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Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 59 - PARTITION LITERATURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Partition Films in the 21st Century

- *Veer Zara* won several Filmfare awards in 2005, as well as the National Film Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment.
- It centers on the love story between an Indian Hindu Squadron Leader, Veer Pratap Singh (Shah Rukh Khan), who is a rescue pilot with the Indian Air Force, and a Pakistani Muslim woman, Zaara Hayaat Khan (Preity Zinta), who comes to India to fulfill her surrogate Sikh grandmother's dying wish.
- The songs in the film asserts national likeness rather than national differences which in turn permeates the ideological message of the film.
- The film seeks for peace, dialogue and mutual recognition between India and Pakistan on the basis of a shared humanity.
- Madhava Prasad- *Veer Zara* reproduces patriarchal and parental authority. It is formulated through the deferral of conjugality and suppression of desire.

Partition Films in the 21st Century

- Farhan Akhtar's *Lakshya* (2004) focuses on the India-Pakistan War in 1999.
- *Lakshya* follows Karan (Hritik Roshan) as he changes from being an aimless, upper middle-class, college-going youth into a model, hyper-masculine national subject after he joins the Indian Army.
- *Lakshya* reproduces the essentialized representations of India and Pakistan as enemies.
- This film on India-Pakistan war calls for peace even as it criticizes the apathetic Indian middle-class contemporary preoccupation with globalized consumption, with career advancement that precludes national service in the Army, and with the valorization of migration to the West for upward mobility.



Partition Films in the 21st Century

- Mani Ratnam's film *Bombay* (1995) - allows the realization of inter-ethnic coupledness. This phenomenon is possible only when the female subject is ethnically Muslim and male subject is an upper-caste Hindu.
- The film is set against the backdrop of the communal riots that created massive attacks in the city of Bombay due to the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, on 6 December, 1992.
- The love story is between Shekhar (Aravind Swami) and Shaila Bano (Manisha Koirala). They fight against the disapproval of parents and unite in Bombay. They are married and eventually become parents. The couple is shown living a happy family life, with no apparent religious conflict.
- The film promotes a generic pan-Indian identity through the elimination of conflict and emphasizes communal fraternizing.



Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- From 1960s to 1989, Bollywood lenses have contributed to large number of films set in the backdrop of Kashmir.
- Some of the films include *Kashmir Ki Kali* (1964), *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965), *Roti* (1974), *Noorie* (1979), *Aarzoo* (1965), *Bobby* (1973) and *Kabhi Kabhi* (1976).
- Hindi cinema has often depicted India as superior to other nations. In comparison to Pakistan, India is shown as militarily superior and in the case of the West, India is projected as culturally superior.
- Bollywood focuses more on the Kashmir conflicts, beauty of Kashmir and bravery of Indian soldiers.
- The representations often vacillate between 'Innocent Kashmiri' frame, 'Tourist Destination' frame, 'Good Kashmir/ Bad Kashmir' frame and 'Islamic Terror' frame.



Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- *Roja* (1992), directed by Mani Ratnam, narrates the love story of Rishi Kumar (Aravind Swamy) and Roja (Madhoo).
- *Roja* hovers between the genres of romance and a political thriller dealing ostensibly with 'terrorism' in Kashmir.
- *Roja* interpellates the 'common man' – upper-caste, middle-class male – to protect 'national interest' by fighting terrorism. Such a figure correspondences between family and nation.
- The filmic clichés serve to force a resolution of the crisis (Kashmiri nationalism, separatism, fundamentalism) that threaten the nation's being.
- The film presents army activities such as search operations, the interrogation of 'terrorists' and the shooting of them.

Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- *Roja* represents the emergence of a "communal consensus" in which "a whole series of assumptions and myths have turned into common sense."
- This is possible through the construction of "a powerful and extendable enemy image" through the appropriation of old prejudices and the combination of new ones based on media propaganda.
- Critics argue that *Roja* inscribes and reinforces the official scenario on Kashmir with an illusion of reconciliation, through emphasizing the territorial integrity of the state within the larger framework of the nation as the most important issue (Rustom Bharucha, 3).

Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- In *Roja*, the enemy figures are mostly Kashmiri Muslims.
- The establishment shots of Kashmir follow certain tropes, such as images of a Muslim praying, army drill and explosions.
- A more detailed awareness of Kashmir beyond the 'Kashmir problem' can begin only through seeking relevant facts and new strategies of intervention: the limits and possibilities of regional autonomy in Kashmir in the context of the past negotiations; the need to respect 'Kashmiri' identity as a complex of cultural and ethnic strains without equating it with 'Muslim' fundamentalism; the capacities/resilience of a democratic state to tolerate, as Balraj Puri puts it, “non-terrorist and peaceful expression of secessionist ideas” (Rustom Bharucha, 7).



Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- Nicholas B Dirks, “Consuming Culture and Politics in *Roja*” (2001) – Kashmir is represented as the potent site of terrorism inhabited by dangerous and ruthless pre-modern Muslims who are in need of attention from heroic Indian army to get humanized.
- *Roja* has failed to show the fact that the militants (shown in the film) have no say in the government, which might shape them as the ideologues they are. It fails to tell the stories of countless families, who lost young children in pointless raids by Indian armed forces (Tamim Ahmad Baba, 48).

Kashmir in Bollywood Films in the 21st Century

- Films like *Fanaa* (2006), *Maa Tujhe Salam* (2002) and others have associated terrorism with Islam. The terrorist is pitted against the “patriotic” Muslim character.
- Militancy in Kashmir has always been an appealing factor to the Indian audience.
- *Mission Kashmir* follows the similar trope as any other Bollywood film that good Muslims do not possess any sense of their own and are often manipulated by devilish personalities.
- The film speaks for the Kashmiri Pandits but does not broach other allied topics, such as hardships of refugee Muslims, who are residents of Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Kashmir

- On March 2000, Kashmir was attacked by Islamic militants. This incident led to the death of thirty-five lakh Sikh men in Chitti Singhpora. The newspapers evoked the incident with the headline, “Ghosts of Partition return to haunt Sikhs.”
- Many of the Sikhs in the villages in Jammu and Kashmir were migrants from Pakistan, who had been displaced during the Partition, due to large-scale ethnic violence between Muslims, on one hand, and Hindus and Sikhs on the other (Kavita Daiya 2).
- *The Kashmir Files* (2022) written and directed by Vivek Agnihotri deals with the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus during 1989-1990 from the Kashmir valley.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- Emergence of Dalit literature after Bengal Partition.
- Dalit literature act as a counter-discourse to the mainstream partition narratives. It becomes a new literature in the post-partition scenario.
- Illiteracy was one of the main reasons for the delay in the emergence in Dalit literature.
- Some of the notable works among Dalit literature includes, Manohar Mouli Biswas' *Surviving in My World, An Autobiography of a Dalit* (2013); *Memories of Arrival: Voice from the Margins* (2021) by Adhir Biswas and V. Ramaswamy; Manoranjan Byapari's *Interrogating My Chandal Life* (2017).

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- In the original Bengali text , Adhir Biswas states the experiences of Dalits and Dalit literary movements in Bengal are similar to the Afro-American literature.
- The author describes about his life of discrimination, the difficulties faced by him for getting education as someone born in an illiterate agricultural family.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- These works unfold the current social position of the Dalit middle-class in West Bengal and their contestations against several oppressing forces.
- The narrative problematizes the undifferentiated world of the Bengali *bhadralok* middle class and historicizes the lonely world of the Dalit within this social stratum.
- The authors chronicle about the hardships of peasant life, inequalities faced by Dalits in terms of food, rituals and religious practices.
- The writings recount how as a child, the Dalit refugee had to share the labour of his parents while studying at school.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- Their childhood was filled with agonies, suffering, pain and caste based discrimination.
- Gender of the Dalit male refugee is often complicated by caste and class subjugation. As juveniles, some of them are forced to act as mediums of erotic pleasure in exchange for food by men of higher authority. It suggests that their victimization cannot be categorized under a single expression of violence.
- Caste subordination further impairs their abandoned status as refugees. The rapes of Dalit males by powerful men expose their insecurity in the charter of law, in addition to their rejection from the Hindu communal paradigm.



Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- Larger number of *namashudra* refugees are followers of Matua religion introduced by Harichand Thakur.
- Harichand Thakur's son Guruchand Thakur institutionalised Matua religion.
- It acted as a counter-discourse to Hinduism and caste system.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* (2018) by Manoranjan Byapari is translated by Sipra Mukherjee.
- It narrates the story of a wretched, poor and caste-ridden soul through the description of socio-political conditions existed during the time.
- He states about the experiences of being Dalit and poor, and how both of them have magnificent roles in deciding the tragic fate at every phase of life.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- Mahasweta Devi draws out the writer in Manoranjan Byapari by publishing his writing in the journal *Bartika* by the name of Madan Dutta.
- Byapari plays multiple roles as a Rickshaw-wallah, a Naxalite, a criminal, a cook and a writer in the circle of his Chandal life.
- "The life that I have lived must be shared with many. I have come back from the jaws of death many times. Recently again I was fighting death, and I had a strong feeling that my life-story must be documented in print, or else it will be lost with me. It's important for people to know that someone survived in such horrid conditions. My writings represent all those people who continue to live in such inhuman circumstances" (J. Sarangi 2012).

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- Sunanda Sikdar's *Doyamoyeer Katha* - different style of narration not only a break-off from the official history and canons – helps to develop a multifaceted perspective on the pre- and post-Partition situations of immigrants.
- Doya's discomfort upon being artificially inserted into the urbane Calcuttan culture lays bare the randomness and absurdity of the administrative decision about Partition. Superficially adapting to the mannerisms of *bhadramahila* yet permanently carrying within her the bewildered child Doyamoyee, the writer Sunanda Sikdar's torn apart personality seems to have hardly overcome or accepted the shock of Partition afterlife.

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- The ordinariness of Doya's memoirs destabilizes the constructs such as what is meant to be an East Bengali female migrant .
- Her story-telling upsets both the official history and *bhadra* nostalgic literature.
- In Post-Partition literature, the *bhadralok* writings took up the center stage through the self-portrayal as veritable patriots.
- Differing from these bhadralok-constructed accounts, Doya's narrative acts as a safety valve against the congealing "ethnography of partition narrative," which is based on "presenting the spectacular to the purported reader and thus [claim] a certain authenticity over the events and lives caught up in the turmoil" (Chakravarty n.p.).
- Sikdar "does not care to give us a representative narrative of trauma and tribulation; it gives us an everyday, quite situated account of one person's impressions over her surroundings, without an iota of sentimentalizing" (n.p.).

Emerging Scholarship and New Scopes

- ‘Doyamoyee’ the name indicates compassion and that becomes humane crux of the narrative. The name is juxtaposed with the unforgiving beliefs and cruel activities prevalent at the time of Partition.
- *Doyamoyeer Katha* counteracts the lengthy accounts of *bhadralok* refugees in better-known Bengal Partition narratives. Her writing is a departure from the mainstream *bhadralok* immigrant narratives, which portray Bengali Hindu home as the breeding ground of nationalist history. Her memoir not only celebrates the village’s “prestigious” background, but also takes account of the foppish male, the single mother, the extramarital affair.

Thank You

