IN-BETWEEN SPACES

Culture and Territoriality
in Literature, Art and Cinema

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• Rekha Karim • Rekha E.

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Foreword

The human mindscape has always been fragmented by borders, in spite of the great work done by many visionaries who reiterated the need to create a world free of borders. Of late, the world has shown enthusiasm regarding borders so much so that we even have an area of research and interrogation christened Border Studies. We speak of national, cultural, linguistic, economic, political, social and ideological walls that segregate minds and bodies. And walls, in general, being of a porous nature, offer ample scope for permeation, infiltration and intrusion, thus opening up interesting areas for academic debate and discussion. This book titled *In-Between Spaces: Culture and Territoriality in Literature, Art and Cinema* is a collection of sixteen remarkable essays exploring borders, both visible and invisible, from multifarious dimensions. An interesting compilation of perspectives ranging from the self and identity, to feminism, postcolonialism, partition and diaspora, the book provides a highly comprehensive overview on border issues. I appreciate all the writers who have contributed their essays and very sincerely congratulate the editors for putting in their hard work, dedication and time to bring out this collection.

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Introduction

Cartographers who have attempted to study the history of territoriality accentuate that social spaces with bounded territories are a modern conception. Of late both land and space have become political territories though it is difficult to trace the historical crossroads as to where and when borders of nations became sacrosanct. Borders are in-between spaces which are not comprehended simply as spatial and limited to visible barriers but as sites of pluridimensional confrontations and contestations that include invisible constellations as well. It can only be understood in its context shaped as it is by history, politics, power as well as cultural and social concerns and hence an interdisciplinary field of knowledge. In territorial discourses the concept of border or in-between spaces embodied physical border while boundaries signified barriers both social and symbolic at work in society. But it's high time we thought of a combined approach that focuses simultaneously on social, symbolic and physical barriers and its effect on culture to bring out permeability and opacity of these spaces on the one hand and its multilayeredness and complexity on the other.

The present collection of essays titled *In-Between Spaces: Culture and Territoriality in Literature, Art and Cinema* probes into specificities which mark the in-between spaces in territorial discourses as a domain of sociological, geopolitical, cultural as well as historical complexities and how such spaces have impacted gender equity and feminist epistemologies. Presenting a wide

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spectrum of areas ranging from literature and painting to cinema, this collection explores the modalities of normalization of the policies of inclusion and exclusion that operate at multiple levels in keeping out the undesirables, resulting in increased hostilities, racial anxieties and securitization of not only borders but bodies as well. As mentioned above it is imperative to consider how these intricacies are forged and transacted in films as well as literary and other cultural texts so that the unmapped territories of selfhood, trauma and uncertainty that form part of the border consciousness can be anatomized. The first paper in this collection of essays written by K. V. Satheesh thoroughly investigates the instrument selected for study, Kim Ki-duk's *The Net,* and effectively establishes a comparison between the social dynamics of two nations, one under dictatorship and the other governed by liberal democratic principles by looking at the way in which the protagonist, Nam Chul-Chul-woo, negotiates his identity in two disparate political and ideological spaces. Drawing on the ideas of deterritorialization and reterritorialization the paper discusses the experiences of a miserable North Korean fisherman who accidently strays into the territory of South Korea. It further deliberates in detail on identity as institutionally mediated discourse, on democracy vs dictatorship, sexuality and the ideology of space and differences in reference codes between two societies that belong to a monolingual community.

V. Kezia Anna's paper titled 'Of Borders and Art: Women in the 'Borderscapes' of Nilima Sheikh's Painting' is a refreshingly new attempt on border art. Border art has emerged as a remarkable area of study with the politics of walling in/out, displacement, trauma, memory, migration and nationhood, all making for a multi-dimensional discourse. This paper is a concentrated and comprehensive reading of select paintings of Nilima Sheikh and the ways in which women inhabit the 'borderscapes' of

those paintings. The essay by Muneer M titled '*Paradeshi*: An Interrogation of Partition, Fragmentation and the Muslim Life in India as Depicted in Malayalam Films' posits a challenge to the ways in which the Muslim community, who are already wounded by the Partition, is perceived even after the formation of the two countries. The movie *Paradeshi* gives a kaleidoscopic view of the tormented lives of some representative human beings who are caught in the whirlwind of loss and devastation. The geographical and psychological ramifications of the Partition is too horrendous to be forgotten. The fragmentary nature of human existence and the unanswered questions posed by the movie about the larger dimensions of Muslim life in India become highly crucial.

The next paper in the volume by Rekha E ruminates on the humanitarian crises that are precipitated by ethnic conflicts. The contemporary world is besieged by narrow disputes that occur within the territories or externally, breaking the boundary lines and escalating into severe crisis. The psychological ramifications of such violent conflicts are unfathomable and invariably lead to more aggression on both sides thereby rupturing the stability in the respective regions. The paper by Monica Deidra Mendez on *The Ungrateful Refugee* is a powerful critique of various categories of borders that assail refugees, the displaced migrants or the diasporic communities who have to spend the remaining days of their lives in states of fluidity. The issues of assimilation and identity crises remain largely unresolved. The question of a national culture and the relative position of the migrants in the West is all the more significant in the light of the intolerant and vicious racist attacks on the people perceived as the 'other.'

'Archiving Memories: *Communalism Combat* as a Multimodal Hypernarrative' by Dr Smithi Mohan unties the digital archive *Communalism Combat* as a prospective new media tool to

contribute to cultural memory in a gargantuan way thus competing with the cultural amnesia and the resultant desuetude. An array of archived events from a spectrum of amateur and official sources, depicting riots, victims, politicians and bystanders all contained within a webpage even though the author recounts that only politically potential and potentially political events are remembered and re-membered. It provides an analytical insight into tightly packed hyper-narrative that generates modes of visibility of victims and events which are otherwise swept under the carpet. The paper by Dr Rekha Karim and Nayab Naseer unfolds a Deleuzean model of smooth and striated spaces in the Academy award winning film *Nomadland.* The theoretically informed reading focuses on the ways in which spaces are configured in the film not only at a syntagmatic level where nomadic concord is assumed as an adversative force perceived against despotic power alignments of state apparatus but also on alternative considerations of nomadic spaces that are less anarchic and more structured.

The essay by Simi Hyder Ali aims at critiquing the geo-political as well as the cultural construction of boundaries that negate the established philosophical and value systems in the mad race for power and hegemony. The two countries, India and Pakistan are irrevocably enmeshed in an impasse. The political games emphasize the unscrupulous outlook that crush the human spirit as depicted in the story by Saadat Hasan Manto. The established socio-cultural power structures that function along the lines of patriarchy and male domination have been legitimized by society and the repercussions of this play of power run deep in all the available discourses that characterize caste, gender, class and race. The paper by V.K. Karthika explores the hidden trajectories of power relations that underscore hegemony as depicted in the Malayalam movie *Nandanam.* Various characters possess different motives and it is interesting to see how the concepts of subjugation,

chauvinism and elitism are delineated by subtly analysing the nuances of the film.

Narratives on diaspora are fraught with the tension of conflicting cultures, rigid cultural borders, displacement and the quest for identity. The borderlines of dislocation as portrayed by Bharati Mukherjee in the novel *Jasmine* are the central concerns of the paper by Parvathy Nair. The shifts in the socio-cultural and geo-political domains have a huge impact on the diasporic people who dwell in the hybrid space of fluidity. Territorial divisions are markers of the exclusionary interventions that attempt to either wall in or wall out human existence thereby creating the trauma of dislocation and helplessness. Inherent in the travails of exiles and refugees is the loss of orientation that is augmented by the unbearable anguish felt in the journey of life. The essay by Kochurani Joseph examines the subtleties encountered by refugees in forging their own identity in an atmosphere fraught with political tension. The vicious circle in which the exiles and refugees find themselves exerts a force so powerful that they are trapped by both external as well as internal factors. The sense of desolation that marks their passage into another country needs to be countered by constructive changes in the attitudes of the respective nations.

Predicated on the heterotopic nature of the coastal border of Kerala the article titled 'The Space in between: A Socio-political Mapping of Kerala Coastal Border in the Medieval Period' by Minu Elizabeth George insightfully takes up the centre-periphery model to scrutinize the stratification of coastal borders to understand how power operated in such spaces as compared to the hinterland stretches with the arrival of imperial powers that later eventuated in alterations in the border region, The next essay by Reethi P. on travel narratives to Sino-Indian border uncovers

an area which requires more research. She attempts an empirical understanding of borders to cognize the idea of nation produced in travel narratives and how it becomes a concept of shared imagination, values and culture defined in relation to the 'other' though territory as such is a geographical notion, to be precise a juridico- political one.

The paper 'On Reclaiming Fragmented Histories and Interrogating the Machismo Cult in Partition Narratives' by Dr Rekha Karim and Ameena Siraj critically examines the limitations of previous studies on Partition narratives that predominantly celebrated resilience of man. The article divulges ghostly sub-texts and unutterable nuances underlying the diegesis of Partition by problematizing the silence of women and spectral trace of trauma in two cinematic representations namely *Garam Hava* and *Khamosh Pani.* Currently such a re-examining of Partition which "was difficult to forget but dangerous to remember" (Butalia xiv) is imperative and pertinent as its appalling stories are still re-emerging in new-fangled formats in many current political conflicts.

The next essay on "Feminisms, Borders, Comic Books and Graphic Narratives" written by Dr Aneeta Rajendran looks at the relationship between some graphic novels and comic books that circulate transnationally and ideas of feminism and femininity seen through the prism of India/Indian-ness. This paper analyses the meanings of feminism/feminist work and social transformation presented through and of such globally circulated texts and argues that mythological and fantastic tropes can be interwoven and overlay one another to produce a new lexicon of the super-heroine who is quintessentially "Indian" but whose Indian-ness is limited and contained by variables drawn from only one religion. By selectively highlighting only some parts of Indian

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