



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 39 - REFUGEE, DESH AND NATION

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Refugee as a Heterogeneous Category

- Refugees were never of homogenous identities. Transit camps and permanent refugee housing colonies hardly levelled the caste, geography, class, and gender differences.
- Ravinder Kaur - Citizenship conceptualized a set of self-constituting practices in different settings of powers, where power itself is understood as a social technology that induces being made and self-making (431).

Refugee as a Heterogeneous Category

- Anindita Ghoshal - “The other problematic angle in refugee studies lies in the issue that the refugees have always been labelled as a monolithic group. Other identities based on their class, caste, linguistic attachment and ethnicity often remained insignificant. The categorisations of refugees were made either as a ‘political or economic block’ or a ‘religious community’, which had negated both the complexity of their compositions and the historical contexts of the locations and their experience of ‘refugee-hood’. So, the problem of ‘regionalisation’, or the idea of ‘multiple layers’ within the ‘identity of refugees’, was seldom raised or questioned by the historians and political and social scientists in the first three decades after Partition.” (Ghoshal, xiii)



Refugee as a Heterogeneous Category

- Sen - The post-war international order of nation-states seeks to organise populations into national groups, each with their own sovereign state or homeland.
- The modern refugee is the product of a world where the ground realities of multi-ethnic societies contradict the political ideal of a seamless congruence between the territory and population encompassed by a state and the political community of a nation.

Defining the Refugee

- Refugee as a category is essentially the able-bodied male. Women, disabled, juvenile, infirm individuals occupy the fringes of the rehabilitation process, as the latter would need state incentives to establish themselves. So the resettlement policies were largely tailored to meet the needs of an ideal type.
- The ideal refugee that represents the category would comprise government officers, traders, businessmen and other white-collar jobs. They were economically more secure, politically aware and astute and entrenched with social networks.

National building and Minority Question

- Nation building ensures that the hegemony of a community is unchallenged. Hence the creation of nations requires constant shedding of people who do not fit the constructed identity or question the framework. This automatically involves minority persecution, ethnic cleansing, denial of political rights to smaller groups and such forms of atrocities due to which exodus of the persecuted takes place.
- Displacement can take multiple forms: refugees, internal refugees, rejection, eviction, expulsion, asylum seekers and so on.
- The process emerges as a pattern because each of the minorities constructs a national identity and strives to build a majority for itself. (Nag 4759)



Refugee Card

- Ravinder Kaur – Talks about the refugee card. Some elites who had transcended their refugeeeness, rendered this card as defunct. For them, it only had a historical value. They were ashamed of showing it publicly to others.
- For the elite immigrants, refugee card was an uncomfortable reminder of an inglorious past. Its absence signified a family's successful self-rehabilitation.
- In contrast, those who failed to successfully establish themselves in the host country and land still retained their card. For the less socio-economically established, the card needed to be produced before the authorities for support.

Different Understandings of Citizenship

- Sen - “Idealised visions of citizenship were not new in South Asia. Multiple and rival ideals of belonging had co-existed in late colonial India. These notions of ‘thick’ citizenship included ideals of Islamic or Muslim belonging, of Hindu homelands, the liberal feminist vision of the universal Indian citizen unmarked by caste, class or ethnicity, and an increasingly irrelevant colonial vision of a loyal subject-citizen. The transfer of power from the crown to independent governments in 1947 was the watershed that marked the symbolic transition from colonial subjects to self-governing citizens...”

- However, the specific iteration of citizenship in India, whether as legal status, identity, or as social and political rights, has been a contested and long-term process.
- Recent scholarship on Indian citizenship focuses on this dynamic aspect of citizenship by exploring how the actualisation of citizenship in India has been, and continues to be, informed by contingent histories.
- There is a broad consensus among historians and political scientists that the decade between 1946 and 1956 was a generative period for the cluster of ideas, rights and legal definitions that constitute Indian citizenship.

Refugee to Citizen

- Pippa Virdee - At the time of Partition, state mechanisms were unprepared for the mass migration that resulted in 12 -14 million people being uprooted. Eventually, organization by the state came into force and a planned evacuation could take place.
- When we move away from the official response to migration, we begin to see the differential experiences of refugees. While the state directed some of the refugees, others made their own plans. Utilizing personal networks, refugees with better economic and socio-cultural resources were able to migrate to places which had an element of familiarity in the shape of family, friends, and business or professional links. The presence of pre-existing business or family links not only influenced the destination of migration, but also assisted in the process of acceptance by the local population.

Refugee to Citizen

- A paradox associated with the upper-class migrants – as a part of common ‘refugee’ historical background, they would be often conflated with the displaced mass’ “miserable image” yet with successful rehabilitation, they could smoothly transit into citizenship and become a part of the upper echelon of the society.
- Haimanti Roy- Although citizenship was the end goal for the Indian government and the refugees, the latter retained their refugee identity as a political choice in many cases, as it provided a concrete platform for them to articulate and negotiate demands for socio-economic integration.

Refugee to Citizen

- “Refugee” is an abominable term – implying that the migrants were strangers whose resettlement and access to resources and benefits depended on the benevolence of the Indian people. There was an argument to use the word “pravashi” instead, which means exiled, because Partition had exiled a people who were originally a part of the undivided India.
- The term “refugee” had special economic significances associated with qualifications, such as obtaining refugee slips, which would provide special benefits including special quota for education and jobs.
- Yet, such patronage had temporal boundaries – in the case of Bengal, any person arriving from East Pakistan after June 25, 1948 was not entitled to registration as refugees, nor eligible to special assistance as planned by the government.



Refugee to Citizen

- On and after 1950- “displaced person” had a fixed definition – someone that had arrived on account of communal disturbances after 1 October 1946 and before 31 December 1950, has no land in West Bengal and does not intend to return to East Bengal (pointing to the fact that the displaced person should have political and not economic incentive).
- 1956 - The Indian government introduced “migration certificate” to control refugees by regulating it as authorised migration. Decision was influenced by the fact that no relief/rehabilitation will be given to people infiltrating in India after 31 March 1958. Post-1958, the Indian state adopted the policy of no longer recognizing a new immigrant as refugee.



Thank You

