



IIT ROORKEE



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CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 34 - HOME AND NOSTALGIA

DR. SARBANI BANERJEE
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Partition as Fractured Identity

- The production of national identity is a contested process. Struggle is involved in producing citizens out of unmanageable accounts by common people, much of what passes for history in modern times.
- In India, the process has been accompanied by an enormous degree of violence, both physical and epistemic. Universality of cartographic metaphors, the production of the inside-outside rhetoric along the borders of the country, reveal the epistemic and physical violence that accompanies the enterprise of nation-building. Encounters between the state and the people along frontiers is suggestive of the disputed nature of sovereign identity.
- Cartographic anxiety as a facet of a larger postcolonial anxiety: a society suspended forever in the space between the "former colony" and "not-yet-nation." (Krishna, *Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India*, 508).



- “As the physical map of India gains ubiquity as an iconic representation of the body politic, it becomes the terrain for competing efforts to define, and possess, the self”(Krishna 510).
- “The operation of the inside/outside antinomy serves not so much to prevent "foreign infiltration" as it does to discipline and produce the "domestic(ated) self” (513).
- People’s lives along the borders of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are abstracted by the discourses of citizenship, sovereignty, and terror. Fluid definitions of space and place prevail in the midst of efforts to hegemonize territory.
- Gyanendra Pandey – preoccupation with 'statist' history glosses over the experiences of ordinary people in the partition episode, condemning them to lifeless statistics.
- Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya - the topography of places transformed due to the partition. Localities and places become meaningful as "socially constructed entities invested with a range of meanings by the people who inhabited them” (2000, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, 16).

- People's association with their places, which post-partition existed only in the realm of memory and came to be embedded in the consciousness, powerfully shaped their subsequent life.
- The cross migration of the communities – mainly Hindus and Muslims had far reaching repercussions and maladjustments in the social stratification, which impacted the industrial economy.
- Short distance between Lahore and Amritsar turned into an interminable journey as the uprooted population traversed an unknown path filled with apprehensions about leaving a chapter of their lives behind, towards an unseen future where they would be turned from prosperous gentlemen into struggling "refugees", a homeless humanity seeking rehabilitation (Maini, 'Partitioned Localities, Fractured Identities: A Historical Reconstruction, ' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 2002, 796).



- Amartya Sen – “[The] varying interpretations [of “Indian identity”] share an inclusionary reading of Indian identity that tolerates, protects and indeed celebrates diversity within a pluralist India. [...] [T]hey shared a general refusal to privilege any narrowly circumscribed perspective (such as an exclusively religious approach, or more specifically, a Hindu view)” (Sen 2005, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, 348).
- The “idea” of the nation was undermined from its very inception as the cohesiveness of the nation was jeopardized by the nationalist discourses that shaped it. In the four decades that followed Independence, the official Indian historiography worked at erasing the violence of Partition from collective memory, and the event was considered an “anomaly” (Bhaskar Sarkar *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, 15).

- Statistics made in the mid-1930s reveal that 97% of the Congress members were Hindus, and during that time Gandhi himself invoked Hindu imagery in his public speeches to gather new followers (P. Anderson 2012, *The Indian Ideology*, 94).
- By using this religious iconography, the seemingly secular leaders were walking in the footsteps of the late nineteenth-century Bengali nationalists who had developed a political and cultural ethos based on Hindu myths and on Bankim Chatterjee's poem, "Vande Mataram," which inspired the anthem of the Congress Party (P. Anderson 99).
- Indian government tried to marginalize the tragedy of Partition by focusing on consolidating its secular ideal.

- By denying this legacy of communitarian violence as a way of smoothening out cultural and religious differences, the government-fueled “collective amnesia” prevented the nation from confronting its collective trauma and working through it (Pandey, “In Defense of the Fragment 33).
- Biased and displaced forms of Partition violence permeated cultural productions and resurfaced on the socio-political stage.
- Time and again the distinction between 'secular nationalism' (advocated by Congress) and 'religious nationalism' (represented by the Muslim League) was blurred, especially in the late 1930s and 1940s when communal forces joined the ranks of 'secular' Congress at the provincial and local levels.

- Ella Moore – “Personal relationships and kinship loyalties were not destroyed by partition but underwent forced readjustments as refugees adapted to the new parameters of their lives. Common linguistics and culture aided assimilation; however difficulties posed by the refugee crises led to a re-evaluation of identity classifications and created a struggle to survive, rather than to belong.”
- Ravinder Kaur – tensions between the ‘differing’ experiences did not create a unity in their misfortune. “Identical historical and macro-social processes, such as the Partition of India, can bring about different results locally.” Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff investigates extensively on how Bengali refugees and Muslim settlers in Jharkhand areas are not directly affected by Partition (Roy and Nandi Bhatia, *Partitioned Lives* 2008).
- Some elements of the society are more inclined to publicise their experiences, such as the affluent *bhadralok* class, of which many individual have penned memories on their experiences following independence.

- As high-class educated citizens the Hindu *bhadraloks* were able to record their own experiences, a privilege not afforded to the mass illiterate population of whom little paper records are held till a long time.
- The Central government restricted its responsibilities by limiting official definition of partition to ‘occurrences’ between June 1947 – 1948.
- Continuous migration, as Meghna Guha Thakurta (2002) states, has not only had a curious effect on the social make-up of the region, but the mixture of motives that compelled migrations in the east was conveniently used by the state to accord discriminatory treatment to displaced persons .



- Pia Oberoi argues that the vast numbers of people who were uprooted from their homes did not, as is expected of persons in refugee situations, lose their citizenship of a state . Rather, they expected that their co-religionists in India and Pakistan would grant them both a nationality and succour.
- Partition refugees were technically not outside the country of their nationality until the Radcliffe Award was announced, when they found themselves without a nationality and outside the country of their residence.
- The refugee also complicated the official notion of displacement, a trope that recurs throughout Partition literature and compels an inquiry into the meaning of place, home and belonging.

- The alternative narrative of partition is difficult to analyse due to the vast scale of voiceless citizens caught up in India's partition. A significant majority of the population were illiterate and therefore unable to write any memoirs. Further, marginalised groups such as women had traditional roles which were dictated by a paternal authority within families, limiting their expressions of freedom.
- Bidyut Chakraborty : It is evident that the high politics of partition constituted the background of the majority of the stories and focussed on upper and middle classes. Within newer contexts family units were renegotiated and open to change, severed customs and traditions of residing together.
- *Reformulation of Loyalties through Partition*, Ella Moore (p 3) : Previously identities were always in flux and layered. Now, putting aside cultural, linguistic, geographical and economic only religious identity marker is privileged.

- Everyday effects of partition cannot be achieved through official letters, statistics and documents – limitations of being subjective, emotional and prejudiced.
- Besides economy and politics, human dimension adds anthropological, sociological and psychological angles. Personal narratives imbued with gender and class connotations , social classifications dictate the level of exposure to the effects of partition.
- Moore – “Entitlement to government aid was ascertained by the first scientific survey in May 1948 which questioned refugee families on issues such as age, sex and marital conditions of family members, caste group and access to economical resources” (Moore 12).
- 15 October 1952 – Introduction of passports formalized citizenship entitlement and legally solidified refugee identities.
- The psychological state of refugees was significantly impacted by the deplorable living and healthcare provisions.
- Refugees were forced to regress into a “Hobbesian state of nature” wherein life became “nasty, brutish and short”(Moore 13).

- According to Udit Sen , there are three distinct phases of rehabilitation :
 - i) 1947-50 – government denied all responsibility for refugees
 - ii) 1950-52 – responsibility shifted from center to state
 - iii) 1952 – government began to shut down all refugee camps
- The formation of group consciousness among the refugees became politicised and soon came under the influence of left-wing groups who were to have a profound effect on government policies.

Thank You

