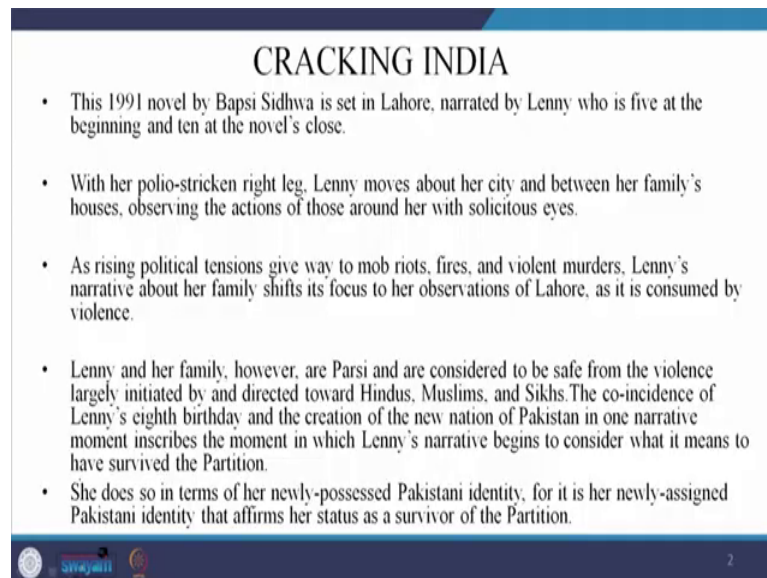


**Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema**  
**Prof. Sarbani Banerjee**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

**Lecture - 30**  
**Accounts of the Survivor - VII**

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are discussing on the Accounts of the Survivor. Today, we are going to start our discussion on Bapsi Sidhwa's important novel called Cracking India. When we talk of Cracking India, the Hindu-Muslim dyad is further destabilized through the presence of a third perspective, a third position - that of the Indian Parsis. The Parsis are a small community that live in India. (Refer Slide Time: 01:19)



**CRACKING INDIA**

- This 1991 novel by Bapsi Sidhwa is set in Lahore, narrated by Lenny who is five at the beginning and ten at the novel's close.
- With her polio-stricken right leg, Lenny moves about her city and between her family's houses, observing the actions of those around her with solicitous eyes.
- As rising political tensions give way to mob riots, fires, and violent murders, Lenny's narrative about her family shifts its focus to her observations of Lahore, as it is consumed by violence.
- Lenny and her family, however, are Parsi and are considered to be safe from the violence largely initiated by and directed toward Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The co-incidence of Lenny's eighth birthday and the creation of the new nation of Pakistan in one narrative moment inscribes the moment in which Lenny's narrative begins to consider what it means to have survived the Partition.
- She does so in terms of her newly-possessioned Pakistani identity, for it is her newly-assigned Pakistani identity that affirms her status as a survivor of the Partition.

This 1991 novel by Bapsi Sidhwa is set in Lahore, and the narrator is a child named Lenny, who is 5 at the beginning of the narrative, and she turns 10 at the novel's close. This could be seen as a journey of a juvenile. The story is of her entree into adulthood and [it is] a rite-to-passage kind of narrative, where she loses her innocence in due course as the country gains independence at the expense of the subcontinent being disinterred.

It is the story of a rite-to-passage. It is a story of a child growing up, where in due course the country gains independence [and] yet, [this is happening] at the expense of the subcontinent being divided into different postcolonial nations. We see that Lenny moves

about the city of Lahore between her family's houses and observes the actions of the adults with her solicitous eyes.

So, she is a special case; she has a polio-stricken right leg. The entire narrative escalates from a situation -- from humdrum life, a kind of ensconced life that Lenny is living with her Parsi parents in an upper middle-class or affluent neighborhood where she belongs, till the political tensions give way to mob riots, fires and and murders and incendiary.

Lenny's narrative shifts its focus to the topic of partition. The entire city of Lahore is consumed by violence. The Parsi's position is as unique as Lenny's polio-stricken leg. They strike out as a unique people or population among Indians, just as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are fighting among themselves.

And so, they are generally considered as safe from the violence that is largely initiated by and directed towards these three communities - Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There is this coincidence we see in the narrative between Lenny's eighth birthday and the creation of the new nation of Pakistan, to which she would henceforth belong.

This is a moment in which Lenny's narrative begins to consider what it means to have survived the partition. So, starting from the story of a Parsi household, a humdrum life, the story transitions to recording the experience of trauma and survival in the post-partition period.

Lenny all of a sudden acquires a newly-possessed Pakistani identity, and this newly-assigned identity affirms her status as a survivor of partition. At first, the narrative of *Cracking India* seems to be about a young girl and her experience of her neighborhood; of the people and family surrounding her during the time of partition. And yet as the novel progresses, Lenny attempts at understanding the meaning of partition, and intercepting with the ongoings of partition. (Refer Slide Time: 06:26)

## CRACKING INDIA

- What at first seems to be about a young girl's autobiographical experience during the time of the Partition becomes, as the novel progresses, a narrative about Lenny's attempt to ascribe meaning to the Partition both as a historical event and as a trauma. It is within this narrative shift that Lenny's role as narrator is most poignantly complicated by her inability to fully experience and witness the Partition as a trauma.
- Whereas Lenny's narrative is often characterized by innocent eyes that lack worldly experience, her youthful first-person narrative is interrupted by what seems as an older voice attempting to remember the time of the Partition. These moments of narrative interruption occur during the instances in which Lenny attempts to tell about the violence tearing through her city's streets and houses. These narrative interruptions corroborate that only within the failure of fiction is testimony to the trauma of the Partition most poignantly voiced.
- The narrative follows a guided tour of a small section of an affluent neighbourhood in the city of Lahore. As Lenny traverses through Warris Road, Queens Road, and Jail Road, and locates the houses of her Electric-aunt and Godmother, it becomes clear that this guided tour is actually the search for refuge 'from the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road.'

Her experiences, her interceptions go on to document and record something that becomes a major chapter in history; it goes on to record a historical event and something that is remembered as a traumatic chapter... poignantly remembered later on.

It is within this narrative shift that Lenny's role as a narrator becomes complicated. There is this inability to fully experience and witness the partition as a trauma. Lenny's narrative is initially captured through her innocent eyes, the eyes of a juvenile that lack any kind of world experience.

However, her youthful first person narrative is subsequently interrupted by an older voice that is trying to remember these disturbed times and trying to understand/decipher and explain the meanings of whatever Lenny experiences through hindsight. These moments of interruption attempts to unfold or unpack and understand about the violence steering through the streets and houses of Lahore.

So, Lenny's inability to explain everything or the gap that is present between the juvenile narrator's voice and the adult trying to decipher meanings through retrospection, corroborates the fact about how fiction... how it is only within the failure of fiction that testimony to the trauma of partition can be most poignantly voiced.

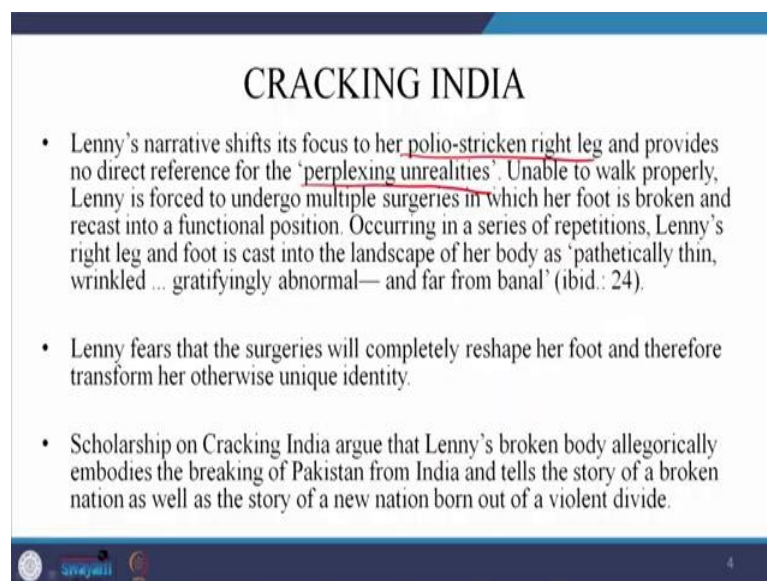
It is only within this failure of fiction, this inexplicability that trauma of the partition can most poignantly be voiced or described or, let us say, portrayed. The narrative follows a guided tour of a small section of an affluent neighborhood in the city of Lahore. We see the reader takes a tour with Lenny through Warris road, Queens road and Jail road, and

locates the house of some of these characters in the novel, such as the Electric aunt and Godmother.

This guided tour actually becomes a search for refuge, search for refuge from the perplexing unrealities of [Lenny's] home on Warris road. So, what is this unreality of the Parsi existence? Lenny's voice quickly shifts its focus from her unreal address, her unreal positioning on Warris road and focuses on her polio-stricken right leg.

One understands, the reader understands that there is a kind of analogy between the two; between the poliostricken leg and the perplexing unreality pertaining to her geographical location. In both instances, her leg could be seen...different critics have seen Lenny's polio-stricken leg as symbol for and representing different things.

It could be [seen] as a foot that is broken and recast into a functional position, and could mean the cracking of the nation. So, it could be a synecdoche of what the nation is going through, the larger happenings at the level of macrocosm/at a macrocosmic level. The happening at a macrocosmic level and her leg. (Refer Slide Time: 11:45)



### CRACKING INDIA

- Lenny's narrative shifts its focus to her polio-stricken right leg and provides no direct reference for the 'perplexing unrealities'. Unable to walk properly, Lenny is forced to undergo multiple surgeries in which her foot is broken and recast into a functional position. Occurring in a series of repetitions, Lenny's right leg and foot is cast into the landscape of her body as 'pathetically thin, wrinkled ... gratifyingly abnormal— and far from banal' (ibid.: 24).
- Lenny fears that the surgeries will completely reshape her foot and therefore transform her otherwise unique identity.
- Scholarship on Cracking India argue that Lenny's broken body allegorically embodies the breaking of Pakistan from India and tells the story of a broken nation as well as the story of a new nation born out of a violent divide.

© Sreyas

Lenny is forced to undergo multiple surgeries, where her foot is broken and recast into a functional position. We understand that the Parsi community also has had to (historically speaking) readjust with the larger Indian scenario, with the existing populace. And there is a story that is narrated in this narrative by Sidhwa, where the narrator recounts how the first Parsi settlers came to India during the Mughal period.

I mean their presence would sweeten or have a positive impact on Indian society without actually claiming a lot of visibility; a kind of a minority that never became extremely visible. So, that is a unique position that is also symbolized through this polio-stricken leg.

And there is this fear that the child Lenny constantly feels; she is perplexed and worries that these multiple surgeries on her foot will completely reshape and transform her otherwise-unique identity.

So, the operations on a foot and the different operations and experiments that the society undergoes/ the fabric of the nation is undergoing different changes. So, until a few days back, Lahore was part of undivided India and after the partition, Lahore becomes part of a new nation-state called Pakistan. Just like Lenny becomes a Pakistani, her foot is also being made to brook different experiments, different operations on it.

So, we see that the foot and the nation are kind of an analogy; through the foot we understand the change -- how the fabric of the nation actually undergoes several changes.

Scholarship on Cracking India argues that Lenny's broken leg embodies the breaking of Pakistan from India, and it tells the story of a broken nation as well as the story of a new nation that is born out of a violent divide.

Lenny actually grows up in a household where there are many females. Unconsciously, she acquires a pacifist attitude and describes how the elders (and, at a later stage, she goes on to say how the males) are actually responsible for all the destruction and war. The elders have bequeathed a war-ridden childhood to the current generation. This is something that becomes obvious, that becomes apparent when the Second World War gets over and the question of partition is looming. (Refer Slide Time: 15:50)

## LOST CHILDHOOD

- When the Second World War gets over, Lenny describes how the elders of her generation are responsible for the destructive and war-ridden childhood of the current generation, during the world war as well as during the Partition.
- She refers to how dominant the atmosphere of war pervades her childhood - "I who have subversively hoped that the defector Bose and the Japanese enemy win the war. All the same I am swept by a sense of relief so unburdening that I realize I was born with an awareness of the war: and I recall the dim, faraway fear of bombs that tinged with bitterness my mother's milk. No wonder I was a colicky baby."

Lenny refers to how the dominant atmosphere of war pervades her childhood. Lenny describes/ Lenny refers to how the question of partition as well as the Second World War at the backdrop actually shaped her childhood and took away a chunk of her childhood actually.

She says, "I who have subversively hoped that the defector Bose and the Japanese enemy win the war all the same, I am swept by a sense of relief. So unburdening that I realize I was born with an awareness of the war. And I recall the dim faraway fear of bombs that tinged with bitterness my mother's milk, no wonder I was a colicky baby." (Refer Slide Time: 16:44)

## LOST CHILDHOOD

- Lenny as a young narrator helps the reader delve into the confused perspective of children during the Partition. The concept of partition for her is merely digging a deep canal between the two countries, as she says, "A new nation is born. India has been divided after all. Did they dig the long, long canal Ayah mentioned?"
- Like many children from her time, Lenny's childhood has been affected by the turmoil. Despite the fact that Lenny represents the section not under direct threat during the bifurcation, her daily life is impacted by it. She witnesses the riots and murders.
- As a kid her birthday is special for her, but the elders are too traumatized by the ongoings to make her feel special. A chunk of her childhood gets lost during all this.

Lenny helps the reader delve into the confused perspective of children that are witnessing the partition. This is where Bapsi Sidhwa's novel actually tends to fill in a gap and actually renders a unique perspective and an additional point of view that revisits the closed Hind-Muslim-Sikh narrative or dialogue.

We have a specially-abled juvenile Parsi [girl's] perspective here. The concept of partition for Lenny is merely digging a deep canal. Here, we also see how the mainstream nation and the local ideas meet each other through a kind of simulacrum. A kind of tell-tale fairytale prism, where there [is] as such no reality but realities, and realities actually are made to stand on the head.

So, people have their localized beliefs that topsyturvy the larger nationalistic happenings by the time these happenings or these political decisions by major high-flying national actors reach the local microcosm; by the time they reach the microcosm their proportions change, and so do their meanings.

So, the imagination of a deep canal that would be drawn/ that would be dug between two countries is a case in hand. Lenny... and this is something once again... we call this telltale because Lenny has got to know about this purported canal and its design from her Ayah, who is also a subaltern existence. So, she says that a new nation is born. India has been divided after they dig the long long canal I mentioned. So, this is how stories brew up - stories that are half-baked and unverified.

They have this fairytale quality to them. Like children from her time, Lenny's childhood is affected by the turmoil, and so, although she lays claim to fairytales like other children of our age, the content of these fairytales are very different. They engage with the question of violence, question of conflict and the question of human dignity being [compromised] and human loss.

Despite the fact that Lenny represents a group of people such as the Parsis that are not under direct threat during the bifurcation, her daily life is impacted by the happenings, the riots nevertheless. She witnesses the riots and the murders. We see that on the day of her birthday, the elders are too traumatized by the ongoings.

And so the happiness, the joy is actually marred and we understand the children born during this time, regardless of the class or the socio-economic background they come

from, actually lose a part of their childhood because of these disturbances. The author refers to the child protagonist and the narrator's lost childhood in an instance, where Ayah actually discovers Lenny's white hair. (Refer Slide Time: 21:45)

## LOST CHILDHOOD

- Further, the author refers to the child protagonist and narrator's lost childhood in an instance where the Ayah comes across Lenny's white hair, to which she expresses her surprise that "our hair hasn't all turned white."
- Lenny's innocence is misused by the Ice-Candy man, when he extracts the information about Ayah by deceiving Lenny. Within seconds Lenny realizes her trust has been broken, this will lead to a scarring experience for Lenny and a part of her innocence is lost with this incident.



This is also very symbolic, where Lenny's white hair is discovered. And to this, she expresses her surprise that all her hair has not already turned white. So, we see this kind of ... this is a treatment that we have earlier seen in Manto too; how the child's alternative perspective actually amplifies the carnage, the animosity.. right.

We see that there is a point where Lenny is offering her birthday cake to another child, whose mother has been raped and murdered. And the child in question actually hails from a much poorer background as compared to Lenny. And the child has never actually heard of a cake. He, in turn, beseeches Lenny and her cousin to play marbles with him.

And so, we see that children's experiences are also variegated, they cannot be put under one blanket. Yet, it is extremely pathetic that children come to terms with/ discover many adult truths. They talk about rape, they enact rape in their games. In casual dialects, we see children are trying to know about and discuss about rape.

There is a point, where Lenny and her cousin point to a few women that have been violated by perpetrators and they call them "giri hui aurat" (fallen women) emulating an adult expression; of course, this is how the mainstream society look at the molested, violated women. And so, [the children] say that these are "giri gui aurat", just following the adults, the way the adults speak.

So, children are learning the common parlance, the common words that are used by the adults during the partition. And Lenny's innocence is misused by the ice candy man, when he in the end.. we see that he is extracting the information about Ayah through deceiving Lenny. So, it becomes a lifetime lesson for Lenny - in all probability the question of trust is something she loses.

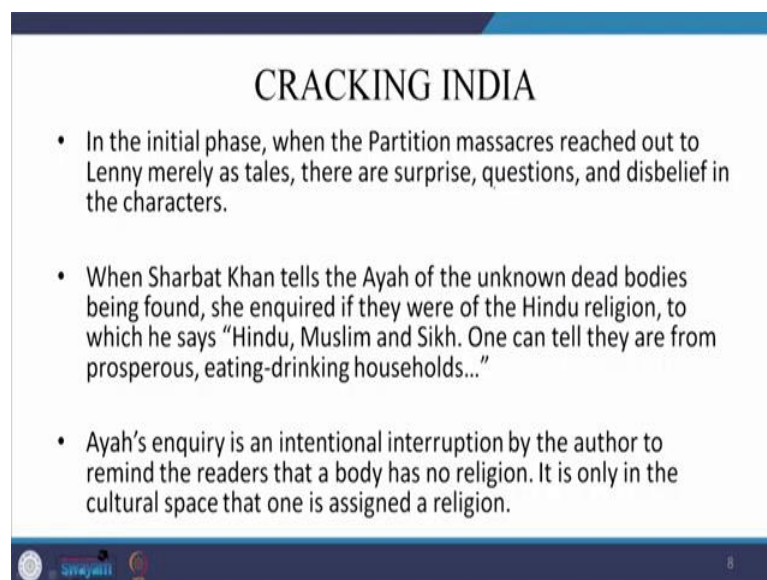
Her trust is broken by a friend. She was extremely fond of the ice candy man, and yet he is the architect of Ayah's abduction. He is the chief architect of Ayah's abduction. The entire narrative is actually motivated in a way to purge the adult narrator's guilt that she has been carrying inside her since she divulged about Ayah.

This narrative is a way of setting oneself free from a sense of [guilt] or relieving oneself from a sense of guilt, confessing something wrong that one has done to a friend, a close friend.

So, the ice candy man suddenly becomes an enemy to Ayah; and he actually extracts the information about Ayah by deceiving Lenny.

And within seconds, Lenny later realizes that her trust has been broken. And so, it leads to a scary experience for Lenny. With this incident, she loses a part of her innocent self and the question of trust is something that she has to deal with for the rest of her life.

Like I said, the entire narrative is actually motivated by [the need to purge] a sense of guilt. So, the process of writing is a way of confessing the wrong that one has done to a friend. So, in the initial phase when the partition massacres reach out to these localities in Lahore, they do so, merely as tales. And so, there are surprises, questions and there are disbeliefs in the characters. (Refer Slide Time: 27:15)



### CRACKING INDIA

- In the initial phase, when the Partition massacres reached out to Lenny merely as tales, there are surprise, questions, and disbelief in the characters.
- When Sharbat Khan tells the Ayah of the unknown dead bodies being found, she enquired if they were of the Hindu religion, to which he says "Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. One can tell they are from prosperous, eating-drinking households..."
- Ayah's enquiry is an intentional interruption by the author to remind the readers that a body has no religion. It is only in the cultural space that one is assigned a religion.

So, for example, when Sharbat Khan tells the Ayah of the unknown dead bodies that are being found, Ayah inquires if these dead people are from/ belong to the Hindu religion, and Sharbat Khan retorts that Hindu, Muslim and Sikh; one can tell they [the dead bodies] are from prosperous eating drinking households. So, this kind of interruption/ preemption by Ayah is intentional in the story, where the author reminds the readers that a body actually has no religion.

It is only through our social and cultural spaces that we acquire a religious identity. So, the novel from its humdrum/ ordinary existence.. it transitions to massacre. So, the turn

of the events tell the readers that partition will become/ will be inevitable after a point. It starts off from a period, when the partition models were more of rumors than reality for the larger section. (Refer Slide Time: 29:08)

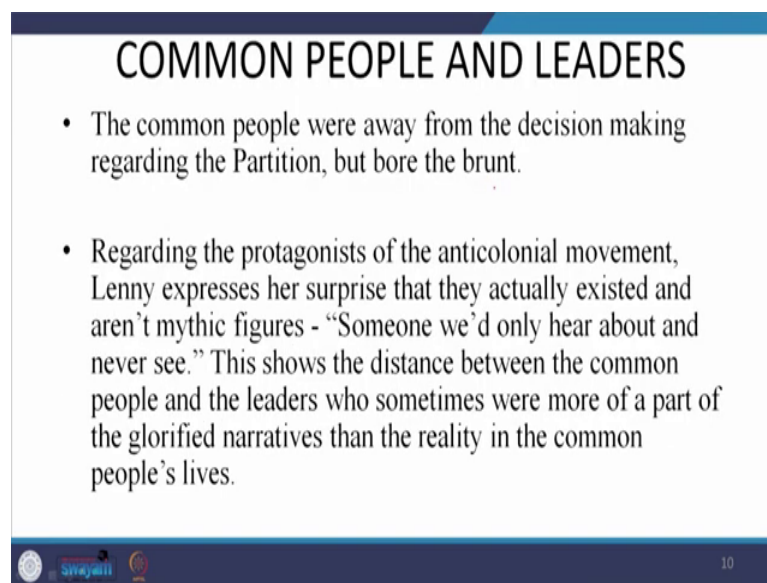
## TRANSITION

- The novel is a slow transition to the massacre. It starts off from a period when the Partition murders were more of a part of the rumors for the larger section, till the situation transitions slowly to unravelling dead bodies everywhere, as the rift between the religious communities increases. Those who were friends get divided on the basis of their religious identity. It further moves over to regularly coming across processions, riots, murders, rapes and the gory truth of the Partition.
- As the Partition massacres become intense, the identity of people gets limited to their religion. Lenny describes this transition and a shift in her own perspective towards people when, for the first time, she realizes that her Ayah is a Hindu woman.

And then the situation transitions slowly to unravelling dead bodies. One finds dead bodies everywhere, and the rift between the religious communities gradually increase. So, one see that there is a point where the people from the subaltern sections, would eat and indulge in merrymaking together regardless of the religious identity,

subsequently at the turn of events...[these] friends from different communities get divided on the basis of their religious identity. So, the processions, the riots, murders, rapes and the gory truth of the partition becomes more and more evident with the progression of the narrative.

As the partition massacres become intense, the identity of the people are synonymous with their religion. There is this shift in the child's perspective where, for the first time, Lenny realizes that Ayah is from Hindu community, that she is a Punjabi Hindu woman. (Refer Slide Time: 30:24)



### COMMON PEOPLE AND LEADERS

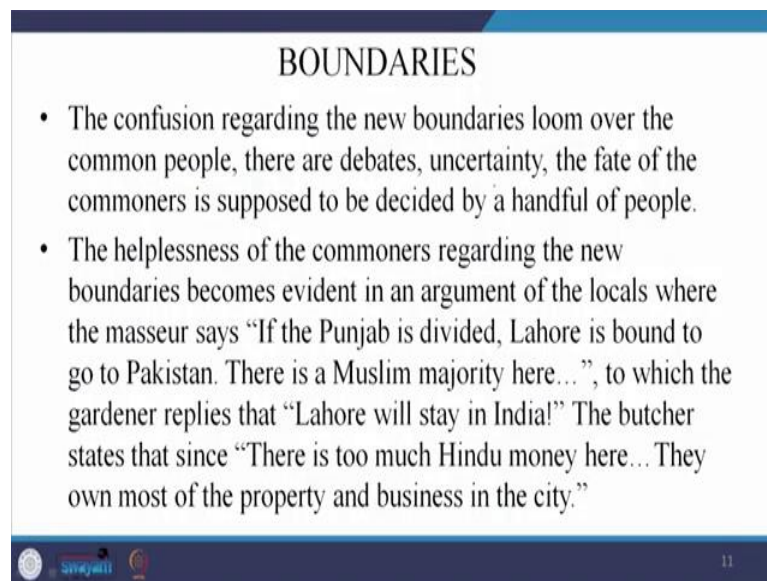
- The common people were away from the decision making regarding the Partition, but bore the brunt.
- Regarding the protagonists of the anticolonial movement, Lenny expresses her surprise that they actually existed and aren't mythic figures - "Someone we'd only hear about and never see." This shows the distance between the common people and the leaders who sometimes were more of a part of the glorified narratives than the reality in the common people's lives.

The common people, as the child understands, were away from decision-making; rather, the decisions were imposed on them. And yet, they bore the brunt of partition. Regarding the protagonists/ the high-flying leaders, Lenny expresses her surprise that they actually existed and that they are indeed not mythic figures. Someone we would only hear about and never see.

This shows the distance between the common people and the leaders and how there is an excruciating gap between the real and the imaginary, the imagined leader and the leader that actually exists. So, this distance between the leaders and the people there is this



incommensurable gap. The leaders are imagined as parts of glorified narratives, who do not or cannot be located or related with the reality or the real happenings in the common people's lives.

So, these leaders cannot be connected, cannot be identified with the happenings in the ordinary people's lives. So, the helplessness of the commoners regarding the new boundaries and the way the nations would be churned out becomes evident through the arguments among the local people. (Refer Slide Time: 32:25)



### BOUNDARIES

- The confusion regarding the new boundaries loom over the common people, there are debates, uncertainty, the fate of the commoners is supposed to be decided by a handful of people.
- The helplessness of the commoners regarding the new boundaries becomes evident in an argument of the locals where the masseur says “If the Punjab is divided, Lahore is bound to go to Pakistan. There is a Muslim majority here...”, to which the gardener replies that “Lahore will stay in India!” The butcher states that since “There is too much Hindu money here... They own most of the property and business in the city.”

 Swayam  11

So, the masseur for example, says that if the Punjab is divided, Lahore is going to become a part of Pakistan because the Muslim majority population lives there. And yet another man, the butcher, actually retorts saying that a lot of moneyed...a wealthy section of Hindus actually live in Lahore. So, where will they go? They own most of the property and business in the city.

This confusion regarding the new boundaries loom over the common people and the debates keep going on, and with these debates the bitterness actually becomes evident after a point. So, the uncertainties lead to a bitterness. And it also exposes the helplessness of the people in the face of this cataclysm.

So, the fate of so many people to be decided by a handful, right; [by] the leaders that one has never seen. And so, we see that the people -- the Hindus, Muslim, sikhs -- all of them subalterns working in rich people's houses or doing [odd] jobs, who used to eat together, suddenly start squabbling. They engage in petty fights and there are disagreements.

And these people also start... they take on different colors, the colors of the community. Suddenly, they deck themselves up in/ [don] skull caps. The Hindus start going to/ visiting/ frequenting to the temples and worshipping the gods. So, suddenly they acquire their communal identity. (Refer Slide Time: 34:55)

CONTINUED...


- Lenny at a point expresses her frustration at the leaders, saying "What's the point of talking so much about people we don't know?"
- This can be seen as the child unable to comprehend the scenario and can also be seen as Sidhwa's criticism of the decision of Partition being imposed on the commoners 'from above.'

Lenny expresses her frustration at the leaders, and says that what is the point of talking so much about people that we do not even know. So, the child is unable to comprehend the scenario -- the chaos and the changes that are visible in longstanding relationships.

And so, through the child's lens, Sidhwa is actually criticizing this decision of partition that was imposed on the commoners from above. (Refer Slide Time: 35:30)

**Excerpt from Ismat Chughtai, "Jadein"**

“दोनों खानदानों की मौजूदा तीन पीढ़ियाँ एक दूसरे से ऐसी घुली मिली थीं कि शुबहा भी न था कि हिन्दुस्तान की तकसीम के बाद इस मुहब्बत में फूट पड़ जाएगी। हालाँकि दोनों खानदानों में मुस्लिम लीगी, कांग्रेसी और महा-सभाई मौजूद थे और मज़हबी और सियासी बहसें भी जम-जम कर होतीं मगर ऐसे ही जैसे फूटबाल या क्रिकेट मैच होते हैं। इधर अब्बा कांग्रेसी थे तो उधर डाक्टर साहब और बड़े भाई लीगी थे, तो उधर ज्ञान चंद महा-सभाई, इधर मँझले भाई कम्युनिस्ट थे तो उधर गुलाब चंद सोशलिस्ट। और फिर उसी हिसाब से मर्दों की बीवियाँ और बच्चे भी उसी पार्टी के थे।”

 13

I would like to conclude today's lecture with this excerpt from Ismat Chughtai's Jadein. It is the quotation, the excerpt is in Urdu; Dev Nagari script: दोनों खानदानों की मौजूदा तीन पीढ़ियाँ एक दूसरे से ऐसी घुली मिली थीं कि शुबहा भी न था कि हिन्दुस्तान की तकसीम के बाद इस मुहब्बत में फूट पड़ जाएगी। हालाँकि दोनों खानदानों में मुस्लिम लीगी, कांग्रेसी और महा-सभाई मौजूद थे और मज़हबी और सियासी बहसें भी जम-जम कर होतीं मगर ऐसे ही जैसे फूटबाल या क्रिकेट मैच होते हैं। इधर अब्बा कांग्रेसी थे तो उधर डाक्टर साहब और बड़े भाई लीगी थे, तो उधर ज्ञान चंद महा-सभाई, इधर मँझले भाई कम्युनिस्ट थे तो उधर गुलाब चंद सोशलिस्ट। और फिर उसी हिसाब से मर्दों की बीवियाँ और बच्चे भी उसी पार्टी के थे।

So, with this we understand how layered and heterogeneous families would be. There would be no political consensus even within the family as a unit. While the brother would be supporting one party, the the father would be adherent [with] another.

There would not be consensus or there would not be a rabid following for anything up till a point. And then, just before the partition, the scenario changed for the worse. It never actually recovered from that situation. With this, I am going to conclude today's lecture and let us meet again for another round of discussions.

Thank you.