



Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition

By Bhaskar Sarkar

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What remains of the “national” when the nation unravels at the birth of the independent state? The political truncation of India at the end of British colonial rule in 1947 led to a social cataclysm in which roughly one million people died and ten to twelve million were displaced. Combining film studies, trauma theory, and South Asian cultural history, Bhaskar Sarkar follows the shifting traces of this event in Indian cinema over the next six decades. He argues that Partition remains a wound in the collective psyche of South Asia and that its representation on screen enables forms of historical engagement that are largely opaque to standard historiography.

Sarkar tracks the initial reticence to engage with the trauma of 1947 and the subsequent emergence of a strong Partition discourse, revealing both the silence and the eventual “return of the repressed” as strands of one complex process. Connecting the relative silence of the early decades after Partition to a project of postcolonial nation-building and to trauma’s disjunctive temporal structure, Sarkar develops an allegorical reading of the silence as a form of mourning. He relates the proliferation of explicit Partition narratives in films made since the mid-1980s to disillusionment with post-independence achievements, and he discusses how current cinematic memorializations of 1947 are influenced by economic liberalization and the rise of a Hindu-chauvinist nationalism. Traversing Hindi and Bengali commercial cinema, art cinema, and television, Sarkar provides a history of Indian cinema that interrogates the national (a central category organizing cinema studies) and participates in a wider process of mourning the modernist promises of the nation form.

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- Sales Rank: #1035859 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duke University Press Books
- Published on: 2009-06-01
- Released on: 2009-05-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .96" w x 6.13" l, 1.35 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 384 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

“A thoroughly absorbing, beautifully written, and forcefully argued account, this book is a major contribution to the flourishing field of Indian film studies.” - Sumita S. Chakravarty, *International Journal of Asian Studies*

“This is one of the most provocative books that has been published in recent years on Indian films.” - Pankaj Jain, *The Journal of Asian Studies*

“*Mourning the Nation* is an important and timely book that seeks to explore the impact of the 1947 partition of British India on Indian filmmaking. . . . On conclusion I felt that I had read something worthwhile, that has added to my knowledge of the Indian cinema and provided a new critical lens through which to gaze upon and think about the vibrant industry that is at last gaining a place in the critical arena. *Mourning the Nation* ensures this and is highly recommended.” - Brian Shoesmith, *Screening the Past*

“[Sarkar’s] study of Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition addresses not only Partition’s impact upon, and representation in, Indian cinema, but also the concepts of nationhood, and of loss and mourning, with such acuity and vigour that . . . [it] is likely to impact well beyond the study of its specific subject. . . . [B]old and audacious. . . .” - Scott Jordan Harris, *Scope*

“Sarkar’s bringing together Hindi (national) and Bengali (regional) films under the rubric of mourning for Partition will make this book essential reading for South Asianists. . . . This is a landmark book within Partition studies. . . .” - Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Interventions*

“*Mourning the Nation* argues for the profound and lasting imprint left by Partition on India’s post-independence culture. Bhaskar Sarkar analyzes films for traces of broken families, dispersed lives, and restless destinies. Taking the reader along unconventional routes and settling on metaphorical sites for his excavation, he never produces less than stimulating arguments. And he provides the reader with a lively entry point for considering how current changes in the Indian economy and polity since globalization have brought some of these crucial issues back into public debate in distinctive ways.”—**Ravi Vasudevan**, editor of *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*

“Centered on the simultaneous repression and representation of India’s Partition, arguably the defining event of modern South Asian studies, *Mourning the Nation* provides the most sophisticated theoretical approach to Indian cinema to date. It will be impossible for future work on Indian popular culture not to reckon with Bhaskar Sarkar’s text, and its broadly suggestive discourse of mourning, loss, and trauma will extend its relevance to scholars from disciplines and areas with little direct interest in Indian film.”—**Corey K. Creekmur**, co-editor of *Cinema, Law, and the State in Asia*

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From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Bhaskar Sarkar is an assistant professor of film studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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