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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 31 – ACCOUNTS OF THE SURVIVOR

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COMMON PEOPLE AND LEADERS

- As Lenny lists the names of the nationalist leaders, names that are “names I hear,” Lenny realizes she has “become aware of religious differences” (93). This sudden transformation is linked directly to the amplification of nationalist rhetoric and the political struggle that led to considering partition as an option.
- “One day everyone is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expends a small fortune on joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods and goddesses in the temples” (93).

CRACKING INDIA

- Cracking India follows the perspective of Lenny in the period before Partition, as part of an affluent Parsee family in Lahore, in a multireligious household.
- Her parents are typically elite and distant and leave the daily raising of Lenny to her nanny, Ayah, a Hindu woman from Punjab. Other servants in the house are Muslim, and they are familiar with a local young man called “Ice Candy Man,” as he sometimes sells ice cream.
- As the violence of Partition rises, Ice Candy Man, who has long been a suitor of the beautiful Ayah, turns to political and religious sermonizing, taking on the role of a minor nationalist leader in their area. He eventually leads a mob to the house, and Ayah is taken away. Later it becomes known that he has resorted to pimping Ayah as a “dancer” in the red-light district of Lahore.
- Lenny’s godmother, a powerful woman, rescues Ayah from this situation. Ice Candy Man disappears after crossing the border into India.



PARSEE

- As Parsees, Lenny's family has little interest in entering the communal political contest between the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.
- Colonel Bharucha says that the real fight is of who gets the power after the Britishers leave - "Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you'll be mangled into chutney!"

PARSEE

- The Parsees, Lenny finds, are “reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures” between the Muslim and Hindu communities that are mobilized by nationalist rhetoric. This leads Lenny to confront the most fundamental of questions: “What is God?”

CRACKING INDIA

- In Cracking India (1991), a nationalist rhetoric still seems to prevail as the narrative explores how the stories of individual traumas become allegories for the trauma of the nation, and visa versa.
- This echoes the importance of an inextricable relationship between the individual and the collective that literary critics articulated in their work.
- Cracking India presents intriguing feminist lens through which the traumas of war and communal violence may be addressed. The narrative erases the distinction between literary work and critical social history, producing what one may term as “counterhistories.”



LENNY AND MEN

- Protected by her family's wealth and stability, Lenny herself is not directly affected by the chaotic conditions. She lives in a safe and predominantly woman's world, spending most of her time with either Ayah or the elderly woman she calls Godmother.
- To Lenny the world of men remains shadowy on the personal level, except for her encounters with her cousin, who is exploring his newly discovered sexuality.
- Men on the national level who make the decisions for millions of people remain incomprehensible. As she understands, remote and calculating men create the climate for violence, and ordinary men carry out the acts devised by the leaders.

LENNY AND MEN

- While describing her meeting with Gandhi, Lenny mentions how she lowers her eyes in the vicinity of a man for the first time. Later on, when she starts to understand the magnanimity of the massacre and the role of men in it, she says “Then, when I raised my head again, the men lowered their eyes.”
- This can be understood as a revelation about the biggest truth of Partition, which was a decision taken by men impacting thousands of women much more than it impacted the men. At this point, the sentence is spoken by Lenny’s feminine self.

WOMEN

- On one hand, a section of the society is concerned about women being exposed to the gory violence in the initial phase of the outbreak. When Lenny and the Ayah see the riot scenes, the masseur raises his concern, saying “They shouldn’t see such things...” Women who are apparently too sensitive to merely see the violence created by men, afterwards face brutal rapes and murders.
- The concept of bodily violence and animosity inflicted on women’s bodies become part of the child’s common parlance, as Lenny and her cousin enact rape on a ragdoll. They talk about “fallen women” who were rape victims.

AYAH

- The Ayah who was admired by a range of men for her beauty is not spared by the brutality of partition. Those she trusted all her life become the reason of her devastation. She is raped and is forced to convert her profession into a dancing girl. It is Godmother, who, strengthening the aspect of female support in the novel helps the Ayah escape to India.

AYAH

- Ayah's shock for all the assault she underwent converts her into a woman bereft of emotions and affection.
- Her 'unfeeling eyes' summarise the pain she has faced that left a happy woman like her merely into a body mechanically functioning. Her character embodies the sufferings of thousands of women during the Partition.

Thank You

