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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 32 – ACCOUNTS OF THE SURVIVOR

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Women in Cracking India

- Caught up in history, the naive, spoiled, and fortunate Lenny gains knowledge about the larger world: It is full of deception, injustice, hypocrisy, religious enmity, and cruelty.
- At the same time she witnesses the resilience of the human spirit and the power of individual courage. She realizes the role women such as Godmother can play - You cannot be near her without feeling her uncanny strength. People bring to her their joys and woes. Show her their sores and swollen joints. Distilling the right herbs, adroitly instilling the right word in the right ear, she secures wishes, smooths relationships, cures illnesses, battles wrongs, solaces grief and prevents mistakes.
- Godmother serves as a feminine ideal; she is a powerful personality who can face wrongdoing head on and correct matters. Lenny grasps the fact that women do not resort to violence for solving problems; men do.



Women in Cracking India

- The book gives a glimpse of the female unity with women trying to protect each other from men and from the commotion caused by men. Sidhwa creates a strong image of these women standing together protecting their children when they feel the arrival of strangers.
- Sidhwa - “Mother, voluptuous in a beige chiffon sari, is alert. In charge. A lioness with her cubs. Ayah, with her haunted, nervous eyes, is lioness number two. Our pride on the veranda swells as Moti’s wife and five children join us.”

Women in Cracking India

- Lenny learns that women are often the victims, as is the case with Ayah and the women who have been raped, then placed in the rehabilitation quarters next to Lenny's family home.
- On the other hand, she witnesses her mother's display of strength when a gang threatens their home, and when her mother and Electric-aunt smuggle gasoline to Hindu friends that are fleeing Lahore.
- After the fight between Mr. Singh and Mr. Rogers, where they fight over the idea of Partition, their wives attempt to make peace and alleviate the situation. This is an example of the non-violent approach of women, and a clash of male ego that ultimately victimizes women on a larger scale.



Women in Cracking India

- Even in the daily life, Ayah takes little interest in the religious violence. One evening when the men discuss the political ongoing, “Ayah stands up, smoothing the pleats in her limp cotton sari. “If all you talk of is nothing but this Hindu-Muslim business, I’ll stop coming to the park,” she says pertly.”
- Later in the novel, it is her who is most badly affected.

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- The unfathomable magnitude of the Partition is, however, complicated by the narrative fracture between the two different first person voices.
- The 'I' who announces 'That night I have the first nightmare that connects me to the pain of others', is not the five-year-old Lenny who dreams of the Nazi soldier before the Partition 'happens.' This 'I' is an older Lenny, the Lenny who survives the Partition and speaks about her nightmare in the present from a position of memory.



Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- Shirley Chew - “By situating Lenny's narrative in the present, Sidhwa imposes limits upon her perspective. This, however, is only one aspect of a complicated strategy. There is also the **occasional back-stepping into the past tense** which renders time an unstable factor in the novel, and blurs the line separating the immediacy of experience from the vividness of a memory in which events are 'branded over an inordinate length of time'. Forty years on and it would seem that Lenny continues to 'live' her memories of the 'hellish fires' and 'monstrous mobs' of her childhood.”



Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- Jennifer Yusin and Deepika Bahri - Distinguished from each other by time, the two first-person voices are not two different people, but are rather two first-person voices spoken by the same Lenny. The younger Lenny is therefore the Lenny within the time of the novel, that is, within the time of the events as they unfold according to the historical chronology of the Partition. The older Lenny is the Lenny who survives the Partition and returns to the events of the younger Lenny's narrative from a place of memory.

Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- The ‘I’ who narrates the nightmares can be read as either the younger Lenny or the older Lenny, or the simultaneous presence of both first-person voices. This demonstrates the very problem of accounting for the traumatic event at the point when it is experienced.
- The most poignant aspect of Lenny’s nightmares is that they intertwine history and the individual in a manner that allows the reader to investigate the Partition as a historical trauma.
- The image of Lenny’s dismembering through multiple surgeries also anticipates the violent separation of Pakistan from India as a dismembering violence.



Narrative Voice in Cracking India

- Lenny's dreams anticipate the Partition as a historical trauma already bound to memory.
- From the point of view of time and narrative, the first-person voice is always already the older Lenny attempting to return— through the voice of the younger Lenny— to the past of the Partition in an effort to rearticulate it as an integrated experience.
- Through the disturbing depictions of violence whose images haunt its readers beyond the narrative, the novel interconnects Lenny's individual trauma with the Partition as a historical trauma. Testimony to the Partition as a historical trauma becomes possible in this interconnectedness between Lenny and the Partition.



The ripping of the doll...

- With the help of her younger brother Adi, Lenny succeeds in ripping apart the legs and in splitting the doll's body.
- Lenny's 'crimson fury' turns the doll into a collective image that represents the violence of her nightmares, the violence of the mob riots, and her violent fantasies.
- Lenny does not simply act out her violent fantasy of gouging the 'bestial creature.' The scene is a collective repetition of Lenny's multiple traumas.

The ripping of the doll...

- The doll represents Lenny and the collapse between Lenny's individual trauma from the surgery and the trauma of the Partition.
- Lenny's dismembering and splitting of her doll is her attempt to experience and grasp the violence of her surgery and of the Partition.
- Lenny also belongs to the image of the naked child as she is metamorphosed from the 'crucified children.' The doll becomes as much as a representation of Lenny as it is of the naked child and the crucified children from her dreams. In order for Lenny to grasp the violence as a trauma, she must become, at once, the aggressor and the victim.

Partition

- The specter of Partition disrupts Lenny's cosy life. Lenny watches Ayah's circle of admirers dissolve. Once a number of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh men were drawn together by Ayah's beauty, but not even her feminine allure can overcome religious intolerance.
- Lenny learns that the little Muslim boy she had played with during her trip to the countryside was the only survivor when a looting band attacked his village, massacred the men, and violated the women.
- From the roof of their house, she and her brother watch parts of Lahore burn. They listen to the weeping of women who had been raped and then, rejected by their families, were relegated to rehabilitation centers where few would be restored. Finally, she watches the kidnapping of Ayah by a gang that Ice-Candy-Man leads.

Thank You

