



Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS)

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Report on the MMIAS Senior Fellow Lecture 2023-2024
Through the Looking Glass and the Prismatic Lens: 1947 Earth,
A Backward Glance
by Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran, Senior Fellow, MMIAS
29th November 2023

The Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS), University of Mumbai, had organised the Senior Fellow Lecture 2023-2024 on *Through the Looking Glass and the Prismatic Lens: 1947 Earth, A Backward Glance* by MMIAS Senior Fellow Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran on 29th November 2023.

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Co-Director, MMIAS, University of Mumbai, welcomed all participants and introduced Professor Sridhar as the MMIAS Senior Fellow and his lecture as the first of the two formal Public Lectures that he shall deliver as part of his appointment as MMIAS Senior Fellow.



I-r: Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha and Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran

Professor Sridhar's lecture focussed on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* as a horrific memory of the Partition of 1947 and Deepa Mehta's reimagination of that memory in *Earth 1947*.

Professor Sridhar started by giving the schema of the talk. He defined the title of his presentation which focused on the traumatic event in terms of time and partition in terms of place or geography. He observed how narratives based on memory and post-memory are distance and time relevant and not possible otherwise. He explained the terms 'Looking Glass' and 'Looking through the Glass', the first part of his title, and how they reflect the memory of the trauma as horrific and not beautiful. The next part, 'Prismatic Lens', talks about how stories are told through light, lens and prism, that is cinema.

The second part of his title 'Earth 1947, A Backward Glance' talks about the traumatic event in history in terms of time, that is, 1947, and also as a spatial event, Earth, that was ruptured by a line denoting partition. He elaborated on how freedom was tainted by blood and death of millions of people. He spoke of how people had become discordant and there was dissonance all around. With regard to the title of his presentation, he discussed how the 'backward glance' belonged to Deepa Mehta. Professor Sridhar explained the origin of 'backward glance' in Walter Benjamin's, 'eyes staring, mouth open, wing-arrested Angelous novus', impelled backwards into the future and is powerless to stem the wreckage, awaken the dead or make whole what has been smashed.

Professor Sridhar then gave an overview of the author Bapsi Sidhwa of *Cracking India* and filmmaker Deepa Mehta of *1947 Earth*. The former captured the traumatic event of partition through words while the latter, who received it as re-memory, captured it through her lens.

After giving an overview of the author and film maker, Professor Sridhar gave the audience a detailed analysis of the novel *Cracking India* in which he cited examples from the book, which has been written from the point of view of a crippled child who witnessed partition.

Following the discussion on the various aspects of the book, Professor Sridhar spoke about Deepa Mehta's *1947 Earth*. He spoke of how Mehta uses the trope of a woman to narrate the story of a nation that was then undivided India. The woman is also representative at one level of the nation as the nation is feminine. He further analysed in detail the plot of the film. Professor Sridhar not only discussed the storyline but also the film as a medium and technique. He spoke in depth on the techniques used by Deepa Mehta to make it a cinematic experience for the viewer.

Professor Sridhar concluded his talk by talking about the similarities and differences between Bapsi Sidhwa and Deepa Mehta. He also posed some fundamental questions which were discussed in the Question and Answer session that followed the talk.

The lecture concluded with Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha's remarks on Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran's presentation. She congratulated Professor Sridhar for making a unique presentation.

The lecture was conducted in a hybrid mode. Professor Sridhar presented from the MMIAS office on the Kalina campus of the University of Mumbai, and it was telecast on Zoom for online participants. Students and faculty from the University of Mumbai's departments attended the lecture offline.



Faculty and students of the University of Mumbai's departments

The event concluded with refreshments for all present.

[Click here](#) to view the entire lecture on the MMIAS YouTube channel.

Place: Mumbai

Date: 29th November 2023