



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

PARTITION LITERATURE

LECTURE 11 - HISTORY AND ALTERNATIVE MEMORY WRITINGS

DR.SARBANI BANERJEE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



- An inherent oscillation in Partition literary texts lies between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.
- Focus by poststructuralists on the linguistic devices by which meaning is produced, and by “deconstruction” on the difficulties these devices create for our understanding of a text, seems to amount to a claim that language cannot refer adequately to the world, and indeed may not truly refer to anything at all, leaving literature and language, and even consciousness in general, cut off from historical reality.
- Paul de Man states - linguistically oriented theories do not necessarily deny reference, but rather deny the possibility of modeling the principles of reference on those of natural law (“The Resistance to Theory”).



- Bhaskar Sarkar : “Cinema, in particular, provides a powerful and captivating means of cultural memorialization; it pulls together the fragments and resembles the past via considerable acts of reimagining. This form of culture entails, beyond a simple recovery of the past, the creative revivification of an archive of inert data and fragmentary evidence” (301).
- *Komal Gandhar* - Anasuya is told to use the emotions of 1947 and her memories of forced migration for her performance in the play like Ghatak’s films.
- Ghatak uses physical landscape in his films to evoke the memory of a united Bengal.
- Genre of film facilitates a mobility of narrative embracing “narrative journeys of psychic splitting and reintegration”(Curtis and Pajackowska 212).
- While fiction and testimony are both able to represent suffering, fiction is better placed to contextualize it and re-examine the political uncertainties that have produced it .

- Films help in confronting trauma by a collective mourning in a public space such as theatre (Viswanath and Malik, “Revisiting 1947 through Popular Cinema: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44:36 ,61–69. 2009).
- M.L. Anand’s *Lahore* (1949) - depicts the plight of Radha and Neela, who are abducted by Muslim men during Partition. Despite being critical of the social exclusion of abducted, the film “still relies on the Hindu woman’s submissive performance of tradition and subjection to male patriarchal power” (Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. 2008: 96).
- M.S. Sathyu’s *Garm Hava* (1974) captures the dilemma of Salim Mirza (played by Balraj Sahni), a shoe manufacturer from Agra, and his dilemmas about migrating to Pakistan after all his friends and family leave.

- Khushwant Singh's 1956 novel *Train to Pakistan* depicts a haunting image of a ghost-like train from Pakistan pulling into the station at Mano Majra, a small frontier village known for its railroads. The train arrives with a 'full load of corpses'.
- Over the past fifty years, this disturbing image of the train to India (or Pakistan) has become one of the most prevailing images of the violence of the Partition.
- The image of the train functions both as a synecdoche of the violence of Partition in the present tense, as well as a memory of past that cannot be fully reconstituted in the present.
- Imagery of train recurrent in Partition artworks – Peshawar Express by Krishan Chander, The Train has Reached Amritsar by Bhisham Sahni, Ritwik Ghatak's films The Cloud-Capped Star and The Golden Line → signifies journey to a place of no return, as well as train of memories, nostalgia, a dead-end for hopes.

- What is witnessed is not the trauma in the present, but instead the impossibility of trauma as an assembled presence. It is only within this impossibility and within the recognition of the inherent failure of language that fiction is able to emerge as testimony.
- Novels such as Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa's 1991 *Cracking India* break open the literary space in which fiction has the potential to become testimony.
- Both novels place the event of the Partition as the center around which the narrative revolves. The historical reality of the Partition therefore haunts the texts as a referent that necessarily questions the fictional status of the novels.

- Satish Gujral expressed the pathos of Partition in his paintings by portraying anguished men and women in the throes of ruination, when all was lost.
- Kamlesh Mohan deals with a story based on Kashmiri Lal Zakir's novel *Karamanwali*. *Karamanwali* represents the agonising internal journey of that generation of women whose children were left behind while they migrated to India or Pakistan. It is based on a real incident of a mother looking for her son. In the process, she experiences the gory and dehumanizing conditions of a 'refugee' camp. This is a topic not much discussed in official historiography.

- Amrita Pritam's novel, *Pinjar* (1950) - literally meaning skeleton, depicts the trauma of Partition violence through the viewpoint of Pooro, whose prosperous Hindu merchant family abandons her after she is abducted by a rival Muslim family. Pritam's novel foregrounds questions of family/community honour and elision of women's rights as their citizenship is undermined by patriarchal notions of communal ownership of women's bodies in the newly independent nations.
- Narrated from the perspective of a young Parsi girl Lenny in Lahore, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), like Pritam's *Pinjar*, tells the story of her Ayah's abduction by a Muslim man in the wake of Partition.
- Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) recounts how the long shadow of Partition continues to recur in multiple moments of violence, such as the riots in Calcutta in 1964 and Tridib's death in the riots in Dhaka, highlighting the human dimension of the tragedy.



- Gayatri Spivak - “procedure of fiction can give us a simulacrum of the discontinuities inhabiting (and operating?) the ethico-epistemic and the ethico-political”(2019: 6). The genre of Partition literature explores these discontinuities, by universalizing the particular and vice versa.
- Manto’s short stories – “Toba Tek Singh,” “Tetwal ka Kutta,” “Khol Do,” “Thanda Gosht” “Kali Shalwar,” “A Tale of 1947,” “Ram Khilavan,” to name a few – depict the moral complexities of subjects at the receiving end of an event, whose political implications were beyond their control.
- Avoiding an explicit representation of violence, Manto delves deep into the psyche of seemingly ordinary individuals capable of extraordinary violence in the throes of a cataclysmic event.
- His protagonists are testament to “his belief that human depravity, though real and pervasive, can never succeed in killing all sense of humanity. His faith lay in that kind of humanity” (Jalal 2013: 24). *Toba Tek Singh* as a Partition text is a classic gesture of disavowal of dominant commonplaces in a hyperterritorial time. The mental institution includes a refusal of the state-mandated principle of territorialism.



- Nandi Bhatia - literary works qualify as an alternative source of history.
- Kartar Singh Duggal - Partition was handled with resilience and sensitivity by the uprooted Punjabis. A majority of them cherish a natural desire to revisit their homes. The catastrophic event of partition redefined the culture of love and harmony among the various religions.
- Duggal's *Abducted Not* - the Britishers establish the Ordinance Factory in the village Pothoar, which provides the space of power to the Britishers to exercise their dominance over the villagers. The sirens of factory are symbolic of the deterioration and devastation caused by the communal riots. Power is exerted through the institutional set up in the village that represents collaboration beyond the boundaries.
- Mushirul Hasan - Partition was brought about by hot-headed and cynical politicians who failed to grasp the implications of division on religious lines.

- Hasan Azizul Huq's article "Kromagoto Atmakhandan" ("Constant Degeneration of Self" in *Deshbhag: Binash O Binirman*)- observes that a socially inveterate communal sentiment, which is by and large immune to open assaults, is fundamentally different from calculated pogroms and riots, which are pre-organized by major actors and involve economic and physical capital.
- The isolated incidents of religious prejudices that occur in one's everyday experience are outcomes of a pathological condition of hatred towards the Other. This hatred is inter-generationally fed, first at the level of family and then on a macrocosmic scale, by instilling anxiety and fear with the help of myths about the Other community.
- On the other hand, a riot, by virtue of its characteristic disorder, makes accommodation for realization of individual goals in a guise of collectivity. The elitist politics obscures its own involvement in these riots by prolonging hate stories at the bosom of each group about the other.
- Personal motives inciting crimes in such pogroms are given religious, caste, class or ethnic meanings.

- Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) - Partition divides families on ideological grounds, tearing them as under across borders, nostalgia ignites memories of a privileged Muslim life in feudal United Provinces.
- Bhisham Sahni's Hindi novel *Tamas* (1973), a reflective response (in the words of filmmaker, Govind Nihalani), written 25 years after Partition, accounts for the irrational murder and mayhem between communities caught in the vortex of violence.
- Mushirul Hasan - ethnic and sectarian strife, combined with deep-seated regional and linguistic cleavage, reveal the limits of an agenda of the imaginary nationhood. Pitted against this, Hasan looks at a host of creative writers and poets who imparted their versions on partition and provides nuanced understandings on communal politics.

- Bhaskar Sarkar (*Mourning the Nation* 2009) - tele-serial like Tamas embodies a secular-humanist nationalist historiography, absolving ordinary people of the responsibility for unprecedented violence of Partition.
- Viswanath and Malik (2009) - a spate of films, *Mammo* (1994), *Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Earth 1947* (1998), *Hey Ram* (2000), *Gadar* (2001), *Pinjar* (2003), *Veer Zaara* (2004) – from 2000 onwards directly depict the trauma of Partition in the domain of mainstream cinema. Shyam Benegal's *Mammo* narrates the impact of Partition on the lives of ordinary people whose desire to cross borders is thwarted by the immigration procedure.
- Kamal Hasan's *Hey Ram* - connects the founding violence of the Partition with the communal violence in the aftermath of riots following the demolition of Babri Mosque, foregrounding the continuing bloody legacy of the event. By focusing on gendered perspectives, ruptured family relations, vicious communal hatred, Partition films challenge the official nationalist historiography of the event.
- A large swathe of the film audience came from the rootless urban population that sought to engage as modern Indian citizens and longed to be part of the idea of the nation.

- Literary-cultural representations that insert personal experiences are tools for reconstructing fragmented histories and supplementing the gaps in personal stories and testimonies.
- Through the literary techniques and devices of storytelling, dialogue, flashback, description, and autobiography, they weave meaningful stories that enable discussion of questions of violence, agency, communalism, and silence.
- To make sense of personal testimonies requires a return to cultural and fictional archives that affirm the experiences of the Partition affected populace and function as discursive spaces that allow the silenced subject to speak, interpret, and raise critical questions. Literary and cultural artefacts signal the elaboration of the personal and make a valuable contribution to the historian's project of recovering alternative histories, however partial or subjective.

- Literary-cultural texts make claims to ‘authenticity’ or ‘accuracy’. The ‘poetic license’ that creative writers exercise becomes a device that facilitates the fictional means to corroborate the compelling memories of the time and allows writers, filmmakers, poets and artists to assume responsibility for what is forgotten and what they can reconstruct.
- Written or produced, in many cases, decades after the event of the Partition, artworks engage strategies of remembering the past to undertake the much-needed task of historical reconstruction and analysis of the effects in different parts of the subcontinent and elsewhere.
- They can be characterized as narratives of memory, which David K. Herzeberger, writing in the context of the Spanish ‘novel of memory’, identifies as “fictions that evoke past time through subjective remembering, most often through first person narration” (*Narrating the Past* ,1991: 34—45).

- Marguerite Duran : “photographs promote forgetting...It’s a confirmation of death” (89).
- According to Barthes, “Not only is photograph never, in essence a memory, but it blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory” (Hirsch 6)
- Marianne Hirsch - holocaust photographs are uniquely able to bring out the hovering relation between life and death, and suggest the desire, necessity and impossibility of mourning in the face of massive public trauma (‘Family Pictures’ 7).
- Post-memory - a term popularised by Hirsch reflects back on memory, revealing it as equally constructed, equally mediated by the processes of narration and imagination (9) and takes semblance to photographs.
- John E.Frohmayer (Chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts) - Documentary images propagate violence. They hold up the having been there of the victim and the victimizer, of the horror. In contrast, the aesthetic is said to introduce agency, control, structure, and therefore distance from the real, a distance which could leave space for doubt (10).

- Christina von Braun - image transforming horror into aesthetic film and photograph as a protective barrier between us and the real (10).
- Rather than viewing Partition through the lens of conflict resolution theory, humanities scholars have identified Partition itself as a form of social violence.
- Recent scholarship in history, literature and cultural studies has focused on the artistic and testimonial evidence of the lasting suffering Partition has engendered, in both material terms (murder, rape, dispossession, and displacement) and psychic terms (trauma, nostalgia, and the formation or suppression of collective memory).
- Literature as an important social document approximate social reality of contemporary contexts, forming counterhistories that disrupt the normative version of the Indian independence and they may also be seen as radical reworking, rethinking and reinscribing over the lived realities of their contextualizing circumstances, rather than only serving mimesis or reflection(202)
- Joe Cleary - “Partition narratives can be compared in terms of their effort to either advance the goal of complete separation or promote convergence and integration”(59).

Thank You

