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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 40 - REFUGEE, DESH AND NATION

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Refugee to Citizen

- The pressure on refugees to integrate and self-define underpins the overlapping space between citizens and refugees. The citizenship in postcolonial state is polymorphous and hierarchical.
- The label 'Refugee' opens a fresh political terrain upon which citizenship is to be negotiated in a postcolonial state. It became a significant tool to gain political influence and bargain concessions from the new state.
- From being refugees to becoming citizens is a journey marked by one's distance from the camp life. There were two types of government housing facilities – self-supported and state-supported. It was an administrative filter to separate the resource-rich individuals from the mass of refugees.

Refugee to Citizen

- Subhasri Ghosh and Debjani Dutta's survey of the Permanent Liability Camps – comprised the old, infirm and unattached women who did not have adult able-bodied son, father or father-in-law or any relative in a position to support them. Orphan boys up to sixteen and girls until married or gainfully employed could claim dependency on P.L. Camps.
- They lived on meagre dole of cash and food supplied fortnightly; a one-time assistance sum promised to them for rehabilitation never reached the camps. On the better side, some of them learned to read and write under the guidance of the lady superindendent.

Refugee to Citizen

- Camp refugees shared their trauma of being labelled as a special category of refugees, and their reminiscences comprise struggles, such as strikes, protests and agitations, against humiliation and apathy heaped on them.
- Some of them recall being jailed for protesting against their deportation outside WB to places, such as Dandakaranya (MP) and Andaman. Period of time spent in prison caused their names to be struck off from camp and their claim to doles.

Refugee to Citizen

- Rehabilitation of refugees and the development of new nation went hand in hand, which had its onus on the desired image of the hardworking refugee that contributes to the nation-building.
- Organizations, such as United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), voiced the refugee's demands, and claimed that the distinction between political and economic migrants not be made.

Refugee to Citizen

- Udit Sen- The Partition refugees' claim to be citizens of their host states gained traction due to contingent circumstances. The need to grant citizenship to the minorities evacuated from divided Punjab was one of many ingredients that went into the making of the citizen-refugee.
- The categorical denial of citizenship to migrants was technically impossible, given that the laws and statutes conferring Indian and Pakistani citizenship were yet to be formulated.
- In both India and Pakistan, the Partition refugees' claim to moral citizenship enjoyed considerable support, not just among their co-religionists, but also amongst bureaucrats and politicians. The exchange of minority populations in Punjab was enabled by this atmosphere.



Definition of Refugee

- Udit Sen - There was a marked reluctance, on the part of the government, to come up with a clear definition of Partition refugees. The lack of clarity allowed the government of India to maintain an inclusive official stance, where in theory citizenship was within the reach of all displaced persons.
- In order to officially count as a DP, those displaced by partition had to meet a host of discriminatory criteria, which the local authorities could change at will by periodically issuing new circulars that imposed new requirements and preconditions.” (Sen 9)

Rehabilitation...

- Ajit Prasad Jain (central minister in charge of rehabilitation between 1950 and 1954) - rehabilitation was a process designed to achieve 'the disappearance of all distinction' between refugees and other nationals.
- Partition refugees were already acknowledged as de facto citizens and guaranteed voting rights. The erasure of 'all distinction' between the Partition refugees and other citizens did not denote a juridical change in their status.
- Instead, it denoted a project of state intervention into their social and economic lives, designed to restore them to normality. Schemes and policies of refugee rehabilitation are therefore best understood as part of a massive project of normalization. (Sen 13)

Refugee and Rehabilitation

- Anindita Ghoshal -Their process of rehabilitation had emerged to be an arduous task of nation building, along with the consolidation and stabilisation of the newfound independence. Refugees flowed from the partitioned provinces of Punjab and Bengal, and some other provinces that were transferred to either Pakistan or India also experienced waves of refugee exodus. For the refugees, it became a long agonizing struggle of rehabilitating themselves not just territorially, but politically, economically, culturally and psychologically. The migration to the new nation was neither smooth, nor was the reception in this part of the 'utopia' as welcoming as was hoped. The Partition-displaced refugees, who lost their ancestral home and hearth, century-old occupation and subsistence, suddenly realised that they were nobody's children—they were the proverbial nowhere people.

Refugee and Rehabilitation

- Anupama Roy - the historical context of partition produced several liminal categories of people, who were neither fully citizens, nor entirely foreign. Within this category [there were] not just displaced persons, but also minors, Pakistani wives and abducted women.
- Roy understands the Indian Citizenship Act as a moment of encompassment. It negotiated the conflict between the ground reality of differential access to citizenship and its universal promise by offering different 'possibilities' of becoming citizens to different groups – through birth, descent or registration (Sen 16).

Thank You

