




Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 26
Accounts of the Survivor - III

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and ah Cinema. Today, we are going to continue our discussions on the accounts of the survivor. Our discussion will be on an important work, a seminal work by Jyotirmoyee Devi -- the much acclaimed novel called *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga* in Bengali, and it has been translated as *The River Churning*. (Refer Slide Time: 01:08)

The River Churning(Epar Ganga Opar Ganga) by Jyotirmoyee Devi

- *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* (1967 and 1991) is an epoch making novel explained in the broader context of the Literature of Partition, a genre whose focus has been on the related themes of dislocation and violence.
- *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga* was first published in 1967 in Bengali as 'Itihashe Stree Parva' (Women's Chapter in History) in the annual issue of the prestigious Bengali periodical Prabashi.
- *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* is analysed to demonstrate how the subject of dislocation and violence has been explored with insight and sensitivity.
- *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* narrates the 'human' history of Partition and strives to fill the gaps created by the conventional nationalist historiography of freedom movement.

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So, Epar Ganga Opar Ganga or The River Churning by Jyotirmoyee Devi was originally written in 1967, and it is an epoch-making novel that explains the broader context of the literature of partition. Its focus has been on the theme of dislocation and violence on the woman. Epar Ganga Opar Ganga was first published in 1967 in Bengali as Itihashe Stree Parva or Women's Chapter in History, in the annual issue of the prestigious Bengali periodical Prabashi. Now, Epar Ganga Opar Ganga talks about how the subject of a dislocation can be explored with insight and sensitivity, and it narrates the human history of partition once again and tries to fill the gaps that have been created by the conventional nationalist historiography of freedom movement.

The novel disrupts the representative economy of female chastity and honour that is imagined around or that centres the body of the woman, and the patriarchal values that inform such an economy. So, the River Churning's female protagonist Sutara Dutta is an embodied subject, for whom victimization registers at multiple levels - at the level of the body, at the level of the psyche, and then at the level of the society. So, the stronger emphasis on the gendered (experience of the refugee) is created in the novel by Jyotirmoyee Devi through gendering the category of the refugee itself.

All refugees in this story are shown as women. So, the focus, the discourse of partition violence in the novel is fashioned through the experiences that women from different parts of India have suffered. So, the violence that women from different parts of India have suffered. The discourse of partition violence is shaped or fashioned in the novel through locating/focusing on the experiences of women from different parts of India and their sufferance.

The River Churning constructs a critique that apply not only to the refugee woman and the extraordinary situation of upheaval that they faced, but the historical condition of being a woman in general in a given social context.

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The River Churning

- *The River Churning* constructs a critique that applied not only to refugee women but the historical condition of being women in its given social context; that is to say, its critique targets not only the violence of the Partition but also patriarchal violence at large.
- It speaks to the contradictory demands of a representation by both the historical and the traumatic.

It is not only talking about [the woman], it is placing/locating the violence of partition within the larger context of patriarchal violence that a woman encounters on an everyday basis. So, it speaks to the contradictory demands of a representation by both the historical and the traumatic. (Refer Slide Time: 05:08)

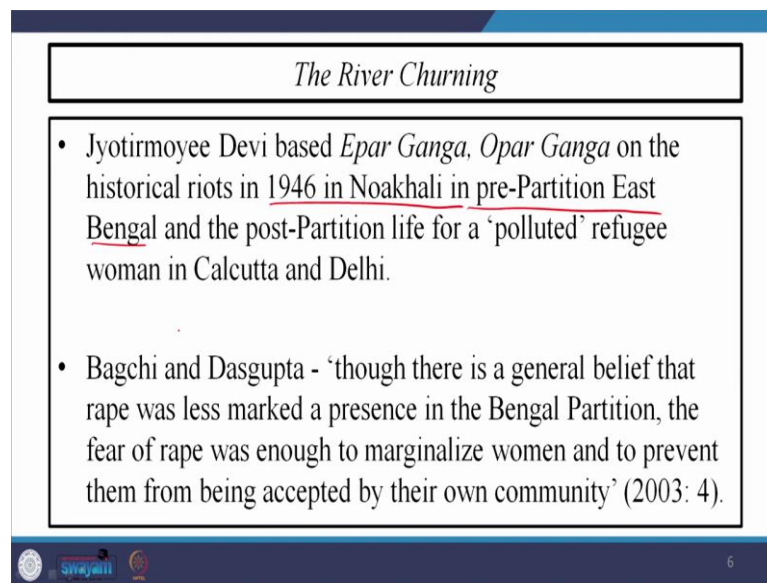
The River Churning

- *The River Churning* relates women's marginality within a linguistic community to the absence of the women's chapter within collective memory and institutional history.
- *The River Churning* also have used Hindu myths to launch a critique of the lack of gender dimension in the public memory of the Partition.
- The novel portrayed the standpoint of the marginal refugee woman, and how the possibility and permissibility of available language is sharply gendered and intersects both the extraordinary trauma of the Partition and the historical ordinary of the 'everyday world.'

River Churning relates women's marginal [position] within the linguistic community to the absence of the woman's chapter within the collective memory and institutional history. So, at the outset we see (in the preface) Jyotirmoyee Devi is referring to Mahabharat. There is an allusion to Mahabharat and how the women's chapter is deliberately silenced. There, she says that there is no ink to actually depict [or] to delineate what happened to the women, to describe the fate of the women.

This is actually referring to the systematic erasure of the gender dimension [from] the public memory of the partition. The novel portrays the standpoint of the marginal refugee woman, and how the possibility and even permissibility of available language has a gendered nature. In the novel, Jyotirmoyee Devi wants to probe why it is not possible for the refugee woman to speak about her experience.

So, the novel is set/written against the backdrop of the 1946 Noakhali riots in the pre-partition East Bengal, and it talks about the experience, the encounters of an allegedly polluted refugee woman in Calcutta and Delhi. (Refer Slide Time: 06:59)



The River Churning

- Jyotirmoyee Devi based *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga* on the historical riots in 1946 in Noakhali in pre-Partition East Bengal and the post-Partition life for a 'polluted' refugee woman in Calcutta and Delhi.
- Bagchi and Dasgupta - 'though there is a general belief that rape was less marked a presence in the Bengal Partition, the fear of rape was enough to marginalize women and to prevent them from being accepted by their own community' (2003: 4).


Critics of this novel, such as Jasodhara Bagchi and Subaranjan Dasgupta say that there is a general belief that rape was less marked a presence in the Bengal partition; the fear of rape was enough to marginalize women and to prevent them from being accepted by their own community.

So, the plot of *The River Churning* goes like this -- it centres the life of Sutara Dutta, who is the daughter of a Bhadraklok schoolmaster in a village that is located in the

Noakhali district of East Bengal. During the pre-partition communal riots of 1946, the local Muslim subalterns mainly from the Dalit peasant groups who also work as domestics in Sutara's homestead, come and kill her father. They most probably rape and abduct her mother and sister, which has been implied but never directly mentioned in the text; and these peasants burn down their ancestral homestead. (Refer Slide Time: 08:19)

The River Churning – Storyline

- *The River Churning* centres on the life of Sutara Dutta, daughter of a *bhadralok* school-master in a village located in the Noakhali district of East Bengal. During the pre-Partition communal riots of 1946, the local Muslim subalterns, mainly from the Dalit peasant groups who also work as domestics in her house, kill her father, most probably rape and abduct her mother and sister (as is implied but never directly mentioned in the text) and burn down the ancestral homestead.
- The village school's headmaster Tamijuddin *saheb* rescues her and after the subsiding of riots, consigns her to her brother's custody in Calcutta. At her brother's in-laws' house in Calcutta (where her brother's family has to temporarily move because of communal unrests at his own locality), Sutara faces discrimination and is treated as an "Untouchable," because she is an East Bengali refugee orphan, who has allegedly lost her "caste" by living at her Muslim rescuer's house.
- Her brother's relatives send her to a boarding school, and in the course of time, she grows up to become a history teacher at a women's college in Delhi. Her post-Partition presence in Calcutta and Delhi is marked by a silence on her part about the Noakhali episode, and an unexpressed pain persistently choking her spontaneous Self. Not able to overcome the past, and not accepted by her Calcutta kin, she leads a sequestered life, until Promode, her sister-in-law's brother, proposes to marry her.

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The village school's headmaster Tamijuddin Saheb, a Muslim neighbour, rescues Sutara and after the subsiding of the riots, he consigns her to her brother's custody in Calcutta. Now, in her brother's in-law's house in Calcutta it is a middle-class joint family set up, [where] Sutara faces discrimination and she is treated as an "untouchable" because she is a refugee orphan from East Bengal and people would, I mean members in the family would guess that because she is a refugee orphan from East Bengal [she] has allegedly lost her "caste" by living with the Muslims in a Muslim man's house. And also tacitly, although not directly said, tacitly because people imagine/guess that she has been raped.

So, her brother's relatives send her to the boarding school. Because she is not accepted within the joint family setup, she is sent to boarding school and in the course of time, she grows up to become a History teacher in a women's college in Delhi.

Her post-partition presence in Calcutta and in Delhi is marked by a silence about the entire episode in Noakhali. So, there is a silence on her part about the Noakhali episode and there is a persistent pain that is choking her. She leads a sequestered life until a man called Promode proposes to marry her.

In the first part of the novel, the narrative is recounted as a flashback and there is a narration, I mean it tells the reader about the onslaught on the family by Muslim peasants. There are several details about the physical violence done to Sutara. (Refer Slide Time: 11:03)

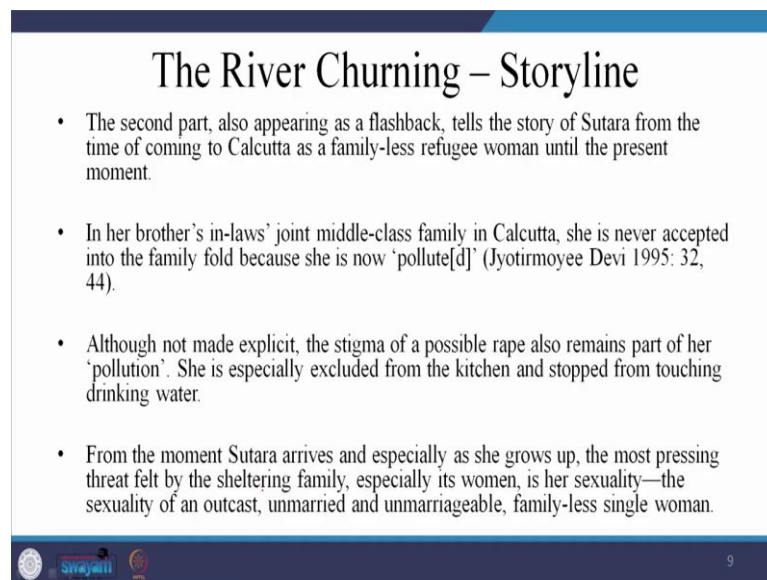
The River Churning – Storyline

- The first part of *The River Churning*, set as a flashback, narrates the onslaught on the family by Muslim peasants. There are several details about the physical violence done to Sutara, but the narrative does not specify whether the violence done to her is sexual. One does not know if she is raped. She is rescued and nursed back to life by Tamij Saheb and his family.
- Having regained her health, Sutara wants to be connected with the surviving members of her family—her two brothers, who live in Calcutta in West Bengal. Tamij Saheb writes to Sutara's brothers. However, they do not show much interest in taking their sister back.
- Unable to ignore Sutara's pleas to be united with the surviving members of her family, and disregarding the considerable danger to their own persons while accompanying the Hindu girl to Calcutta, Tamij Saheb and his sons return Sutara to her brothers.

But the narrative does not actually tell us whether the violence has a sexual meaning or a sexual aspect. One does not know for sure if Sutara has been raped. She is brought back to life, she is rescued and nursed by the neighbour Tamij Saheb and his family.

After regaining her health, she wants to be connected to her family members in Calcutta, who are actually reluctant to take her back; however, Tamij Saheb and his sons risk their own lives while accompanying Sutara to Calcutta and then they reunite her to the surviving members of her family. They unite her to the surviving members of her family.

The second part is also recounted as a flashback. It tells a story of Sutara from the time of coming to Calcutta as a family-less refugee woman until the present time/present moment of the narration. (Refer Slide Time: 12:32)



The River Churning – Storyline

- The second part, also appearing as a flashback, tells the story of Sutara from the time of coming to Calcutta as a family-less refugee woman until the present moment.
- In her brother's in-laws' joint middle-class family in Calcutta, she is never accepted into the family fold because she is now 'pollute[d]' (Jyotirmoyee Devi 1995: 32, 44).
- Although not made explicit, the stigma of a possible rape also remains part of her 'pollution'. She is especially excluded from the kitchen and stopped from touching drinking water.
- From the moment Sutara arrives and especially as she grows up, the most pressing threat felt by the sheltering family, especially its women, is her sexuality—the sexuality of an outcast, unmarried and unmarriageable, family-less single woman.

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So, she is considered as tainted, as polluted by the members of her brothers-in-laws' family, and although it is not made explicit the stigma of a possible rape also remains a part of this alleged notion of pollution, an alleged notion of pollution centring ah Sutara.

She is especially excluded from the kitchen and not allowed to touch the drinking water. So, she grows up with the most pressing threat felt. From the moment Sutara arrives and starts to live in the house, there is a pressing threat felt by the host family, especially the women in the family and the threat is posed in the form of her sexuality. Her sexuality is viewed as that of an outcast, unmarried and unmarriageable woman, who could actually pollute the rest of the members.

In the plotline [of] the novel, we see there are obsessive discussions of Sutara's problems in the family. (Refer Slide Time: 14:02)

The River Churning – Storyline

- The obsessive discussions of Sutara's problems in the family soon slip into the 'problem of Sutara' (47). In the Bengali original, the text actually uses the phrase 'Sutara problem' ('Sutara samasya'; Raychaudhuri and Sen 2001a [1991]: 127).
- Like the 'women's question' in the late nineteenth century, Sutara is perceived as a predicament and a nuisance.
- 'Sutara problem' also echoes the rhetoric of the 'refugee problem' posed by the East Bengali refugees to Calcutta and West Bengal.

And so, it becomes the problem of Sutara. It slips into a kind of phrase; Sutara becomes synonymous with problem, with crisis that the hosts face as a result of having her. So, the text actually uses the phrase Sutara problem or Sutara Samasya.

This actually echoes/reverberates the larger situation, where women's question posed a huge threat to the idea of a sanctified and a morally righteous nation. And so, the process of cleansing was rigorously followed at all levels of society. Sutara is perceived as a predicament and as a threat or a nuisance. She echoes the refugee problem that the host society [of] Calcutta and West Bengal was going through at that time.

Sutara problem echoes the rhetoric of the refugee problem posed by the East Bengali refugees to Calcutta and West Bengal. So, in the third part of the novel we see Sutara moving to Delhi as a lecturer of history and living there as an outcast from her larger community in Calcutta. (Refer Slide Time: 15:45)

The River Churning – Storyline

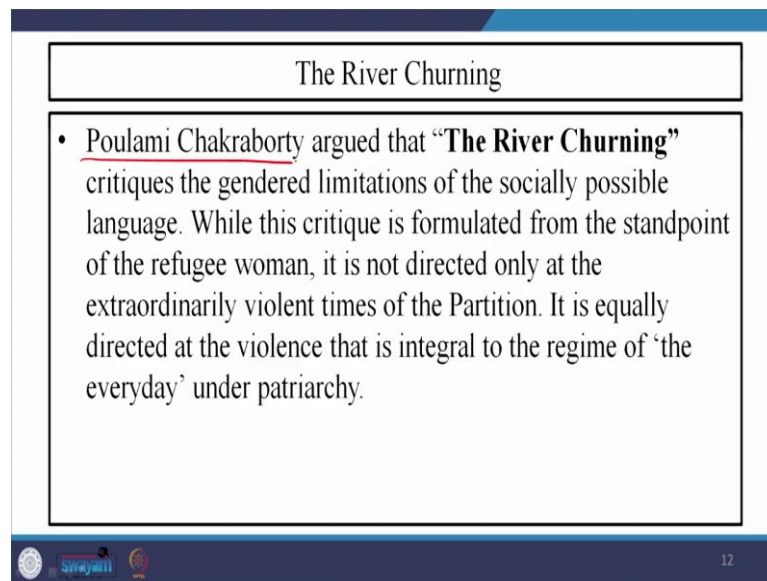
- In the third part, Sutara moves to Delhi as a lecturer of history and lives as an outcast from her larger community in Calcutta. She befriends her colleagues, who also have a close relationship to the Partition.
- Sutara's trip to Calcutta to attend a wedding at Amulya Babu's house ends in her utter humiliation; that she is not wanted is made clear to her.
- Towards the end of the novel, Sakina's mother proposes a match between her son Aziz and Sutara, which Sutara rejects. At the end of the book, Promode proposes marriage to her. Though not stated, it is strongly indicated that Sutara accepts that proposal.

Even as she visits one of the family occasions [and] she joins her family to attend a wedding, she is treated as an outsider.

She is treated as someone unwanted and it ends in...her reunion with the family ends in utter humiliation. So, towards the end of the novel, we see Tamijuddin Saheb's wife proposes a match between her son Aziz and Sutara, but Sutara rejects such a match.

And so, at the end of the book, the gentleman called Promode proposes marriage to her and although it is not stated, in all probability it is implied, it is strongly indicated that Sutara accepts the proposal.

Now, critics have read this novel as a rich site that talks about the question of women's bodily honor, the question of what is speakable and the problem of a socially permissible language to describe the woman's suffering. (Refer Slide Time: 17:28)



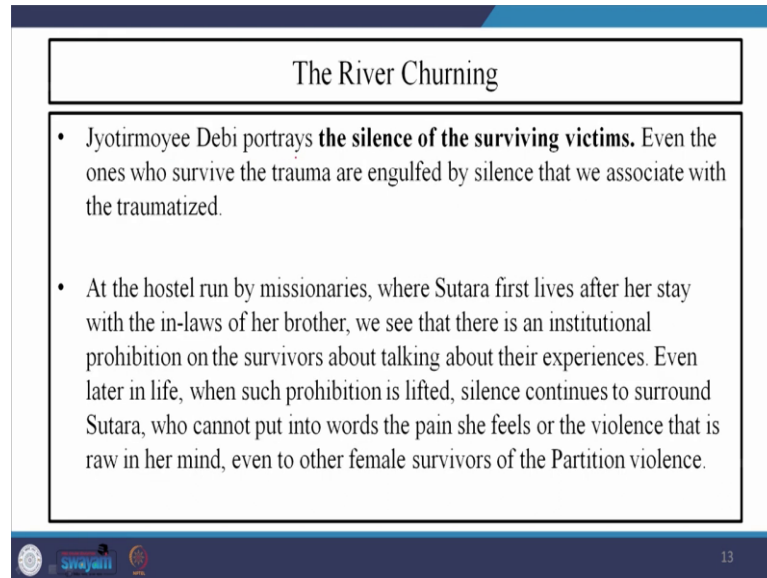
The River Churning

- Poulami Chakraborty argued that “**The River Churning**” critiques the gendered limitations of the socially possible language. While this critique is formulated from the standpoint of the refugee woman, it is not directed only at the extraordinarily violent times of the Partition. It is equally directed at the violence that is integral to the regime of ‘the everyday’ under patriarchy.

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Poulami Chakraborty, for example, argues/critiques the gendered limitations of the socially possible language.

So, the question of what could be said, how much could be said, the threshold that needed to be crossed and who would believe such a woman. (Refer Slide Time: 17:46)



The River Churning

- Jyotirmoyee Debi portrays **the silence of the surviving victims**. Even the ones who survive the trauma are engulfed by silence that we associate with the traumatized.
- At the hostel run by missionaries, where Sutara first lives after her stay with the in-laws of her brother, we see that there is an institutional prohibition on the survivors about talking about their experiences. Even later in life, when such prohibition is lifted, silence continues to surround Sutara, who cannot put into words the pain she feels or the violence that is raw in her mind, even to other female survivors of the Partition violence.

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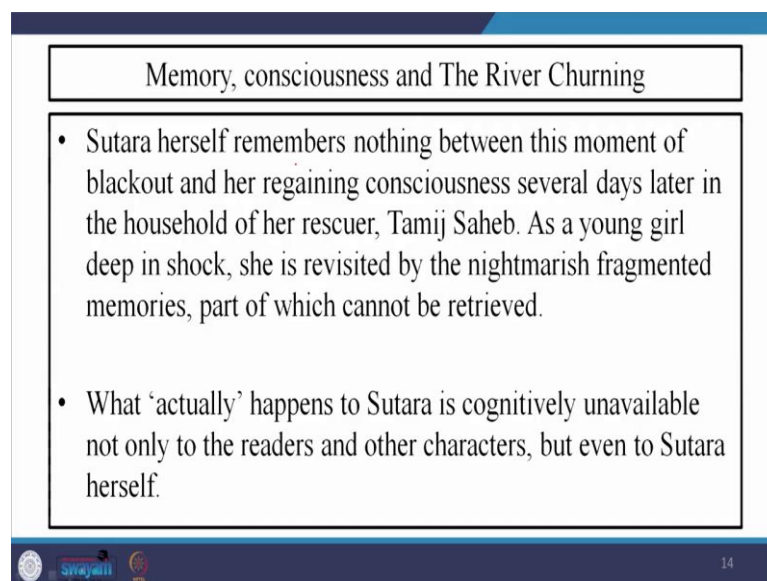
Jyotirmoyee Devi portrays the silence of the surviving victims and the silence that is institutionalized at various levels. For example, there is a prohibition on the survivors in the hostel where Sutara is relocated; in the hostel that is run by the missionaries where Sutara is relocated, there is an institutional prohibition on the survivors about talking of their [past] experiences.

Although at a later stage she is not bound by such institutional prohibition, silence persists [and] Sutara cannot overcome the silence and put into words the pain that she feels or the violence that is in her mind. In fact, her mind becomes a blind-spot that the reader never gets to know. How much she knows, does she know and what does she know? Sutara herself remembers nothing between the moment of blackout and her regaining consciousness several days later in the house of Tamij Saheb.

But this would also be something problematic to say that she knows nothing. Like I said, how much [is] the degree of remembrance, the extent of what is remembered and how it is remembered is something that the reader is never permitted to explore, the reader never gets to know what Sutara [or] how much Sutara remembers.

As a young girl that is deep in shock, she is revisited by the fragmented memories and of course, one can understand that parts of such a memory cannot be retrieved. What actually happens to Sutara is, therefore, cognitively unavailable.

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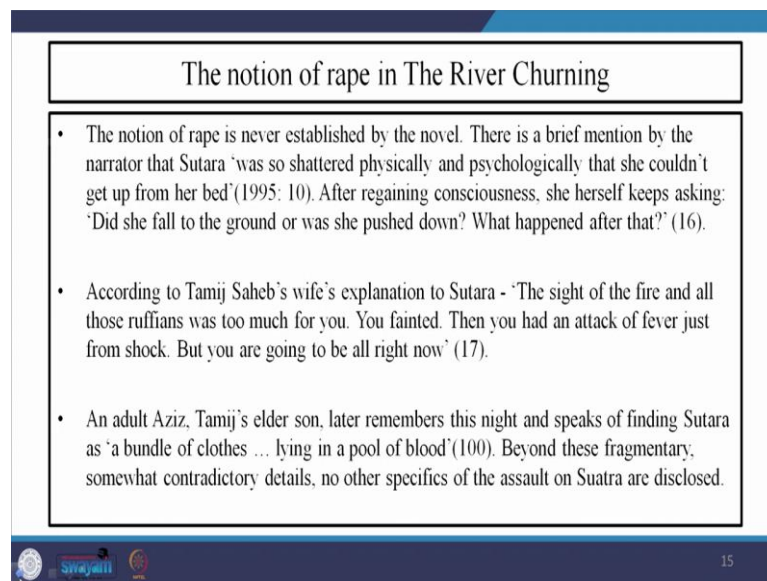


Memory, consciousness and The River Churning

- Sutara herself remembers nothing between this moment of blackout and her regaining consciousness several days later in the household of her rescuer, Tamij Saheb. As a young girl deep in shock, she is revisited by the nightmarish fragmented memories, part of which cannot be retrieved.
- What 'actually' happens to Sutara is cognitively unavailable not only to the readers and other characters, but even to Sutara herself.

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Not only to the readers and to the other characters in the novel, but to Sutara herself.
(Refer Slide Time: 20:17)



The notion of rape in The River Churning

- The notion of rape is never established by the novel. There is a brief mention by the narrator that Sutara 'was so shattered physically and psychologically that she couldn't get up from her bed' (1995: 10). After regaining consciousness, she herself keeps asking: 'Did she fall to the ground or was she pushed down? What happened after that?' (16).
- According to Tamij Saheb's wife's explanation to Sutara - 'The sight of the fire and all those ruffians was too much for you. You fainted. Then you had an attack of fever just from shock. But you are going to be all right now' (17).
- An adult Aziz, Tamij's elder son, later remembers this night and speaks of finding Sutara as 'a bundle of clothes ... lying in a pool of blood' (100). Beyond these fragmentary, somewhat contradictory details, no other specifics of the assault on Sutara are disclosed.

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So, this notion - a tacit understanding that she has been raped, she has indeed been raped is scattered throughout the novel.

It is never established, but there are brief references. There is a brief mention by the narrator that Sutara was so shattered physically and psychologically that she could not get up from the bed. And she keeps asking after regaining consciousness, she keeps asking did she fall to the ground or was she pushed down; what happened after that.

We also have to understand that here we are trying to decipher the mind, not only of a female riot victim, but also that of a juvenile who may not be familiar with the idea of rape altogether. So, she does not really know what has happened to her. Then we see that the adult Sutara in hindsight through retrospection is trying to study her juvenile self.

So, this is a very complicated terrain of a memory that the reader is being taken to. Tamij Saheb's wife, for example, is using a very mild or euphemistic explanation to Sutara.



I mean Tamij Saheb's wife is trying to explain to Sutara in a way that a child can understand -- The sight of the fire and all those ruffians was too much for you and that is why you fainted; then you had an attack of fever from shock and you are going to be all right. So, the euphemism is a way of averting, of dodging the encounter with the

experience in the form of memory head on. There is no direct facing up to the fact throughout the novel.

Aziz, Tamij Saheb's eldest son later remembers this night and speaks of finding Sutara as a bundle of clothes that are lying in a pool of blood. So, beyond these fragmentary somewhat contradictory details, no other specifics of the assault on Sutara are disclosed by the narrator. (Refer Slide Time: 23:39)

Critical Comments regarding 'The River Churning'

- Debali Mookerjea-Leonard - there is no scope for reading the 'unspoken' by the author/narrator as an act of uncritical shame or as a '**residual prudery of a post-Victorian novelist**': the Bengali equivalent of the word rape occurs quite often in Jyotirmoyee Devi's writing, especially in her essays (2003: para 41). Mookerjea-Leonard's argues that the details of the assault on Sutara are omitted because the '**veiling of a bodily trauma through language constitutes a counter-discourse to the economy of display of woman**' (41).
- Jasodhara Bagchi - Sutara's experience was '**hit twice by patriarchy**': a '**physical assault on a woman's body and sexuality**' by a '**male of one community who establishes his own "identity" by exercising his territoriality over her body**', followed by affliction caused by 'her "own" community', which 'exclude her' and subject her to '**a prolonged and unbearable panoptic gaze by the community over Sutara's body and mind**' (1995: xxxii). For the latter reason, the narrative itself disallows the readers' gaze to dwell on Sutara's body.

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Now, there are several critical comments regarding the silence that pervades throughout the novel - the pervasive silence throughout the novel. So, there are several critics commenting on the pervasive silence throughout *The River Churning*.

For example, Debali Mookerjee Leonard says that there is no scope for reading the unspoken by the author-narrator as an act of uncritical shame or as a 'residual prudery of a post Victorian novelist'. Mookerjee Leonard would go on to say or argue that the absence of the word rape or any direct description does not simply mean that Jyotirmoyee Devi is maintaining some sort of Victorian or middle-class prudery, as a way of refraining from using a direct word such as rape.

The Bengali equivalent of the word 'rape' occurs quite often in Devi's writings, especially in her essays. So, Leonard argues that the details of the assault on Sutara are omitted because the 'veiling of a bodily trauma through language constitutes a counter-discourse to the economy of display of women'. So, her silence, according to Leonard, the way she reads the novel is a kind of/ it constitutes a counter-discourse.

Similarly, Jasodhara Bagchi says that Sutara's experience was hit twice by patriarchy. A physical assault on a woman's body and sexuality by a male of one community that establishes his own identity by referring his territoriality over her body; and then, there is affliction caused by her own community that exclude her and subject her to a prolonged and unbearable panoptical gaze (by the community over Sutara's body and mind).

Because there is this panoptical gaze, the silence is constantly kind of challenged by so much that is being spoken about Sutara. And so much of the collective gaze on her body and the speculations regarding what might have happened to her. For this reason, the narrative disallows the reader's gaze to dwell on Sutara's body. (Refer Slide Time: 26:50)

Critical Comments

- Jill Didur – the writing sought to **'redirect the gaze of the reader/researcher away from women's bodies and sexuality'**, that are sites always under surveillance of community and state anyway (2006: 13).
- Mookerjea-Leonard has argued that by keeping silent on the details of the assault, the novel **'recovers something of the private pain that women suffered'** (2003: para 41).
- Didur interrupts this attempted recovery project: **'these silences and ambiguities in women's stories,'** she argues, **'should not be resolved, accounted for, unveiled, or recovered, but, rather, understood as women's inability to subsume their experience within projects of patriarchal modernity that has produced them in the first place'** (2006: 11). She critiques any imperative to 'recover', and sees the silence in *The River Churning* as precisely the refusal to do so. She suggests treating **'loss as loss'**, as Spivak has suggested (Spivak 1999: 198n1; cited in Didur 2006:136).

Jill Didur states that the writing sought to redirect the gaze of the reader or the researcher away from women's bodies and sexuality, which have been sites always under surveillance of community and the state. Leonard similarly argues that by keeping silent on the details of the assault, the novel recovers something of the private pain that the woman suffered or rather that women suffered during partition.

So, what I was trying to say is that the silence is constantly competing with and trying to outlive the discussions that are not directly a part of the novel, but something that Devi implies as a part of the curious gaze, that shapes the curious gaze of the family members [regarding] what might have happened to Sutara.

The silence is a way of reclaiming the woman's dignity that could have been taken away through too much discussion about the incident in her village, the episode of violence. Didur interrupts this attempted recovery project; she says these silences and ambiguities in women's stories should not be resolved, accounted for, unveiled or recovered, but they should rather be understood as women's inability to subsume their experience within projects of patriarchal modernity that has produced them in the first place.

She is critiquing this imperative to recover. And so, *River Churning* is an outright refusal on the face of trying to recover the woman's experience and she is referring to Gayatri Spivak's suggestion of treating loss as loss. So, we see Poulami Chakraborty talking about the legal definition of rape and the basic incommensurability between female

understanding of rape and legal definition of it. So, how much a woman can talk about an incident that is based on the centrality of the phallus. (Refer Slide Time: 30:08)

Concept of Rape in “The River Churning”

- Poulami Chakraborty - The legal definition of rape, which bases itself on the centrality of the phallus (literally), makes it not only difficult to prove rape in a court of law but constructs a basic incommensurability between female understanding of rape and the legal definition of it.
- Rape is, in this regard, incommensurable to patriarchal rules of representation unless those rules are radically altered.

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She is not only acted upon, but in the entire discourse she occupies a marginal position, where the question of reconstructing or recounting, bringing the incident back or reconstructing the incident through language again is challenging... it's difficult. And the question of believability -- who is going to believe such a woman when she is trying to reconstruct the incident through language. Is there even such a language that exists in a society?

In *The River Churning*, we see that the rape is not at the climax of the plot [but happening] at the outset. (Refer Slide Time: 30:59)

Critical Comments

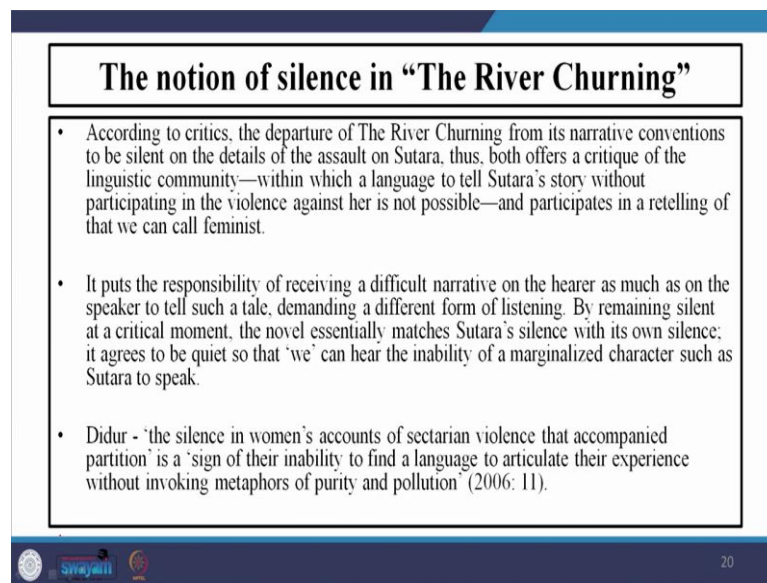
- *The River Churning* - the rape is not at the ‘climax’ of the plot as in the classical masculinist rape narratives (as, for example, in *Clarissa* and *A Passage to India*). *The River Churning* makes ‘the structural location of the rape incident at the beginning of a woman’s story’, which **Sunder Rajan** reads as a way to get to a liberated narrative structure:
[T]he position of the rape scene at the beginning pre-empts expectation of its late(r) occurrence. Not only is the scene of rape diminished by this positioning but it is also granted a more purely functional purpose in the narrative economy, and narrative interest becomes displaced upon what follows. (1993:73)

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The rape incident happens at the beginning and so, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan reads it as a way of getting to /arriving at a liberated narrative structure. Forming or shaping a liberated narrative structure. Sunder Rajan would go on to say that the position of the rape scene at the beginning pre-empts expectation of its later occurrence.

Not only is the scene of rape diminished by this positioning, but it is also granted a more purely functional purpose in the narrative economy, and narrative interest becomes displaced upon what follows. So critics note that the departure of *The River Churning* from the general narrative conventions, where rape is always at the climax, and choosing to be silent on the details of the assault on Sutara, what is the nature of the assault is something that the narrative never gives away.

It is a way of offering a critique of the linguistic community. Is there a language to tell Sutara's story without participating in the violence against her? So, is there a language to tell/recount Sutara's story without abetting, without participating in the violence against her? (Refer Slide Time: 32:30)



The notion of silence in “The River Churning”

- According to critics, the departure of *The River Churning* from its narrative conventions to be silent on the details of the assault on Sutara, thus, both offers a critique of the linguistic community—within which a language to tell Sutara’s story without participating in the violence against her is not possible—and participates in a retelling of that we can call feminist.
- It puts the responsibility of receiving a difficult narrative on the hearer as much as on the speaker to tell such a tale, demanding a different form of listening. By remaining silent at a critical moment, the novel essentially matches Sutara’s silence with its own silence; it agrees to be quiet so that ‘we’ can hear the inability of a marginalized character such as Sutara to speak.
- Didur - ‘the silence in women’s accounts of sectarian violence that accompanied partition’ is a ‘sign of their inability to find a language to articulate their experience without invoking metaphors of purity and pollution’ (2006: 11).

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So, is there a language to tell/recount Sutara's story without abetting, without participating in the violence against her?

It puts the responsibility of receiving a difficult narrative on the hearer as much as on the speaker, demanding a different plane or a different form of listening. So, there is a point where the narrator's silence and Sutara's silence actually resonate. And there is an

agreement to remain quiet, so that we can hear the inability [of] the disabled nature of language in the case of a marginalized character such as Sutara.

Jill Didur would say that the silence in women's accounts of sectarian violence that accompanied partition is a sign of their inability to find a language to articulate their experience without invoking metaphors of purity and pollution and thereby subscribing to the parameters set forth by patriarchy and the patriarchal society. With this, I would like to stop today's lecture and we would meet again with another round of discussions.

Thank you.