



Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
Prof. Sarbani Banerjee
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 27
Accounts of the Survivor - IV

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are talking about the Accounts of the Survivor in the context of Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel Epar Ganga Opar Ganga, translated to English as The River Churning. (Refer Slide Time: 02:34)

The notion of Myth in “The River Churning”

- The notion of myth, Hindu epics, legends, and other non-historical storehouses of collective narratives play a crucial role in the narrative of ‘The River Churning’.
- Allusions to the two Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are central to the novel, especially to the latter.
- In the very first page, the novel refers to partitioned India as the **‘truncated Maha-Bharata’** (or Great-Bharata), reminding us of resonance of the name of the epic with the Sanskrit name of India (Bharata). It refers to Delhi as the ancient ‘Hastinapur’ of the Mahabharata.

 Swayam  2

The notion of myth, Hindu epics, legends and other non-historical store-houses of collective narratives play a crucial role in the narrative of *The River Churning*.

We see that a mythical framework or the framework of epics, primarily Mahabharata and Ramayana, and Mahabharata mainly, inform the way Jyotirmoyee Devi is shaping the experience of women's trauma. Jyotirmoyee Devi's understanding and shaping of women's trauma in her novel is greatly informed by and draws on Hindu epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana; mainly it is influenced by Mahabharata.

This notion of the postcolonial refugee woman being positioned/located [in terms of] her trauma, her silence [and] question of unspeakability being traced viz-a-viz a mythical paradigm is something that the reader discovers in Jyotirmoyee Devi's work.

There are allusions (like I said) to the two Hindu epics - the Mahabharata and Ramayana. And, Mahabharata is actually at the center of the discussions or Mahabharata's understanding actually explains the protagonist Sutara's pain and suffering throughout the novel. In the very first page, the novel refers to partitioned India as the truncated Mahabharata.

The modern India is actually juxtaposed with the great Bharata or the Mahabharata, which is in a way bringing in two temporal spaces together.

It would be better to say that the mythical landscape of Bharat is overlapped with the modern postcolonial nation that India is. So, talking about India as the great Bharata, Mahabharata reminds us of a resonance of the epic with the Sanskrit name of India. So, her understanding is actually facilitated with resources, with a knowledge that is available to the Hindu communities in the form of the two epics. So, she refers to Delhi as the ancient Hastinapur of the Mahabharata. (Refer Slide Time: 04:17)

Continued.....

- Poulami Chakraborty - parts of the novel are named after three books of the epic.
- In the translated text by Chatterjee, the first part is called 'Adi Parva: The Beginning', after the first book of the epic, 'The Book of the Beginning'. The second part is called 'Anusasan Parva: The Imposition', after the thirteenth book, 'The Book of Instructions'. The last part, in which part of the original title survives, is called 'Stree Parva: The Women', after the eleventh book of the epic, which is usually translated as 'The Book of the Women'.
- The allusion to the epic Mahabharata is of critical importance to the novel; so much so, that Meenakshi Mukherjee has felt that 'the original title ['Itihashe Stree Parva' (Women's Chapter in History)] would have reflected the starkness of the theme better, highlighting the link with Mahabharata' (1994: 15).

Critics and scholars like Poulami Chakraborty say that the parts of the novel are named after three books. So, Poulami Chakraborty rightly notes that the different parts of the novel are named after the three books of the epic. In the translated text by Enakshi Chatterjee, the first part is called Adi Parva or the beginning, which is after the first book of the epic.

Adi Parva the beginning is after the first book of the epic - the book of the beginning; and then, the second part is called the Anusashan Parva: The Imposition, which is after the thirteenth book, the book of instructions; and the last part in which the original title survives is called Stree Parva. Stree parva: The [Women's chapter], which takes its name after the eleventh book of the epic, which is usually translated as the book of the women.

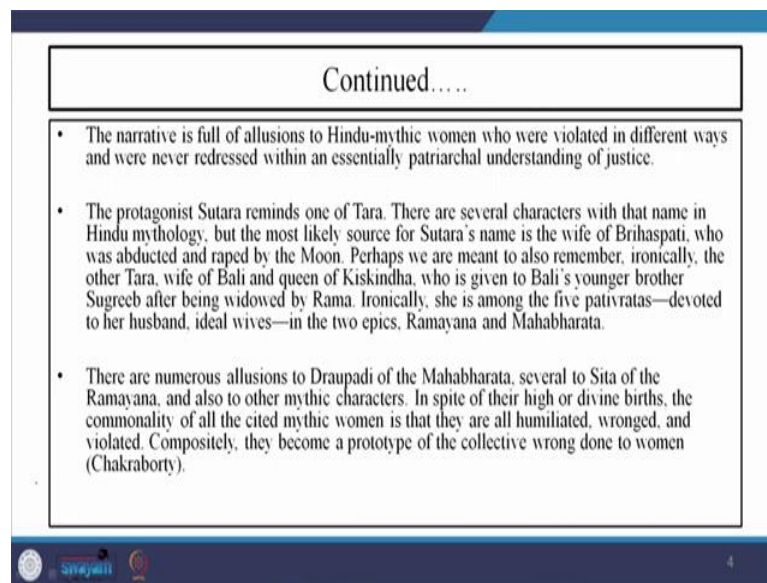
Allusion to Mahabharat is crucial in the work, and Meenakshi Mukherjee feels that the original title is... So, this work was originally named not Epar Ganga Opar Ganga, but Itihashe Stree Parva - Women's Chapter in History, and this original title, according to Meenakshi Mukherjee, would have reflected the starkness of the theme in a better way and it would have highlighted its direct link with the epic, Mahabharata.

We see here a kind of juxtaposition being made between history and the idea of history formation, which is a western idea, a kind of recording of facts, formal objective observation and documentation of facts [juxtaposed with] Itihasa.

Itihasa is an indigenous [term], its origin is in Sanskrit, and it means 'thus was a tradition'. In a way, there is a suggestion that women's experience cannot be

accommodated and contained by the formal production of or formation of historiography. It needs an alternative space in order to record the women's voice or even the lack thereof, the lacuna or the absence of the women's voice.

There is a constant reference to and there is a constant connection made between the current experience, the contemporary lived experience of the protagonist with the mythico-historical experiences from Mahabharata's women's chapter. (Refer Slide Time: 07:49)



Continued....

- The narrative is full of allusions to Hindu-mythic women who were violated in different ways and were never redressed within an essentially patriarchal understanding of justice.
- The protagonist Sutara reminds one of Tara. There are several characters with that name in Hindu mythology, but the most likely source for Sutara's name is the wife of Brihaspati, who was abducted and raped by the Moon. Perhaps we are meant to also remember, ironically, the other Tara, wife of Bali and queen of Kiskindha, who is given to Bali's younger brother Sugreeb after being widowed by Rama. Ironically, she is among the five pativratas—devoted to her husband, ideal wives—in the two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- There are numerous allusions to Draupadi of the Mahabharata, several to Sita of the Ramayana, and also to other mythic characters. In spite of their high or divine births, the commonality of all the cited mythic women is that they are all humiliated, wronged, and violated. Compositely, they become a prototype of the collective wrong done to women (Chakraborty).

Swajal 4

So, the narrative is full of allusions to Hindu mythic women, who were violated in different ways and their suppressed oppressed status, whenever redressed within an essentially patriarchal understanding of justice.

Critics note [that] protagonist Sutara's name is evocative of Tara. Tara was the queen of Kiskindha and Bali's wife in Ramayana, and she was given to Bali's younger brother Sugreeb after being widowed; this was a decision taken by Rama. So, we see that Sutara is named after a woman who had two husbands in her life and it was not a choice made by her, it was imposed from above by Lord Rama to her.

Yet, the character Tara is actually considered as one of the five ideal women, the Pativratas who have been loyal to their husbands and have actually fulfilled [their] roles perfectly as a wife. In Hindu mythology, there are several characters with the name of Tara, but the most likely source for Sutara's name could be (like I said) Bali's queen Tara in Ramayana, or it could be in the name of Bruhaspathi's wife by the same name - Tara.

So, Bruhaspathi wife's name is also Tara and she was abducted and raped by the moon. We see there are different references also made to Draupadi of Mahabharata and also several references made to/ several allusions made to Sita of Ramayana. So, in spite of these women's mythical and suprahuman status, despite these women's divine births and supra human status we know that all these mythic women cited in the story by Jyotirmoyee Devi...

I mean, there is a common experience that binds all these mythic women that are being cited by Devi, it is the experience of humiliation, of being wronged and violated. So, compositely they become a prototype of the collective wrong done to the women. And, this is the repository, this is the mythical knowledge of the Indic land taken from another time and space being juxtaposed with the current situation that the refugee women experience, the sufferings that the refugee women go through... their afflictions. (Refer Slide Time: 11:06)

Draupadi of Mahabharata and “The River Churning”

- Draupadi of the Mahabharata has a very strong presence in The River Churning.
- Cynthia Leenert comments: “Although Draupadi, as well as Sita, is one of the five pativratas the fact that she is married to five men puts her in a comparative disadvantage, despite the justification given in the Mahabharata for her multiple marriage. Only foolish characters question Sita’s purity, most notably the straying wife [of a washerman] who uses Rama’s acceptance of Sita after her rescue as justification for her own demand that her husband take her back. Conversely, only insightful characters such as Krishna fully understand Draupadi’s innate virtue. This perceived difference in reputation—Sita’s purity so evident that only the wayward and foolish cannot perceive it, and Draupadi’s so subtle that one must almost be trained to see it.... [I]n Jyotirmoyee’s novel, the protagonist and other Partition survivors endure rape and rejection, with only a few high-minded characters recognizing the true purity of this collective Draupadi (2003: 85).

Cynthia Leenert comments that although Draupadi as well as Sita are one of the five pativratas, the fact that [Draupadi] is married to five men puts her in a comparative disadvantage, despite the justification given in the Mahabharata for her multiple marriages. So, basically what Leenert says, if paraphrased, would be that there is a better justification to understand Sita as pure.

The Indians actually understand it is easier to depict Sita as pure and although she was abducted by another man and she had to stay in his house, it is easier to resuscitate her defiled image and put her back within the frame of the ideal. However, it is more difficult in the case of Draupadi because she is looked at as already a problematic character by virtue of the fact that she has five husbands.

So, Draupadi cannot be resurrected to that pedestal of the ideal woman. What Leenert says is that the reader has to be more trained in order to read/to see Draupadi as a woman, whose reputation is not already tarnished because she has five husbands. So, in Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel, these partition survivors are also struggling with this kind of a tarnished reputation, a tarnished image.

And so, these survivors after many of them endure rape and rejection, it is very difficult just like Draupadi... it is very difficult for them to assert their bodily purity or the dignity of their character. (Refer Slide Time: 15:13)

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard's comments on "The River Churning"

- Mookerjea-Leonard comments that, "'Jyotirmoyee Devi situates Sutara within the "woman-as-nation" paradigm, but in her writings the fallen woman is the symbolic representation of the nation' (2003: para 39).
- The patriarch Amulya Babu sees Sutara's pitiful face and, thinking of the imminent Partition, likens her to 'the blood[ied] symbol of the [pain of the] mother figure we call our country' (Jyotirmoyee Devi 1995: 38). Here, whereas Sutara is the symbol of the pain of the motherland, the text does not simply call her the symbol of the bloodied motherland. Instead, that she is the bloodied symbol points to recognition of the gendered embodiment of the symbol, to the violence of that embodiment, and to the critique of this process.

Sriyaji 6

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard says that 'Jyotirmoyee Devi situates Tara within the woman-as-nation paradigm, but in her writings the fallen woman is a symbolic representation of the nation'.

So, Sutara's experience, Sutara's position is actually explained well in terms of the woman's ordeal from ancient Bharatvarsh. I mean that is where she is actually located or her experience is transposed - to the experience of the ordeals of the women from ancient Bharat Varsha. At one part in the novel, patriarch Amulya Babu sees Sutara's face and compares Sutara to the bloodied symbol of the pain of the mother figure we call our country.

Recurrently, there is this image of Sita, the pure woman that is misunderstood or that is blamed wrongly, which is drawn on or which is referred to explain the position of Sutara. So, Sutara becomes the pained motherland; she is a symbol of the pain of the motherland. Mookerjea-Leonard would go on to say that the text does not simply call her as a symbol of the bloodied motherland.

Instead, that she is the bloodied symbol points to recognition of the gendered embodiment of the symbol to the violence and to the critique of this process. That is how Leonard understands Sutara's representation as defiled motherland. (Refer Slide Time: 16:08)

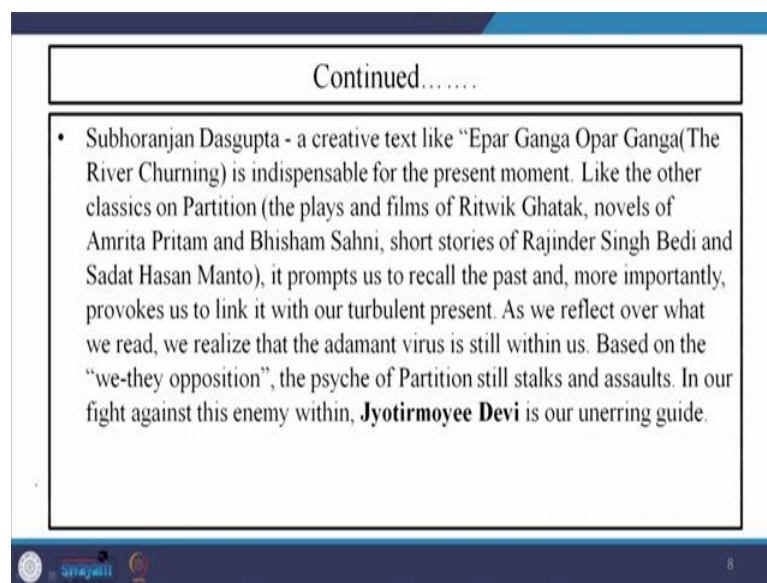
Continued....

- The question of women's independence comes up in terms of paid labour and of the financial independence of women of a certain class, but it runs into a broader context of liberation itself. The echo of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is unmistakable here. Yet, the ambiguity in the last two lines—the two questions—displays the limits of Sutara's financial independence and, given her exile from her community, rings against the question of a broader political freedom, as well as against freedom in the everyday context of patriarchy.

Sriwijaya Sriwijaya 7

The question of women's independence comes up in terms of paid labour and of the financial independence of women of a certain class, but it runs into a broader context of liberation itself.

We could look into Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. It would be a reference point to understand the case of Sutara. So, the echo of Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own* is present in Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel. So, Sutara's financial independence and yet her exile from her community rings against the question of a broader political freedom, and yet the lack of this freedom, the limitations of this freedom within the wider context of patriarchy and patriarchal schemings. (Refer Slide Time: 16:53)



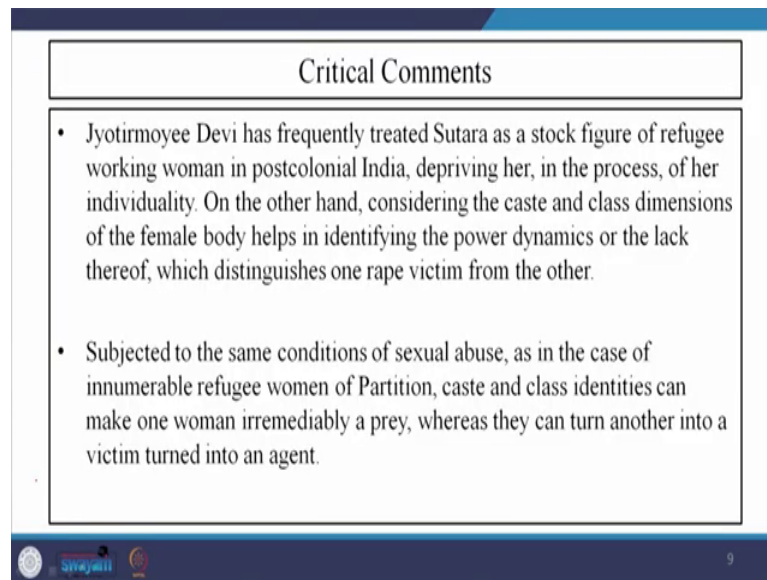
Continued.....

- Subhoranjan Dasgupta - a creative text like "Epar Ganga Opar Ganga (The River Churning) is indispensable for the present moment. Like the other classics on Partition (the plays and films of Ritwik Ghatak, novels of Amrita Pritam and Bhisham Sahni, short stories of Rajinder Singh Bedi and Sadat Hasan Manto), it prompts us to recall the past and, more importantly, provokes us to link it with our turbulent present. As we reflect over what we read, we realize that the adamant virus is still within us. Based on the "we-they opposition", the psyche of Partition still stalks and assaults. In our fight against this enemy within, **Jyotirmoyee Devi** is our unerring guide.

8

A critic like Subhoranjan Dasgupta would say that *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* is indispensable for the present moment, like other classics on partition, (and he is referring to plays and films by Ritwik Ghatak, novels [by] Amrita Pritham and Bisham Sahni and short stories by Rajinder Singh Bedi, Sadat Hasan Manto). It is actually placing Devi's novel within this opus - some of these most important or seminal works on partition, which prompt us to recall the past and provoke us to link the past with the turbulent present.

Dasgupta would say that as we reflect over what we read, we realize that the adamant virus is still within us. Based on the we-they opposition, the psyche of Partition still stalks and assaults. In our fight against this enemy within us, Jyotirmoyee Devi is an unerring guide. (Refer Slide Time: 18:10)



Critical Comments

- Jyotirmoyee Devi has frequently treated Sutara as a stock figure of refugee working woman in postcolonial India, depriving her, in the process, of her individuality. On the other hand, considering the caste and class dimensions of the female body helps in identifying the power dynamics or the lack thereof, which distinguishes one rape victim from the other.
- Subjected to the same conditions of sexual abuse, as in the case of innumerable refugee women of Partition, caste and class identities can make one woman irremediably a prey, whereas they can turn another into a victim turned into an agent.

9

The novel could actually be read or revisited through a certain critical perspective, where Jyotirmoyee Devi is actually treating Sutara as a stock figure of the refugee working woman.

She is -- in a way of depicting Sutara as the pained motherland, the assandered motherland -- she reified the gendered roles that have been celebrated and timelessly glorified, and that form a major subtext in the nationalist discourse/ in the mainstream nationalist discourse. We have already talked about the position of the females in the Indian National Congress and how they would play an inspirational rather than a substantive role. So, if the men (the Swadishis) would go to the prisons, they

would...upon the Swadeshi's return from the prisons, the INC women would welcome them back and perform certain rituals that had Hindu colorations in them.

So, with an arati (a lamp with a wick) and incense sticks, they would welcome the prisoner, the Swadeshi back. The gendered division or the gender roles and women's position within this discourse of patriotism -- it was defined, it was limited and it actually echoed her roles within the domesticity. And we see that Jyotirmoyee Devi is not really critiquing that.

Throughout the novel, Sutara is an emancipated woman. She actually earns her education and she goes on to become a lecturer, and yet there is a vacuum in her life and this lacuna or this pathos has its origin in...it is a bourgeois lamentation; a lamentation that has its origin in bourgeois ideals. So, because her life became kind of wayward or a destruction from the imagined ideal is there a kind of trauma or underlying pain informing the entire narrative which she cannot overcome.

It is only overcome in the end with her marriage with Promod ... you know, it is overcome in the end after she is engaged with Promod, in a way Promod proposes her [for] marriage. And so, we understand that she can actually re-own/reclaim her membership within the Bourgeoisdom or the bourgeois cosmos and that actually tends to take away the pain.

It is reactionary in a way if we read the story, if we read the narrative from this point of view. So, subjected to the same conditions of sexual abuse, as in the case of innumerable refugee women of Partition, one can understand that caste and class identities of a woman can actually create different registers of survival experience.

They can make one woman irremediably a prey, whereas another a victim turned into an agent. (Refer Slide Time: 23:55)

Critical Comments

- Because Sutara belongs to "*bhadra*" social standing, there is a complicity of class and caste in the *bhadra* society in worsening her experience as a pariah refugee girl.
- Would a non-*bhadramahila* need to struggle so much with the ideal of righteousness, if placed in the same situation as Sutara Dutta? Underscoring only the gender and the sexuality of a molested woman reduces her to being just a body, which cannot be differentiated from other molested female bodies.

Sutara belongs to...she is inherently from an upper-class bhadra social standing and there is a complicity (we understand) between the class and caste in the bhadra society, which further worsens a woman's experience as a pariah refugee girl.

When upper-caste upper-class woman is violated, much more is at stake. The Dalit woman is always-already demonized in the common parlance, in the patriarchal way of speaking. Or, according to the vocabulary that the patriarchal society supplies, the Dalit woman is actually responsible for the molestation or the violation she undergoes.

So, much more is at stake, and the experience for the upper-caste, upper-class woman becomes entirely different when once she is violated or she is survivor of any kind of sexual violation or violence. The question that remains is that - would a non-bhadramahila need to struggle so much with the ideal of righteousness, if placed in the same situation as Sutara Dutta? Underscoring only the gender and the sexuality of the molested woman reduces her to being just a body, which cannot be differentiated from other molested female bodies.

So, her gender experience needs to be underpinned with her class-caste coordinates. As a riot-inflicted and presumably raped woman, the narrator makes Sutara's gendered body reclaim its bhadra or respectable status through obeying the strictures of middle-class upper-caste Hinduness. We see her performing penance in a way, travelling to Haridwar and taking a holy bath, and after this incident comes the chapter where Promode actually proposes her.

It is a kind of purgation, it is a kind of self-denial also, it is a kind of denial or self-deprivation that Sutara is inflicting on herself. Maybe she sees herself as a deviant from the bourgeois ideals... we never get to know. However, because there is a kind of... the language is absent if the person that has experienced the violence never speaks up in the narrative.

Sutara's silence about the rape could also be seen as positing her/producing her as a conformist middle-class woman and in turn, her attributes actually qualify as that of an authentic bhadramahila. So, [her silence] produces her as a conformist middle-class woman and qualifies her attributes as that of an authentic bhadramahila, (Refer Slide Time: 26:10)

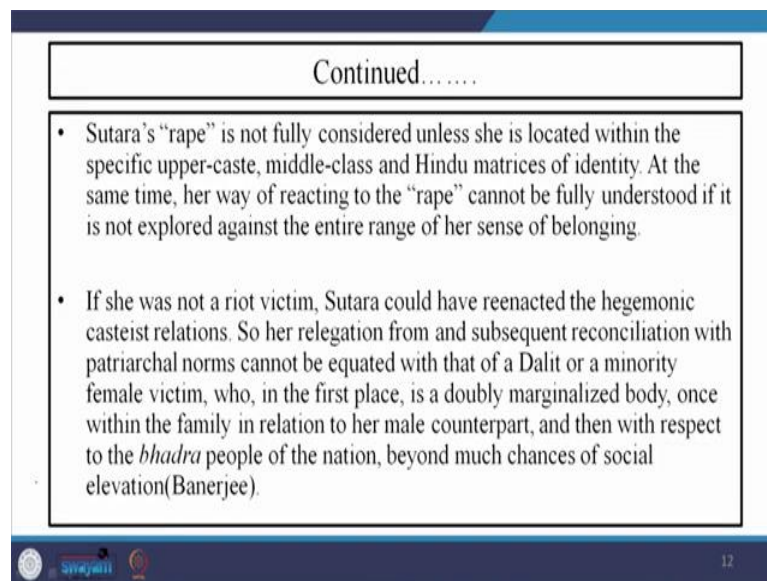
Continued.....

- As a riot-inflicted and presumably raped woman, the narrator makes Sutara's gendered body reclaim its "respectable" ("bhadra") status, by obeying the strictures of middle-class, upper-caste Hindu-ness.
- The narrator's emphasis on "Sutara The Victim"'s abject image, based on the assumption that she is a sexually violated female, facilitates the novel's admittance within the canonical literary corpus of Bengal Partition.
- Sutara's silence about the "rape" produces her as a conformist middle-class woman and qualifies the highly esteemed attributes of an "authentic" bhadramahila, thereby acting as the novel's chief ingredient that identifies with mainstream "Bengal Partition Memory."

thereby acting as the novel's chief ingredient.

So, Sutara's genteel and docile character almost taking after Sita's ideal qualities become the chief ingredient that identifies and positions this novel within the opus, the classics produced on Bengal Partition. It actually [presents] Sutara's figure as the violated refugee woman, and her behavior henceforth resonates with the mainstream Bengal Partition memory or even the partition memory.

Maybe the marriage or [her] re-entry into bourgeoisdom that she gets in turn is the reward for her docility, for her submissive character. The narrators emphasize Sutara-the-victim's abjected image, based on the assumption that she is sexually violated, which is never mentioned in the novel. [Silence] facilitates the novel's admittance within the canonical literary corpus; canonical literary corpus of Bengal Partition. (Refer Slide Time: 27:31)



Continued.....

- Sutara's "rape" is not fully considered unless she is located within the specific upper-caste, middle-class and Hindu matrices of identity. At the same time, her way of reacting to the "rape" cannot be fully understood if it is not explored against the entire range of her sense of belonging.
- If she was not a riot victim, Sutara could have reenacted the hegemonic casteist relations. So her relegation from and subsequent reconciliation with patriarchal norms cannot be equated with that of a Dalit or a minority female victim, who, in the first place, is a doubly marginalized body, once within the family in relation to her male counterpart, and then with respect to the *bhadra* people of the nation, beyond much chances of social elevation (Banerjee).

Sutara's rape is not fully considered unless we also locate her within the specific caste-class matrices of identity, especially because she comes from an upper echelon of the Hindu community. And, her way of reacting to this rape cannot be fully understood (I mean we would call it rape within quotes because we never know, once again). And this experience of rape as it is given to understand in the rest of the novel cannot be fully grasped unless it is explored against the entire range of [one's] sense of belonging.

There is this possibility, like Marxian critics say, that it is very difficult for a bourgeois female to identify and relate and establish a sisterly alliance with her Dalit counterpart.

So, had Sutara not been a riot victim, she could have very well re-enacted the hegemonic casteist relations like her female kin in Calcutta.

So, her relegation and subsequent reconciliation with these patriarchal norms or the values that make up the bourgeois society, this entire class-caste space of the bourgeoisie - her relegation and reconciliation with the patriarchal norms of bourgeoisie cannot be equated with that of a Dalit or a minority female victim's experience.

[This is] because a Dalit woman is always doubly marginalized, once by the male kin within or her male counterpart in her own community and then with respect to the refined class people of the nation. So, for a Dalit woman, there is hardly any chance of the question... for a Dalit woman, the question of deviation and the chances of social elevation do not even arise. (Refer Slide Time: 30:20)

Continued.....

- Nayanika Mookherjee - the sentiment of sorrow is built differently around male and female war victims. While the pain of a father or brother of a raped woman is "emphasized as part of the nationalist commemoration of the war" (45), the female loss is localized in relational terms – a sorrowful widow, mother and sister.
- If one interprets that Sutara is not raped, does her magnitude of trouble become any less? She is orphaned by the riots, rejected by her natal family, if not on grounds of sexual impurity then because she has spent days in a Muslim neighbour's household. Her homestead is burnt down, which means that in the absence of her father who has been murdered, she, among her other siblings, also incurs the responsibility of refurbishing the class-caste prestige associated with her family name. This can only be done through re-accumulation of social and economic capital. While constantly fighting against the odds, Sutara not only embalms her wounded femininity, but also grapples to rebuild on her middle-class and upper-caste facilities that have been razed by Partition.

We have already talked about this - Nayanika Mookherjee talking about the sentiment of sorrow being built differently around the male and the female. So, the pain of the father or the brother of the raped woman is emphasizes as a part of the nationalist commemoration of the war, whereas the female loss is actually understood in relational terms. So, she is a sorrowful widow, mother or sister. One never knows that Sutara is indeed raped; what if she is actually not raped? Does her magnitude of trouble become any less?

This way of reading the novel would invite other ways of/alternative ways of looking at Sutara's loss, which are not less in any sense...which cannot be underestimated in any

case. So, she is orphaned by these riots. She is rejected by her natal family, if not on the grounds of sexual impurity, then because she has spent some time in a Muslim neighbor's household and then her homestead is burnt down.

It is a kind of problematic that one needs to engage with, where one never associates a woman's loss in terms of the property. Her father's homestead is burned down; it could also mean that in the absence of her father who has been murdered, she along with her male siblings also incur the responsibility of refurbishing the caste-class prestige that is associated with her family name.

So, the burden of re-accumulating social and economic capital that have been razed by partition, Sutara is not only embalming her wounded femininity. It is important to understand that she as a woman, in her circumstances/her situation is also grappling to rebuild on her middle-class upper-caste facilities which have been taken away by the partition in the first place. (Refer Slide Time: 32:38)

Continued.....

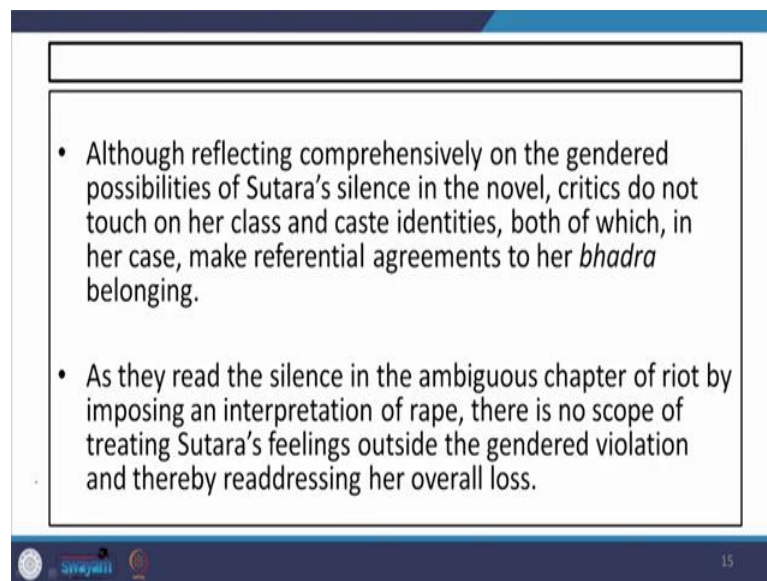
- Delimiting Sutara's refugee experience to her gender ignores the male-formulated construct of caste within which a female body is located by virtue of its birth among a certain clique.
- This approach reserves the class and caste-based agency only for the males, such that the likelihood of class and caste-based setbacks can only be associated with masculine defeat and nostalgia.

So, delimiting Sutara's refugee experience to her gender in a way ignores her caste-position, and we understand that by doing so, we ascribe [it debunks] that caste is a male phenomenon. So, we understand that caste is a male formulation and a woman is an extension of the male's identity. A woman cannot even own her own class and caste. She has only her gender to own and narrate.

This approach of only looking at Sutara in terms of a gender reserves the class and caste-based agency only for the males, such that the likelihood of caste and class-based

setbacks can only be associated with the masculine notion of defeat, loss and nostalgia.

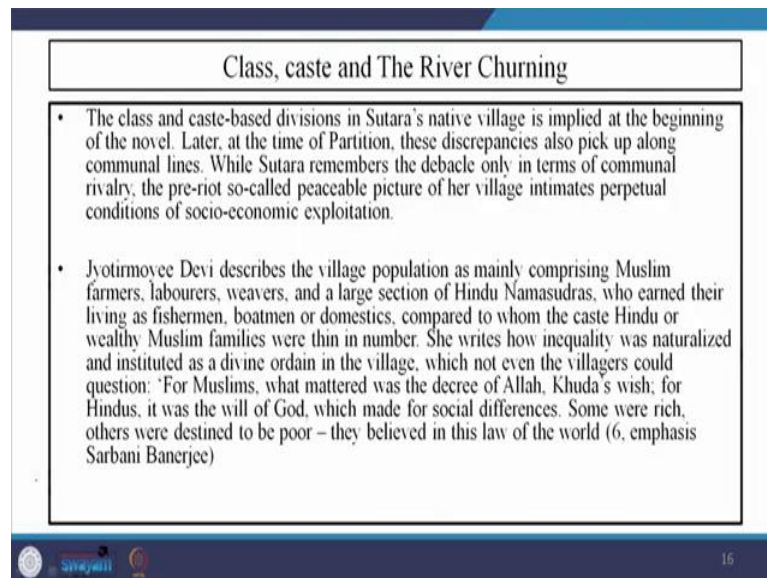
(Refer Slide Time: 34:15)



- Although reflecting comprehensively on the gendered possibilities of Sutara's silence in the novel, critics do not touch on her class and caste identities, both of which, in her case, make referential agreements to her *bhadra* belonging.
- As they read the silence in the ambiguous chapter of riot by imposing an interpretation of rape, there is no scope of treating Sutara's feelings outside the gendered violation and thereby readdressing her overall loss.

Although reflecting comprehensively on the gendered possibilities of Sutara's silence where, for a trauma survivor, we have already talked how silence manifests through repetitions, slippages and sometimes lack of articulation; and this is something that we study in the case of Sutara. In the case of Sutara, however, there is a kind of defining silence, but the critics are not touching on her class and caste identities, both of which make an important referential agreement to her bhadrā belonging.

As there is an ambiguous chapter in this, I mean as I read the silence in the ambiguous chapter of riot through imposing the interpretation of rape, there is no scope of treating Sutara outside of the gender violation. When we talk about the situation in Sutara's village in Nohakhali at the time of riot, one would see that there is a class-caste situation. (Refer Slide Time: 35:37)



Class, caste and The River Churning

- The class and caste-based divisions in Sutara's native village is implied at the beginning of the novel. Later, at the time of Partition, these discrepancies also pick up along communal lines. While Sutara remembers the debacle only in terms of communal rivalry, the pre-riot so-called peaceable picture of her village intimates perpetual conditions of socio-economic exploitation.
- Jyotirmoyee Devi describes the village population as mainly comprising Muslim farmers, labourers, weavers, and a large section of Hindu Namasudras, who earned their living as fishermen, boatmen or domestics, compared to whom the caste Hindu or wealthy Muslim families were thin in number. She writes how inequality was naturalized and instituted as a divine ordain in the village, which not even the villagers could question: "For Muslims, what mattered was the decree of Allah, Khuda's wish; for Hindus, it was the will of God, which made for social differences. Some were rich, others were destined to be poor – they believed in this law of the world (6, emphasis Sarbani Banerjee)

16




The class and caste-based divisions in Sutara's native village is actually mentioned in the novel at the beginning, and these discrepancies take up an extreme form and they pick up along communal lines during the partition. So, what is understood as the peaceable and the normal picture of the village is actually a perpetual condition of socio-economic exploitation by the upper-caste Hindus on the peasantry.

We see that Jyotirmoyee Devi explains the village population (mainly comprising Muslims from the village population) as farmers, weavers and laborers (most of them), and a large section of Hindu Namasudras who earn their living as boatmen and fishermen, and Hindus are relatively more affluent.

So, inequality is naturalized and it is instituted as a divine ordain, and that is the classic picture of a pristine and idyllic village. (Refer Slide Time: 36:24)

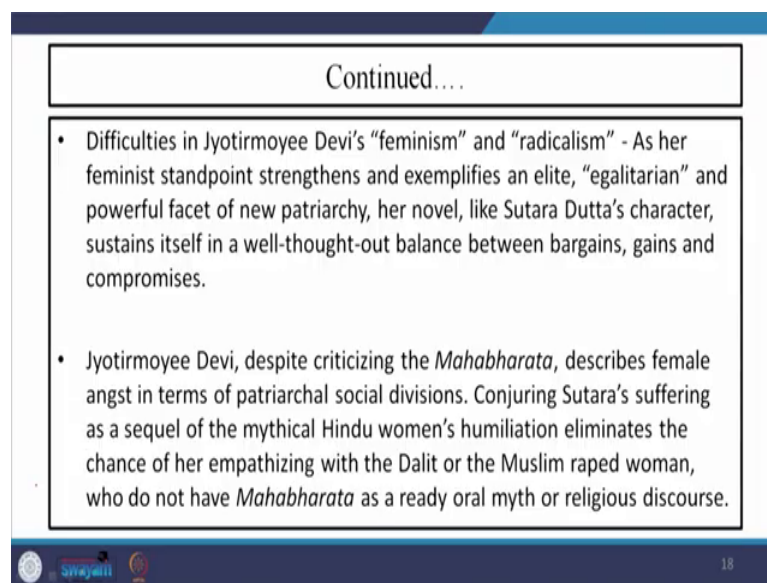
Continued.....

- Inherent in its fatalistic submission to feudalism can be found the inkling of class-caste revolt.
- From the status-quo hinted in the above statement, the nature of the riot and the outrage done to the Dutta family takes on a new dimension. For example, while the *bhadralok* Duttas were accosted and molested by their "non-bhadra" Muslim workers, Sutara was saved by an upper-class Muslim neighbour, which offers a second standpoint of class harmony among elite Hindus and Muslims, outside the vista of religion.
- Besides class, the fact that caste practices had worsened rural relations is understood from the fact that the incendiary first broke out at Bamunpara (the Brahmin locality) ("Adiparva: The Beginning" 7), implying a dislike among the subalterns towards the *bhadralok* Hindus.
- On the other hand, as Sutara afterwards shapes her notion of "Muslim men" from the memory of local Muslim labourers attacking and assaulting her family, and not that of her Muslim neighbour Tamij saheb who rescued her, she carries a prejudiced and selective picture of the carnage, replicating the nationalistic Hinduized theory.

17

So, inherent in this ideal is the suggestion or the possibility of a class-caste revolt. So, we see that ah the Duttas were first molested by the their Muslim workers; the Muslim peasants came and violated the family.

However, Sutara was rescued by an upper-class Muslim neighbor, which offers a second standpoint of class harmony between the upper-class, wealthy Hindus and the wealthy Muslims, outside of their religious identity. We can read that besides class, the fact that caste practices had worsened rural relations is understood from the fact that the fire first broke out in the Brahmin locality. It actually suggests that there was an inherent dislike among the subordinates towards the bhadralok Hindus. (Refer Slide Time: 37:13)



Continued...

- Difficulties in Jyotirmoyee Devi's "feminism" and "radicalism" - As her feminist standpoint strengthens and exemplifies an elite, "egalitarian" and powerful facet of new patriarchy, her novel, like Sutara Dutta's character, sustains itself in a well-thought-out balance between bargains, gains and compromises.
- Jyotirmoyee Devi, despite criticizing the *Mahabharata*, describes female angst in terms of patriarchal social divisions. Conjuring Sutara's suffering as a sequel of the mythical Hindu women's humiliation eliminates the chance of her empathizing with the Dalit or the Muslim raped woman, who do not have *Mahabharata* as a ready oral myth or religious discourse.

18

So, there are certain difficult zones [aspects] in Jyotirmoyee Devi's version of feminism and radicalism (if we may). It strengthens, reifies, reinforces new patriarchy; it exemplifies an elite egalitarian and powerful facet of this new patriarchy. And, Sutara's character sustains itself in a well thought-out balance between certain bargains and certain compromises that she makes. So, although Jyotirmoyee Devi is criticizing Mahabharata, she is also describing female angst in terms of patriarchal social divisions.

Sutara's suffering becomes a sequel of the mythical Hindu women's humiliation, and this knowledge (like I have been trying to put towards the beginning of this lecture today)...this knowledge of Hindu women's humiliation is something that the Dalit woman, the Muslim raped woman cannot understand because Mahabharata as a text or

as a ready oral myth or religious discourse is not available to these sections of the Indian society. With this, I would like to stop today's lecture.

Thank you.