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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 23 – WOMAN IN THE CONTEXT OF PARTITION

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Newspaper journalists and attorneys, particularly the government-backed ones, dramatised and elaborated the situation, turning communal tensions into a daily problem.
- K.K. Mitra presided over the founding of the **Women's Protection League**, which was preceded by a meeting of the **Indian Journalists Association**. P.K. Sankar of the newly formed **ABP** and **Basumati** expressed homage to those who helped in the anti-abduction campaign.
- Through their headlines, newspapers with a monopoly on the portrayal of the daily happenings effectively created a **typical homogenous paradigm of diverse abduction incidents**.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- The term "**Muslim goondas**" came to be used to refer to all Muslims. The problem of abduction provided a forum for forming a network between Hindu reformers/communalists and low caste groups, which was an attempt at homogenizing the Hindu community.
- Even before they renamed themselves **Namasudras**, the **Chandals** forbade their ladies from going to the marketplace.
- The attempt to prevent widow remarriage was another indication of this desire to make women subject to genealogical determination.
- The **Rajbansi** publicist, **Chandreshwar Ray**, enacted laws prohibiting widow remarriage and women from going to the marketplace.

Women's Caste and Gender

- **Joanna Liddle** and **Rama Joshi** - a traditionally “lower-caste” man asserts his signs of social improvement and economic success by adapting to cultural mannerisms of the “upper-caste,” and its starting point is the body of the woman.
- Liddle and Joshi - increased upward mobility among individuals or a group is directly proportional to greater control over women's bodies.
- Such control manifests through “women's disinheritance from immovable property in the form of land, and their exclusion from productive economy, involving removal from public life to the domestic sphere of the home in the form of seclusion or purdah.”

Women's Caste and Gender

- **Hutton** – stepping up in terms of caste is purely a male-centric benefit, at the cost of greater hardship for women, such that the meaning of caste practices does not apply uniformly to all members of a given group.
- The *Chandala* is ranked the lowest in the Indian caste hierarchical ladder because the group originates from sexual union between a Sudra (“low-born”) man and a Brahmin (“high-born”) woman. *Chandala* is the symptom of the greatest possible subversion of patriarchal rules that safeguard “social exclusiveness” and “biological purity.”

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- For the Namsudras, the widow remarriage issue was so crucial that it contributed to a schism among them in 1922.
- As Panchanan Barma becomes the first Rajbansi lawyer and hence part of high Hinduism, his social and professional dependence on high castes revealed and formed Bangiya Jana Sangha, in collaboration with upper caste reformers like U.N. Mukherjee and Digindra Narayan Bhattacharya, dedicating the organization to the cause of **inter-caste alliance**.
- The Kshatriya Samiti campaign against abductions predated the **Women's Protection League** efforts.
- Women's Protection League dominated by prominent upper caste figures.



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- It was Panchanan Barma who first publicised the issue of raising it in the Legislative Council.
- Abduction stories flooded the pages of the *Kshatriya* by 1924, and Panchanan Barma continued to record abductions by Muslims in the second half of 1925, which were translated and published by the *Patrika*. On this issue, the Hindu Mahasabha trailed the Kshatriya Samiti.
- Women's Protection League dominated by prominent upper caste figures.
- Honour is one of the main categories of patriarchal civilizations by which women's subjugation is translated as an affront to the male, although honour has a distinct register depending on one's social station.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Dramatising Muslim control as a threat to the Hindu male identity itself.
- 'Abductions' as a means of communalising relations among women through suppression of many gender-related questions.
- Choice of only certain cases by the newspaper was ideological. Reports evince the collective character of male violence.
- The sheer volume of Muslim action in abduction cases would drown out the involvement of Hindu cops (as in the **Suhasini case**) or Muslim women's shelter providers (**Kushtea case**)

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- **Zoya Hasan** - The Shah Bano case, which involved an elderly Muslim woman's petition for support from her former husband, had reached the Supreme Court. To appease hardliner Muslim sentiment, then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi rejected the previous affirmative judgement.
- Muslims are considered as a homogeneous and monolithic community, with the state's backing strengthened at the expense of Muslim women's interests.
- Tablighi Jamaat, a preaching Islamic reform organisation active in South Asia, is strongly egalitarian and condemns many institutional norms that promote gender inequality.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Some critics argue that religion's impact on women's lives is overblown - **Katy Gardner**: In defining the meaning and relevance of *parda* for Muslim women in Bangladesh, religion is less important than class.
- Religious influences are so deeply interwoven in women's lives that they cannot differentiate it from other forces.
- Women do not have united identities or interests due to differences in women's autonomy and activity. For example, the rape victims of **Bangladesh Civil War** were poor sections whereas most feminist hail from urban middle class background.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- **Menon:** Post-partition, the abducted women free themselves while also seeking to stay within structure of families of their own making - and women of the Hindutva movement seek to restore Hindu men in position of dominance in the family and society.
- The **fundamentalist traditionalism** - ostensibly contemporary political objectives interspersed some **extremely puritanical, orthodox views** about women's role in society.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- **Barbabra Metcalf** finds link between fundamentalism and nationalism. Women who engage in activism do not necessarily mobilize against patriarchal domination. Example: Hindu or Muslim nationalist women.
- **Patricia Jeffrey** - Women's agency may improve, yet they may be worse off than before.
- According to Jeffrey, women should channelize the energy they invest on protecting their families, communities and nations towards creating several liberating possibilities.

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Immediate post-partition - When national borders were shifting, women had an extraordinary amount of autonomy in choosing their marital partners. But after India and Pakistan were formed, the state assumed the role of protector and provider, insisting on establishing where women and their children belonged.
- Nationalist women who have committed in nationalised mobilization are engaging in causes that may not serve their own rights (**a paradox**).

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Women not only victims of larger socio-political processes. The middle class expresses the agency through freedom they derive from *purdah*, whereas poor sections through songs and rituals that defy prescriptions.
- Ethnic and religious differences also hinder women's solidarity. Communal divide limit the women, who are themselves bearers/practitioners of communal stereotypes. (Complicity in communal violence).

Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- **Feldman** (for Bangladesh) and **Rouse** (for Pakistan) - Islamic movements are a response to women's increased economic independence.
- It is possible that a woman either privileges her ethnic/communal identities, or their interest as women, i.e., **in terms of gender.**

Thank You

