Background Information:

-The film was directed by Deepa Mehta and was released in 1998

-It is based on a book by Bapsi Sidhwa

-It stars Nandita Das, Maia Sethna, Amir Khan (who was also in Lagaan and Rang De Basanti), and Rahul Khanna

-It is the second film in Mehta’s Elements Trilogy (Karishma talked about Water)

-The movie is about the partition of India and Pakistan after Independence; this is also the topic of Midnight’s Children which we are reading in this class

-It is not the usual Bollywood film, the music is showcased more like a Hollywood soundtrack rather than interludes of singing and dancing

Basic Plot:

-The movie is narrated by Lenny, a pampered girl who lives in Lahore with her parents but is taken care of by her nanny, Shanta

-The movie centers on a group of friends, including Shanta, of different religions (Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims)

-They are all close friends and they often discuss what is going to happen when Britain splits India, but they promise that they will stand by each other

-Hassan and Dil, two muslim men in the group, are both in love with Shanta (who is Hindu)

-When violence erupts and religion starts to define people, the individuals inside this group of friends begin to change

-Lenny, through innocent eyes, witnesses the love, hatred, betrayal, vengeance, and ultimate tragedy that surround the group

Setting:

-Lahore is a city in the Punjab province, it is very close to the border of India and Pakistan but ultimately it was given to Pakistan in the partition

-Before the partition it was made up of people of all different religions; Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians

-After the partition there was a great migration and the city became predominantly Muslim

-This is a map of India and Pakistan after Independence, East Pakistan eventually became Bangladesh

-There are many moving scenes in the movie that depict the tragedy of the migration

-In one moving scene, Hassan sees a mass of poor people walking through the streets with all their personal belongings (cots, clothing, animals, anything they can carry), leaving Lahore because they no longer feel safe there

Characters:

-Lenny is the daughter of a wealthy, Parsi family

-Parsi’s were a religious group that was persecuted in Persia and migrated to the India region

-Lenny is introduced as a pamper red girl, who is curious as well as very innocent

-She plays with dolls and often talks about who she is going to marry

-Her care-taker is Shanta, and they share a very close bond

-Shanta is the beautiful Hindu woman who is loved by all the men in the group of friends

-She is very protective of Lenny

-She worries what affect the partition will have on Lahore, and is horrified by the violence that she witnesses

-None love her more than Dil and Hassan

Characters Continued:

-Hassan is a kind, shy Muslim man who is madly in love with Shanta

-Throughout the story he remains faithful to his friends and helps them; when one of his Sikh friends needs to leave Lahore he plans a way for them to escape and helps them hide from the angry mobs

- Shanta reciprocates love for Hassan

-Dil’s character shows the change that occurred in many people after the partition

-He started out full of life, reciting couplets at his every entrance and often joking around

-Lenny refers to him as Ice-Candy Man because he brings her ice cream whenever he sees her

-In the beginning, he strongly believes that everyone is equal and that God does not discriminate against religions

-Tragically, he loses his two sisters in a brutal train massacre and is driven mad with revenge

Continuation of Plot:

-After losing his sisters, Dil feels his anger and believes that in order to avoid becoming like the monsters that killed his sisters he needs Shanta to reciprocate her love

-He asks Shanta to marry him, telling her that she can control him and make him feel not so vengeful

-Shanta declines his proposal and soon after shares an intimate love scene with Hassan, which Dil accidentally witnesses (this only makes Dil more upset)

-Hassan proposes to Shanta and says that he will convert to Hinduism and move to Amritsar with her because their love would not be accepted in Lahore because he is a Muslim and she is a Hindu

-During this time the Hindus and Sikhs were being driven out of Lahore and it was unsafe for Shanta to stay

-Unfortunately, the next day Hassan is found dead in the street

-Dil betrays Shanta and leads a mob of angry Muslims looking to punish Hindus straight to her, they take her away and she is never seen again

Outside Connections:

- There is a character Parallel in Earth to the characters in The Home and the World

-I thought the characters Shanta, Hassan, and Dil paralleled Bimala, Nikhil, and Sandip, respectfully

-Though Shanta was not married to Hassan, she is much like Bimala because she is caught up in the conflicts but does not agree with violence

-Hassan is like Nikhil because he is caring and kind and becomes a victim of the radicalism and hatred; he is not so easily swayed by the violence and hatred generated by religious differences

-Dil is like Sandip because he gets consumed by revenge like Sandip got consumed by nationalism

-Also I saw a connection to something Partha Chatterjee said in his book;

-He talked about how the mob was hard to control and that it’s easy to become part of the mobocracy

-He says that they needed someone like Gandhi to control the mob

-Gandhi was completely absent from the movie, after Independence he was assassinated and the mobs were set free and they resorted to violence

Religious Conflict:

-In Lahore, all religions lived together not only peacefully but lovingly, they often referred to each other as brothers

-These are the symbols of the main religions addressed in the movie

-Parsi’s are neutral, Lenny is neutral not only because she is a child and she is innocent, but her religion is also unbiased

-Deepa Mehta does a good job of portraying the film in such a way that you understand that no religion or group was right in what they were doing

- The Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were all committing atrocities and the British were propagating the violence by splitting India

-The movie often hinted at the idea that the partition was Britain’s last scar that it would leave India with

-Dil saw that all sides were to blame and referred to men as animals, they were all the same and they created chaos and bloodshed

Corruption of Nationalism

-The movie spurs the question: If all these people of different religions lived together peacefully, what caused them to change their ways?

-What united these people before against the British is now tearing them apart

-They have shared the land for so long and now that they have fought alongside one another to actually own the land they are fighting over it

-Nationalism has disappeared and has been taken over by religious extremism

Symbolism

-There was a lot of foreshadowing and symbolism in the movie

-In the beginning of the movie a gardener cuts flowers and hands them to butler who says: “It’s a sin to cut flowers after sunset, they’re sleeping. It’s just as well, imagine their pain if they had been awake.”

-Like the flowers, India was cut right when they had just settled down

-Also in the movie there are allusions to humans being like animals

-In the zoo there is a lion that Lenny is scared of and Shanta soothes her and tells her “The cage is so strong that even a hundred lions can’t break it.”

-This clearly shows how Shanta is ignorant of the power of the masses, and it later, through what Dil says, is a parallel to how humans are animals

Symbolism Continued

-There is also a scene in which Dil is teaching Shanta how to fly a kite; another kite comes along and threatens to cut the string of Dil’s kite, instead Dil cuts the string of the other kite

-This symbolizes how the British (or the other kite) may have had the idea for the partition but it was the people (Dil’s kite) who began the violence; it also foreshadows Dil’s part in the violence  
-Also the group of friends represented the people of Lahore because they were all different religions

-In the end the group is torn apart, and have turned on each other; the Sikh is in hiding from his friends, Hassan is dead, the Hindu has left, and Dil and the other Muslim man take part in capturing Shanta and taking her away

Film Nuances

-Deepa Mehta uses earthy tones throughout the movie to show looming danger; the amber and red tones were like fire and blood, also I think the tones were an allusion to the title: Earth

-I believed the title also represented the land which people fought over; people were literally fighting over earth (dirt, flowers, trees, etc.)

-The film score, by A.R. Rahman was incredible and really captured the scenes well; the lively kite flying song, the upbeat wedding song, the ominous “waiting for the train” song, and the sweet love song all added great affect to the movie

Reviews

-It was well received and most critics say that it depicted an accurate portrayal of the brutalities that occurred during the partition

-Stephen Holden of the NYTimes says: “‘Earth’ is a powerful and disturbing reminder of how a civilization can suddenly crack under certain pressures.”

-It is a New York Times Critic’s Pick

Conclusion

-The movie is true to what actually happened during this time: there is a lot of violence and bloodshed in the movie; in one scene the main characters all witness a mob of angry Sikhs literally tearing a Muslim man apart

-The train that was massacred carried the dead, bloody bodies of men and children, and sacks filled with women’s severed breasts

-Atrocities like this happened often during the partition movement and Deepa Mehta was true and effective in her depiction of the tragic times

-The movie is not a nationalistic movie for India, it does not even take place in present day India

-In the end, the movie proved how love and innocence were crushed under the power and force of revenge and hatred