



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 10 - HISTORY AND ALTERNATIVE MEMORY WRITINGS

DR.SARBANI BANERJEE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



PARTITION AND THE SUBALTERN

- The Other or Woman is constituted outside and she is unaccounted for in the symbolic order of the nation.
- She is important because her corporeal presence and her temporality resist ossified symbolisation, turning into persistent remainders of the historical material that escape the linear and teleological timeframe of the nation. This remainder that cannot be symbolised by the existing interplay of political forces disrupts and destabilises.
- Subaltern presences are characterised by a surplus of temporal potentiality that can reorganise the nation's relationship to its past.

- The nation and its hegemonic history writing does not always want to recognise these abject presences and their alternative temporalities, as acknowledging them would introduce a bifurcation into the causal path of the linear and teleological national time.
- The subaltern has disruptive potentialities in the enactment of the political through the temporal disruption, such as by evoking the question who belongs to the political community and who is cast out.
- The Subaltern corporeal temporality disturbs the singular form of the national truth through introducing the political potential embedded in multiple parallel temporal universes, challenging the nation's myth of being a singular unitary subject.
- The fusing of the national 'true' past with the subaltern past causes differences and destabilises the already established teleologically determined narrative.

- Homi Bhabha - subaltern's presence and temporality reveal the ambivalence that structures the national linear time. Their *durée* provides the potential for the national hegemonic past to be made out as not necessarily true, and it is this that creates memory capable of activating a new future.
- The moment of subaltern telling their story in public shatters the hegemonic distribution of the post-independent national history and truth. Her presence debunks the ruptures that cut through the national body politic.
- The subaltern's discontinuous temporality brings forth the other pasts and presences and renders visible the continuous reimagining and reproduction underplaying the imagined unitary national identity.
- Their temporality shifts political judgment and entails that the criteria for history and national identity be negotiated anew.

- She/He enables herself/himself and their kind to be seen and heard as speaking subjects and engages in a radical political practice that displaces the limits of social exclusions. Political struggle in this sense is the struggle for one's voice to be recognised as the voice of a legitimate partner.
- Badri Narain Tewari - studies the memorial stones and shrines in different regions of Uttar Pradesh that commemorate the Dalit heroes and their significant role in the events of 1857. For the Dalit in the region, these minor monuments are sacred structures that commemorate the stories and legends of the heroes from their community.
- These structures symbolize an alternative history of the marginalized Dalit rebels from 1857. Some of these stones are called 'shahid baba' by the local villagers and regularly offered home-made sweets like 'thekua' as a form of worship status of demi-god to Dalit icons.

- By the early 1980s, a new historiographical school emerged and challenged existing assumptions; writers such as Ranajit Guha pioneered the study of Indian history 'from below'. The Subaltern Studies School, as they came to be known, sought to provide an alternative history from the populist nationalist struggle that was being depicted. By the early 1990s the impact of this approach started to permeate Partition Studies and resulted in a shift away from the 'great men of history' approach towards a 'history from below.'
- Focus on refugee experiences and actions during and after the partition reveal a significant historiographical shift in theorizing the nature of migrations induced by the Partition. For instance, the recent emphasis on oral history narratives as a means of recovering the alternative experiences of Partition reveal how the master narratives may exclude or marginalize narratives of other groups.

- Dalits who migrated to West Punjab and Delhi were from many different sub-castes, groups with distinct identities and caste professions. For example, many of them were 'ex- Criminal Tribes' in West Punjab till the 'Criminal Tribes Act' was repealed in 1952. The 'criminal tribe' refugees were later added to the list of schedule castes.
- The use of oral history and memory opens up new discussions on the differential experience(s) of Dalits of the 1947 Partition. Dalits remain the less discussed in the contexts of Partition and are the ones that have put up with the worst form of ramifications.
- The real accounts of Dalit refugees show how the Bhils in Delhi have all migrated from West Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur.



- Bhil Basti is a refugee colony of West Delhi. The narratives of these refugees reveal that they were not allotted houses or even huts from the government unlike the 'upper' caste refugees. They mostly lived in jhuggies (slum dwellings of a non-permanent nature) when they came from Pakistan, and worked at the quarry site where they settled down temporarily. This settlement near Karol Bagh area eventually transformed into the colony called Bhil Basti and has pucca constructed houses.
- The Dalit narrative of the 'first' freedom struggle is filled with stories about brave women martyrs belonging to suppressed communities like Jhalkaribai, Avantibai, Pannadhai, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi.

- Historiography of the Partition of India and historical narratives generally focuses on violence among religious groups, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In these narratives, Dalits, more often than not, find themselves being silenced, where they are treated as a subset of Hindus or Sikhs.
- It is a general notion that Dalits were not targeted for their caste identity but only for their religious beliefs. One reason for the perception is the belief that both the sides, India and Pakistan, valued them as low wage workers to work in the agricultural fields and industries. Thus, Dalits find themselves at the periphery in all the narratives of the Partition discussed in academia or literature.

-



- When communal representation politics entered in India religious conversion became a political tool and made Dalits suffer. On the one hand it enabled Dalits to increase their bargaining power. On the other, they became a target of representative politics: Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. They competed with each other to attract and patronize Dalits within their fold, thereby enhancing and replenishing their numerical representation.
- In PEPSU (The Patiala and East Punjab States Union; which was a state of India uniting eight princely states between 1948 and 1956), Dalits were found to have been attacked and brutalized in the census related disturbances. Dalits were attacked by the Hindus and Sikhs.

Thank You

