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CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 60 – IMMIGRANT POPULACE IN THE DIASPORA

SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION IMMIGRANTS IN THE DIASPORA

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- First generation migrants were adults at the time of Partition, and moved either as single men and women with their natal or extended families, or if the women were recently married, they moved with their new families.
- Those born to these adult refugees are the second generation. They were born before or after partition. They were either children at the time of partition (between 0 and 15 years of age) or were born in Independent India. These children of refugees had a wide range of experiences growing up while their parents established themselves in the host land.
- The third generation includes those born to the children of the refugees (the first generation are their grandparents).



- Each of these three generations have different understandings of partition for two reasons: they grew up in different time periods and their family narratives are disjointed.
- The memories are not straight-forward remembrances, but interspersed with forgetting: individuals do not want to remember, families do not want to recall bad times, people attempt to avoid the stigma of being a refugee, and the nation-state wants to focus on the newly established independent nation.
- The personal fragmented narratives have given each of the three generations distinct, yet overlapping, views of partition around three dominant issues: the emphasis on success, the temporary nature of the event and the shared culture.
- The second and third generations relate to the success of their families in two ways. On the one hand, they project back to a notion of pre-partition success and, on the other hand, they project forward and espouse familial duty and their own versions of a hard work ethic.

- The second and especially third generation emphasize the effect of partition on their families by recounting the wealth and status lost when the family became refugees. The third generation imagines a pre-partition lifestyle in which their forefathers had substantial tracks of land and lived in a sizeable haveli inhabited by a large joint family and many servants.
- The second generation focus on maintaining their middle-class identity, which stems in part from the knowledge that historically their own families had wealth commensurate with status. By emphasizing education to gain wealth, the second and third generations attest to their potential for maintaining their families' reputation that was originally earned by dint of hard work and sacrifice of the refugee generation.

- Success for the second and third generations is a combination of understanding of their family's pre-partition life style, a hard work ethic and the family pressure to do well by achieving material success and stability.
- The third generation's vision of past wealth is a direct product of how the first generation narrates the past. The hard working Punjabi refugee is not only a first generation trope, but also a larger stereotype. The figure of the hard working Punjabi refugee is acknowledged through film and social lore.
- Elder generation emphasized their own success and stability in comparison with the difficulties still faced by their Pakistani counterparts: "They did not fit in"; "There are still problems"(Raj Dhooleka 38).

- Third generation usually grew up with memories inherited from the two generations that preceded them, memories that are partly idealised, partly imagined and partly extremely negative. This process of passing on and inheriting memories is likely to distort the contours of an individual's understanding of history, unless divergent views are brought together and presented in parallel.
- Anjali Gera Roy – “Partition-in-the-west, as in Partition-in-the-east, was not uniform experience shared by all those who crossed the border from the west but varied according to gender, class, caste, ethnicity, region, education, profession, mode of transport and place of settlement”(5). Gera Roy analyses the ways in which Partition altered the notions of home, belongingness and a community.
- How these ‘un-objectifiable memories’ and subjectively transmitted stories influence the third generation's understanding of post-partition history.

- For Punjabi refugees in Delhi, the convergence between the social arenas of the family and the nation reveals the corresponding characteristics of strategic ignorance. Family members who judiciously need or want to forget produce ignorance.
- In parallel, the newly formed nation's need to forget the violence of its origin generates its own specific ignorance.
- Ignorance on the state level does not always coincide with ignorance on the family level. These disjunctures expose the "set of norms whose sole purpose is to regulate the inherent debatability of the past in the present" (Appadurai 'The Past as a Scarce Resource,' 201).

- *Inherited Memories* seeks to fill, by talking to children and grandchildren of Partition refugees and understanding how memory is “passed down, what is retained or lost, and how it is owned and shared by subsequent generations.”
- Firdous Azim - “these are the memories of third-generation descendants of migrants/ refugees, who have no direct experience of life before the 1947 Partition... The story they weave is complex, with many strands, where differences pertain not only to religion, but also to ethnicity and language.”
- Partition narratives in refugee families illuminate two unresolved modalities of "anti memory" (Werbner 'Beyond Oblivion: Confronting Memory Crisis'1998), the tension between ignorance and forgetting.

- Forgetting is the power of erasure, obliterating and revising memories. Ignorance is the power of unawareness, contributing to a strategic space unhampered by memory. Both are used in different ways at the level of the family and the state (Raj Dhooleka 46)
- The familial silence around the shared links between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims has translated into a structural ignorance. Generational forgetting has led to an intergenerational ignorance. 'Enemies' and 'friends' are accordingly defined.
- The creation of Pakistan is now popularly glossed as the political result of yielding to Muslim interests. Partition in this reading "represents another loss: that of the unity-territorial and imagined of the nation" (Tharu 75).

- For second generation Bengali migrants, interviews reveal nostalgic pining for a lost homeland, emotional attachment, to a large extent being sublimated and diluted.
- The younger generation in West Bengal no longer speaks the dialects from East Bengal, nor are sticklers of East Bengali customs and traditions. They clearly feel rooted to Calcutta. Their social setting, transformed into, what Olwig calls 'cultural sites'.
- Younger members from immigrant families grow up in housings that have been, in many cases, modelled after the 'original home' in East Bengal/Pakistan. In the absence of the real referent, they understand 'East Bengali lifestyle' through a simulated existence in Calcutta or other parts of India.

- What is interesting, the Kolkata has undergone a lot of changes through the post-Partition decades and the meaning of the city has shifted through its interface with the new ways of living and being. Further, with the name changed, the city is a palimpsest.
- While for the first generation, landed property, rivers, joint-family system represented the cultural sites, for the second generation the cultural site has shifted to the country of immigration.
- Dipankar Sinha- By the turn of the millennium, the phenomenon of insider/outsider to a large extent has watered down. There has been considerable 'mainstreaming' of the colony population.

- Diasporic communities may take many forms and engage in a substantial range of activities, yet “the diaspora” continues to resonate for scholars, social movements, and national governments as a locus for examining transnational practices, particularly in terms of global capital and political and cultural flows.
- Diasporas are multi-faceted social organizations, interwoven in the contemporary context with legacies of colonialism and emerging trends towards cultural, economic, political, and social globalization.
- Diaspora should be conceived beyond the traditional notion of persecuted victims forced to flee their homeland. However, the enduring image of diasporic communities remains bound not to the notion of migration, but rather to that of forced displacement.
- Independence and partition of India in August 1947 fundamentally changed how members of the Indian diaspora community in Africa identified and defined themselves, by focusing on the experiences of Indians in East Africa, and South Africa.

- First, independence caused them to move away from India as the source of political identity and see themselves as a distinct community defined by the unique context of their adopted country.
- Second, the partition of India required Indians in Africa to re-define notions of territorial belonging as it was now a country fundamentally different from the one they left.
- In some cases, the religious divisions worsened by partition also causes Indians in Africa to identify more strongly along religious lines. Different circumstances in Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa caused the Indian populations in those countries to react differently to the independence and partition of British India.
- The diaspora shared a common “pan-Indian” identity that was reinforced by a common subordinate relationship with the British. Writing in 1946, Nagendranath Gangulee saw the interests of Indians at home and abroad as identical and demanded support for the Indian diaspora from the British Indian Government (Heuberger 76).



- Partition of India, marked by the violent clash between Hindus and Muslims, affected the identity of the diaspora along religious lines. Due to the circumstances of their migration, the history of the Hindu and Muslim Indian immigrants in Africa was closely knit.
- Regardless of the social differences they experienced in India, indentured immigrants in Africa in the nineteenth century found themselves living and working side by side, often in very difficult conditions.
- According to Gangulee it was necessary for Indians overseas to compromise and adapt their “habits” in order to live in their adopted African countries.
- Intermarriage between castes that was forbidden in India also occurred regularly. For Indians born abroad, differences of caste and religion carried less cultural significance than in the home country.



- In light of the extreme violence between Hindus and Muslims that followed partition on the sub-continent, mutually tolerable relationship enjoyed by Indian Hindus and Muslims in the diaspora was also fundamentally harmed or altered. It is evident that divisions between Hindu and Muslim communities in Kenya and South Africa occurred later in the twentieth century.
- Chandrashekhar Bhat - internal relationships in Indian communities abroad were often defined by the external conditions of their adopted countries. About the Indian immigrants in Africa prior to partition, Bhat describes: “Indian identity supercedes all other bases of identity to enter onto ethnic competition often leading to conflict with other immigrant groups” (Bhat 4).

- Partition is central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent, as the Holocaust is to identity among Jews.
- Ayesha Jalal – calls Partition “the central historical event in twentieth century South Asia.” She writes, “A defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the peoples and states of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future.”(Dalrymple *The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition*, 2015).
- British scholar Yasmin Khan, “The Great Partition” - Partition “stands testament to the follies of empire, which ruptures community evolution, distorts historical trajectories and forces violent state formation from societies that would otherwise have taken different—and unknowable—paths” (180).

Thank You

