

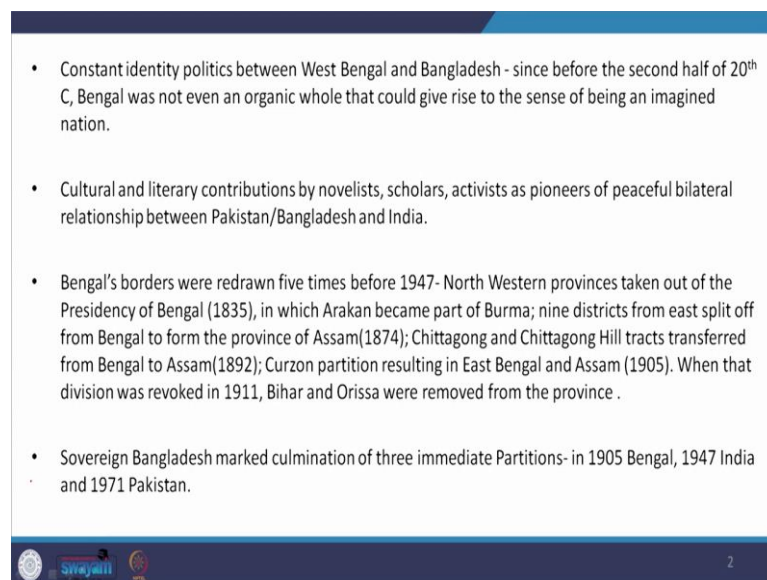
Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 35
Home and Nostalgia - III

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are talking about Home and Nostalgia today. So, we are talking about how a nation is shaped through its negotiating fluid borders. The border lives constantly experience some sort of struggles; lives at the borders are fraught with struggle, fraught with fluid existences.

We had discussed about a short story *The Wild Geese Country* by Amar Mitra, where we see this question of how life and its exchanges go on across the barbed wire [because of the] much-needed exchanges. People are actually trading something as common a commodity as Zandu Balm.

And the border security force stands there indifferent, but actually also not opposing the people, not stopping the people, because it would be inhuman to call such a transaction as smuggling. So, a kind of deal that sustains human existence. (Refer Slide Time: 02:02)



- Constant identity politics between West Bengal and Bangladesh - since before the second half of 20th C, Bengal was not even an organic whole that could give rise to the sense of being an imagined nation.
- Cultural and literary contributions by novelists, scholars, activists as pioneers of peaceful bilateral relationship between Pakistan/Bangladesh and India.
- Bengal's borders were redrawn five times before 1947- North Western provinces taken out of the Presidency of Bengal (1835), in which Arakan became part of Burma; nine districts from east split off from Bengal to form the province of Assam(1874); Chittagong and Chittagong Hill tracts transferred from Bengal to Assam(1892); Curzon partition resulting in East Bengal and Assam (1905). When that division was revoked in 1911, Bihar and Orissa were removed from the province .
- Sovereign Bangladesh marked culmination of three immediate Partitions- in 1905 Bengal, 1947 India and 1971 Pakistan.

So, a constant identity politics between West Bengal and Bangladesh is a visible and it is available in the mainstream narrative since before the second half of the 20th century. If

we look at Bengal, it was not even an organic whole which could give rise to the sense of being imagined as a nation in its full right.

So, we see in this regard a lot of cultural literary contributions, cultural and literary contributions being made by the novelists, by the scholars and activists who are pioneers of a peaceful bilateral relationship between Pakistan and India, India and Bangladesh and so on. Through arts, through alternative pacifist possibilities, proposing such possibilities, these activists and artists are trying to imagine human relationships in a different way, through a different language than is offered by the discourse of nation and nationalism. They have a different language to offer through their poems, their writings through stage acts, plays, through intercultural exchanges and through scholarship.

If we look at history, we see that Bengal's borders were actually redrawn five times even before the India's partition in 1947. The North Western frontier...the Northwestern provinces were taken out of the Presidency of Bengal in 1835, in which Arakan became a part of Burma. Nine districts from the east had split off from Bengal and formed the province of Assam in 1874.

The Chittagong and Chittagong Hill tracts were transferred from Bengal to Assam in 1892 and then the in infamous Lord Curzon Lord Curzon [initiated] partition that resulted in the formation of East Bengal and Assam in 1905, and when this 1905 division was revoked in 1911, Bihar and Orissa were removed from Bengal's province. They had become separate states.

So, Bangladesh itself marked a culmination of three immediate partitions. One in 1905. So, with Bangladesh, with the formation of Bangladesh, we see Bengal actually mutating three times in history. Once in 1905 and then in 1946-1947 and finally, in 1971 with the Liberation War.

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- Leonard A.Gordon : “All Bengalis, then, whether Hindu or Muslims, whether in Bangladesh or in India, have multiple identities. At different moments, especially 1947 and 1971, members of both communities have had to make choices about their primary identifications and their nationalities” (Latif 34).
- Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh could resolve problems of community and identity for Bengalis on both sides of the international border.
- Bangladesh paranoid with the idea of reunification of Bengal, which would according to them, recreate the political contours of the British Raj, and delete Bangladesh.
- “ The irony is that it is the refugee, ejected by one side and rejected by the other, who straddles the two parts of Bengal in the restless wanderings of his mind across the man-made border” (Latif 36).

So, what Leonard Gordon states here is applicable to all victims of partition from both sides of the border. So, whether Hindu or Muslims, they actually have multiple identities. At different moments, members of both communities have had to make choices about their primary identifications and their nationalities. And this becomes very true in the case of the Bengalis.

Especially in the Eastern side, we saw an additional face-off between West Pakistan and East Pakistan, which led to the formation of Bangladesh. So, at every point the people have to define themselves.

They have to realize which facet of their identity is more important than the other.

For example, are they more Muslims than they are Bengalis, are they Bangladeshis because they are not Indians, or they are Bangladeshis because they are not Pakistanis? So, whenever we become something we also, at the same time, choose not to become something else. So, we become something through negating another possible way of being.

So, which identification is more important? Is it an identity based on language or is it an assertion of one's moving away from the Hindu caste system and caste grid and thereby becoming a Bengali Muslim. So, is it a nationality that is primarily defined by the Islamic world system or something defined by one's pride for the mother tongue? So, all these things make the question of identity quite complicated.

Bangladesh has always been paranoid about this idea of reunification with the rest of Bengal, which is part of India, the Western Bengal, which according to the Bangladeshis would recreate the political contours of the British Raj and we could see that the social grouping as a country in terms of a specific language and a specific religion would be thereby deleted; it would be undermined and it would cease to be.

So, Latif notes the irony is that it is the refugee ejected by one side and rejected by the other, who straddles the two parts of Bengal in the restless wanderings of his mind across the man-made border. (Refer Slide Time: 09:05)

- *Chere Asha Gram (The Abandoned Village)* is a compilation of essays written by refugees serialised in *Jugantar*, a vernacular West Bengal newspaper from 1950 and compiled into a book under the editorship of Dakshinaranjan Basu in 1975.
- Nilanjan Chatterjee : studies the *advastu's* contention with "epistemological denial in India" in the metropolitan dystopia of Calcutta and other new exile terrains.
- Regarding the terrible beauty of a Bengal rent asunder : " The part is not whether the Bengal so imagined is utopian... but that the refugee mind feels compelled to evoke it to sustain its sense of self" (Latif 40).
- "Refugee central to the idea of Bengal as a state of mind" because he "embodies its unity and integrity in the very act of losing his place in its geography" (42).

So, in this regard, when we talk of home and nostalgia, we need to look at this compilation of essays by Dakshinaranjan Basu in 1975. These were like essays written by refugees, serialized in a vernacular West Bengal newspaper called Jugantar, 1950 onward.

And later it became a book called Chere Asha Gram or the Abandoned Village, and it was edited by Dakshinaranjan Basu in 1975. The Udvastus constantly look at Calcutta as a metropolitan dystopia and they also constantly see themselves in a state of exile. So, Bengal is imagined as a terrible beauty in these writings, in these nostalgic renditions.

In this regard, Latif notes that the part is not whether the imagined is utopian or not, but that the refugee mind feels compelled to evoke it to sustain its sense of self. So, through this utopian homeland once a self is actually reclaimed,

a self that has been endangered, a self that has undergone different setback is reclaimed through evocation of the utopian motherland. So, refugee central to the idea of Bengal as a state of mind is because the refugee embodies its unity and integrity in the very act of losing his place in his geography.

One can become a refugee only through not finding a permanent home or a well-ensconced position in the host land. Refugee thus is a state of mind, and its unity and integrity, its meaning is derived from an individual's state of not belonging anywhere

and individual's condition of statelessness. So, early Bengali writers look at the land (as in early Bengali writings); the land gave the narratives the impetus to turn imaginative gaze on the desires and assertions of the colonized people. (Refer Slide Time: 12:07)

'Idyllic Home ' in the Popular Imagination

- For the early writers, the land gave their narratives the impetus to turn their imaginative gaze on the desires and assertions of a colonized people.
- Recuperation of the land through imagination was cut short with the partition: the project of 'nationalistic adumbrations of the decolonized identity' came asunder with the partitioning of the land that made these imaginings possible and probable.
- Debjani Sengupta - narratives reject the politics of difference and although their identities are tied to the making of boundaries, their life stories create spaces where different identities come together to create 'a discursive space' of meaning production through motifs taken from the land. They re-imagine places and spaces as 'inclusive and hybrid' where the power of the politics of hate is somehow thwarted (Sengupta 238).

So, we see that the land becomes a great source of inspiration in early writings/in early works. There is a way of looking at the land, and the land actually looks back; it gazes back. It has its own spirit, it is not a lifeless space or it is not an inanimate existence as such.

So, partition actually stopped short this process. The process of land being a source of inspiration in writings, in artworks because a partition had asundered a land that had been together for centuries in the history. So, the project of nationalistic adumbrations of the decolonized identity was ascended with the partitioning of the land. With the partition we see that there are certain rifts, certain stops and gaps in the imagination also.

The imagination cannot continue beyond [that]. Even in artwork there is a kind of break, a kind of rupture, which cannot be overcome very easily. So, Debjani Sengupta notes that narratives reject the politics of difference, and although their identities are tied to the making of boundaries, the early writings create spaces where different identities have the possibility of coming together and thereby forming a discursive space of meaning through motives taken from the land.

So, through artworks a land can be re-imagined, different realities different meanings are attributed to the land which the colonizer's imagination would not allow. So, a land is enabled in multiple ways; its possibilities are kind of expanded through imaginations, through fictive interventions.

So, land imagined as inclusive and hybrid, where the power of the politics of hate beat the hate or the tension imposed through the colonial apparatus or later on the inter-communal, inter-ethnic and interracial hatred, are somehow thwarted.

Through writings, through creativity, we see hatred can somehow be transcended and there the creative writers offer ...they could be utopian...there could be utopian aspects attached to a given land, but that would allow one to come out of a dyadic rhetoric

that was available in the real society. So, fictions, memoirs often talk about the partition with special emphasis on locality and on belonging to a syncretic society. A society comprising mixed population from different communities, (Refer Slide Time: 16:29)

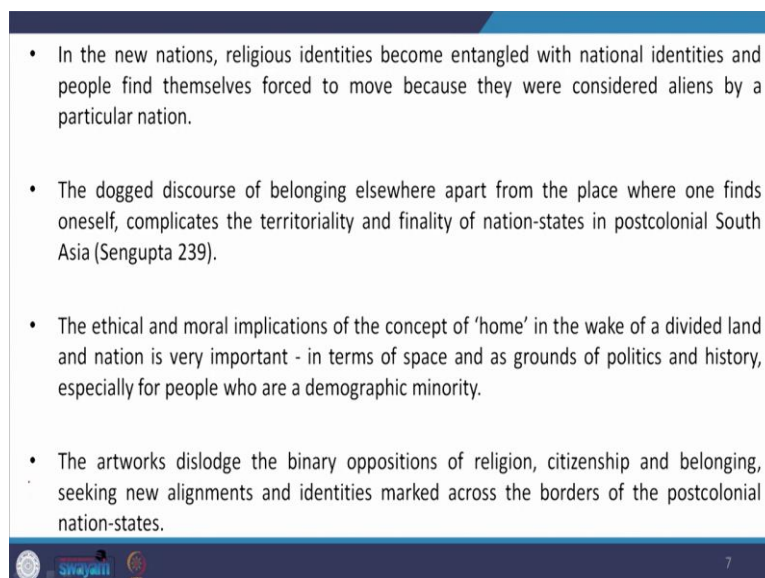
- Fictions and memoirs written in the past decade talk of the partition with special emphasis on locality and belonging: in them the geography and landscape of East and West Bengal (two halves that resulted from the partition) are sites of meaning making, both in the context of the text and as its historical setting.
- The land surveyed, mapped and ruled by an imperial power and now left divided, becomes the site of a postcolonial search for justice and equality. The divided land becomes a site of contestation and recuperation for people who are suddenly left at the wrong side of the border.

who are able to live together with a significant sense of dignity; where the human dignity is not really stripped.

So, the geography and landscape of East and West Bengal become sites of meaning-making, both in the context of the text and its historical setting. So, we see that this land that was initially surveyed by the colonizer ruled by their imperial power, and then left divided after the British leave,

becomes a site of post-colonial search for meanings, search for a humanity that has been left asundered and bruised, and thereby search for justice and equality and all such human values that have drained, that have somehow debilitated. So, the divided land becomes a site of contestation as well as recuperation for the people who... especially for the population, the section of people that are left on the 'wrong' side of the border.

And they are constantly trying to find a home and thereby their inquiry, their association with the land is really very complicated. The ethical and moral implications of the concept of home in the wake of a divided land is very important. Both in terms of land as a space, a given piece of territory as well as in terms of grounds of the land being a ground of politics and history, especially for people that are a demographic minority. So, when there is this determined discourse of belonging elsewhere apart from the place where one is physically located, (Refer Slide Time: 18:41)



- In the new nations, religious identities become entangled with national identities and people find themselves forced to move because they were considered aliens by a particular nation.
- The dogged discourse of belonging elsewhere apart from the place where one finds oneself, complicates the territoriality and finality of nation-states in postcolonial South Asia (Sengupta 239).
- The ethical and moral implications of the concept of 'home' in the wake of a divided land and nation is very important - in terms of space and as grounds of politics and history, especially for people who are a demographic minority.
- The artworks dislodge the binary oppositions of religion, citizenship and belonging, seeking new alignments and identities marked across the borders of the postcolonial nation-states.

the concepts of territoriality and finality of nation-states are complicated in the South Asian context. The artworks, therefore, dislodge the binary oppositions of religion regarding the question of citizenship and belonging, and they seek new alignments.

They concoct new possibilities, new identities, which can be marked across the borders of the postcolonial nation-states. So, they also question the cartographic lines. If not question, creative writing gives some license to play around with the lines that have been imposed from above. So, a lot of critics actually say that creative writings are not grounded in reality; its correspondence with facts is hardly there.

But then the literary persons, the creative artists respond by saying that the formation of nation-state, the Radcliffe Line itself is also very arbitrary. So, something that is arbitrary but taken so seriously in the official discourse can be played around with, can be tampered through fiction, through fictional possibilities.

New meanings being imbued to partition, which might not have any truth claim. So, the boundaries which are based on political hegemony problematize the idea of identity and homogeneity of a nation. Living on border signifies living where the spaces are overlapping. Homi Bhabha calls borders as a space of intervention, emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative intervention into existence.

So, who one is, where one would like to see oneself and what one would like to call as a home, where else one's real home is...it's also through creativity, the question of human agency also becomes important. How humans are agents in calling a place as their home and others as not. It is a way of getting back at a history that has rendered ordinary people status of puppets.

So, through writings people try to overcome this legacy of trauma that the South Asians from three abutting countries -- now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are dealing with. So, Ambreem Hai calls border and the subjectivity of those positioned on the border as a crucial if ambiguous site of vital reconstruction, a position that is replete with contradictions and difficulty, and yet it also offers a regenerative promise. (Refer Slide Time: 22:08)

- “The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place”(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*).
- The boundaries which are based on political hegemony problematize the idea of identity and homogeneity of nation. Living on the border signifies living where the spaces overlap.
- Bhabha - border as “the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices, that introduces creative intervention into existence”. (1997, “Front/ Lines/Border/Posts” 9).
- Ambreem Hai - border (and the subjectivity of those positioned on the border) as a “crucial if ambiguous site of vital reconstruction , a position replete with contradictions and difficulty, but regenerative promise” (2000 , “Border work, Border Trouble, 380).

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- The lost Bengali Hindu’s home is thus ... “the home of the Bengal nationality, the village in which in the 1880s nationalist writers had found the heart of Bengal (Chakraborty, *Remembered Villages*,p.2150) - nationalist construction of home.
- In the *Chhere Asha Gram* ('The Abandoned Village') – native village is pictured as both scared and beautiful, which makes communal violence an act of defilement and sacrilege against everything that stood for sanctity and beauty in the Hindu-Bengali understanding of what home was.
- The remembered village would derive some of its value from the associations it could claim with the nation's antiquity and anti-colonial struggle.
- Village in a state of idyllic present is invaded by the beast of communalism. Tagore and Bankim contributed to the urban imaginings of the countryside that had been developing 1880's on.

So, the lost Bengali Hindu's home has always been like we see in Cheere Asha Gram. The lost Bengali Hindu's home is the home of the Bengal nationalism. In the village in the 1880s, nationalist writers had found the heart of Bengal. So, that is the quintessential village which also lends some legitimacy to the nationalist construction of home.

So, in Cheere Asha Gram or The Abandoned Village, the native village is pictured as both sacred and beautiful. Communal violence in this context (in the context of such a utopian village) is seen as an act of defilement, as a kind of anomaly, and it's a sacrilege against everything that is pious and beautiful...in the Hindu Bengali understanding of what home is.

I would once again harken back our discussion on NeelKantho Pakhir Khoje by Atin Bandyopadhyay. It is exactly depicting this village, where the Hindu zamindar's domination over the Muslim peasant is normalized. The peasant protest is never a thing, never a possible thing in the horizon. So, the Muslim subordination working as a landless tenant in the land and being a loyal servant at home is part of the harmonious ecosystem.

The partition becomes a cacophony, a kind of breakaway or a kind of disruption to this continued timeless, time immemorial picture of pristine beauty. The remembered village would derive some of its values from the associations with the nation's antiquity and anti-colonial struggle. So, we see how then village actually penetrates with the lattice of the nation

and nation-making. Often these villages (and we could continue talking about this in our next class)... where we see many plays talking about one son from the middle-class Hindu family joining the Swadeshi movement. A son, a male child who is otherwise a brilliant student, a promising scholar quits education and sacrifices his life for the motherland.

So, this is where the utopian village is connected with the larger happenings, with the anticolonial struggles. The son becomes a martyr and so, village is also a miniaturized mother that is producing these sons, and we have poem as [polygenous]. So, the village is the mother and quintessential mother's figure, the rural mother's figure that inspires the son, that is worried about the son, but all the same proud to give a son for the nation's purpose.

So we see this is how the village, and otherwise remote and closed society of village, intersects with the national and nationalist happenings, with the anti-colonial struggles. This actually reminds us of Jibanananda Das' poems that have been used for so many anti-colonial struggles. Jibanananda Das' poems have heightened passion about the rural society.

He says in "Rupashi Bangla" - "I have seen the face of Mother Bengal. So, I do not want to see the rest of the world." It has also been criticized as a very parochial imagination, but something that is invested with/charged with a lot of sentimentality, a lot of it is highly and deeply emotional. It is deeply invested with emotion and with the author's conviction.

So, village in a state of idyllic present is invaded by the beast of communalism. It comes out of nowhere. The village life was a sleepy, humdrum life that was timelessly going on the way it was - this is how we see the picture of the village; and suddenly riots happen from nowhere.

There is thereby we see no confession about the naturalized violence and hegemony, and the naturalized caste gradations and job or task gradations/ hierarchies in tasks that village life would very much support, which is why the minority sections would always remain poor peasants to the behest of the majority that were landlords and zamindars.

So, Tagore, Bonkim Chandra who contribute to the urban imaginings of the countryside that had been developing 1880s onward, village is something seen as opposed to city. Village is pure whereas a city is degraded, full of degraded values and so, village is a spiritual home for the urban Bengali. East Bengal landscape surrounded by rivers bestows new poetic literary perspectives.

We have similar imagination in Punjab, when Punjab is... the rustic lands of Punjab are referred to as Sone-di-Chidiya. So, the golden bird that Punjab is.

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- Village as opposed to city, became spiritual home for urban Bengalis – East Bengal riverine landscape bestowing new poetic, literary perspective.
- Tagore as a landlord and Nirad C. Chaudhuri as a salaried clerk have made many colonist impressions of the rural Bengal. Both being rooted in Calcutta and visiting the East Bengal countryside on duty or for outings, described the natural scenery through studied sensibilities of European art and poetry.
- Saratchandra's 'Pallisamaj' 20th C emotionalism (nostalgic folksy image) - from idyllic abodes of peace, Bengali village shown as site of factionalism, casteist exploitation, obstacle to enlightenment, making these villages candidates for nationalist developmental work.
- Jibanananda's Das' 'Rupashi Bangla' ('Bengal the Beautiful') soared in popularity during 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh.
- *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyay (1927) show Bengali village marked by poverty, suffering yet tender sentiments of intimacy, kinship, innocence (Chakraborty 'Remembered Villages' 2148).
- *Chhere Asha Gram* – cultural cliches, literary kitsch aimed at the shared nostalgia of city *bhadralok*-Muslims participating in Hindu festivals, narratives invested into the images that have eternal values (2149).

In the case of Bengal we see Tagore as a landlord and Nirad C Chaudhuri as a salaried clerk making numerous colonist impressions about the rural Bengal.

They are rooted in Calcutta and they visit the countryside for outings, for some visit in the capacity of an outsider to the village society, and they describe the natural scenery through studied sensibilities of European art and poetry. Their way of seeing the perspectives are shaped through the Western prism of thought, the Western romanticism, especially in the case of Tagore.

So, Saratchandra's *Pallisamaj* talks about...it is about 20th century emotionalism, nostalgic folksy image. From idyllic abodes of peace, the Bengali village is shown as a site of factionalism. So, Sarat Chandra actually makes the attempt to move away from romanticizing the village, moving away from romanticizing the village to also showing casteist exploitations in stories, such as "Mahesh", and then the village being depicted by Saratchandra as obstacle to enlightenment.

So, that the village slowly becomes an ideal candidate for nationalist development work - from being the idyll to its fallacies being revealed and discussed. It becomes the ideal candidate for nationalist development work. So, like I said, "Rupashi Bangla" by Jibanananda Das ("Bengal the Beautiful") was in popularity during the Liberation War of Bangladesh; it inspired the freedom fighters in 1971.

Similarly, Bibhutibhushan Bandhopadhyay's "Pather Panchali" show the Bengali village as marked by poverty, suffering yet it also reflects on the tender sentiments of kinship

and the innocence of the rural children. In this regard, we must also think of another work - Ashani Sanket, which talks about the infamous Bengal famine, but it ends on a positive note of accommodating more people and it ends with a note of the desire of a transformed rural society.

And this transformation being spearheaded by an educated cultured upper-caste man and his wife. So, the development being spearheaded by a poor Bhadra man and his wife -- [through] the values of his family. To end with, we see that Chere Asha Gram, The Abandoned Village sketches certain cultural cliches, literary kitsch that are aimed at the shared nostalgia of the bhadralok, urban bhadralok [presenting] Muslims as participating in Hindu festivals, narratives that are made into/turned into images that have eternal values.

We might also want to look at the image of the 'good' Muslim and the 'bad' Muslim emerging from this narrative about the ideal Bengali village. We will talk more on this topic in our subsequent classes.

Thank you.