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CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 58 - PARTITION LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Partition as Life

- Kavita Daiya - 1947 Partition experience of gendered violence and displacement critically shapes the contemporary ethnic nationalisms that prevail in transnational South Asian political life today.
- The Partition constitutes a field of transformation and a discourse that became the condition of possibility for the gendered ethnicization of citizenship and belonging in postcolonial South Asia.
- Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*: “In India there is no institutional memory of Partition: the State has not seen fit to construct any memorials, to mark any particular places—as has been done say, in the case of holocaust memorials or memorials for the Vietnam war.”



- Early work on colonial and postcolonial history and the Partition primarily documented the consolidation of empire and the concluding Indo-British political negotiations that led up to Partition and formal decolonization; these accounts largely end at the transfer of power that occurred in 1947.
- The protagonists of these historiographical narratives are largely the male, nationalist elite—namely, Nehru, Gandhi, and Jinnah; these studies of Partition often focus on the regional—rather than urban or national—impact of this violence and displacement in the partitioned states of Punjab and Bengal.

- Recent revisionist work that has returned to the scene of the Partition has primarily taken two directions. In one, the translation into English of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali literature about the Partition experience has resulted in a range of new novels and edited collections of short stories and poetry becoming available for those interested in the Partition, most notably through the works by Mushirul Hasan and Alok Bhalla.
- Feminist and subaltern studies research has focused on recording the oral testimonies of Partition survivors and witnesses (much like those of Holocaust survivors) and making audible the silences in the histories and memories of Partition, especially for women and ethnic minorities in India.

- Kavita Daiya uses the term post-colonial public sphere to those processes in a formerly colonized, democratic society, by which post-colonial subjects articulate a new framework and discourse for their everyday experience, motivations, actions and fantasies, working towards decolonization.
- The post-colonial public sphere is not always subaltern or oppositional. The minor subject seems to contest, re-imagine and resist the conditions of oppression through various media like newspaper, magazine, literature, film and Internet. Hence they become the counter-public of the “postcolonial public sphere.”
- Benedict Anderson - that print media (novels, journals and newspaper) represented modern nation. It mediates between state and civil society to form a collective imagined community- the nation.

- Film technology emerged as a powerful tool in the post-colonial urban India, that bridged public and private, elite, minor, local and the national through the mediation of civil society and citizenship.
- Film shaped the collective memory by representing the unrecorded histories and survivor's oral testimonies through their alternative stories about national history.
- Bollywood films attempted to melodramatically reconfigure contemporary questions about geopolitical war and peace, the relation between ethnicity and citizenship in national culture, and to memorialize women's experience during partition in transnational public sphere.

- As an effective medium of propagation of consumer culture, popular [Hindi] cinema has managed to combine a reassuring moral conservatism with fragments of utopian ideologies and possibilities, and also addressed the question of commodity culture. The very familiarity of the narrative makes it a useful non-interfering grid within which to elaborate the new. Madhav Prasad (*Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 109.
- Lalitha Gopalan - cinema “is inextricably linked to our Utopian imaginings, it stages the most anxious impulses of our psychic and social life, it gives us hope for a better world” (Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema, 29).



- Many Bollywood films today explore questions about national belonging by taking up Partition as gendered violence and as generative of Indo–Pakistan war and peace.
- Recent Bollywood melodramas often take up the ethnicization of citizenship enabled by Partition, but they do so contradictorily—they reify, reflect, as well as problematize, the manifestation in the cultural and political inscription of the Indian Muslim as third column/ enemy, of Pakistan as the “Other,” and of the ascendancy of Hindu fundamentalism over secular nationalism in modern India.
- Partition transformed Bombay film industry not just materially but also in terms of genres in Hindi cinema. It flourished with the theme of ‘lost and found’ in the early national period.

- The siblings belonging to nuclear families are separated or lost in childhood, their traumatic experiences with reference to thousands of families who have not successfully united.
- R.B. Chopra directorial *Afsana* (1951), narrates the story of identical twin brothers separated from parents and each other during partition.
- *Waqt* (1965) directed by Yash Chopra talks about three brothers separated at the time of partition.
- *Nasik* (1954) by I.S. Johar is a social film narrating the experiences of a refugee family displaced by partition.
- Yash Chopra's *Dharmaputra* (1961) is based on Acharya Chatursen Shastri's Hindi novel, which centers on an illegitimate Muslim boy who is raised in post-partition India by Hindu parents.

- In the mid 1960s, Indian state initiated several efforts to create national cinema and provide cultural support for the socialist government
- Film Finance Corporation (later, National Film Development Corporation) had a crucial role in shaping national culture through cinematic production of socially progressive films, which later led to the emergence of middle-class cinema.
- Since the nineties, the politics of nationalism have become almost a regular feature of Bollywood films. Even in films that are family dramas and love stories, epics about coming of age and individual growth, or what Rachel Dwyer calls the “Hindu social,” as well as the nationality and Indo–Pakistan relations are indexed in the plot or symbolic economy.
- Farah Khan’s *Main Hoon Na*/I’m Here for You (2004), Farhan Akhtar’s *Lakshya*/Objective (2004), Chandraprakash Dwivedi’s *Pinjar*/Skeleton (2003) and Yash Chopra’s *Veer Zaara* (2005) are some of the recent films dealing with partition.

- The popular Bollywood film *Main Hoon Na*, written and directed by Farah Khan, was released in 2004 and is considered a box-office success.
- The film was criticized from two standpoints- the masculinist valorization of the nation-state and the representation of military is problematic.
- On the other hand, however, the film critically argues for secular, de-ethnicized citizenship and international peace.
- *Main Hoon Na* also explicitly allegorizes the popular Hindu religious epic Ramayana; the protagonist is named Ram after the Hindu god Ram, and the character of Ram's brother is named Lakshman, as in the epic.
- Ram is “exiled” from his home, like the God, by a step-mother who rejects him—though in this modern version, it is because he is the illegitimate product of an extra-marital affair .

- The film insists that there should be, and “there will be peace (aman), there will be friendship (dosti) too” between India and Pakistan. The film optimistically ends with the national exchange of innocent prisoners on the Wagah border by India and Pakistan. Also, it does not posit the Pakistani, the Afghani Taliban, or the Indian Muslim as the militant villain or as an enemy of the Indian state.
- The new wave of “cinepatriotism” in 1990s Bollywood cinema ties the filmic representation of the Muslim as terrorist “to the construction of the abnormal monster in contemporary discourses of counter-terrorism both in the West and in India.”

Thank You

