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Articles



Ruth Laila Schmidt

The Transformation of a Naga Prince Tale 1–15

This paper analyses a traditional folktale recorded in the Shina language of Indus Kohistan in Pakistan. The tale features as its main protagonist an intelligent, resourceful and courageous woman. Other versions of the tale can be found in Kashmir, the Western Himalayas and the Panjab, but these either do not have a female protagonist, or do not give such a prominent role to the heroine. This strong depiction of female agency contrasts with the subordinate role of women in Kohistani society, who are relegated to domestic and agricultural work – a role which has been reinforced by the Islamic beliefs of the Deobandi sect.

Most versions of the story describe a supernatural serpent that turns into a prince or brings fortune to its rescuer. In the Kohistani tale, this magic serpent is interpreted as a mountain fairy, thus linking the tale to pre-Islamic beliefs found in the region of the Hindu Kush, defined as “Peristan” by Alberto and Augusto Cacopardo (*Gates of Peristan. History, Religion and Society in the Hindu Kush*, 2001). At the same time, many devices are used to give the story a more acceptably Islamic flavour.

Keywords: Kohistan – Hindu Kush – women’s folktales – Deobandi Islam
– serpent beliefs – mountain fairies

Sanjukta Dasgupta

Narrating Gender: Tradition and Transgression
in Tagore’s Fiction 17–32

Tagore’s short stories script the steady emergence of the Bengali New Woman, literate, intelligent and vocal. The stories critiqued in this paper can be regarded as resistance texts. These transgressive stories configure the agency of women, hitherto relegated to the margins.

Keywords: Identity – literacy – women’s education – transgression – religion

Blanka Knotková-Čapková

Witches and Rebels:

Archaic Beliefs and Their Misuse by the Power Discourse

(in selected Bengali texts) 33–47

The female literary character of “the witch” appears frequently in various genres – myths, fairy tales and also modern stories. When conceptualizing this character type from the perspective of a gender/feminist analysis, we have to include methodological approaches of feminist spirituality (theology) as well as a secular gender analysis of religion and literature. There is no general homogeneous opinion on the issue as to whether gender and feminist studies are one discipline or two different ones. I am not denying that the notion of ‘feminist’ usually evokes a closer connection to the political/ideological aspects, and, from the historical point of view, may even seem to be not an appropriate name for the discipline today, as current feminisms do not thematise only female identities but gender identities as a whole. Still, the methodological background of gender and feminist studies is one – feminist theories. I am using here the two notions mainly with regard to this common methodological source.

In myths and fairy tales, the witch is a magical being, supernatural, demonic – and mostly gendered. Its female image personifies destructive power/s, homologized with the essential feminine (see below). In modern literary texts, the female witch type is secular and human, but keeps the features of the destructive archetype – she is an evil, dangerous character who should be disciplined by the “right order.” In this article, I am first going to introduce the methodological starting points of the above-mentioned analytical approaches, and shall then apply them to some selected Bengali literary texts. As will become evident, the concept of the witch as a supernatural, magical being (rebellious against the divine power order), and that of a disobedient, mundane woman (rebellious against the secular, human power order) may overlap. Both the orders are androcentric.

Keywords: Gender – feminism – literature – archetype – witch – Hinduism
– subversion – Mahāśvetā Debī

Theo Damsteegt

Mahābhārata and Emergency: Girirāj Kiśor’s Play

Prajā hī rahne do 49–66

Through an analysis of some of the dialogues in a play by Girirāj Kiśor based on the *Mahābhārata*, this article shows that one of the themes of the play is that of subjects being dominated by a ruler and protesting against that dominance. The analysis also shows how a woman, Draupadī, has conversational power over men in the dialogues in which she participates. In her statements, she identifies with the people rather than the royal family into which she has married.

The play is found to argue against the extreme dominance of a ruler over his subjects, and was thus acutely relevant at the time it was written and first performed, in 1976, a time when Indira Gandhi had abolished democratic rights during the Emergency.

Keywords: Draupadī – *dharma* – dialogue analysis – Indira Gandhi – democracy
– Emergency – Hindi drama – *Mahābhārata*

Anne Castaing

“Gender Trouble” in the New Hindi Novel:
The Ambiguous Writings on Womanhood in K. B. Vaid’s *Līlā*
and Mridula Garg’s *Kaṭhgulāb* 67–88

Some recent studies aim at highlighting the way post-independence Indian literature can reveal the ambiguities linked to the representation of the “self,” whose “Indianness” rested on both indigenous and exogenous sources, in a continuous dialogue with Western form of discourses (Marxism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism, for example). The gender issue remained nevertheless relatively excluded from these debates. It is undeniable that the development of Western feminist discourses and Gender Studies since the 1960s, from Simone de Beauvoir to Judith Butler, significantly modified the representation of woman and womanhood. Indeed, in the field of social science, many studies aim at deconstructing the mythic model of the docile and silent “Oriental” woman, represented by the figure of Sītā, and at underlining, even stimulating her empowerment, thus radically opposing the passivity of Indian traditional women with a militant feminism nurtured by the ideal of gender equality and even gender indetermination.

Nevertheless, cultural forms, performances or productions can reveal porosities between these two opposed representations. By exploring two recent Hindi novels (K. B. Vaid’s *Līlā*, 1990, and Mridula Garg’s *Kaṭhgulāb*, 1996), whose polyphonic structure allows the empowerment of women within the narrative space, this paper aims at underlining the way literary feminism can also rest on a composite and complex representation of womanhood which constantly re-negotiates its models and can also be nourished by traditional sources. The gender question and the fluidity of this notion are not only echoed, but also find their roots in an indigenous mythical ethos, whose paradigms cannot be reduced to an essential manhood and womanhood. This paper thus interrogates the cultural specificities of this “gender trouble” in the Indian context, showing that feminism in this particular background can lay on a re-interpretation of traditions rather than on a radical break with them.

Keywords: India – Hindi – novel – feminism – gender – womanhood – stereotypes
– identity – Indianness

Dagmar Marková

What Can Indian Film Thrillers Tell the Viewer? 89–101

Most recent Indian films, independent or Bollywood productions, even the most commercial, seek to provide Indian viewers with something of the wider social context. In particular, the message is one of love for one's country regardless of religion and specific Indian ties of love within the family. It is possible to present all of this in a thrilling way. For the European viewer, there is always an insight into the Indian mentality.

Keywords: Indian film – Bollywood – film thriller

Claudia Preckel

Hey Ram! Oh God! Communal Riots and Religious
Fundamentalism as Depicted in a Partition Film 103–118

In South Asia, hardly any historical subject is discussed with such emotion as the Partition of 1947. In the new millennium, after many decades of almost complete silence, writers and film directors (not only) in India have started dealing with 1947. One of the film directors who is keen to show the effects of death, loss and pain on the individual as well the entire Indian nation is the Tamil director Kamal Hāsan. His film *Hey Ram!* (He Rām!, 2000) is set against the backdrop of the Partition and the assassination of Gandhi in 1947 and the destruction of the Bābrī Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, which led to a wave of violence and communal riots throughout India. The (Hindu) protagonist, Saket Rām, an archaeologist, is traumatised after his wife is killed by Muslims in Calcutta. Later, Saket Rām is deeply influenced by the proponents of hindutva and he even plans to shoot Gandhi. Only an unexpected encounter with his Muslim friend stops him...

The paper aims at analysing the role of religions as portrayed in the film. Special focus is put on the roots of religious fundamentalism and the question as to whether Hāsan blames anybody for the outbreak of communal violence. Another important issue is the role of history in the prevention of violence.

Keywords: Partition – history – communalism – Islam (South Asia) – Hinduism
– hindutva – religion – religious fundamentalism

Book Reviews and Notes

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of Tamil Dalit Writing.

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