

Researchers' Colloquium

Department of Liberal Arts

IIT Bhilai

Book of Abstracts

Wednesday, 21 November 2025

3:30 to 5:30 pm

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“I Want to Live Neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan-I Will Live on this Tree”: Examining ‘Land’ Entitlement and Identity Crisis in Manto’s Toba Tek Singh

Nidhi

How are we related to a place? What makes us claim a place as ours? Is it the legal allotment or, the experience of belonging that entitles one to the land? According to Huggan & Tiffin, entitlement is “much more, or sometimes much less, than the imaginative and/or emotional possession of a place based on a perception of belonging. But then again, it isn’t just about property and the laws that govern ownership either. Rather, entitlement is both of these things and usually encompasses the tension between them” (Huggan & Tiffin 98). Defining the relationship to place, in accordance to roots, has been a matter of discussion for both ecocritics and postcolonial theorists as well (Azima 101). While ecocritics talk about the rooted connections to a place, as Swarnalata Rangarajan in her book on Ecocriticism points out that “place is integral to community, identity, purpose and a sense of connection with nature” (64), postcolonial theorists focus on rootlessness due to events like migration and displacement. However, the concept of roots and rootlessness are not to be considered two distinct identities, they are both inclusive and important in defining place connectedness.

In this paper, I will be tracing the anxiety and subsequent loss of identity due to forced land entitlement in the short story Toba Tek Singh (1954) by Saadat Hasan Manto on the partition of India in 1947. The reason for opting a partition narrative for this purpose is that it deals with the violent ambiguities surrounding the partition of India into two nations, India and Pakistan, based on religion, which was followed by groundless violence. As a consequence, millions of people, who had been living on their land for generations were uprooted and forced to migrate to a foreign land, which they did not have any idea about or a sense of belonging to. It resulted in mass schizophrenia and people lost their sense of self, their identities, as Paromita Deb observes “Partition not only destroyed the sub-continent’s communal life, it also altered and reconstructed identities” (222).

Keywords: Belonging, Displacement, Identity, Partition 1947, Violence

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Disappearing Islands and Displaced Communities: Coastal Erosion Along the Shoreline of the Bay of Bengal in Select Eco-documentaries

Barsha Santra

The estuarine Ganges delta in the Bay of Bengal gained international attention when its inhabited islands, such as Lohachara and Ghoramara, began sinking exponentially, posing a threat to

permanent inundation. This unprecedented coastal erosion marks an apocalyptic moment in environmental history, leading to the displacement of a massive population often described as India's – and perhaps the world's – first climate refugees. The slow violence of erosion, performed at the elemental and molecular scale of soil, rising seawater, and tidal currents, eludes documentation and theorisation, and thus historically exercised lesser claims to redressal in terms of policy changes and administrative measures. The eco-documentary films, foreground the visual and sensory impact of coastal erosion and position it as an active material agency beyond human control and domination. The paper examines how these eco-documentaries, through their ethical commitment and the deployment of cinematic techniques such as meditative narration, long shots, slow pacing, and time-lapse, address the representational challenges of coastal erosion. It also explores how the films convey a sense of immediacy that is integral to their advocacy mechanism, allowing access to the lived experiences of victims, combined with statistical data and experts' assessments of the crises. The paper demonstrates how, by juxtaposing aerial images of the vanishing islands and close-up shots of microcosmic, quotidian realities of living with erosion, these films exemplify methods for traversing the scalar differences between planetary and local scales. It concludes with a reflection on how coastal erosion in the global South functions as a conceptualizing metaphor for environmental injustices, where the marginalized section of society is disowned by the state and thus bears the double brunt of physical and metaphorical displacement.

Keywords: Coastal erosion, eco-documentary, Bay of Bengal, material agency, environmental justice

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Difficult Attachments: Violence, Healing, and the Limits of Traumatic Affinities in Imtiaz Ali's Highway

Deepanwita Dey

While the heteropatriarchal institution of the family is often associated with ideas of love, nurturance and caregiving, it usually overlooks the complex nexus of unarticulated violence, anxiety and conflictual systems that sustain it. Imtiaz Ali's *Highway* (2014) explores this dynamic, where two individuals belonging to diametrically opposite spectrums of society navigate their journey of familial and societal violence, trauma and healing. Through the intersecting journeys of Veera Tripathi (played by Alia Bhatt), an upper-class, upper caste woman with an affluent background, and Mahabir Bhati (played by Randeep Hooda), a working-class man scarred by his own violent life, the film explores the emergence of alternative attachments, kinship and bonds, forged through shared suffering and mutual recognition of pain and vulnerability. This paper

critically examines the film against the socio-cultural backdrop of post-liberalisation India, tracing a fundamental shift in Bollywood's representation of the family from the 1980s to the present. In contrast to the Bollywood cinema of the late 1990s and early 2000s which framed the family as a moral anchor in the face of rapid shifts and transformations brought by liberalisation of the economy, contemporary Bollywood cinema (post-2010s) increasingly exposes the family not as a site of refuge and moral stability, but as one of repression, violence, and trauma. *Highway* foregrounds this transition and reconfigures the ideals of home and family, conventionally associated with safety, intimacy and belonging, into contested terrains marked by sexual violence, fear, and patriarchal control. Veera and Mahabir's tenuous relationship gestures toward the possibility of reimagining kinship beyond the normative structures of bourgeois domesticity and the institution of marriage. The film foregrounds an alternative understanding of kinship and attachments grounded in affective vulnerability rather than predetermined social structures. At the same time, *Highway* simultaneously exposes the limits of such alternative kinship relations and solidarities, as the inescapable realities of social class, caste, and gender hierarchies constrain the characters' freedom and the sustainability of their connection and continue to dictate their lives, thus delimiting the utopian potential of these fragile bonds. By destabilising the bourgeois ideal of the patriarchal family and foregrounding trauma as a condition of contemporary existence, the film participates in a broader cultural shift in post-liberalisation India—one that interrogates the foundations of bourgeoisie domesticity, belonging, and love in an unequal and fractured social order.

Keywords: Belonging, Bollywood, Class, Family, Vulnerability

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Imagining the 'Good' Queer Indian: Homonormativity in the web series *Made in Heaven*

(2019)

Rudrani Dasgupta Chaudhury

Since the advent of OTT (Over the Top) streaming services in the Indian market, there can be seen an impetus towards representations of queerness in web content. Such representations are invariably informed by the neoliberal consumer culture discourse. This paper argues that in these representations the subversive potential of queer identities is diffused, and they are accommodated within a narrative of social empowerment informed by neoliberal values of freedom, choice and individualism. Queer subjectivities are constructed in terms of their potential as consumers, within a new normative that champions the consumerist lifestyle. This paper attempts a textual analysis of the web series *Made in Heaven* (2019) using the theoretical framework of 'homonormativity' conceptualized by Lisa Duggan. Duggan has defined homonormativity as the politics that does not

oppose dominant heteronormativity but seeks assimilation within the normative through a depoliticized and domesticized queer culture concerned with consumerism and integration into nationalist discourse. With reference to the text the paper explores the uniquely Indian homonormativity constructed in the conjuncture of global LGBTQ+ rights discourse, nationalism and neoliberal cosmopolitan culture. The paper examines the figure of the ‘good’ queer Indian who is positioned as an urban, economically empowered, English-speaking, cosmopolitan citizen.

Keywords: Homonormativity, Neoliberalism, Queer, Representation

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Broadcasting Historical Trauma, Mediating Empathy: Studying Digital Afterlife of the Partition 1947

Chandrani Sanyal

The paper analyses two documentaries produced by the BBC, *The Day India Burned* (2007) and *My Family, Partition and Me* (2017) as sites of transnational memory of the 1947 Partition of India. Produced by a global media institution like, British Broadcasting Channel these documentaries are circulated globally via digital platform like YouTube and materialize what Alison Landsberg terms as prosthetic memory. These allow the viewers to experience mediated forms of empathy and memories of event they did not experience firsthand. As these memories circulate among the transnational and diasporic contexts through the digital visual platform, they emerge as transnational memory. Elaborating on the theoretical underpinnings of transnational memory, the paper argues that digital circulation of the memories of the Partition open the scope of networked and participatory negotiation of historical trauma. The BBC documentaries on the Partition, by weaving together survivor testimonies, archival footage, dramatized reconstruction, and contemporary diasporic engagement, construct an affective and mnemonic interface between postcolonial South Asia and its global spectators and allow a collaborative reimagination of the trauma and the legacy of the Partition. The paper establishes how these representations help mediate historical empathy and initiate shared witnessing across borders, resulting to a globally negotiated field of remembrance. By analyzing both textual strategies and the participatory reception of these documentaries online, the paper proposes the concept of transnational prosthetic memory to describe how digital media and streaming platform enable the transnational engagement with historical trauma, transforming Partition from a South Asian history into a shared global memoryscape.

Keywords: Digital media, Partition, Prosthetic memory, Trauma, Transnational memory

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Moving Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Porous Thresholds and Female Agency in K R Meera's
Hangwoman

Dipannita Mandal

This essay examines how *Hangwoman* (2014) by K R Meera challenges the mainstream contemporary narrative of feminist progress by revealing how women's apparent empowerment can paradoxically reinforce existing patriarchal structures. Drawing on Meera Kosambi's concept of the porous threshold along with insights from other Indian feminist scholars, this essay highlights how contemporary patriarchal structures maintain dominance not through exclusion, but through selective methods of incorporation that appear progressive but still serve patriarchal interests. Through the analysis of the protagonist Chetna Griddha Mullick's mobility across professional, emotional, and social boundaries, the essay identifies and describes three mechanisms of patriarchal constraint in the text: professional incorporation that legitimises rather than challenges necropolitical institutions, emotional labour that humanises state-sanctioned violence, and the media-driven commodification of female crossing of societal boundaries transformed into a consumable spectacle. By analysing how Chetna's agency operates within this interconnected system instead of against it, this essay illustrates how female agency is better understood in relation to structural pressures, contradictions, and the performative roles women are required to inhabit, rather than as an absolute condition.

Keywords: Female agency, Commodity feminism, Contemporary Indian fiction, Intersectionality

