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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 46 - DISPLACED PEOPLE, ABANDONED HOMES

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia** – In May 2005, there was a report of potential eviction of Partition refugees in Rajpura, Punjab, from their temporary government-allotted accommodation called **Kasturba Sewa Ashram**, causing panic among the refugees that apprehended another displacement.
- The story was a local news and did not catch national attention – cause of eviction was shown as unsafe constructions, a reason could be that the land, whose price considerably appreciated over the years, needed to be claimed by the government – unfolding of **unofficial** History of Partition still taking place in as late as **2005**.
- **Piu Oberoi** - Those persons forced to leave their homes during Partition were seen as refugees because of the failure of available state mechanisms for effective protection for '**displaced persons**'.

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Shuchi Kothari** and **Rita Kothari** – record from their interviews that some wealthy business-class people can afford to make ‘unsentimental’ admission of not wanting to go back to their ‘homeland’ across the border because they assimilated in an organized fashion with the fabric of India.
- One’s class position comes into play in the treatment of memory and nostalgic renditions.
- Similarly, **Anasua Basu Roychaudhury** notes how memory is used as a means of cutting off from the East Bengali past.
- Roychaudhury’s interviewee Nonigopal *babu* proclaims “Our *desh* has changed.”



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- His purposeful withdrawal from the former Self and its geopolitical belonging is because the native land had failed to sustain the individual and his kin.
- Such nostalgic remembrances of the sacred homeland have been embittered by memories of riots, and therefore cannot be integrated alongside the sublime imagination of an idyllic “desh” left behind (departure from the Grand Narrative.)
- **Pippa Virdee** - In the south and eastern side of **Lyallpur city**, the Government College and the Khalsa College had been turned into refugee camps.
- Sixty thousand people gathered at Khalsa College to seek temporary refuge before their departure towards India.



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Arya High School was also used as a camp, housing around 40,000 people.
- Refugees were squatting in classrooms, and on *verandahs*, and playgrounds.
- Temporary refugee camps such as Khalsa College was infested with diseases like cholera and dysentery and were prone to attacks by looters and rapists.
- Convoy of refugees crossed more than 100 miles on foot along with their livestock.
- Most people walked, while those who brought their carts or *tongas* used them for transporting goods, and the sick and elderly travelled with them (Civil and Military Gazette 1947).

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Indian troops guarded the refugees. A sense of normality prevailed in the form of rest breaks, cooking, milking cows, especially for the infants, and tending to the sick.
- Music and occasional speeches by village leaders helped to raise the refugees' morale.
- The Indian government assisted by dropping food and drugs by air.
- Vaccines and doctors were flown in to assist the sick, and field ambulances were sent to vaccinate refugees before crossing the border, after which the refugees were taken into reception camps.
- In several instances, such as the Hindu and Sikh migrants moving from Lyallpur West Pakistan, routes (such as the Balloki Route) were indiscriminately closed often by the Pakistan government.

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Alexander Kluge** - what is the history of a nation after all but its stories? Numerous stories. Stories upon stories, like the many surfaces of a nation.
- The migrants were forced to adopt a fixed identity due to the camp's structure.
- Their identities, in reality, were shaped by their daily micro-aggressions and frictions.
- While giving due cognizance to the overarching circumstances that conditioned their lives, it is nonetheless equally important to pay heed to the refugees' perceptions of themselves.
- These self-perceptions frequently contradict the fixed identities that have been assigned to them.



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Despite their subjective nature, **memories** can serve as a rich repository of displaced people's experiences.
- According to the government rehabilitation, the term "**refugee**" refers to a **person who has been uprooted from his or her *desh*.**
- In the aforesaid notification, the Government of West Bengal defined a 'refugee' as a **person who migrated into West Bengal for reasons of safety.**

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- The legal definition of a refugee, on the other hand, refers to a person who is forced to flee his or her place of origin because he or she is scared of persecution for his or her way of life or faith, in his or her native land. (Mentioned in the **UN Convention of 1951** and its **1967 Protocol** as well as the **1969 Convention** and the **Cartagena Declaration of 1984**).
- As India was not a signatory to any of the International Refugee Protection Regimes, the officials of the Government of India and West Bengal preferred to use the term '**displaced**' rather than '**refugee**' when it came to the question of rehabilitation.
- In Bengal, however, the influx continued for many years following the Partition, and is ongoing in different forms even today.



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- ***The trauma and the triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India (Volume 1)***
 - While '*the Partition of Punjab was a one-time event with mayhem and forced migration restricted primarily to three years (1947-50), the Partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process*' (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2).
 - This inexorable constant, carved in our memories, has always served to remind us of the horrors of the past while also allowing the government to view the people in a new manner.

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- A **displaced person** is one who had entered India and left or who was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan (on or after October 15, 1947) for disturbances or fear of such disturbances or on account of setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan. (**Government of India 107**)
- Hindus who had fled East Pakistan before 15 October 1947 owing to religious strife were not included in the official definition.
- The "**passport system**" had yet to be implemented at the time, and the refugees were considered an exceptional case because they possessed citizenship rights in both states.
- Despite the fact that India gained independence on **August 15, 1947**, citizens were given an extra two months to settle in the country of their choice.

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- These '**displaced**' people were eventually known as '**migrants**,' and were separated into two groups: '**old migrants**,' and '**new migrants**.'
- Many people fled their homes in the **hopes of finding peace and security** on the other side of the border, either as a direct victims of violence or as a result of fear of violence.
- Hindus displaced by the newly formed East Pakistan were forced to seek refuge in the Indian federal states of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, which were on the other side of the new and arbitrarily established border.
- Educated Hindus, mostly belonging to the upper and middle class, could avail new opportunities of livelihood in their adopted land within a comparatively shorter period of time, which perhaps reduced their agonising experiences at least to some extent (Bandyopadhyay & Basu Ray Chaudhury 60-85).



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- The displaced people arrived at the **Sealdah Station, Calcutta's** reception, and interception centres as the cross-border influx continued in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s.
- The government only realised the importance of creating pre-planned provisions for the refugees in the early 1950s.
- Several transit camps were established in West Bengal's neighbouring districts to provide temporary aid to the refugees.
- As there was a time gap between preparing for Partition and preparing to face the consequences of the Partition, the Government of West Bengal treated this period as a '**passing phase**'.

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Defining categories of identity such as **evacuees, refugees, displaced persons, aliens, and infiltrators** was a major filtering process for establishing post-Partition national orders and **turning colonial subjects into national citizens** through these grids.
- Further, these identities were produced discursively, mediated through the actions of officials located at the borders and associated with diplomatic missions.
- Refugee documents, border slips, and passports became the means through which the Indian State sought to differentiate between refugees, migrants, aliens, and citizens.
- Legislations surrounding the rights to own and transfer property became intrinsic with the question of negotiating one's nationality.

Experiences of Displacement Through Fiction

- Implicit within these redefinitions were the attempts of each state to establish a minority citizen's loyalty to the state.
- The determination of such loyalty was susceptible to contingent political, social, and economic contexts and was predicated on successful negotiations between minorities and the nation-states.
- The extensive scholarship on the Partition is problematic in several crucial aspects.
- The **Partition serves as a template for the reinvention** of national histories within India and Pakistan.
- In these canonical works, Partition is represented as the **momentous culmination of an anti-colonial national struggle** that acceded to the division for the sake of a larger Indian unity, or as a unilinear clear-cut movement towards national self-representation of distinct communities.

Thank You

