

Review of *Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*

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***Partition Literature and Cinema*, edited by Jaydip Sarkar and Rupayan Mukherjee. Abingdon,
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The artistic representation of such a grand, traumatic and violent event as the Indian Partition via the literary and cinematic mediums open up several ethical questions which are always difficult to answer, to say the least. Should the historical reality be made subservient to the artistic intentions? Should the creative minds be allowed to take a poetic licence or should their priority be the responsible representation of an authentic reality? Should what has been a first-hand traumatic experience for some be made capitalizable as subject-matter for films and novels that are to be consumed by others with little or no connection to those experiences? In his Introduction to the book under review, Mosarrap Hossain Khan notes that movies on such subjects can trigger a repetition compulsion, so that the audience gets involved in an act of collective mourning. Given that the cinematic medium is generally habituated with gratifying the audience, rather than disturbing them, how and on what grounds does one implement the creative choice in such a manner that the two forms of receptions are isolated or intermingled? Or, are not human beings, as essentially story-telling animals, entitled to holding up their reality and experiences before others, without their creative choices being dictated by the audience's reception? Given that the act of communication and the mediums of communication always ask for a degree of modification to even make the communicative process possible, should not the story-teller be allowed a degree of liberty in his or her art of representation?

The chapters compiled in this book approach the subject of the Partition and its literary and cinematic representations from multiple angles, and through various cinematic (most of them being adaptations of literary works) and literary examples. But, as a running theme, the authors have not treated cinema as simply a repository of historical memories and materials or relegated its role to only representation. Instead, *Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Jaydip Sarkar and Rupayan Mukherjee, has paid attention to the mediations—especially the methodological, ethical and aesthetic aspects of these mediations—that are involved in the cinematic treatment of the theme of the Partition, which is a definitive theme in case of the understanding of the nation-state for a considerable number of people and communities from the Indian subcontinent. Arnab Roy and Jaydip Sarkar's New Historical study of Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* (which served the material for Govind Nihalani's film with the same title) especially addresses the inception of the nation-state by demonstrating the conceptual reification of national identity with historical data. When physical violence lays the ground for the epistemic and political violence that dispossess the individual of his or her sovereignty in the process of establishing a transcendental nationality, the individual's ability to tell his or her singular story to power becomes a vital gesture. At the same time, the individual is not necessarily a reliable agent, since, as especially Shirshendu Mondal highlights in his chapter on *The Train to Pakistan*, we are suspiciously prone to assume the essential sincerity of the individual when isolated from the mob. But, since the Partition was a point of history where human beings realized the capacity and inclination towards violence inherent in them, Mondal busts the platitudes that obviate the human reality of the Partition by presuming harmony in diversity. Owing to the methodological reflectiveness of this book, such potential pitfalls of humanism similarly are brought to notice in the

third chapter, Rupayan Mukherjee's essay on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (formerly titled *The Ice-Candy Man*) which was adapted by Deepa Mehta for her film *Earth*. Mukherjee addresses the practice of the mythicization of personal experiences, and the un-representable excess of reality that these mythic representations often have to grapple with.

Especially of interest for a researcher reading this book would be the set of research tools that the writers employ in their readings, the gaps they bridge with a specialized attention, and the openings for further research that these provide. To this effect, the book's content shows a concentration of attention into three distinct sections, thus addressing the things that became pivotal issues owing to the partition—the historical narrative, the questions of memory and homeland, and the woman question. The movies are opened up to analytical considerations that would interest students of the humanities, including especially those involved in film studies, and the analysis are not meant to influence film-makers. Hence, the Introduction and many of the chapters would be particularly interesting and relevant for readers seeking a psychoanalytic analysis of trauma, but can serve as material for someone seeking to understand and portray the state of a traumatized individual on screen.

Writers in the volume have drawn attention to the biological violence involved in the splitting of the conjoined political bodies that the Partition connotes. The repetition compulsion makes us revisit and caress the wound of the past against our better judgements, even when maybe some dream of a pleasurable utopian nation-state has been offered. Both Kritika Nepal's and Tuhin Sanyal's chapters on Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" address the tendencies of exorcising the trauma of partition by essentializing it as a madness affecting some Other. Manto's unruly 'madness' implies the impossibility of embodying this trauma in a stable manner, which translates into the impossibility of accommodating the splinters of identity within a single nation-state.

Mitarik Barma's stake on Intizar Hussain's *Basti* approaches diaspora studies in a manner pertinent for the Indian subcontinent. The imagined community or 'Rupnagar' against which the diasporic identity is defined is constituted by elements from Hindu mythology, and hence the notion of an imagined homeland becomes exclusionary in effect. Reading Somasree Sarkar's chapter on Ritwik Ghatak after Barma's piece would be recommended since just as the mythical community generates an objective national identity, Sarkar shows by utilizing Lefebvre's spatialized dialectics how cultural spaces similarly impose eliminatory boundaries. The reader is hence made aware of the possibility of backing an assertion with complementary arguments drawn from two different theoretical approaches. Reading Rajadipta Roy's chapter on Ghatak makes the reader consider the importance of 'motivated forgetting' (as discussed by both Nietzsche and Freud), or what Roy terms 'anti-memory', in orienting one's mind productively towards the future. Hence, against the reiterative nature of traumatic memory, Manto and Ghatak practice a strategic silence that unburdens the creative mind from the anxieties triggered by the imagined community.

Madhuparna Mitra Guha and Rupayan Mukherjee's chapter on Jibanananda Das's stands out as the only chapter dedicated to poetry, and they back with poetic evidence Lefebvre's claim that the essential heterogeneity of social spaces is effaced by a dominant narrative that co-opt diversity into a single objective consciousness of lived space. Jibanananda Das destabilizes the hierarchy of narratives and implodes lived experience by expressing a methodological preference for the imagined over the real. A reader could have appreciated Das even better had some bi-lingual verses from *Rupashi Bangla* been included. Rupayan Mukherjee and Kritika Nepal's chapter on Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House" as well touches upon the politics of spatiality and nationality, this time by analysing the process of signification and identity formation concerning especially religious consciousness and its fragmentation.

The book captures the primacy of the spatial dimension in the cinema medium in the event of the presentation of ideas, as opposed to the literary medium which can develop its ideas through interior monologues and subjective reflections without as much dependence on actions occurring in space. Hence, names such as Lefebvre and Edward Soja get reiterated in pieces including Soumik Hazra and Shubham Dey's chapter on *GaramHawa*. As a result, the efficacy of the cinematic medium depends upon the ability of ideologically constituted virtual spaces to physically affect live individuals, and the events of Partition are prime examples of ideological formations's ability to physically assault human bodies with lasting effects. Especially for the female individual, the fragmentation of nationality and identity translates into the experience of a physical barring. Anisha Ghosh brings home this point of bio-political exclusion and existential alienation through an analysis Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* by raising the possibility of a feminine notion of the nation-state in especially the context of the Indian subcontinent.

Upon reading Anisha Ghosh's piece or Jaydip Sarkar's chapter on Jyotirmoyee Devi's *EparGangaOpar Ganga*, the reader might indeed wonder if the realities of the Partitions were not even more immediate for the women, who were often the ones running the greater chances of victimization. The conception that the Partition was something happening to the women, rather than something about which the women took actions, as given by a tradition of male-centric narratives of the events, gets its rebuttal through a tradition of oral narrations that only slowly emerged upon the pages and on the screen. Hence, the same process of mythicization of the individual that Mukherjee refers to in his essay on *Cracking India* has the effect of effacing the physical reality of the women, and the female individual may attempt to counteract this tendency by introducing an alternate sexual economy and financial enfranchisement.

Rupayan Mukherjee and Somasree Sarkar again show their familiarity with several contemporary Western theoretical currents in their essay on Manik Bandopadhyay's "The Final Solution". The process by which the sanctity of the body is preserved through a symbolically therapeutic purging of the 'bad' experience of the Partition by attributing it to some other is essentially a biopolitical exercise. The cinematic and literary mediums can disturb this exclusionary politics of individuation by displaying the ambiguity of the physical boundaries of the self. A film like *Khamosh Pani*, which forms the subject-matter of Sankha Ghosh chapter, utilizes what according to Helen Cixous is the fluidity characteristic of the female body and of *écriture féminine* through the slippery medium of silence to enact the spectral nature of both bodily and national boundaries.

Given the sensitive nature of the events surrounding the Indian Partition, it is not surprising that a considerable number of literary and cinematic works that have engaged with this subject-matter has had to face public controversies and backlash. This makes the choice of materials by the authors in this book bold and also relevant, given that there is a need to explain the aesthetic and moral choices made and approaches taken by the writers and filmmakers before we may either properly appreciate or question the works on political and moral grounds. Jaydip Sarkar's Postscript notes that the Partition has been a reality whose nature was not determined by just religious divides but also on the lines of gender, class, caste and language. Sarkar and Mukherjee's endeavour can be credited with striking a balance in terms of the academic attention which (as Debjani Sengupta has for instance identified) has been otherwise generally dedicated more towards the Partition of West Pakistan, rather than to the Bengali experience of the Partition. The nuances of individual heterogeneity are a chief critical concern running throughout the work, and in this way, the book addresses the ethical, humanist, and aesthetic horizons captured so far in literary and cinematic works on the Indian Partition.