

When Pakistan went it alone

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Pakistan is one of the most fascinating – and worrisome – countries on Earth.

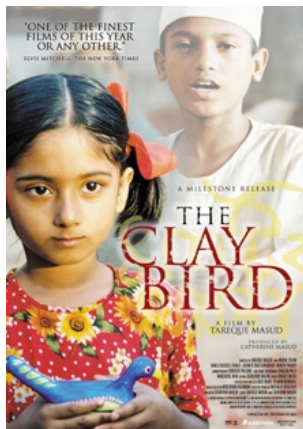
Ruled by a military dictator, feared as a nuclear power, prey to Islamist extremism, stalemated in Kashmir and buffeted by the war in neighbouring Afghanistan, the Muslim republic is a geopolitical hot spot.

With 165 million people, it's also one of the world's most populous nations (sixth from the top, in fact), and a fiercely independent one as well.

On Tuesday, Pakistanis celebrate a milestone: 60 years of self-rule. It was in August 1947 that colonial Britain divided the Raj into two separate countries along religious lines. One was India, the other was Pakistan.

That split – and the violence unleashed, in which one million people died and 14 million were displaced – was the source of much of today's unrest on the subcontinent.

Here are four films set during and after that watershed period of history in Pakistan, when Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs fought for primacy of their religion and way of life. It's a struggle that – unlike its victims – never seems to die.

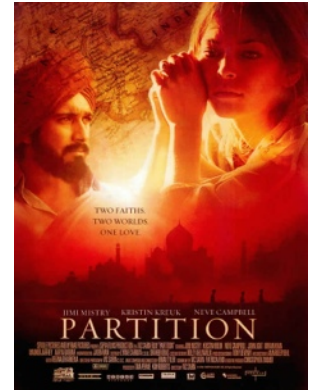


The Clay Bird (*France/Pakistan/Bangladesh, 2002*) Before the Liberation War in 1971 that killed 3 million of its people, Bangladesh was East Pakistan, and this film is situated there in that bloody time. It's a family drama about a peasant boy sent to a madrasa (a Muslim boarding school for boys), and about his father's blind faith in Muslim brotherhood, even while the murderous Pakistani army is at the gates. A fine Milestone/New Yorker DVD, with informative extras.

Earth (*India/Canada, 1998*) Lahore, 1947. A Parsi girl has a Hindu nanny, and the Hindu nanny has a Muslim beau, and all is harmony until the upheaval of independence when the British leave the place to the zealots. Banned on release in Pakistan, this is the second film (between *Fire* and then *Water*) in Canadian director Deepa Mehta's acclaimed

trilogy. Avoid the pan-and-scan Canadian Seville DVD; the U.S. Zeitgeist release is widescreen.

Partition (*Canada/South Africa/Britain, 2007*) An old-fashioned melodrama, this Canadian-made epic set in 1947 is about the doomed love affair of a young Muslim woman (Smallville's Kristin Kreuk) and a former Sikh soldier in the British army (Jimi Mistry). It was filmed in B.C., Delhi, Punjab and Derbyshire by Kashmir-born veteran director Vic Sarin. The Seville DVD is widescreen, anamorphic and boasts 5.1 Digital sound in both English and a French dub.



Silent Waters (*Pakistan/France/Germany, 2003*) A disturbing film about the plight of ordinary women caught up in religious extremism in Punjab two decades after independence. In 1979, after General Zia-ul-Haq declared a new Islamization policy and local villagers take the law into their own hands to root out dissidents, a widow flashes back to horrible Muslim-Sikh "honour killings" she witnessed as a child. The DVD is part of First Run Features' enlightening Human Rights Watch series.

And two titles that deserve a DVD release: Two excellent Pakistani films by exiled director Jamil Dalhavi are unavailable on DVD: the military-coup movie **The Blood of Hussain** (1981), which was banned by Zia and forced Dalhavi to flee the country; and **Immaculate Conception** (1992), about a childless Western couple in Karachi who visit a fertility shrine run by eunuchs but end up in a game of deception.