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NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 51 - DISPLACED PEOPLE, ABANDONED HOMES

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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Hyderabad During Partition

- Although the princely kingdoms of India maintained self-government in theory inside their own borders, they were subject to subsidiary alliances with the British at the time of **Partition in 1947**.
- The British abandoned all such agreements with the **Indian Independence Act of 1947**, allowing the states to choose full independence.
- By **1948**, nearly all of them (princely states) had **acceded** to either India or Pakistan.
- There were approximately **565 princely states** in India when **Mir Osman Ali Khan** was **Nizam of Hyderabad** and **Mir Laik Ali** was his Prime Minister.
- The southern state of Hyderabad was the largest, with an area of 82,000 square miles.

Hyderabad During Partition

- In 1951, the Muslim Nizam reigned over a feudal empire with a majority Hindu population of 18.6 million people.
- Hyderabad was the only significant exception, as it chose independence and planned to keep its wealth and influence by relying on an irregular army.
- The Nizam was also afflicted by the **Telangana revolt**, which he was unable to quell.
- Hyderabad and the Dominion of India signed a standstill agreement in **November 1947**, which kept all prior agreements in place, except for the stationing of Indian soldiers in the state.
- Fearing the establishment of a Communist state in Hyderabad and the rise of militant **Razakars**, India invaded the state in **September 1948** following a crippling economic blockade.

Hyderabad During Partition

- The Razakars were a paramilitary group associated with the **Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen** (“**Council of United Muslims**”)
- The Nizam then signed an instrument of accession, thereby joining India.
- **Massive communal violence** erupted as a result of the operation, which was frequently carried out by the Indian Army.
- The **Sunderlal Committee** was established by **Jawaharlal Nehru**, India's prime minister.
- Its report, which was not released until 2013, concluded that *"as a very reasonable & modest estimate the total number of deaths in the state somewhere between 30,000 & 40,000."*
- Other responsible observers estimated the number of deaths to be 2,00,000 or higher.

Hyderabad During Partition - *Madras on Rainy Days*

- **Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*** (2004) is situated in late 1980s and early 1990s Hyderabad.
- The protagonist is nineteen-year-old **Layla**, a naturalized American citizen who was born in Hyderabad city and brought to India from the US to marry Sameer.
- The novel explores not only Layla's thoughts about her impending marriage but also represents an insight into the post-Partition lives of her extended family, who live in Hyderabad city **after having been driven away from their ancestral property during Partition.**
- Layla's maternal grandfather, a Nawab, loses his feudal estate in Miryalguda in the **Nalgonda district** of the erstwhile princely Hyderabad state during the late 1940s.

Hyderabad During Partition - *Madras on Rainy Days*

- It was seized by his own workers during the **Telangana Armed Struggle** and, subsequently, appropriated by the Congress government.
- Layla's family lives in **exile**, haunted by **displacement and loss**.
- This **sense of trauma persists for decades** and is sharply highlighted, and its expression violently and suddenly silenced with the gang rape of Layla's cousin Henna during a communal "riot" in the late 1980s.
- **Taqi Mamu's** pained and self-preoccupied loquaciousness over his displacement and disenfranchisement in the Indian nation becomes a foil for Nafiza's silence.



Hyderabad During Partition - *Madras on Rainy Days*

- Both Nafiza and Taqi Mamu witness the seizure of the estate, but the fact that Taqi Mamu angrily airs his views whenever he can, and Nafiza chooses not to, makes for a stark contrast; her silence marks the class difference.
- It also indicates that there is a zone of voluntary silence in personal narratives of Partition, viz-a-viz the Hyderabad chapter.
- Partition is conditioned by exile from “**the space of identity**”, “**a world that has ceased to exist, that has been violently erased**”, where there now stands a dam. For Layla’s parents’ generation and Uncle Taqi (*mamu*), Partition refers to an absence, an irreconcilable vacuum.



Hyderabad During Partition - *Madras on Rainy Days*

- Layla is **twice-exiled**: not only does she live in exile in the US, away from Hyderabad, but she also cannot return to the Miryalguda of her mother's time, simply because it physically does not exist anymore.
- Even if she were to return to Hyderabad permanently, Layla would still psychologically remain in exile, interminably affected by her family's persistent memories of displacement and trauma.



Hyderabad During Partition - *Clear Light of Day*

- In **Anita Desai's** novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980), the character named Raja befriends a Hyderabadi Muslim family that later flees to Hyderabad from its house in Old Delhi during the turmoil of Partition.
- After their departure from Old Delhi, Raja is thrilled to receive a letter from the Hyder Ali, informing him that they are safe in Hyderabad.
- The first contradiction in Raja's synopsis of Hyder Ali's letter is the fact that the family is in hiding in spite of there being "no trouble in Hyderabad."
- No explanation is given for this dissonance anywhere in the novel.

Hyderabad During Partition - *Clear Light of Day*

- Second, and far more important, is the mistaken idea that there is no trouble in Hyderabad during Partition.
- Desai posits recollection as implicit and indirect – ***“working through her characters’ interaction, especially through dialogue and reminiscence, thus building up a concept of history in an indirect and implicit manner”***.
- These commendations are guilty of overlooking how the connection between the family’s history and Partition history in the text does not account for the experiences of marginalized and silenced groups, who faced the worst of Partition violence and displacement.

Hyderabad During Partition - *Clear Light of Day*

- Hyder Ali's cultural gatherings have a sense of experienced loss in them.
- The setting, scene, and action recall the lost culture of Hyder Ali's household, and in the pleasure of the present community, this memory runs as a subterranean current of another community's displacement and exile, and the nation's fractured legacy.

Hyderabad During Partition - *Razakar*

- Neelkanth's **Razakar** as **autobiographical** and yet also biographical is a common feature of many literary narratives associated with Partition.
- Neelkanth's **Preface to Razakar** begins with references to the gendered violence of Partition and reproduces the oral testimony of an elderly Punjabi neighbour.
- The narrator tells him that she witnessed her three young daughters commit suicide in order to escape imminent rape at the hands of other men.
- Emphasizing that **traumatic memories** of Partition still linger in the hearts of survivors, Neelkanth confesses writing the book as his own family was also affected by Partition violence.



Hyderabad During Partition - *Razakar*

- His parents and paternal uncle and aunt were displaced from their home in Nizamabad district in Hyderabad and sought refuge in **Barshi** (in present-day Maharashtra).
- They returned “**after the storm went silent**” and had to resume their lives again. But the broken branch of life could never be put back again. A **chain of tragedies** followed them.
- Neelkanth writes that his book is based on actual events that took place in Hyderabad.



Partition and Migration in case of Assam

- **Anindita Dasgupta** in her paper “**Denial and resistance: Sylheti Partition ‘refugees’ in Assam**” has discussed about Sylheti Partition migrants in the northeast Indian state of Assam. There was categorical denial of the Sylheti *bhadralok* of their ‘*refugee-ness*’ and their resistance to being constructed as such in Partition studies.
- Sylheti Partition migrants put forward **three** overwhelming reasons for not being refugees.

Partition and Migration in case of Assam

- **Firstly**, during the Partition, the Sylheti Partition migrants were not ‘victims’ or ‘sufferers’ of partition violence/riots as in the west.
- **Second**, their lives, for generations, had straddled the two valleys (the Brahmaputra and the Surma) of colonial Assam.
- **Third**, the **Radcliffe Boundary Commission** had retained four thanas (districts) of the erstwhile Sylhet district in Assam and, therefore, many Sylheti Hindus became ‘Indians’ without having to move an inch.
- Thus, they were refugees neither in the sense of being victims/sufferers driven out of homes by riots nor in the sense of being uprooted.



Partition and Migration in case of Assam

- For most **Sylheti *bhadralok***, Partition meant a loss of landed property in Sylhet or the *desher baari*, leaving intact their landed property and job in the other areas of Assam that remained within India. What stood out clearly in Sylheti *bhadralok* narratives was the proposition that there was a class of people who 'did not have to flee for fear of life'.
- They did not see themselves as passive objects of history swept away by forces beyond their control, but as active agents and participants in the process of decision-making that, they insisted, was their own.
- For the **Sylheti *bhadralok***, there was shame in being identified as refugee; it meant a slur on the **social status** of his family and reflected badly on their own economic position.

Partition and Migration in case of Assam

- For this English-educated and professionally qualified group, 'refugee-hood' implied that a person had no alternative source of income outside Sylhet, or the requisite educational qualification, to fall back on: *'No, no ... We were not refugees. Refugees were living in Sealdah railway station. We never stayed in refugee camps even for a day. My father had houses in Shillong and Dibrugarh'* (Dasgupta 344).

Partition and Sylheti Migrants

- The representation of the **Purbo Bongiyo** (East Bengal) refugee has remained trapped within predictable categories of **shoronartha** (seeking refuge), **vastuhara** (homeless), and **udbastu** (uprooted); looked on with disdain and distaste by the local West Bengali population as **Bangals**, a term that came to be synonymous with refugees.
- Such representations of refugees are jarred by startlingly different images of Sylheti Partition migrants; for instance, the Sylheti '**optees**' in Guahati in 1947–1948 who are remembered as: “came like tourists, camera in hand, clicking random pictures of the city. They thought Assam was a jungle and were so excited.”



Partition and Sylheti Migrants

- For the first and second-generation Partition migrants in the **Brahmaputra** and **Surma Valleys** in **Assam**, it emerges that there was no major incident of violence in Sylhet immediately before, during or after the **Sylhet Referendum** and Partition.
- The **prime factor** for migration, it appears, was a psychological pressure, a fear of what could happen if they stayed back, rather than what had happened or was happening to them at that time:
 - They were mostly swayed by rumors and stories of atrocities on Hindus that floated in from Punjab.
 - People feared that their religion, culture and self-respect will not be safe in Pakistan.

Partition and Sylheti Migrants

- The **Sylheti *bhadraloks*** scattered themselves among the local residents, especially in those areas that already had a sizeable Bengali population, to the extent that certain '*refugee-pockets*' emerged in Assam and in the surrounding region in **Shillong Tura** (now in Meghalaya), the **Cachar Valley**, the erstwhile princely state of Tripura, and in some of the urban localities of the **Brahmaputra Valley**.
- Most Sylhet refugees managed to establish themselves comfortably in and around Assam by the **early-1960s**. The educated section again excelled in business and the professions, while small businessmen also found success in various commercial enterprises. Central government sectors like banks, railways, the office of the Accountant-General, insurance, post and telegraphs were also largely manned by **Bengali Hindus**.

Partition and Sylheti Migrants

Map of Assam Part of Sylhet District
As per Award of the Boundary Commission
1947



Partition and Sylheti Migrants

- The profile of the **Sylheti *bhadralok*** is conclusively different from the refugee stereotype emerging from popular imagination and Partition scholarship.
- They constituted a chunk of the colonial elite in all the Assam districts who, despite losing their *desher baari* after the **Sylhet Referendum**, were not pauperized or victimized by communal violence.
- With the help of an integrated social network and educational qualifications, they managed to re-establish themselves in their land of choice without much difficulty. To this class, refugeehood entailed a condition of shame, penury and helplessness, and this was an appellation they were eager to resist and deny (Dasgupta 357).

Thank You

