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# Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 61 – IMMIGRANT POPULACE IN THE DIASPORA  
DIASPORA; RE-VISITING PARTITION THROUGH A TIME-SPACE GAP

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- “Victim diasporas” (Pablo Bose 59) such as Jewish groups persecuted across Europe through the centuries, Africans scattered by slavery over the Americas and the Caribbean, or, more recently, Armenians and Palestinians, displaced by genocide or deprived of a homeland.
- Alternative labels are often used synonymously for diasporas —transmigrants, émigrés, immigrants, and expatriates among them—though these terms often describe very different forms of population movements.
- Regardless of the reasons for “leaving,” generations of communities have flourished away from their “original homelands,” yet retained strong economic and political ties to their places of origin and often maintained a distinct cultural identity.
- Whether arriving as legal or undocumented labour, migrant workers have stayed on in host countries, settling in discrete, identifiable communities, and sending financial support to their families left behind. It is indeed this dialectic, of connections to both a “new” and an “old” home simultaneously, that is characteristic of diasporas, no matter what their origin (Pablo Bose, 59).



- Role of compulsion is central in identifying whether a community is diasporic or migrant in nature.
- The actual compulsion is at the behest of a human agent. The motivations behind forced migration are often part of a larger political strategy, tribal animus, or base self-interest (Bose Pablo 59).
- In the context of the Indian Partition, by 1970s, the terms “refugee” and “displaced” had increasingly been replaced in official language by “migrants.”

- The exile that the refugee communities experience is from their homes and the lives that they are forced to reconstruct in a new land.
- Both the 'original' home and the newly built home might be very similar, though paradoxically both might be equally foreign to the refugee.
- Populations fleeing conflict and violence cross an international border to become refugees in neighbouring countries, whose populations might be quite similar in cultural practices and beliefs, and whose “difference” has less to do with nationalism and more with the arbitrary boundaries of competing colonial powers (Bose 60).

- New development complexes by the government are aimed at diasporic groups and their assumed needs and desires, a set of preferences that are removed at several levels from those of “ordinary” Indian citizens.
- For many Indians within India—particularly in the emerging middle-classes—the NRI and the lifestyle associated with them has equally become an object of aspiration.
- A segment of the refugee diaspora is sustaining and transforming the notion of an idealized homeland—at the same time they are themselves shaped by events and perceptions within their homeland.

- The independence and partition of the Indian sub-continent directly affected lives of Indians living overseas, and unsettled long-held notions of cultural, religious, and territorial belonging.
- Due to new foreign policy concerns that focused on the rights of native Africans and a diminished political use for Indians abroad, the independent Indian Government was less engaged in the cause of the diaspora than its colonial counterpart had been.
- The loss of support from India caused Indians overseas to shift away from India as the only source of identity and define themselves through the unique contexts of their positions as Indo-Kenyans, Indo-Mauritians, and Indo-South Africans.
- At the time of partition, Kenyan and South African Indian populations were engaged in an intense struggle against a common oppressive colonial entity that was increasingly hostile.
- India served as a uniting force that allowed the diaspora to define themselves as Indians against a common British 'Other' and local populations.



- In Kenya and South Africa the Indian communities were a small ethnic minority, surrounded by a large native African population. This meant communal divisions were less significant than racial ones.
- In South Africa and Kenya, Indian populations were a small percentage of the whole and needed to remain unified to face hostile, racist, and exploitive colonial regimes.
- Partition and the loss of India as a uniting force caused Indians to re-conceive their identities by defining themselves against each other, and fragment along religious lines.



- While Hindus, regardless of the location of their ancestral homes, emphasized their relationship to India, Muslims distanced themselves from India and in some cases referred to Pakistan as their “homeland” even when the physical location of their ancestral homes fell within India.
- The division of India forced Indians overseas to reconceptualize their relationship with an ancestral homeland that was now fundamentally altered. For the diasporic Indians, the division of ancestral homelands occurred along religious lines after their departure from the subcontinent (Heuberger 89).

- In Mauritius, the partition of India did create new divisions among Hindus and Muslims. These divisions were reflected mostly in the political realm and hardly reflected the extreme communal violence of the subcontinent.
- The communal violence that broke out in India caused Muslims and Hindus on the island to move away from ethnic conceptions of identity and define themselves along religious lines more than ever before.
- The independence and partition of the Indian sub-continent created a unique and pluralistic diaspora with very complex notions of belonging and identity, which continues to inform the study of Indians overseas today.

## Re-visiting Partition Through a Time-Space Gap

- The orientalists legitimised colonialism as a means of returning India to its glorious past, and maintained an analogy with ancient European civilization, while the modernist legitimation of colonization consisted of introducing civilisational and social improvement through progress.
- Ronald Inden's *Imagining India* (1990) - a representational effort history becomes a cultural-political project through gathering a body of themes, images, icons and narrative forms such as travelogues, etc., acts as a discursive apparatus for constructing the other.

- The 'imagined', 'translated' and 'orientalist' India was constructed through intellectual process, which was implicated through socio-cultural relations existed during those times.
- The ideological concerns and construction of 'India' produced by William Jones and other orientalists require a simultaneous probing of method and content in order to determine their ideological status – observing how India the known becomes Jones' 'India', a knowledge object for colonial ruling (Writing 'India', Doing 'Ideology'; 33).

- Both India and Pakistan have produced documentations, which despite its biases, are useful to the historians in understanding the communal violence of August 1947.
- Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, in *The Emergence of Pakistan* – In Pakistan, there have been a number of government publications that understand the violence against Muslims in East Punjab in terms of a so-called ‘Sikh plan’ (Virdee, 27).

- Mohinder Singh Randhawa and Bhaskar Rao focus on the epic story of rehabilitation; both were official documents, which portray the Indian government's stance and relay their agenda.
- Richard Symonds, who was engaged in relief work in Punjab during the 1947 disturbances, provides a personal account, which combines insights from 'high politics' with what would now be termed a 'history from beneath' approach (*The Making of Pakistan*).

- For both India and Pakistan, it was important to establish an independent national identity; re-imagining the past and creating a new national history allowed this new identity to emerge and to reinforce and justify the nascent nation-state. This explains the dominance and glorification of the 'great men' such as Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah, in the post-independent histories of India and Pakistan (Virdee, 31).
- Over the past seventy years, many Indian writers are now much more critical of the founding fathers, Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru, and more broadly of the Indian independence movement.
- The 1947 Partition of the subcontinent does not feature to a great extent in postcolonial narratives of India, as is evident in the lack of its memorialization through museums. In short, the Punjab, Bengal, and Kashmir have different landscapes of partition memory.

- Ram Manohar Lohia's autobiography makes an independent analysis of Partition from the socialist standpoint including its reasons.
- The autobiographical narrative by Shahnawaz Khan from Pakistan provides the experience of his daughter Mumtaz's transformation in political ideology, from being a Congress follower to becoming a Muslim League supporter.
- *In Freedom's Shade* written in Urdu (1949) and translated by Anis Kidwai in 2011 is about the collective violence, mass dislocation and rehabilitation efforts in Noakhali, Bihar, Multan, Rawalpindi and Garhmukhteshwar.
- Kamlaben Patel's *Torn from the Roots* published initially in 1977 in Gujarathi and translated into English in 2006

- It is an important memoir about Patel, a social worker from Gujarat who became involved in the activities of Operation Recovery headed by Mridula Sarabhai aimed at restoring abducted women to their families.
- She witnesses men bursting into tears with the prospect of separation from the women that they had abducted. Patel also became aware of the strong feelings of guilt on the part of the abducted women. Patel's narrative adopts a dispassionate tone while describing the various aspects of the recovery operation which the author was part of as an official representative of the government of India in Pakistan.
- Prakash Tandon's *Punjabi Century* (1968) is about a Punjabi family of the Khatri caste, chronicling events from 1857 to 1947. It qualifies as a Partition memoir, which refers to the dispersal and scattering of the Tandon family after their forced migration during the Partition.

- Abdul Rahman Siddiqi's *Smoke without Fire: Portraits of Pre-Partition Delhi* (2011) seeks to recapture memories of the way of life of Muslim families in Old Delhi in the time leading up to the Partition.
- Siddiqi candidly acknowledges uncanny aspects of the Partition experience in August 1947—while the violence had begun to peak with shooting in the streets, the twenty-three-year-old journalist and his friends kept “romancing” (a euphemism for visits to the kothas where the courtesans plied their trade) (84).

- “The Sixth River: A Journal from the Partition of India” (2019) is a wryly ironic memoir of Partition written in Urdu in 1948 by Fikr Taunsvi, the pen-name of Ramlal Bhatia, a Hindu columnist and satirist based in Lahore, who migrated to India in November 1947.
- In Taunsvi’s ironic view, given the absurdity of the Partition, art, literature, philosophy, and science all had become speechless.

- Tandon's and Siddiqi's narratives are more conventional and nostalgic chronicles of personal and family history to which the Partition becomes a termination point leading to a new beginning.
- Taunsvi takes a skeptical stance with respect to nationalist illusions and alludes to the risks faced by writers. Without self-pity or nostalgia, he acknowledges the climate of intolerance and hostility against the moment of celebration and self-glorification.

- Novels on Kashmir feature young Kashmiri men frustrated by personal and political oppressions, and underscore the damage wrought upon the youth whose lives have been consumed by violence and murder.
- The best-known of these novels are Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011)
- In Waheed's *The Collaborator*, women are minor characters who serve as occasional reminder of the lack of domestic space in the rural sites of a war-torn Kashmir.

- Meena Arora Nayak's *Endless Rain* (2006) features a radicalized young man named Ali, who joins the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in the mid-1980s after losing faith in politics as a means of securing a plebiscite.
- *Endless Rain* explores the history of Kashmir from the mid-1940s until the early 1990s and highlights the methods undertaken by Kashmiri men to gain sovereignty for Kashmir. The novel traces the lives of three generations of a Kashmiri Muslim family living in Srinagar.
- Iffat Malik, in his study *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict, International Dispute*- “only in this century have the Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir developed distinct communal identities—originally they were united by a common ‘Kashmiri’ identity, referred to as Kashmiriyat, and formed a single Kashmiri community.

- Tahmima Anam, a trained anthropologist at Harvard, is well known for her Bengal Trilogy. Her works include *A Golden Age* (2007), *The Good Muslim* (2011), *The Bones of Grace* (2016) and *The Startup Wife*.
- Her debut novel *A Golden Age* (2007) narrates the story of Rehana Haque, a young woman from an aristocratic but impoverished Calcutta family and her tumultuous life as a result of the civil war.
- *The Good Muslim* (2011) is notable for its nuanced depiction of the challenges of the nation-building process, and the realities of corruption and compromise.
- *The Bones of Grace* (2016) revolves around Zubaida Haque, an adopted daughter of a native Bengali family who finds herself torn between two worlds – her loyalty towards her motherland Bangladesh, and America where she completed her studies.



# Thank You

