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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 50 - DISPLACED PEOPLE, ABANDONED HOMES

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Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- The '**train**' has long been a prominent **motif** in Indian Partition stories. In the context of Partition, the symbol of the train refers to time, and is associated with uncountable refugees, who were uprooted from their origins and forced to move to a new land to start life from the scratch.
- When religious separation became a possibility in 1947, most individuals concluded that moving over to their respective '**safe zones**' was the only way to stay alive.
- The journey was not without dangers; assaulting hordes swooped in on the fleeing masses, who were travelling by rail, truck, bullock cart, or on foot.
- The bulk of migrants are thought to have travelled by train, which became the main **means of transit due to its accessibility and low cost.**
- However, it made the migrants victim of frequent attacks from members of opposing communities. As a result, the most prominent images of Partition violence may be inscribed in the 'train,' the railway bogies took the brunt of the rioters.



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- On its rails, members of the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities committed **genocide against the rival community members**.
- The first of these incidents occurred on **July 22, 1947**, though the first actual train sabotage occurred on **August 9, 1947**, when a **Pakistan Special Train** carrying Pakistani government employees and their families from **Delhi to Karachi** was derailed about a quarter of a mile outside the princely state of Patiala by mines planted on the tracks.
- In Lahore, **Muslim vengeance was swift, and attacks and stabbings of passengers in trains, in addition to derailments, became prevalent** (Tucker 122).
- **Swarna Aiyar** has written extensively on these '**trains of death**' in her essay "**August Anarchy: The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947.**"



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- These ambushes are well-represented in Partition literature, in both longer and shorter forms. **Train to Pakistan**, a well-known Partition narrative by **Khushwant Singh** set in Punjab, is full of violent scenes on the '**deathly wheels**.'
- The novel **Freedom at Midnight** by **Larry Collins and Dominic Lapierre** reproduces tales of train massacre survivors that parallel these accounts of violence. A mob severed the train from the engine, according to a witness, and passengers were thrown onto the platform, where they were slaughtered by the perpetrators.
- Those who attempted to flee were hunted down and killed or thrown into wells. Only **one hundred persons out of the two thousand that boarded the train made it to their destination**.
- In Sindh, which borders Punjab, such attacks occurred on a sporadic basis.



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- **September 1947** - Non-Sindhi Muslim refugees, most likely the **mohajirs**, attacked and plundered a train transporting Hindus from Punjab travelling through **Nawabshah** (Kothari 75).
- **The Grand Trunk Express**, also known as the Great Indian Peninsula Express, was assaulted by rioters after Partition in September 1947. **Aziz Ahmad's** Urdu story "**Kali Raat**" ['**Black Night**'] depicts the **tragic journey** of a Muslim family travelling by this train from **Delhi to Hyderabad**.
- The personified train in **Krishan Chander's** Urdu fiction "**Peshawar Express**" narrates its horrendous tale of corpse-laden voyage unleashed by killings en route at **Taxila, Rawalpindi, and Wazirabad**.
- The story "**The Train Has Reached Amritsar**" (Hindi, also translated as "**We Have Arrived in Amritsar**") by **Bhisham Sahni** has a similar setting and plot, inspired by the author's own experiences while travelling by train from **Peshawar to Delhi** on the eve of Independence.



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- In Bengal, the rare occurrences of train **violence** in the province were limited to the August 1946 riots.
- **General Francis Tucker** (Head of the Eastern Command in Calcutta) – describes the province's only railway riot:
 - *'A local train carrying largely Hindu babus (clerks), which had halted near Entally on a regular basis for the driver to throw out a present of coal for his village, was assaulted by Muslims at this spot, and one Hindu was slain.'*
- The next day, eleven Muslim passengers were **slain** when a train was stopped by Hindus (Tucker 422). As a result, the Bengal Partition stories mostly associate emigration journeys with **agony and misery** than violence.

Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- Bengal sees the minorities' predicament as they try to flee persecution at the hands of the majority group. The Bengali's experiences were heart-breaking, although bloodshed was comparatively less. These refugees were mentally and physically broken after fleeing impending death or dishonour, possibly at the hands of their friends and neighbours.
- Bengal Partition stories **focus on the emotional and psychological fallout of communal strife.**
- Bengali train travel tales often represent the complex human condition(s) exhibited in a diverse group imprisoned for a specific period of time within a closed space, i.e. the railway compartment.

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- Their plight is described in several works from the region: "**An Evening of Prayer**," an excerpt from **Selina Hossain's** novel **Gayatri Sandhya** ['**The Pious Evening**,'] and **Hasan Hafizur Rahman's** short story, "**Deaths on the Night Train**" [translated into English as "**Two More Deaths**"], "**Mukto Seemanter Shesh Raat**" ("**The Last Night at the Open Border**") describes the angst of the helpless male narrator, who cannot save the honour of a woman from a 'police encounter.'
- **Ritwik Ghatak's trilogy** refer to train as symbol of a train of nostalgic thoughts from the past. Train as a point of no return, stopping dead in the tracks, demarcation of a foreign land – "**Dohai Ali**" in *Komal Gandhar*.

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- Public spaces such as trains, railway stations, hospitals and prisons were infested by the Dalit refugees in the post-Partition period. This reflected the government's incompetence in rehabilitating Dalits systematically.
- The gory and nemesis-driven subtext that populates the Partition-centric train journeys additionally becomes an epithet of stagnation and teeming unemployment.
- For the idealist refugee youth, train journey would be unconsciously pregnant with the hope of “going back” to the place from where he came. For others, the train and station would become the vicarious home.
- At the turn of the century, the Gujarat riots (2002) had also begun with the Muslims burning a train filled with Hindu worshippers.



Thank You

