
Jaydip Sarkar and Rupayan Mukherjee, eds.
Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction

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Jaydip Sarkar and Rupayan Mukherjee, eds. *Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York, Routledge, 2020. 179 p. ISBN: 9 7810 0304 5373. £ 34.99

- 1 Almost seven decades after the Partition of India in 1947, which Gyanendra Pandey calls “a moment of rupture and genocidal violence” (2004, 1), one witnesses the publication of a plethora of works of fiction which have attempted to reconstruct the event through multiple voices, languages and points of view. Literature and films on the Partition could indeed be seen as a “site for memorialisation of the human tragedy [which offer] a counter to official histories” (4). The edited volume *Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (2020), which brings together critical works on the fictional representation(s) of the Partition and its aftermath, reiterates the necessity of analysing it through regional and locality-specific lenses and not just from a nationalistic perspective.
- 2 The use of the expression “an alternative archive of the Partition of India” in the title of the introduction to the book invites readers to perceive the Partition not only as a horrendous historical event, but also as a potent trope in literature and cinema from the Indian Subcontinent. The volume also underlines the continuities and echoes between the current events in India such as the National Register of Citizens (NRC) controversy and the Partition, demonstrating how the lingering memories of the Partition still fashion postcolonial Indian social life and creative works, and why it is all the more relevant today to engage with this topic. The volume consists of three parts,

an introduction and a conclusion (Postscript), which critically engage with some of the works on the Partition both in English and those translated into English from vernacular Indian languages such as Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali. According to William Dalrymple (2015), the areas most affected by the Partition, with millions of cases of massacres and sexual violence, were the Punjab province on the Western frontier and Bengal on the Eastern side of India. The writers and cinematographers from both these regions have widely used the Partition as a compelling theme in their works, a fact which is highlighted in this volume.

- 3 The first part of the book compiles scholarly contributions on creative works from both sides of Punjab. While Kritika Nepal's chapter engages with the issue of personal trauma in the aftermath of the Partition by focusing on Pakistani writer Saadat Hasan Manto's short story originally written in Urdu, "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), Rupayan Mukherjee's chapter draws on Bildungsroman patterns in the Indian novel *The Ice-Candy Man* (1988) to portray "the dark, sinister and dystopic world of Partition, where the familiar slithers into the terrain of unfamiliarity, where the self is estranged or exiled at home and the home gradually becomes an unfamiliar 'other'" (47). Tuhin Sanyal's chapter focuses on Gulzar's poetic rendition of the Partition trauma. The chapters in this section broadly focus on the particular experience of the people from the Punjab region and its urban spaces such as Lahore during the grim violence of the Partition. One of the central themes in this section is the fictional portrayal of victims and their traumas through the motif of "the massacred body... and finally the partitioned body of the Nation" (50), in Nepal's words.
- 4 The second section of the book shifts its focus to Bengal. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (2009) argued that there is a lack of "critical engagement" (xi) with Bengal's Partition literature in comparison to that from Punjab. This section aims to fill this lacuna by delineating the Partition through a Bengali perspective. As the title of part two, "Memory and mnemonic: of homeland and homelessness," suggests, this section focuses on the predicament of Bengali characters along with the issues of displacement, loss and nostalgia. Madhuparna Mitra Guha and Rupayan Mukherjee's chapter depicts how Bengali poet Jibanananda Das's selected poems portray "the displaced subject's longing for a lost homeland" (94) by imaginary recreation of Bengal as an idyllic and mythic space. Rajadipta Roy and Somasree Sarkar deal with memory and postmemory of the Partition by analysing Ritwik Ghatak's Partition movies and short stories in their respective chapters. In the words of Sarkar, this part engages primarily with the "émigré experiences" (168) and their longing for the lost home(land). It thereby illustrates the specificity of Partition literature from Bengal.
- 5 The emergence of E.P. Thompson's concept of "history from below," on the one hand, and Ranajit Guha's Subaltern school on the other hand, offered ways to look at history from non-elite perspectives. Taking inspiration from these, seminal works on the Partition such as Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, dealing with marginalised subaltern subjectivities, emerged in the late 1990s. These works focused particularly on female experiences of gendered violence, body politics and trauma. The third section of this collected volume contributes to this ongoing research by focusing on the plight of female protagonists in various visual and literary representations. Soumik Hazra and Shubham Dey's chapter analyses marginalisation of women within the patriarchal system and their intricate relationship to the home space in post-Partition India

through the film *Garm Hava* (1974). Anisha Ghosh's study of Amrta Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950) focuses on the issue of vulnerability by showing how the violence of the Partition was enacted upon the female bodies through rape and abduction. Jaydip Sarkar's article on Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1967) analyses how a Bengali female protagonist whose body was violated during the Partition endures social hostility in the hope of emancipation and re-settlement.

- 6 The volume concludes by arguing that Dalit or lower-class refugee subjects' traumatic experiences of the Partition and re-settlement were very different from those of the other refugees owing to their caste and social status, and that it is equally important to focus on these alternate personal narratives of the Partition which offer a "critique of the grand narratives of Nation, national identity and standard national literature" (170). It, hence, also brings to light the intersections between Dalit and Partition studies, an interdisciplinary area of studies that has largely been ignored until now.
- 7 Juxtaposing aesthetics and materiality, real events and mythical constructs, the volume briefly unravels the intricacies of a huge corpus of the Partition fiction from different perspectives, be they spatial, gender or class. The book caters to the growing needs of researchers in this field by including a comprehensive study of works on the Partition both from well-known and lesser-known authors and directors. It is a useful resource for those interested in South Asian history, literature and film.

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Bhawana Jain obtained her PhD in English from the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis. Her research focuses on contemporary migration and postcolonial literature. She has a particular interest in issues pertaining to diaspora, trauma narratives and cross-cultural encounters. Her work on diasporic representations and trauma has been published in several books and journals. She has previously taught at the University of Delhi and at University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, and is currently working at the University of Angers.