

Intermedial Representations of Lived Experience: Indian Soldiers in Film and Literature

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Abstract: *This article examines the intermedial representation of Indian soldier's lived experiences across literature and cinema. Drawing upon intermedial theory, particularly Irina O. Rajewsky's typology of medial transposition and intermedial reference, the study analyses how soldier's subjectivities, trauma, ethical ambivalence, and everyday realities are articulated and transformed as narratives move between textual and audio-visual forms. Focusing on Partition literature, especially the short fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and mainstream Hindi war cinema, notably J. P. Dutta's *Border*, the article demonstrates how literature often privileges interiority and moral ambiguity, while popular cinema tends toward spectacle, collectivized heroism, and nationalist affect. At the same time, the article identifies emergent cinematic strategies that reintroduce testimonial and literary modes. By foregrounding intermedial processes, the article contributes to South Asian cultural studies, film studies, and war representation scholarship.*

Keywords: Intermediality, Indian soldiers, war cinema, Partition literature, trauma, nationalism, remediation, etc

I. INTRODUCTION

The figure of the soldier occupies a central position in the cultural imagination of the Indian nation-state. From literary narratives of Partition to contemporary Hindi war cinema, soldiers are repeatedly mobilized as symbols of sacrifice, masculinity, and national integrity. Yet these representations are not uniform. They vary significantly across media, historical moments, and ideological frameworks. This article argues that an intermedial approach, one attentive to how stories move between literature and film, offers critical insight into how soldier's lived experiences are shaped, reframed, and sometimes obscured.

Rather than treating literature and cinema as discrete representational domains, intermedial analysis foregrounds the *processes* through which meaning is transferred, transformed, and re-signified across media. Such an approach is particularly productive in the Indian context, where literary testimonies of violence and displacement coexist with a powerful cinematic industry that plays a formative role in popular nationalism. By examining how soldier's experiences are narrated differently in prose and film, this article explores the ethical, aesthetic, and political stakes of such mediation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Soldiers, War, and Representation in the Indian Context

Scholarship on Indian war representation has developed along several intersecting trajectories. Studies of Partition literature emphasize testimonial urgency, ethical ambiguity, and the fragmentation of subjectivity (Butalia; Bhalla; Mehta and Mookerjee-Leonard). Saadat Hasan Manto's stories, in particular, are frequently cited for their refusal of nationalist moral clarity and their focus on bodily vulnerability and bureaucratic violence. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* similarly foregrounds local experience over abstract ideology, situating violence within intimate social worlds.



Parallel to this literary scholarship, film studies scholars have analyzed Hindi war cinema as a key site for the production of nationalist affect. Sarmistha Chatterjee, A. M. Athique, and Priya Jaikumar argue that mainstream war films often function as ideological apparatuses, transforming military conflict into emotionally legible narratives of sacrifice and heroism. J. P. Dutta's films, especially *Border*, are frequently discussed as paradigmatic examples of cinematic nationalism, characterized by ensemble casts, melodramatic structures, and a privileging of collective over individual subjectivity.

However, relatively few studies bring these two bodies of scholarship into sustained dialogue. Where comparisons exist, they are often thematic rather than medial. Intermedial studies- developed in the work of Irina O. Rajewsky, Jürgen Bruhn, and Lars Ellestrom- provide a methodological bridge, enabling scholars to analyse how medium-specific affordances shape the representation of lived experience.

Theoretical Framework: Intermediality and Remediation

Intermediality refers to the interaction and crossing of media boundaries. Rajewsky identifies three primary modes: medial transposition (adaptation from one medium to another), media combination (the co-presence of multiple media within a single work), and intermedial reference (one medium evoking another). This framework is especially useful for analysing war narratives, which frequently circulate across novels, films, memoirs, and oral histories.

Literature and cinema offer distinct representational capacities. Literary prose enables sustained interiority, temporal flexibility, and ethical hesitation. Cinema, by contrast, relies on visual immediacy, sound, and collective spectatorship. When narratives of soldiering move from page to screen, these affordances reshape how experience is perceived. Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation further clarifies this process, emphasizing how newer media refashion older ones while simultaneously claiming greater immediacy.

Literary Representations: Soldiers, Ambivalence, and Lived Experience

In Partition literature, soldiers rarely appear as heroic protagonists. Instead, they emerge as bureaucratic agents, peripheral enforcers, or traumatized witnesses. In the short fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto, soldiers and uniformed figures are often indistinguishable from other perpetrators of violence, their authority stripped of moral legitimacy. Stories such as "Khol Do" foreground the violated body rather than martial valour, implicating institutional power in personal catastrophe.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* similarly resists militarized heroism. Although the novel culminates in an act of sacrifice, the emphasis remains on ethical choice rather than national duty. The soldier, where present, is embedded in a landscape of fear, rumour, and moral uncertainty. The novel's narrative strategy: - limited focalization, attention to mundane detail, and delayed revelation- constructs lived experience as fragmented and contingent.

These texts exemplify what trauma theorists describe as *testimonial realism*: a mode that privileges partial knowledge, silence, and ethical discomfort. Literature's ability to dwell in such uncertainty enables a representation of soldierly life that resists mythologization.

Cinematic Representations: Spectacle, Collectivity, and National Affect

Mainstream Hindi war cinema, particularly from the 1990s onward, offers a contrasting representational regime. J. P. Dutta's *Border* dramatizes the Battle of Longewala through spectacular set pieces, patriotic music, and ensemble characterization. Individual soldiers are distinguished by regional identity and personal backstory, yet ultimately subsumed within a collective narrative of sacrifice.

The film's formal strategies: - slow-motion death scenes, rousing musical cues, and climactic victory- transform the lived experience of battle into a consumable national myth. Critics have noted that such films often prioritize emotional mobilization over historical complexity, producing what might be termed *affective nationalism*.

Nevertheless, cinema is not monolithic. Films such as *Haider* and select independent productions employ fragmented narrative structures, voice-over, and visual allegory to engage more critically with militarization and state violence.





These works demonstrate how cinema can appropriate literary techniques to recuperate testimonial modes, complicating the binary between spectacle and interiority.

Intermedial Case Studies

From *Train to Pakistan* to Screen

The film adaptation of *Train to Pakistan* illustrates the dynamics of medial transposition. While retaining the novel's central plot, the film amplifies melodrama and visualizes violence more explicitly. The shift from narrative suggestion to visual representation alters the ethical register of the story, foregrounding spectacle over introspection. This transformation exemplifies how intermedial movement can reconfigure lived experience for mass audiences.

Manto and the Limits of Adaptation

Manto's stories pose particular challenges for cinematic remediation. Their power lies in linguistic economy and moral shock—qualities that resist expansion. Attempts to visualize these narratives risk diluting their ethical force, underscoring the importance of medium specificity in representing trauma.

Border and the Remediation of Soldierly Testimony

Border remediates oral histories, patriotic poetry, and earlier war films into a multimodal spectacle. The film's use of ensemble narrative mirrors epic traditions, while its emotional cues guide viewer response. Intermedial analysis reveals how these strategies construct a collective memory of war that privileges cohesion over contradiction.

Discussion: Ethics, Medium, and the Politics of Memory

The comparison between literature and cinema highlights a fundamental tension: between experience as lived and experience as remembered and circulated. Literature often preserves the former through ambiguity and interiority; cinema frequently transforms it into shared affect and national narrative. Neither mode is inherently superior, but each carries ethical implications.

Intermedial analysis foregrounds these stakes, revealing how representational choices shape public understanding of soldiering. In a media-saturated environment, the circulation of cinematic images often outweighs literary testimony, making critical engagement with intermedial processes all the more urgent.

III. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that intermediality provides a crucial framework for understanding representations of Indian soldier's lived experiences across literature and film. By analysing how narratives are transformed as they move between media, the study demonstrates that representation is not merely a matter of content but of form, affect, and institutional context. Future research might extend this approach to regional cinemas, veteran's memoirs, and digital media, further mapping the complex ecology of war representation in South Asia.

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