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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 35 - HOME AND NOSTALGIA

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- Constant identity politics between West Bengal and Bangladesh - since before the second half of 20th C, Bengal was not even an organic whole that could give rise to the sense of being an imagined nation.
- Cultural and literary contributions by novelists, scholars, activists as pioneers of peaceful bilateral relationship between Pakistan/Bangladesh and India.
- Bengal's borders were redrawn five times before 1947- North Western provinces taken out of the Presidency of Bengal (1835), in which Arakan became part of Burma; nine districts from east split off from Bengal to form the province of Assam(1874); Chittagong and Chittagong Hill tracts transferred from Bengal to Assam(1892); Curzon partition resulting in East Bengal and Assam (1905). When that division was revoked in 1911, Bihar and Orissa were removed from the province .
- Sovereign Bangladesh marked culmination of three immediate Partitions- in 1905 Bengal, 1947 India and 1971 Pakistan.



- Leonard A.Gordon : “All Bengalis, then, whether Hindu or Muslims, whether in Bangladesh or in India, have multiple identities. At different moments, especially 1947 and 1971, members of both communities have had to make choices about their primary identifications and their nationalities” (Latif 34).
- Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh could resolve problems of community and identity for Bengalis on both sides of the international border.
- Bangladesh paranoid with the idea of reunification of Bengal, which would according to them, recreate the political contours of the British Raj, and delete Bangladesh.
- “ The irony is that it is the refugee, ejected by one side and rejected by the other, who straddles the two parts of Bengal in the restless wanderings of his mind across the man-made border” (Latif 36).



- *Chere Asha Gram (The Abandoned Village)* is a compilation of essays written by refugees serialised in *Jugantar*, a vernacular West Bengal newspaper from 1950 and compiled into a book under the editorship of Dakshinaranjan Basu in 1975.
- Nilanjan Chatterjee : studies the *udvastu's* contention with “epistemological denial in India” in the metropolitan dystopia of Calcutta and other new exile terrains.
- Regarding the terrible beauty of a Bengal rent asunder : “ The part is not whether the Bengal so imagined is utopian... but that the refugee mind feels compelled to evoke it to sustain its sense of self” (Latif 40).
- “Refugee central to the idea of Bengal as a state of mind” because he “embodies its unity and integrity in the very act of losing his place in its geography” (42).

‘Idyllic Home ‘ in the Popular Imagination

- For the early writers, the land gave their narratives the impetus to turn their imaginative gaze on the desires and assertions of a colonized people.
- Recuperation of the land through imagination was cut short with the partition: the project of ‘nationalistic adumbrations of the decolonized identity’ came asunder with the partitioning of the land that made these imaginings possible and probable.
- Debjani Sengupta - narratives reject the politics of difference and although their identities are tied to the making of boundaries, their life stories create spaces where different identities come together to create ‘a discursive space’ of meaning production through motifs taken from the land. They re-imagine places and spaces as ‘inclusive and hybrid’ where the power of the politics of hate is somehow thwarted (Sengupta 238).

- Fictions and memoirs written in the past decade talk of the partition with special emphasis on locality and belonging: in them the geography and landscape of East and West Bengal (two halves that resulted from the partition) are sites of meaning making, both in the context of the text and as its historical setting.
- The land surveyed, mapped and ruled by an imperial power and now left divided, becomes the site of a postcolonial search for justice and equality. The divided land becomes a site of contestation and recuperation for people who are suddenly left at the wrong side of the border.

- In the new nations, religious identities become entangled with national identities and people find themselves forced to move because they were considered aliens by a particular nation.
- The dogged discourse of belonging elsewhere apart from the place where one finds oneself, complicates the territoriality and finality of nation-states in postcolonial South Asia (Sengupta 239).
- The ethical and moral implications of the concept of 'home' in the wake of a divided land and nation is very important - in terms of space and as grounds of politics and history, especially for people who are a demographic minority.
- The artworks dislodge the binary oppositions of religion, citizenship and belonging, seeking new alignments and identities marked across the borders of the postcolonial nation-states.



- “The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place”(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*).
- The boundaries which are based on political hegemony problematize the idea of identity and homogeneity of nation. Living on the border signifies living where the spaces overlap.
- Bhabha - border as “the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices, that introduces creative intervention into existence”. (1997, “Front/ Lines/Border/Posts” 9).
- Ambreem Hai - border (and the subjectivity of those positioned on the border) as a “crucial if ambiguous site of vital reconstruction , a position replete with contradictions and difficulty, but regenerative promise” (2000 , “Border work, Border Trouble, 380).



- The lost Bengali Hindu's home is thus ... “the home of the Bengal nationality, the village in which in the 1880s nationalist writers had found the heart of Bengal (Chakraborty, *Remembered Villages*, p.2150) - nationalist construction of home.
- In the *Chhere Asha Gram* ('The Abandoned Village') – native village is pictured as both scared and beautiful, which makes communal violence an act of defilement and sacrilege against everything that stood for sanctity and beauty in the Hindu-Bengali understanding of what home was.
- The remembered village would derive some of its value from the associations it could claim with the nation's antiquity and anti-colonial struggle.
- Village in a state of idyllic present is invaded by the beast of communalism. Tagore and Bankim contributed to the urban imaginings of the countryside that had been developing 1880's on.

- Village as opposed to city, became spiritual home for urban Bengalis – East Bengal riverine landscape bestowing new poetic, literary perspective.
- Tagore as a landlord and Nirad C. Chaudhuri as a salaried clerk have made many colonist impressions of the rural Bengal. Both being rooted in Calcutta and visiting the East Bengal countryside on duty or for outings, described the natural scenery through studied sensibilities of European art and poetry.
- Saratchandra's 'Pallisamaj' 20th C emotionalism (nostalgic folksy image) - from idyllic abodes of peace, Bengali village shown as cite of factionalism, casteist exploitation, obstacle to enlightenment, making these villages candidates for nationalist developmental work.
- Jibanananda's Das' 'Rupashi Bangla' ('Bengal the Beautiful') soared in popularity during 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh.
- *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyay (1927) show Bengali village marked by poverty, suffering yet tender sentiments of intimacy, kinship, innocence (Chakraborty 'Remembered Villages' 2148).
- *Chhere Asha Gram* – cultural cliches, literary kitsch aimed at the shared nostalgia of city *bhadralok*-Muslims participating in Hindu festivals, narratives invested into the images that have eternal values (2149).

Thank You

