

Conférence

Organisée par Eileen Williams-Wanquet, ERASMUS et le CRLHOI

Tolerance or Engagement ?

Ethnic Tensions in Contemporary Indian Writing and Cinema

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The bloody events associated with the partition of the Indian subcontinent lurk behind many novels and films about India's multicultural make-up. Ever since 1947 and the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan, novelists and film directors in the Indian subcontinent have tackled the very thorny issue of ethnic tensions with a certain degree of trepidation but with a clear desire to heal the wounds and move on. Cultural productions have shown that minorities, even when they choose to identify themselves as self-contained groups, impervious to the mainstream culture – such as India's Muslim community – cannot exist in isolation. They must find themselves caught up in relationships with the majority cultures at the social, political and economic level. Tolerance works in both directions, and resistance to interact with the other, regardless of the other's political power, can only be interpreted as an act of disapproval. At the extreme end of the spectrum lies an active response to the Other and a conscious desire to engage with the intricacies of difference. This lecture seeks to unravel some of the recipes for ethnic conviviality presented in a selection of Indian novels and films. The cultural productions chosen for discussion are three films: *Dil Se* (dir. Mani Ratnam, 1998), *Mr & Mrs. Iyer* (dir. Aparna Sen, 2002) and *Fanaa* (dir. Kunal Kohli, 2006) and three novels: Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (1988), Bapsi Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man* (1988) and Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (2006).

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