anti-imperialism to colonial nostalgia" over the decades.[5] *Bhowani Junction* (1954) is distinctive in a way that it openly acknowledges the struggles, plight and contribution

of the Anglo-Indian community in pre-partition India, which many of the other postcolonial narratives ignore, be it fictional or non-fictional. The narrative is largely told through the Anglo-Indian voice a community that has historically been a minority lying around in the periphery, "socially marginal to the British, and both socially and culturally marginal to the major Indian communities", as Cassity puts it.[6]

History Versus Fiction the Jeopardies

Considering the aim of this research project and the debate of history versus fiction, the opening note of *Bhowani Junction* (1954) by John Masters is of special significance. He gives an interesting and contradictory statement in the dedication of his novel. He opens the statement by saying, "This book is wholly a work of fiction, and no reference is intended in it to any person living or dead", and that besides a few political personalities, no direct reference is made to any real individual.[7] He also accepts the fact that he has changed many key details and dates of the mutinies, yet at the same time he also hopes that "this book is also a work of history because [he has] tried to give the 'feel' of the times and a sense of historical perspective".[8] This is a dangerous and confusing statement where the author initially insists that his novel is purely a work of fiction and then immediately in the same sentence asserts that the novel should also be perceived as historical work just because he has tried to give a 'feel' of history in the narrative. Thus, Masters' novel becomes a work of historiographic metafiction, where both the author and his work *per se* demonstrate an awareness of its fictional quality, besides laying claim to history simultaneously. Moreover, this novel is a self-proclaimed work of historical fiction, which is written by a British writer, who was also an officer in the British-Indian army. This fact alone reveals the standpoint of the writer.

However, this narrative is important because it is one of the earliest examples of British partition writings within fiction, which demonstrates that our earliest fictional and non-fictional records on the Partition of India, carry a colonial perspective. The events depicted in this novel are set within the period around when the British were preparing to leave India in the year 1946. The contents of the novel are divided into four sections, which are used as the narrative spaces of different focal characters. Patrick Taylor, an Anglo-Indian, narrates Book One; Victoria the female protagonist of the novel, also an Anglo-Indian, narrates Book Two; the British Colonel Rodney Savage narrates the third; and Patrick

returns to the scene again in the last section of the novel Book Four. There is a different narrative voice in all the sections except for the last one where Patrick is being reintroduced as the narrator. Patrick is a thirty-six years old Eurasian working in the traffic department of the Indian railways in 1946. Victoria and Patrick used to be in a relationship before she was posted in Delhi as a subaltern in army for four years. After her return to Bhowani, Masters' fictional town in India, she works under the command of Colonel Rodney Savage, a British official and another one of Victoria's silent admirers. Another important character is Patrick's subordinate, Ranjit Kasel, a young Indian Sikh, a secret member of the Communist movement in India, who later becomes involved with Victoria too.

Victoria's dilemma of identity is reflected for the first time when Patrick comments that she looks as if she has come *away* from her home. She snaps at him and says, "Don't call England 'home'. It is not *our* home, is it?".[9] When she says *our*, she implies that no matter how much the Anglo-Indians try, England will never be their home, because they are not as *white* as the English should be. This is one of the initial few instances where the reader starts getting a glimpse into Victoria's thought process and the early signs of an upcoming identity crisis that will shake her life. Patrick himself is of mixed descent but he hates Indians and calls them 'Wogs'. Victoria on the other hand, who is also an Anglo-Indian, has deep and tender sentiments for her country and her people the Indians.

Anglo-Indian Ambivalence

Patrick is of half Indian descent but he constantly negates this fact in his head and tries to make sense of how the Anglo-Indians are superior to Indians and they only have "a little Indian blood not much, of course" in their veins.[10] On countless occasions, Patrick's disgust for India is brought to light in the narrative. While taking Victoria on a motorcycle ride, he asks her to wear her hat, or she will get sunburnt and become all brown; only to receive Victoria's witty reply, "It isn't sunburn that makes us brown, is it?".[11] Patrick's concern, however, is larger than just getting sunburnt and brown. He is afraid that people might not distinguish them from Indians if they did not wear their hats. He ponders, "If we didn't wear topis, people would think we were Wogs".[12] He further ponders why even with colored eyes, red hair and fair complexions, "We didn't look like English people. We looked like what we were Anglo-

Indians, Eurasians, cheechees, half-castes, eight-annas, blacky-whites" all the different derogatory names that the Indians and British had given to the Anglo-Indian community in India.[13]

There is a seemingly casual and harmless mention in the novel about different refreshment rooms and resting areas for Hindus, Muslims and Europeans inside the Bhowani railway station, which, as a matter of fact, is a disconcerting insight into the religious differences and polarity between different communities in India. Patrick's narrative also gives an indication of how the Indians treated Anglo-Indians as British, and not as their fellow Indians. There is an unceasing ambivalence between both these communities where the mixed-race people like Patrick are constantly expecting to be treated as equals both by the British and the Indians, without realizing that they cannot have it both ways. He passionately believes that the Indians hate his community, reference to which is found on every page of the novel. On one occasion at the railway station, Patrick comments, "Several Wogs turned and glared at me, and one or two muttered abuse under their breaths, but they didn't dare speak aloud".[14] He thinks that all these Browns had been behaving rather offensively after the war that they fought for the English. Indians formed the largest volunteer force during the Second World War, of about 2.5 million Indian soldiers, and hence, according to Patrick, "They'd all got quite out of hand during the war".[15]

Patrick's narrative makes one realize that this was probably a mutual feeling between Indians and the Anglo-Indians either side did not accept the other completely, which kept on adding to a mutual resentment. Patrick's narrative paints Indians as ignorant, rude, filthy and offensive, and he cannot help but remark about their shagginess relentlessly, as he comments on the crowd inside his office, "The coolie-messenger was squatting in the doorway, and I kicked him on his feet as I went by... The door was marked clearly: NO ADMITTANCE EXCEPT ON DUTY, but that wouldn't make any difference to an Indian".[16] Indians, as we see in the narrative, are murky, totally incapable of adhering to any rules, unacquainted with manners of the civilized world, and Patrick bitterly despises them as he continues, "The air was thick as soup, and all the punkah did was turn over the dust and that filthy bidi smoke and the smell of too many Wogs".[17] Born and brought up in India, having half Indian parentage, speaking and understanding the local language, using words like 'punkah' and 'bidi' in his everyday discourse, Patrick still cannot identify with the Browns, and he is too alien for the British at the same time. One cannot help but wonder where all this hatred comes

from. Perhaps Patrick is no less troubled than Victoria over this crisis of identity and belonging caught in the middle of two colors, he too is a citizen of no land, resident of a house that does not exist.

The Dominant Voice in the Narrative

On the one hand, John Masters fails to address the core Partition issues and key political events that have left a deep mark on history, and on the other hand, he takes a unique stand in telling the untold story of the problematic Anglo-Indian identity. Masters dedicates his novel to the Indian railways with reference to the services of Anglo-Indians in India. Documenting the Anglo-Indian service in India, Kathleen J. Cassity notes, "Between 1857 and 1947, one-third of all Anglo-Indian men comprised more than half of all railway workers".[18] She further notes that in the narrative of the British Empire, the term "railway man" was used as a euphemistic expression for this community.[19] This is a historically established fact that the infrastructure of the British Empire, including education, health, civil service, and railways, was largely managed and run by the Anglo-Indians. However, they were not considered worthy enough to take up any other high profile jobs, and were largely confined to the railways only.

The Great Betrayal

One of the key issues highlighted in the novel is the feeling of betrayal and homelessness in the whole Anglo-Indian community. India, for them, was the only home they had ever known. They laid claim on India, yet considered themselves superior to Indians due to their half British/ European descent, a notion that was turned upside down when they found themselves as the inferior party in comparison to the British. They now did not belong to either of the two communities and became completely outcast. Frank Anthony, the Anglo-Indian community leader confesses in the introduction of his book that there was a social seclusion and pride in the Anglo-Indian community itself, and that they avoided mixing up with the local Indians. Narrating the background of the Anglo-Indian community, Anthony narrates their story in these words, "Brought into existence deliberately by the British, used throughout British Indian history to serve and often to save British imperial interests […] this comparatively microscopic community […] was cynically betrayed by Britain before its withdrawal from India".[20] He chalks out the details of

how the Anglo-Indians were recruited as freelance soldiers in the Indian and British armies respectively, based on their skin colors, even if they were twin brothers with different skin complexions. They were engaged to fight for Britain in multiple conflicts, including the Indian Mutiny of 1857 World War I, and the World War II. There were numerous Anglo-Indian officers and soldiers who won military awards even Victoria Cross for their gallantry, and yet were mentioned in the records only as "India Born Officers" instead of Anglo-Indians.[21] With their rising popularity and achievements, they were eventually banned by the British from entering the army, civil service, traveling abroad for higher education or joining any important officer rank in the government. Frank Anthony member of the Indian Parliament also addressed his community in the middle of Partition turmoil and told them that the Community could not afford to stand on two stools. They decided that they were, are and will always be Indians and therefore will avoid associating with the British, or side with partition.[22] The historian, Michael Edwardes in his book *The Sahibs and the Lotus: the British in India* (1988) notes that the Anglo-Indians had accepted being lesser to the pure British race, but not to the Indians. They took pride in being identified as British and with the abrupt departure of British from India, the whole Anglo-Indian community felt betrayed, vulnerable and faced a disturbing identity crisis.[23]

After a heated discussion in the novel, Patrick soon realizes that even though he claims that he will go to England when the Congress party comes to power, yet he cannot do it in reality. Victoria tells her family that she has worked with the Indians and the English for four years and they fail to acknowledge the existence of Anglo-Indians. She laments, "Do you realize that they hardly know there *is* such a thing as Anglo-Indian community?".[24] Patrick reevaluates what he claimed before in these words, "We couldn't become English because we were half Indian. We couldn't become Indian because we were half English. […] The English would go any time now and leave us to the Wogs".[25] Victoria's perspective on the ongoing scuffle is that it is probably time that Anglo-Indians stopped trying to be inferior or superior to anyone. She says maybe they can just pretend to be a part of India now, wear Saris and Dhotis, and marry Indians, she tells Patrick, "You don't realize how fresh and free it is to be English or Indian", instead of living as a "cheechee".[26] This further reflects the intense identity crisis that many of John Masters' Anglo-Indian characters seem to be suffering from. In an environment of political turmoil, economic opportunism and fight for existence, the Anglo-Indian community could not just expect to lay low,

mind their business and receive benefits and grants from the Hindu government, mainly because the British were leaving and the Anglo-Indians needed to prove their allegiance to the Indians.

The Political Unrest

An interesting conversation follows between the Collector of Bhowani, Mr. Govindaswami and all those who are summoned to discuss the derailment of trains and Congress's possible involvement in it. This particular point in the novel also has an allusion to the 1942 Quit India Movement. Patrick reflects on the events of 1942 and insolently thinks of Gandhi one of the most esteemed political figures in Indian history: "in 1942, that sanctimonious little bastard Gandhi had decided he'd rather have the Japs than the British".[27] In Patrick's perception and recollection of the events from 1942, the so-called peaceful protests and sit-ins turned out to be violent and he holds Gandhi responsible for it. He recalls, "What Gandhi's non-violence turned out to mean was derailing trains all over the country, and pouring petrol over village policemen and setting them on fire, and dragging people out of trains to beat them to death".[28]

There is yet another political allusion made by the Collector in this segment about how most of the Congress leadership genuinely feels that these peaceful protests are the right way to send British back to where they came from, but there are also people inside Congress who want protests and disturbance for other political gains. They do not want the Congress to come into power at all, after the British leave. This is a reference to another political campaign that the Communists were leading secretly. There were right and left wings within the Congress itself, promoting different ideologies. Upon Victoria's inquiry about what these people actually want, the Collector explains that, "They want a complete revolution. Their masters, and their mind, are in Moscow" a reference to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.[29] Govindaswami thinks that Congress needs to be saved from itself, as they have elements within their party that do not mean well. One such man was K. P. Roy, once a Congress man and a supposed terrorist in the novel, as quoted in their discussion, "He was a sort of Frankenstein to them. They'd created him, and made a lot of Indians think that he was a hero […] the Congress couldn't openly attack him".[30] A secondary plot that runs along with the Anglo-Indian dilemma in the novel, is about the Communist traitors and terrorists who constantly instigate trouble, protests and mischief within

the region, while staying in the backdrop as depicted by John Masters and letting the whole Indian population take the blame for it.

And Never the Twain Shall Meet

Reginald James Maher, another notable Anglo-Indian personality, traces the pre and post-partition Anglo-Indian history in his book *These are the Anglo Indians* (2007, 4th ed.), initially published in 1964, and the second book in the Anglo-Indian Heritage Series after Frank Anthony's (1968) and Herbert Alick Stark's (1936) publications. While commenting on the diversity of India in the opening of his book, Maher makes a worth pondering remark: "Language and customs in India differ sometimes so much as to be almost diametrically opposed to each other. One community's food can often be another community's taboo".[31] Although, Maher's comment is not particularly made in the context of partition or Jinnah's two-nation theory, but it still gives a third-party insight into the inherent differences between different communities and religions in India. Maher elaborates the disturbing background of how this community was the most affected by the British withdrawal. Trained, educated and culturally accustomed to the English ways of living, the Anglo-Indians found themselves abandoned and clueless about their future after the British departure. By definition, Anglo-Indians are the ones who have European or British heritage in the male line that settled in India permanently and married Indian women. Maher explains that this did not just happen by chance, but was rather carefully planned and executed by the East India Company. They married their British soldiers off with Indian women in order to strengthen British legacy in India.[32] The Anglo-Indian community was created to counter the danger felt by the British with the emergence of Portuguese in India a growing insecurity for the Protestant faith.[33] Maher suggests that, "The experiment proved entirely successful. This new group with its British heritage, turned out to be more British than the British, carried their loyalty to an extent that aroused the animosity of those it helped later to subject".[34] He suggests that before leaving the country, the British could at least have made special arrangements for the left-behind Anglo-Indians who were half British themselves, to ensure their protection in the forthcoming Congress led India. This is followed by an important statement by Maher that such protections are only possible if the policymakers and people of that particular country are willing to provide it, which, in case of the Indian government has never been on the agenda.[35] Counting the services of

Anglo-Indians towards telegraphing, railways, construction, and modern communication, Maher recounts, "The masses of India were unprepared for those revolutionary changes, which they looked upon with superstitious dread".[36] He confidently states that although it is an irony, but it was the Anglo-Indian toil that made the independence of India possible. Maher also blames writers and movie makers for attacking and assaulting the true identity of Anglo-Indians. He calls John Masters' characterization of Anglo-Indians absurd, and it is "the odious Victoria Jones of Bhowani Junction" that repulses him the most.[37] The common themes found in both Frank Anthony's and Reginald Maher's books about the Anglo-Indian history is their commitment to work, service to India, refutation of allegations of illegitimacy, poor historical book-keeping in the context of Anglo-Indian achievements, misrepresentation of the community by writers and film makers, and historical betrayal by the British. It is surprising to see that a narrative like *Bhowani Junction* (1954) that claims to be positively centered around the Anglo-Indian community and their struggles before and during the partition of India, can offend the Community so bitterly, when it was intended to have the opposite effect.

In *Bhowani Junction* we see a constant divide between different religions and communities a gulf between Muslims and Hindus, between Anglo-Indians and the British, and between Anglo-Indians and their fellow Indians. The Collector Govindaswami informs Patrick about the objection raised by The Union of Railway Workers of India over special treatment given to the Anglo-Indian railway employees and drivers. They are not sent on duty if their separate running rooms are not available because they do not share this space with the native Indians. Patrick's immediate response to this issue is that, "How can they expect our train crews to pass the night in an Indian running room, among".[38] Colonel Savage's comment that, "Meantime [he's] going to treat all the railway people with suspicion except the Anglo-Indians", suggests that the Anglo-Indians were not involved in any kind of politics or unrest that was stirred by Hindus and Muslims, or at least this is what John Masters through Colonel Savage seem to propose.[39]

Patrick does not often mention the binaries between Muslims and Hindus of India unless he is talking in the pretext of some communal or religious violence. Besides the British grievances, his major binaries are drawn between "us" and "them" the Anglo-Indians and other Indians. Although, the novel chooses to ignore the most burning communal issues of the time, which were mainly between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, but

it rightly provides more coverage and space to Anglo-Indian community in the narrative which has been a rare sight on the pages of literature in the past.

The White Man's Burden

At times, it is almost exasperating to see how the character of British Colonel Rodney Savage is shown in such a heroic light a depiction that is constant in both Patrick and Victoria's narratives. They both apparently hate him but secretly admire him and look up to him. Repeated instances are given for how responsible, dutiful, active, conscientious, wise and action-oriented he is. Victoria, who called him 'swine' in front of Macaulay, later describes at length how Colonel Savage deals with the whole situation of unrest. She quotes him talking to the Collector in these words on separate occasions, "Don't forget I'm responsible for security over the whole of your civil district as well as on the railway.... Okay I'll go with the jeeps and stop the train at the level crossing here".[40] He keeps his cool even when an Anglo-Indian or an Indian lash out at him, because apparently, he is above and beyond such petty exchange of words. He just smiles under his lips, as if he is laughing at all of them in his head. He is fearless, brave and determined, as Victoria recalls it, even in the face of a scary protest at the railway station, where "A stone whizzed through the air, missing Colonel Savage by inches, and broke the windscreen of one of the jeeps".[41] His weaknesses are the kind of weaknesses which would ultimately be considered gallant and manly. It seems unjust to see such contrasting portrayals of the British and the Indians throughout the novel.

U.R.W.I. and The R.I.N. Mutiny

An important event in the novel is where the U.R.W.I., Union of Railway Workers of India starts its own little mutiny against the inequality between Indians and Anglo-Indians. While Colonel Savage tries to deal with that along with his team, a frequent reference is made about how it could turn into another mutiny, like the one everybody had witnessed before. The Collector Govidaswami says, "You realize that there are people about who want this to develop into a blood bath, another Great Mutiny? Another eighteen fifty-seven?", to which Colonel Savage responds, "God help us all if they succeed".[42] Victoria's narrative introduces the reader to the historically known Royal Indian Navy (R.I.N.)

mutiny which follows the rebellion of the U.R.W.I., Union of Railway Workers of India in the novel. These are true events depicted in the novel surrounding 1946, a year before the partition. The detail of these smaller mutinies reveals the fact that partition did not just happen overnight the struggle and rebellion started years ago, especially after 1940, when the Lahore Resolution, was passed to demand a separate homeland for the Muslim majority of India. The next major event happened in 1942 when Gandhi called for the Quit India Movement against the British Raj. Earlier, Gandhi had also launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and almost all the political parties of that time joined hands. Gandhi's Quit India Movement seems to have a special significance for the British since a recurring reference to 1942 is made in the novel in the context of derailments, bloodshed, and political and social unrest. These bits and pieces of collective struggles finally forced the British, who were already overwhelmed after the Second World War, to quit India. The R.I.N. mutiny, however, was not supported by the Congress and Muslim League, but the protestors had full support of the Communist Party. The novel discusses the implications of mutiny within the Royal Indian Navy. The secret members of the Communist Party, led by Mr. Surabhai, lie down on the railway line and chant their 'Quit India' slogans in solidarity with the detained R.I.N. soldiers. Victoria thinks that "The people lying on the rails meant no harm. They looked silly but somehow dignified".[43] When both the Collector Govindaswami and Colonel Savage fail to negotiate successfully with the protestors who are lying on the railway line and holding a train from moving forward, Colonel Savage orders his low-caste Gurkhas to drink three glasses of water each and then urinate on the protestors from above the line, most of whom are the high-caste Hindus. Seeing this violence, brutality and disgraceful handling of the situation, Victoria feels extremely sick causing her feelings to further harden towards the British. She describes the situation with agony and disgust: "The police, mouths twisted, lathis flailing; the men in the crowd; the people with the brutal faces, full of lust to hurt".[44] She sees Mr. Surabhai as a kind-hearted and brave man who believes in the cause he is supporting, while others see him as a traitor and an agitator.

John M. Meyer (2017) considers the Royal Indian Navy's mutiny a key event in the struggle towards freedom from the British Raj and deems it crucial in two important aspects, namely, "civilian control over the Indian military, and a competition for power between Congress and Communists that undermined Indian workers and their student allies".[45] He draws on various sources to make his point: a Communist history of

the event, interview with a lead mutineer, and documents published in the *Towards Freedom* Indian archives published by Oxford University Press. He describes how a low-key resistance ignited by a handful of sailors became an uprising with over 20,000 sailors involved, ultimately making its way to the streets of Bombay, turning into a revolution.[46] He further writes that, "The Communist Party in Bombay seized upon the mutiny as an opportunity to rally the working class against the British Raj, with the hope of ending British rule through revolution rather than negotiation".[47] He explains the tussle between Congress and the Communist party and suggests that the Congress betrayed the Communists by taking its support off the protests. He notes that, "Congress, sensing the danger of the moment, snuffed out support for the mutiny, and insisted on a negotiated transfer of power".[48] A shadowy side to the Communist party is publicized in *Bhowani Junction* (1954), regardless of which character speaks. Meyer (2017), however, reveals a different fact, documenting that "The mutiny had an especially large impact on the competition for power between Congress and Communists, and civilian control over the Indian military".[49] He further adds that, "The failure of the RIN mutiny of 1946 ensured that the movement for Indian independence morphed from a radical revolutionary fire to a conservative transfer of power", which is what the Congress wanted.[50] Calling the R.I.N. mutineers 'heroes', Teertha Prakash Jena (1996) describes the causes and implications of the mutiny and records, "The heroes of challenge in R.I.N, before dispersing, had collected all the record, every scrap of paper that had been used by the members of N.C.S.C [Naval Central Strike Committee] and consigned them to the flames" making it practically impossible for the Enquiry Commission to properly charge any of the members with treason.[51] Gonvindaswami, the Collector in the novel, also goes on explaining to Victoria that, "Congress have been searching wildly for a way to get the strike ended and take the R.I.N. mutinies out of the Communists' hands into their own, and at the same time to seem to support both the mutiny and the strike".[52] It was both a wise and a wicked game that the Congress played, staying safe on both sides. They pretended to be on board with the government as well as with the Communist party, the strikers and mutineers. Referring to how all credit of controlling the protestors and R.I.N. mutineers goes to the British, Colonel Savage remarks with pride and disgust: "Gandhi ought to give me a bloody medal when he gets in the saddle up there the Order of the Radiant Dhoti".[53] Of course, it is always the British officers, cleaning up all the Indian and Oriental mess, as Colonel Savage seems to imply.

Stereotypical Propaganda

There are rare mentions of Muslims and their pre-partition struggles in *Bhowani Junction* (1954), at least not with reference to any notable contribution in the freedom movements. They are spoken about in a belittling manner, if mentioned at all. In the backdrop of R.I.N. uprising, John Masters documents the violence and unrest through Victoria's narrative, "The night before, the city had flared up into senseless shouting and throwing of bricks. Even more senselessly, it was the Mohammedans who had thrown bricks at the Hindus.... and the Hindus had done Mohammedans no harm".[54] Though in several historical archives, even those documented by Indian and Hindu authors, it is clearly established that before and during the partition violence, both communities were equally blood-thirsty and violent. It is unjust on any writer's part to be taking sides and holding one particular religious community responsible for mass murders and brutalities. Kavita Puri (2019), a British-Indian director, producer and writer notes in the foreword of her interview archives of partition survivors that, "Of course there were differences: there was no intermarriage; most Hindus did not eat at the homes of Muslims; there were socio-economic disparities and cases of localised outbreaks of communal trouble".[55] Commenting on the responsibility of partition violence, Kavita Puri writes, "In partition there were perpetrators on all sides, and obviously within families". She further says that for a historian or a writer who aims at documenting the true human experiences instead of randomly throwing blames, it is imperative to hear all the stories and take all different narratives into account. Puri spoke to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh survivors of partition, seventy years later, and documented their narratives in a documentary she made for the BBC. She mentions how a woman who watched the interviews of partition survivors, wrote to BBA saying, "she had no idea that all sides suffered".[56] One common theme that emerges from all the narratives of these survivors, is that their neighbors from another religion helped them flee from the violent mob. Numerous Hindus have reflected on how their Muslim neighbors warned them ahead of time and saved the lives and honor of the daughters of their Hindu neighbors.[57]

John Masters' portrayal of Indians, including all religious communities, is offensive at times. Even when he is praising an Indian character, there are a number of descriptions involved regarding the color of their skin, the hard color of their eyes, and their general harshness and impoliteness. It almost sounds like they are from a different world a third world as

they say, which is not clean, white and well-mannered like the British world. Whether it is a highly educated civil servant like the Collector Govindaswami, or a well-liked Congress leader Mr. Surabhai, or a decent railway employee Ranjit Kasel, or a common beggar in the street, everyone and everything has a coarseness ascribed to it. On one occasion, when Victoria explains how the streets are empty during the strike, and even the beggars are gone, she describes one of the beggars as, "The beggars had gone, even the man with his leg twisted around his neck, even the legless armless body in a basket".[58]

The Political Farce

The event of joint Congress and Muslim League protest is an extremely absurd sight. The Collector Govindaswami had probably foreseen it, which was why he gave both parties a different route to protest in favor of the R.I.N. sailors. Just when Mr. Surabhai, the local Congress leader leads his members to join the Muslim Leaguers, a ludicrous fight erupts between both parties when the Muslim League flag is mistakenly hit by the Congress flag and then both flags hit the ground. Emotions are high and heated. Someone from the Muslim League rally hits Mr. Surabhai with a bottle, saying, "They are trampling on our flag!", while Surabhai helplessly shouts, "We are brothers for freedom!".[59] It is also important to note that these incidents are told through Victoria's voice, and therefore, can be considered as a projection of an Anglo-Indian view of the Muslims.

Who Wears the Crown?

The British Colonel remains a so-called hero in the narrative, highlighting his own valor by quoting Govindaswami, "It is such men as you who help me to forget my unfortunate pigmentation".[60] While at the same time mocking the Anglo-Indians, he says "Anglo-Indians weren't brave, or even despicable. They were only comical. They tried to marry British soldiers. They spoke like Welshmen. They wore topis at midnight" everything that we have already seen in Patrick and Victoria's sister Rose Mary.[61]

The most crucial incident in the closing section of the novel is Communist terrorist K. P. Roy's attempt to assassinate the Indian leader Gandhi. He tries to derail the train that Gandhi was traveling on, by using explosives, but he is killed by Patrick before that and hence the latter

emerges as the new hero at the end, unknowingly saving Gandhi's life. Gandhi's actual assassination is foreshadowed in the novel by adding a scene of his attempted murder at the end, although the author preferred to conclude on a positive note. Another reason is that although the novel was written and published in 1954, but the story is set in 1946 and Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, which is why the author had to use foreshadowing technique to hint towards a grave incident that was to take place two years later.

Missing Representation and the Silenced Voices

It is pertinent to note how feasibly John Masters has almost excluded the Muslim voice from the narrative. It is nowhere to be found even among the peripheral characters, and therefore Muslims do not get to provide a perspective and opinion on the events surrounding the partition of India. The political progression in the novel is slow and the narrative, although set in the backdrop of partition, is primarily focused at the Anglo-Indian lives. Masters' way of handling the narrative primarily through the Anglo-Indian voice quenches the thirst which was prompted due to lack of representation given to the Community in literature; yet, it also points to selective representation in the novel. We find Hindus, Christians, atheists, the English, Anglo-Indians, and pretty much every major and minor community of that time in the novel; but not Muslims. A few mentions have been made for Jinnah and the Muslim League in the political context, that too, in a disapproving manner they were the prime mischief mongers in the whole partition saga, as the novel seems to suggest. The Congress party of India is also repeatedly shown in a negative light pertaining to the inclination of some of its members towards Communism.

Criticism from the Anglo-Indian Community

Despite all its glory, *Bhowani Junction* (1954) as a piece of literature, claiming to fall between the divide of fact and fiction, could not satisfy the Anglo-Indian community. They protested that the portrayal of Anglo-Indians in the novel is too stereotypical, ludicrous and low. Writers and critics found it to be a derogatory portrayal of the Anglo-Indian community, and Victoria's character as overly sensualized and pornographic.[62] Victoria's character is particularly targeted and disliked by these critics because of her portrayal as a hedonistic woman. This sort of immoral depiction of their women, in one of the selective few

pieces of literature that care to talk about Anglo-Indians, could easily strengthen the pre-existing myth about Anglo-Indians having an illegitimate and shady parentage. It is perhaps for this reason that Frank Anthony, an Anglo-Indian leader who served his community for twenty-six years starting in 1942, has given exclusive space to the praise and acknowledgement of Anglo-Indian women in the introduction of his book *Britain's Betrayal in India* (1968). He writes elaborate expressions to describe their matchless beauty, their selfless contributions to the nursing service in India, their elegance and education, and most importantly, their character. This is included on purpose in response to Victoria Jones's bold character portrayal in *Bhowani Junction* (1954), which was published fourteen years earlier than Frank Anthony's historical account of the Anglo-Indian life, and his famous rebuttal for John Masters' novel in these words, "Even writers, in fact Anglo-Indian but masquerading as British, have purported to draw on the Community for producing penny-shovelling exercises in near-pornography".[63]

Actual Historical and Political References in the Novel

Amidst the Anglo-Indian struggle, the novel documents the following historical incidents and occurrences with reference to the Partition:

1. Flashbacks of the War of Independence- 1857 (The Great Mutiny)
2. Flashbacks of the Quit India Movement- 1942
3. Allusions to Gandhi's Civil Disobedience- 1930
4. The Royal Indian Navy (R.I.N.) Mutiny- 1946.
5. The Rebellion of Union of Railway Workers of India fictional name, but an important reference to all the smaller mutinies that contributed into the Indian fight for emancipation.
6. A brief mention of the Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh- 1919
7. Communal and religious violence is constantly in the background.
8. Frequent derailments the Indian kind of jingoism, as implied in the novel.
9. Foreshadowing of Congress's plan to nationalize the Indian Princely States.
10. Foreshadowing of Gandhi's upcoming assassination in 1948.
11. The tussle between Congress and the Communist party.

***Bhowani Junction's* Cinematic Adaptation (1956) An Artistic Failure**

John Masters novel *Bhowani Junction,* published in 1954, was quickly bought by MGM productions in the same year and was adapted

on Hollywood screen under the same title, directed by George Cukor and produced by Pandro S. Berman in 1956. Produced by the British wing of MGM studios of the United States, most of the film exteriors and interiors was shot in Lahore and London respectively. The director initially wanted to shoot the film in India, to show the original setting of the narrative but the Indian Government and Press were against the film due to their objection on some of the content about Indian leaders. Emaneul Levy, a highly acclaimed American film professor and film critic published his review of Cukor's adaptation of *Bhowani Junction* in 2007 and again with minor editing in 2015. He notes the tussle with the Indian government over production of this film in these words, "Unfortunately, the Indian press and film industry were against the production from the start. The Indian government refused to grant permission to shoot in India, basing their objection on one line in the script that described Indian politicians in a disparaging way".[64] The Government of Pakistan was therefore requested and as a response, complete assistance was provided to the film crew. The film opens with a note of gratitude by the producers to the Government of Pakistan for providing battalion of soldiers and policemen to shoot certain scenes.[65] The Government of Pakistan not only allowed the shooting of film in Lahore but also waived off all production taxes, despite the fact that John Masters' original novel had numerous instances where both Muslims and their political leaders are referred to in a derogatory manner.[66]

There are numerous disagreements between the original text and the screenplay written for the adaptation. The most prominent one is that both the opening and closing of the film are heavily altered. While discussing film versus novel comparison and critique, it is always important to determine the ways in which any alterations affect the theme and essence of the original. In the backdrop of Partition, Masters' novel already lacks depth and detail, but Cukor's film adaptation takes it to another level of negation and denial. Emaneul Levy calls Cukor's *Bhowani Junction* (1956) a commercial success but an artistic failure, which in his opinion, is a "feature that fell in between its two narrative strands: shallow as a tragic portrait of a woman's divided and troubled identity, and oversimplified as a political melodrama, set against tumultuous political circumstances".[67] Masters' novel (1954) presents three voices in the narrative, which give the novel variety of perspective and better representation; whereas the film version opts for the British Colonel Rodney Savage as the sole voiceover narration. Levy suggests that Cukor's adaptation suffered at the hands of censor boards and MGM

studios. The initial version of the film, told through Victoria's perspective, was poorly received by the preview audience. Cukor was therefore forced by the MGM production to change the voiceover to Rodney Savage. This change of narrative voice completely diminished the intent of the original novel to give representation and space to Anglo-Indians. Levy also notes, "[Colonel's] narration contained a lot of unnecessary exposition and created further distance between the viewers and the screen. In the end, *Bhowani Junction* was turned into a compromisingly sentimental yarn, shallow as a tragic portrait and oversimplified as a political melodrama".[68] Rest of the characters are deprived of voicing their opinion in the cinematic adaptation of Masters' novel.

Trailer of the Film

The trailer of the film *Bhowani Junction* (1956) is an interesting and significant sight. It depicts how the film was advertised and sold to the audience. Opening with a teaser of half-naked Victoria Jones taking a shower, the headline of film trailer dramatically announces, "The most alluring woman the most exotic land the most exciting action".[69] The voiceover then begins introducing Masters' most *sensational* novel turned into a movie, where Ava Gardner reenacts "the affairs of Victoria Jones", Stewart Granger relives "the romantic life of Colonel Savage" and Bill Travers plays the "jealous lover".[70] This is certainly not how these characters are originally portrayed in Masters' novel. The narrator then enthrallingly describes how the MGM team of technicians, producers and director went to Pakistan, "to film the first American movie ever made in that exciting corner of the earth" (Berman & Cukor, 1956). By the year 1956, the West was still thrilled and overwhelmed with the idea of the Exotic East and the Exotic Oriental. Focusing on the grand scenes of "roaring gun battle... a spectacular train wreck... a cast of thousands... and mob fury", the film is reduced merely to a "fascinating love story of the Eurasian girl and the British Colonel" in the trailer, completely ignoring the intent of the original text.[71]

George Cukor's Adaptation a Sensual Melodrama

The film opens with the caption of *India-1947*, which is a year ahead of Masters' timeline in the novel, which is mainly 1946. The screenwriters of this film, Sonya Levien and Ivan Moffat, tried their best to introduce all the major events of the novel into the film as briefly as

possible, yet they both ignored the true purpose and essence of Masters' book. The main focus of the film remains on the Communist terrorist Daway, originally named K. P. Roy in the novel, Victoria's over-sensualized characters and Colonel Savage's unnecessary glorification by Victoria Jone's father. A large number of important Partition incidents and issues are either missed in this cinematic adaptation, or are merely mentioned in an over-simplified and casual sentence to create an illusion of their presence. Colonel Savage, for example, provides an insinuation to the R.I.N. Mutiny in his brief conversation with General Ackerby, as an event that aroused "fever pitch of patriotic sympathy" in Indians that turned the whole country into a battlefield.[72] Whereas, the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny is one of the most crucial events that provide a constant background to Masters' novel, and almost all other events in the original narrative are either affected by this event in some way or are a reaction to this mutiny. Colonel Rodney Savage's character is undoubtedly valorized in Masters' novel too, but the film completely shifts its focus to Savage, while the rest of the characters, both Indians and Anglo-Indians, stay in the periphery. *Bhowani Junction* is originally Victoria's Anglo-Indian predicament, which in George Cukor's version, becomes Colonel Savage's narrative of British glory.

The American Fear of Communism

Film critics have argued that Cukor's adaptation is more fixated on the anti-Communist propaganda rather than concentrating on the theme of Anglo-Indian trouble amidst partition of India in the original text. Colonial Films. Org, a joint venture of Birkbeck, University College London, British Film Institute, British Empire and Commonwealth Museum and the Imperial War Museum contains an archive of over six thousand colonial films and their critique prepared by their team of researchers. In their critique of George Cukor's *Bhowani Junction* (1956), it is termed as a British-American film which "avoids a clear position on British colonialism, and instead focuses on the American anti-Communist ideology by depicting the Communists as a violent, anti-British group".[73] Another writer Dror Izhar (2011) notes in his book, "It is clear why an anti-Communist tale would captivate American society during this period. The novel's success in both countries, when the Cold War was at its peak, brought about the production of a film by MGM".[74]

The film goes an extra mile to sympathize with the British government and Empire when Savage tells the General how Indians and Congress

had made things extremely hard for them because, in his words, "They were afraid that the British might change their mind about leaving... so they were determined to speed us out by every 'peaceful' means at their disposal".[75] This is a reference to Gandhi's call for peaceful resistance which was turned into mindless violence on many occasions. According to Savage, the Congress party had planned to create a well-organized confusion in Bhowani under their local leadership and choke the railway station with hundreds of people at a time. However, as Savage explains, "Under the guise of Congress, the Communists were ready to turn 'genuine passive resistance' into a bloodbath".[76]

The British government, as depicted in the film, had to clean up all this mess before their departure and send their own officers and soldiers all over the country to provide a backup to local authorities. In the opening few scenes, the members of local Congress under Surabhai's direction create a horrible din and confusion at the Bhowani junction and disrupt railway operations. In Masters' novel, Mr. Surabhai is depicted as more of a nationalist hero, while in the film version, his character is shown as a nasty anti-British agitator. At one point, Savage describes him as "a mixture of a noble patriot and Donald Duck", who does all the right things in the wrong way.[77] The secret Communist members are also seen in the film, aggressively chanting slogans of *Inqilaab*! a call for revolution. The Indian Congress and Communist party members, as Savage describes in the film, love going to the jail and choke the jails and courts.

The Scenes of Swarming Crowd

While this voiceover is heard in the background, teeming Indian crowds shouting, screaming, dancing and chanting slogans take up the screen. The way it is filmed, it seems to suggest as if for the Indians, it was not a struggle and fight for independence but an exciting opportunity to create mischief and have some fun while they had nothing better to do with their lives. Many notable film reviews of that time considered Ava Gardner (playing Victoria Jones in the film) and the massive crowd scenes as two major strengths of the film. The huge panoramas of teeming crowd that is a constant presence in the film, strong sound effects and the scene of monstrous derailment are undoubtedly some of the most solid attributes of the film. Immediately after Colonel Savage's opening scene, describing the situation of Bhowani to his travel companion General Ackerby, the film moves on with a wide shot of swarming

crowds all across the railway station, which is then followed by a montage of further crowd shots with background narration. As a viewer, one immediately infers that the emphasis of the scenes are the massive groups of masses. The camera angles, wide and close shots of the crowd create a sense of urgency and restlessness that provide the film with a feel of social and political incoherence. These shots also highlight Colonel Savage's point that hundreds of people cannot be arrested as they end up clogging the jails. It also provides an insight into how the director George Cukor perceived India of that time. Quoting the director George Cukor's words, Emaneul Levy (2015) notes, "Cukor's impression of India at the time [was] a country of 'thousands of people swarming around. People, people, people!'", which was a striking contrast to the fancy MGM studios and his own posh residence in Hollywood Hills.[78] Bosley Crowther (1956) also comments on the crowd scenes as, "Mr. Cukor has pulled no punches. He has made them ugly and lacerating things. He gives you a sense of the abundance and the pitiful cheapness of Indian life".[79]

It is often frustrating to see how such a tormenting and huge historical trauma has been reduced to something so naïve and pointless. It is important to discuss here that even though the novel also missed plenty of partition related issues and events, but at least the novel had a claim to an ardent Anglo-Indian emphasis and attention. The film overruled both notions and neither helped the Anglo-Indian cause, nor the Partition shifting all its focus to the glorification of the British army officer and shooting of huge crowd scenes. Emaneul Levy concludes, "In the end, 'Bhowani Junction' was turned into a compromisingly sentimental love story, depicting an unsatisfying resolution of a romantic union between Gardner and British officer Granger.[80]

The Altered Ending

The team of *Bhowani Junction* film obviously did not agree with John Masters' choice of real hero. Although, Colonel Savage is no less than a hero in the novel, but in the traditional sense, a hero is seen particularly as the one who wins the bride at the end. In Masters' novel, Patrick saves Gandhi and wins Victoria's affection once again, but in the film version, he is killed in the last scene and Colonel Savage and Victoria's love story is given an eternal ending which it never had in the original text. In the novel, Patrick is the one who shoots K. P. Roy, whereas, in the film version, his due credit is snatched and given to Colonel Savage

who shoots Daway (K. P. Roy), while Patrick ends up dead from Daway's bullet. Hence, the crown is placed on the British head after all. It is crucial to keep in mind that both the author John Masters and George Cukor, the director, are British and American respectively. Both tried to represent India and the Indian state of mind through their own lenses. Cassity (1999) sees this hierarchy as, "the inadequacy of literary representation by cultural outsiders, especially in a colonial setting where there is a power differential between cultures and the writer is representing the subjugated culture from the more powerful position".[81] Colonel Savage's victory in the film allows an alternative imagery of the British leaving India gracefully.

Question of Fidelity in Historical Films

Cukor's adaptation of *Bhowani Junction* is very vivdly filmed. The scenes of mob fury, riots and derailment are especially very intense and a lot of effort has been put into those scenes. A film can be loyal to the novel and still be very different to the actual essence of the original. Cukor has tried to remain as faithful to the original text as he could, but even though he has kept the whole story similar to Masters' novel, he still decided to change the opening and closing of the film, which impacted the narrative in many ways. Most notably, this alteration deprived the narrative from the original Anglo-Indian representation that was given to them by John Masters, and added more spice to British glorification and appraisal.

It is essential to note that George Cukor's *Bhowani Junction* (1956) is an adaptation of a novel that claimed to be part fiction and part history. The film completely ignores the historical part and focuses on a romantic tale told in the background of mob frenzy, without providing sufficient political and historical context of the events that led to partition. To anyone who is not familiar with the events preceding and following the partition of India, this film would give a mindlessly violent impression of India of that time, and for no apparent cause but to hurry the British out, which is an unfair way of depicting the freedom struggle and one of the most violent, traumatic and massive migrations in human history.

Conclusion: Depiction of Pre-Partition Events Film and Novel

Millions of people butchered, thousands of women raped and killed, the Indian holocaust, the greatest ever migration in history, the decades

long struggle for emancipation and freedom is nowhere to be seen on the screen. It is missing from the novel too, but this is where the Director's role could have been imperative and groundbreaking. Using the aesthetic medium of historiographic metafiction, the author and the director have experimented with the history of partition to serve their respective purposes. While John Masters remained focused on the Anglo-Indian crisis before and during the partition of India; George Cukor focused only on the characters, completely disregarding the background of partition. It is especially unsettling to see that the Director and the whole team took their chance to change certain important things in the original story and even changed the ending of the novel in their film adaptation, but did not address the important political and historical events that occurred during that period, even if that meant adding into the missing pieces of the novel and purposefully contributing into period films.

The novel *Bhowani Junction* (1954), written by John Masters was selected for this study because it provides one of the earliest glimpses into the portrayal of partition in literature, and because the novel claims to be set somewhere at the borderline of fiction and history. Although the partition of India has been set as the backdrop of this narrative, it is still primarily the story of Anglo-Indians and their awkward place in the whole partition saga. Through Victoria Jones, Masters has attempted to portray the quest of the Anglo-Indian community towards finding a *Home*. However, he has told Victoria's journey of self-discovery only by her constantly shifting affiliations and relationships with men. It reduces the gravity and solemnity of the cause and misrepresents it as a mere hedonistic enterprize. What seems to be lacking is John Masters' thoughtfulness to include the Indians, both Muslims and Hindus, as the narrative voices.

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