



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 33 - HOME AND NOSTALGIA

DR. SARBANI BANERJEE
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Partition as Cartographic Lines

- Cartography - art, science, and technology of expressing the known physical features of a geographical space through maps, charts, three-dimensional models and globes.
- The study of bias, influence, and agenda in making a map is what comprise a map's deconstruction. A central tenet of deconstructionism is that maps have power.
- Cultural influences dominate map-making- certain abstracts on maps and the map-making society itself describe the social influences on the production of maps- how states engage in the consolidation of a group of people into a nation to solidify their territorial holdings.



- According to deconstructionist models, cartography was used for strategic purposes associated with imperialism and as instruments and representations of power during the conquest of Africa. The depiction of Africa has been interpreted as imperialistic and a symbolic of subjugation due to the diminished proportions of certain regions compared to Europe.
- In the case of Africa, maps furthered imperialism and colonization through showing basic information like roads, natural resources, settlements, and communities. Maps made European commerce in Africa possible by showing potential commercial routes and made extraction of natural resource possible by depicting locations of resources.
- Maps also enabled military conquests and made them more efficient, and imperial nations used them to put their conquests on display.

- The plan to partition India was announced on June 3, 1947, but the new border was not made public until August 17—two days after Partition took place. At the start of this period, India and Pakistan were not commonly understood as separate nation-states, but were vastly more ambiguous and complicated ideological conceptions.
- Indians rallied behind local political leaders, mailing them maps—often sketched on paper and sometimes even carved in wood—expressing their hopes for the future of their country (Khan 2017, *The Great Partition*, 43). At the same time, the ‘real’ lines that would divide the colony were being drawn by Radcliffe.
- Army cartographers had chosen to draw map features that would ultimately have greater influence over the partition line than the political, social or ecological relationships. Indeed, the final border would separate people from their lands, families and communities, provoking a mass migration of millions (Kosinski & Elahi 1985 6).

- The idea that India's Muslims should be considered a nation apart from followers of other religions was first recorded in 1888; Muslim as a nation was first attached to territory in 1930; and the first call to create an independent state was put forward in 1933. In 1947, the nation-state of Pakistan was carved out of the British Indian Empire.
- India's Muslim leaders didn't only imbue an existing nationalism with aspirations towards statehood—they actually defined and oversaw the production of this nationalism, mapped its claim to territory and then roused its development into a state. This entire process took fifty nine years, and maps didn't just document this transformation, they functioned as a key enabler of the process.
- Contentions over the India-Pakistan border have led to three wars since Partition, frequent stand-offs between the two nuclear armed countries, and an ongoing occupation of Kashmir—which today is the most militarized region on Earth (Bhat 2019, "The Kashmir Conflict and Human Rights," *Race & Class*, 61(1), p. 78).
- Cartography is used to develop and translate imperial, political and religious ideas into geographic imaginaries, which then produce effects on the ground.

- Radcliffe's lack of knowledge of India was considered an asset in the boundary-making process, because it was assumed that anyone who had studied or visited India was bound to be predisposed to one side or the other (Lapierre & Collins 1999, *Freedom at Midnight*, p. 227).
- The members of the Punjab Boundary Commission held public hearings, where all concerned parties were asked to propose how they believed Punjab should be partitioned. This process was rife with casteism; influential groups like Congress and the Muslim League could present their case in person, while those with less political clout, such as the Dalits, could only submit their arguments in writing (Chester 2009, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia*, p. 58).
- Radcliffe drew out the boundaries on maps with inadequate detail, with no first-hand knowledge of the territory, nor with any input from the people who lived there, and with only textual and visual references (surveys and statistics compiled by British agencies) to guide his hand.

- Mountbatten in his last exchange with officials in London before Partition: “Let the Indians have the joy of their Independence Day, they can face the misery of the situation after” (Lapierre & Collins 1999, *Freedom at Midnight*, p. 286).
- Mountbatten’s decision to keep the borders secret meant that even as the dominions of India and Pakistan legally came into existence, and independence celebrations took hold of the subcontinent, the leaders of these new states did not know the extents of territory and population they now governed, and the public at large did not know which state their homes fell into.
- *Dawn*, a newspaper founded by Jinnah as the Muslim League’s mouthpiece, declared it “territorial murder” (Butalia 1998, *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 85). The cleaving of Indian territorial space ruptured its unravelling body politic, as the confusion surrounding the border gave way to violence.
- As groups discovered what side of the border their communities fell on, they set out to affirm or contest the contours Radcliffe designed. Murder and rape were deployed to eliminate, drive out and lay claim to the territory occupied by opposing ethnic groups.
- ‘Proper’ borders were marked on the ground using dead bodies, as “the dead, thereby became signals to the living of the construction of ethnic boundaries” (Mayaram 1996, ‘Speech, Silence and the Making of Partition Violence in Mewat’, *Subaltern Studies IX*, 149).

- Religious groups who found themselves in the minority abandoned their homes and began to move, packed together in trains or by foot in immense kafilas (caravans), towards the country where their community formed the majority.
- The border, demarcated on the basis of “ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims”, acted as a filter through which either side could only identify the other by their religious affiliation.(Tarar, *Mapping Partition: The Cartographic Construction of Pakistan* , 57).
- Emergence of a material formation (the border), derived from a particular marker of identity (religion), lead to the ascendance of that marker in the constitution of the body politic (who belongs to India or Pakistan). The sanctity of these body politic could be preserved through transference and obliteration of bodies who did not fit such molds (Tarar, 57).

- Radcliffe's map is symbolic of British imperialism and Orientalism in South Asia. It flattened lands and people into legible taxonomies and was callously applied from a distance. It is also imbued with power in that its declarations took precedence over the aspirations, demands and livelihoods of the common people.
- The map's power is enabled by it being a product of the broader legal framework of British imperial control. It is a container of power in setting forth the instructions that imperial (and later national) agencies executed.
- The survey map, produced as an instrument to aid British administration, depicts Punjab as a land which is home to infrastructures instead of people. Radcliffe held the preservation of infrastructural links, not social relations, as the only criterion in determining the new border.
- Matthew H. Edney: "meaning is invested in all aspects of cartography: in the instrumentation and technologies wielded by the geographer; in the social relations within which maps are made and used; and, in the cultural expectations which define, and which are defined by, the map image" (1997, p. 2).

- Matthew Edney writes in his detailed history of British cartography in South Asia, “many aspects of India's societies and cultures remained beyond British experience,” and thus “India could never be entirely and perfectly known” (Edney 1997, p. 2).
- In their survey maps, the British merely “mapped the India that they perceived and that they governed” (Edney, 1997, p. 2). The ‘India’ these maps depicted was later taken up uncritically by nationalist leaders as a conception which preceded the Raj (Edney, 1997, p. 15). It served as the territorial foundation for the aspirations and demands of their movements.
- Maps continue to be the dominant method of communicating spatial information, though they are now updated and circulated at incredible pace over the internet. The India-Pakistan border, though clearly visible from space, still continues to be negotiated on maps.

- Users in India are shown a custom world map in which all of Kashmir, even the regions controlled by Pakistan and China, are depicted as a part of India using a solid outline.
- Those located in Pakistan are shown a 'global' variant of the map which depicts the various contestations over Kashmir using dashed lines.
- This shifting border on Google Maps demonstrates that even the most 'authorial' sources of maps can offer information that is incongruent with the ground-truth, and deliberately misleading in their attempt at catering to local nationalisms.

- In a critique of Anderson's notion of an 'imagined community,' Partha Chatterjee asks that if "nationalists in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (Chatterjee 1991, 'Whose Imagined Community?', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30(3), p. 521).
- In an attempt to rewrite India in terms of a univocal narrative of modern nationalism that is supposedly secular and hostile to all other forms of identity, alternative ideas of the self, be they religious, regional, linguistic, or ethnic, are rendered spurious, reactionary, and vestigial (Krishna 1994, 507).

Thank You

