

## FILM REVIEW

# Garm Hawa

**G**ARM HAWA has already received excellent notices. I had not expected it to be so good. Some of the so-called New Wave films (the expression has become dated in Europe) were tedious beyond belief. I went to *Garm Hawa* prepared to sit through a pretentious, self-consciously "intellectual", slow-moving, arty film laboriously expanding a short story into a full-length feature. It proved to be refreshingly different.

People used to seeing all those grotesque "Muslim socials" are also in for disappointment. Imagine a "Muslim subject" without a single Lucknawi nawab or courtesan! No bejewelled heroine sighting the Moon of Id and looking up at the heavens like a praying mantis. Not even a *mushaira*! What is the world coming to?

*Garm Hawa* takes us back to the grim days following Partition—and raises many questions. The subject of India Divided has been done to death in novels, short stories and poetry. But, for the older generation of the three major communities, the memories are still bitter. The Muslims of India, for a variety of complex reasons, continue to live under the long shadow of 1947. For many of them, especially in North India, Partition has meant deserted, crumbling houses, divided families and a certain emotional conflict arising out of the fact that blood relatives now belong to two mutually hostile camps and cannot easily meet one another. Also, economic insecurity and a sense of regret. These problems are at last being aired, with the inevitable verdicts passed and remedies suggested by political experts and eminent journalists.

Mass upheaval and the general feeling of rootlessness have not been confined to this subcontinent alone. The post-war world has seen a lot of tragedies—in divided Germany, Korea, Vietnam. The Jews were exiled from Eastern Europe; the Palestinians were thrown out of their homeland. The creation of new countries plays havoc with individual lives. In India, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs suffered equally. The creation of Bangladesh made nonsense of the two-nation theory and the ideology of Pakistan.



BALRAJ SAHNI AND DEVYANI as father and daughter, Salim Mirza and Amina. *Garm Hawa* will be remembered for Balraj's farewell performance, along with his films like *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Kabuliwalla* and *Heera Moti*. *Garm Hawa* is directed by M. S. Sathyu, who has worked as an art director of stageplays. This is his first feature film. His wife and associate, Shama Zaidi, had her training in stagecraft in Germany and France. Her mother, the late Begum Qudsiya Zaidi, was a patron of the Hindustani Theatre, Delhi.

Today the question is being asked: Was Muslim communalism alone responsible for the folly of 1947, or should Indian communalism, as a whole, share the blame?

History will continue to be interpreted from different points of view. But a sincere artist can portray a segment or an aspect of the tragedy in purely human terms. *Garm Hawa* is one such portrayal of some of the troubles faced, in and after 1947, by India's "problem community".

I saw the film in New Delhi last month. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had invited a cross-section of people to

—Continued



DEVYANI AND JAMAL HASHMI. The Iranian-born stage actor from Hyderabad plays Amina's fiancé Kazim who goes away to Pakistan.



SHAUKAT KAIFI AND RAMA BANS as Salim Mirza's wife and sister respectively. Shaukat (Mrs Kaifi Azmi) belongs to a family of writers and journalists of Hyderabad. She is a noted actress of the Bombay stage and began her career with Prithvi Theatres. Rama Bans is a former wife of I. S. Johar. She is now a leading beautician and currently in charge of the Health Club, Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay.

give their opinions. *Garm Hawa* had run into trouble because of its bold treatment of a sensitive subject. The audience reaction was interesting. A Muslim lady sitting next to me said: "We can identify with the characters. Most of us have faced similar situations."

A senior parliamentarian remarked: "Whose fault was it anyway? The Muslims themselves demanded Pakistan."

A distinguished Maulana did not like the way the hero's daughter was shown making love to her fiancé.

The progressives were satisfied with the last Red-flag sequence.

The next morning, *The Motherland* (September 12) declared that *Garm Hawa* was pro-Pakistan and anti-India. The reviewer added that he had not seen the film. (I would not be surprised if, with the current revival of the Muslim League, the new demagogues and their followers announce that the film has been produced by the Jana Sanghis and the Communists.)

Director M. S. Sathya was distressed. The screenplay had been scrutinised earlier by the authorities, rejected and then accepted. Sathya and his "Unit 3 MM" had borrowed two-and-a-half lakh rupees from that fairy godmother of young idealists—the Film Finance Corporation. They had raised six lakhs on their own. They had yet not found a distributor. And now there were rumours of the film being banned. How can one talk of the "new" or "parallel" cinema in India if the path to achieving anything worth while is so thorny?

### Only In Secular India

Fortunately, the film has now received clearance—without a single cut. That should remind us that only in secular India a film like this could be made; and only in a democracy like ours, which allows freedom of expression, it could eventually be shown to the public.

*Garm Hawa* is based on two well-known Urdu short stories, *Jaren* ("The Roots") and *Chauthi Ka Jora* ("The Wedding Dress"), both written, many years ago, by Ismat Chughtai. The screenplay is jointly written by Kaifi Azmi and Shama Zaidi. The main lead is played by the late Balraj Sahni. It turned out to be his farewell performance.

Back to Agra, October 1947.

*Garm Hawa* is the story of Salim Mirza, an unforgettable character interpreted with restraint and understanding by the great Balraj. The film has a rather conventional opening: stills of Partition riots, refugee trains, etc. Then the Muslim League flag. Salim Mirza's demagogue brother making a fiery speech: he will not go to Pakistan because he must look after the interests of the Muslims remaining in India. But a few weeks later he quietly leaves for the new country. (The character suspiciously looks like the famous League leader, Chaudhury Khaliquzzaman, who had declared his undying loyalty to the Indian Flag and had, the next week, decamped for Pakistan.)

Salim Mirza owns a small shoe factory and lives in a traditional joint family in the heart of Agra. The family starts breaking up. Then it becomes a heart-breaking routine: Salim Mirza going to the railway station to bid painful farewell to various members of his Pakistan-bound family. His

daughter Amina's fiancé also goes away to Karachi."

A non-political Salim Mirza becomes a political suspect. His business suffers. Neither banks nor money-lenders advance him loans. He has to leave his ancestral *haveli* and move into a smaller house. His mother is baffled by politics. She refuses to leave her house and hides herself, like a stubborn, frightened child, under a staircase. The frail old matriarch is forcibly carried to the new house. The *haveli* is occupied by a Sindhi refugee businessman (A. K. Hangal).



A. K. HANGAL gives a memorable performance as the Sindhi refugee who starts all over again in Agra. This refugee has had his share of sufferings in Pakistan before he migrated to India. In Agra he befriends Salim Mirza. Both are victims of political circumstances beyond their control.

Dadi Amman is dying. She wishes to breathe her last in her own home. The kindly Sindhi allows Salim Mirza to bring her back to the *haveli* where she dies. This perhaps is the only touch of sentimentality in a film refreshingly devoid of melodrama and pathos.

The genesis of a Hindu-Muslim riot: the tonga carrying Salim Mirza hits and topples a barrow inside a congested lane. A fight ensues between the tongawallah and the barrow-boy. Soon it develops into a communal riot. The hooligans beat up Salim Mirza and burn down his shoe factory.

The harassed man does not lose his dignity or courage. He begins making shoes himself. As the new wholesalers boycott him, he starts selling his ware from door to door. "Everything will be all right!" remains his refrain. An opportunist relative brashly dons the Gandhi cap and khadi and becomes the local leader. Salim Mirza is accused of spying for Pakistan. Amina's fiancé (Jamal Hashmi) comes from Karachi on a visit and is imprisoned for entering India without valid papers.

Amina (Devayani) discovers with a shock that he is getting married to the daughter of a Minister in Pakistan. She is now wooed by a rakish cousin (Jalal Agha). He too goes away to Pakistan. In a blinding moment of self-pity and silent hysteria, Amina kills herself. Her father is stunned with grief, tries to remain stoical.

As the family business is gone, Salim Mirza's son (Farooq Sheikh) tries to get a

job. He is told by the interviewer to go to Pakistan. But, as an unemployed graduate, the young man is not alone. Along with his jobless Hindu and Sikh friends, he whiles away time at a dingy *chaikhana*. (The tea-stall is run by an unsung and unacclaimed freedom fighter.)

The young man's friends say to him: "Why don't you go away to Pakistan?"

He retorts: "Yes, why not? Aren't thousands of Hindus and Sikhs emigrating to Canada and England to better their prospects?" (Such dialogue may be objected to. Some of the diehard Muslim Leaguers make pro-Pakistan comments. That too may be taken amiss by audiences.)

Eventually, Salim Mirza decides to emigrate to Pakistan. On the way to the railway station, he comes across a huge procession of the unemployed carrying Red flags (a common trade-union colour) and demanding *roti, kapda and makan*.

### The Turning Point

This is the psychological moment, the turning point. Salim Mirza's son looks at the procession, then hesitatingly at his father. Salim Mirza understands. He nods approval and winks. The son jumps down from the tonga and joins the procession. After some moments Salim Mirza gives the keys of his house to his wife (Shaukat Kaifi) and tells her to go back home. Then he, too, jumps down from the tonga. Father and son mingle in the seething mass of people. They have decided to join their countrymen and struggle together for a better future.

Too obviously symbolic, perhaps, but this happens to be the most stirring sequence of the film. It has also raised a controversy. What does the end signify? Should the Muslims of India join the Communist Party (and which one)? Is working for the Red Revolution the only way to fight communalism? Will Communism put an end to the mess created by confused political ideologies and corrupt politicians? What the hell should the Indian Muslims do?

*Garm Hama* has been directed with great sensitivity and understatement. Dialogue by Kaifi Azmi is powerful, the photography is pleasant. This is one of the few Indian films I have seen in which even the minor players do not ham their roles. Costumes by Shama Zaidi and Rabab and Sitara Jafri lend greater authenticity to the film, which was entirely shot on location in Agra.

*Garm Hawa* is Balraj Sahni's picture, but the other players have done very well. Dadi Amman is everybody's grandma, played superbly by a 75-year-old Muslim woman the film-makers "discovered" in the *mohalla* where the story was filmed. The cast includes some old troupers of the Indian People's Theatre Association: A. K. Hangal, Shaukat Kaifi, Yunus Parvez, Farooq Sheikh is excellent as Salim Mirza's son Sikander. Dinanath Zutshi of Delhi TV and Bisham Sahni's daughter Kalpana have also acted in the film. Jalal Agha provides the only *filmi* touch to an otherwise realistic setting.

Likewise, the overlong *qawwali* is jarring. At places the dubbing is faulty.

However, these are minor flaws in "*Garm Hawa*", which I think is one of the finest films ever produced in India.

QURRATULAIN HYDER