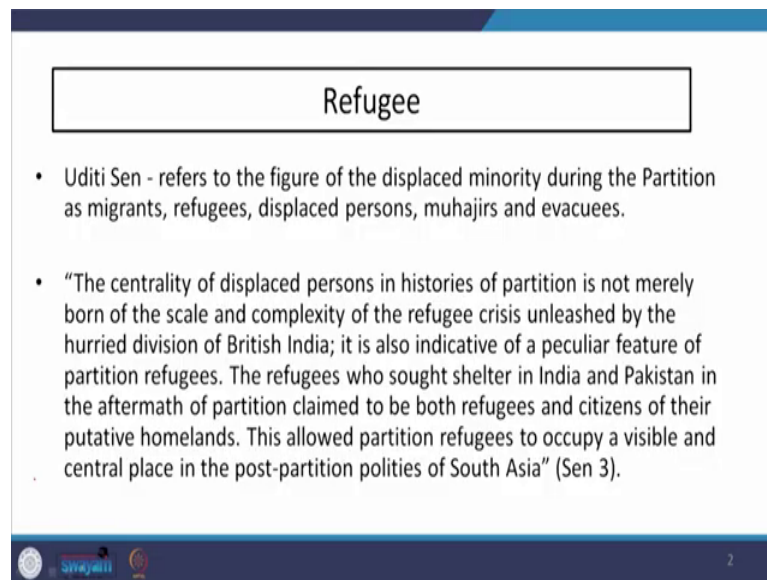


Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 38
Refugee, Desh and Nation - I




Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. So, today we are going to talk about Refugee, Deseh and Nation, a new module. Before we start discussing on this new topic, we need to understand the definition of refugee.

There are many critics, many scholars on partition that have worked on the refugees and that define the refugee. Udit Sen refers to the figure of the displaced minority during the partition of India as migrants, refugees, displaced persons, Muhajirs and as evacuees. So, these are the common terms or expressions that are used for people that were displaced from one part of the subcontinent to the other, which went on to become a new postcolonial nation-state. (Refer Slide Time: 01:40)



Refugee

- Udit Sen - refers to the figure of the displaced minority during the Partition as migrants, refugees, displaced persons, muhajirs and evacuees.
- "The centrality of displaced persons in histories of partition is not merely born of the scale and complexity of the refugee crisis unleashed by the hurried division of British India; it is also indicative of a peculiar feature of partition refugees. The refugees who sought shelter in India and Pakistan in the aftermath of partition claimed to be both refugees and citizens of their putative homelands. This allowed partition refugees to occupy a visible and central place in the post-partition polities of South Asia" (Sen 3).

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And so, Udit Sen says that the centrality of displaced persons in histories of partition is not merely born of the scale and complexity of the refugee crisis unleashed by the hurried division of British India; it is also indicative of a peculiar feature of partition refugees. The refugees who sought shelter in India and Pakistan in the aftermath of partition claimed to be both refugees and citizens of their putative homelands.

This allowed partition refugees to occupy a visible and central place in the post-partition politics of South Asia. So, when we talk of refugee we need to understand that it is a very complex position.. subject position in a new nation-state, and it entails a number of reactions by the social group itself and by the non-refugees.

It's a paradoxical position where the refugee has a lingering past, a kind of background, a kind of history that bears its weight on his or her identity and yet, the process of bargaining with the nation-state is its constant [position]... and that is something which defines the journey from being a refugee to becoming a citizen.

So, the refugeness is expressed through one's nostalgia for the desh that one left behind, where one could never go back. So, a journey to a point of no return is something that essentially defines the refugee experience and also a journey to a new land, the host nation-state and land.

And so, like I said, there is a paradoxical situation or a paradoxical position of the displaced person, who does not want to cut off the umbilical cord that attaches, that connects one with the desh, the homeland where one belongs in terms of lineage, in terms of ancestral property. And yet, one wants to establish oneself in the new host land where one has relocated as a result of the partition. (Refer Slide Time: 04:45)

Refugee

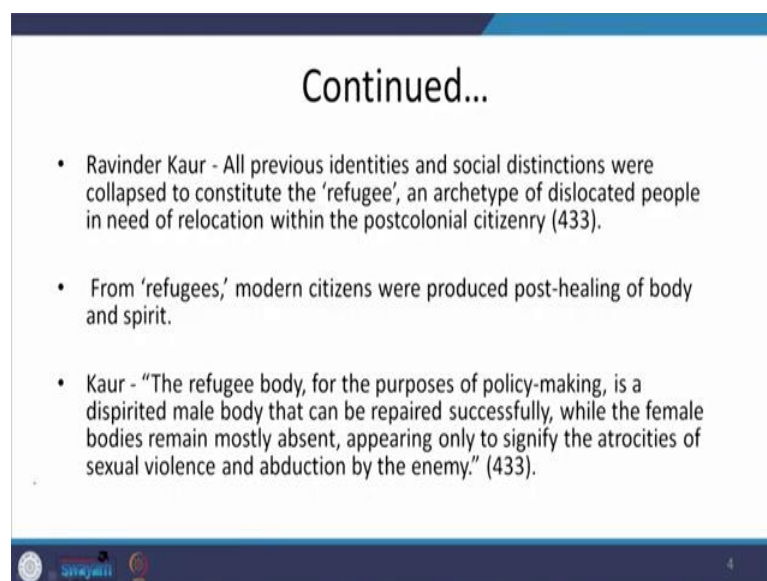
- Refugee in the popular imaginary have been represented as helpless and homeless, in the need of rehabilitation. The photos and descriptions of famished people in railway stations enhance this image.
- The act of cooking, sleeping, sitting with family, waiting in a queue became special refugee activities: The act of dislocation was the defining characteristic of the newcomers, and 'refugee' was the prism through which their mundane activities were described.

When we talk of the refugee, worldwide there are certain popular imaginations and pictures that come to our mind -- that of the helpless and the homeless who is in need of rehabilitation. So, photos and descriptions of famished people actually inform the notion of refugee. People in crowds, in groups/ in large groups, in railway stations, in camps enhance the image of.. the popular image and imaginary of the refugee.

So, the very ordinary and mundane acts such as cooking, sleeping, sitting with the family in groups and waiting in the queue for doles... after the partition these mundane acts such as cooking, sleeping, sitting with the family, waiting in queue went on to become special refugee activities.

In other words, whatever the refugees would do (ordinary human acts) would become the defining characteristic of the refugee. The mundane activities were being read through the prism of the refugee. So, once (what I am trying to get at is that) once a person became a part of this social category refugee, they could hardly be anything else although they were as humans as their needs...the basic needs were as ordinary as any other person.

Their entire activities would be understood, would be grasped through the prism of refugee and refugeness. So, Ravinder Kaur in her research notes that all previous identities and social distinctions were collapsed; they were in a way conflated/ made to disappear, and this process actually constituted the formation of refugee. (Refer Slide Time: 07:28)



Continued...

- Ravinder Kaur - All previous identities and social distinctions were collapsed to constitute the 'refugee', an archetype of dislocated people in need of relocation within the postcolonial citizenry (433).
- From 'refugees,' modern citizens were produced post-healing of body and spirit.
- Kaur - "The refugee body, for the purposes of policy-making, is a dispirited male body that can be repaired successfully, while the female bodies remain mostly absent, appearing only to signify the atrocities of sexual violence and abduction by the enemy." (433).

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So, refugee was an archetype of dislocated people in need of resettlement/relocation within the post-colonial citizenry. From refugees the process of journey.. the process of the journey from refugee to citizenship was also seen as a process of healing of one's body and spirit. So, one realizes that refuge as a term does not harbinge positive meanings or positive import; it is a situation from which one needs to come out at the earliest.

So, not being a refugee anymore is also connoted as a process of having healed/ having recuperated, having rebounded/ bounced back into an enormously normal way of life. So, Kaur states that the refugee body for the purposes of policy-making is a dispirited male body that can be repaired successfully while the female bodies remain mostly absent, appearing only to signify the atrocities of sexual violence and abduction by the enemy.

So, here we have to understand that implicit in the term, in the social marker refugee is a specific gender, a specific age and, as we will learn, subsequently also a specific class who speaks about the refugee, who gets to speak about the refugee conditions, about the refugee way of existence.

Typically, the standard image of refugee is fulfilled by a young male displaced person, who is in his prime, not too young to be a juvenile not too old to be someone that cannot participate in the nation-building process. So, it is referring to refugees... typically speaking, it is a young male from a privileged class and caste that gets to speak about the entire refugee experience, and this is something that the critics actually problematize

and revisit because refugee experience is not homogeneous and one; but it is varied, multilayered with diverse meanings, diverse existences, diverse experiences. Hannah Arendt in her study of totalitarianism in Europe establishes the link between state formation and the flow of refugee. (Refer Slide Time: 10:43)

Refugee and Citizen

- Hannah Arendt in her study of totalitarianism in Europe established the link between state formation and the flow of refugee.
- Nation formation results in displacements. Nation-state lends legitimacy to the process of getting rid of the other.
- Sajal Nag - Two centuries of Divide and Rule politics by the colonial state and five decades of communal mobilisation logically culminated in the partition of British India (1947).

So, how is nation basically formed? There is certainly a connection between how nation is built through a grammar of exclusion, through an act of exclusion.

Nation-state lends legitimacy to some at the expense of getting rid of the other. So, one's membership in a nation also means that one is not a member in another nation; one cannot simultaneously belong to different nations. It is a question of allegiance, it is a question of loyalty, and the process of nation-state actually goes on to shape an individual citizen's identity.

So, nation-state facilitates identity formation through categorizing individuals as self and other -- people that are part of the nation, the denizens versus the ones that are outsiders; and so, the refugee is someone that was an outsider that carries the history, the baggage of being an outsider...once being an outsider that came as a result of political, social upheaval as a result of historical decisions that came and started dwelling in the host land at a given time period.

Sajal Nag notes how the Divide and Rule politics by the colonial state by the British Raj followed by decades of communal mobilisation actually logically led to the partition of British India. So, when we talk of the refugee question, we look at the discussions within the Constituent Assembly, which rapidly led to a broad-based consensus that the Hindu and Sikh minorities that fled from Pakistan belong to and belonged in India. (Refer Slide Time: 12:56)

The Refugee Question

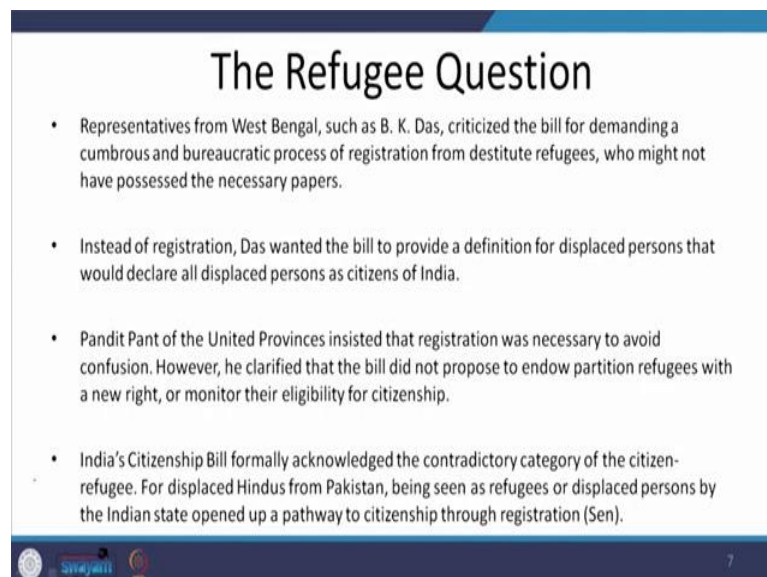
- Discussions within the Constituent Assembly rapidly led to a broad-based consensus that Hindu and Sikh minorities fleeing violence in Pakistan belonged in India.
- In 1950, the refugee's right to belong to India was enshrined in the Constitution. Article 5 allowed citizenship by registration to all those who had migrated to India from Pakistan, provided they had arrived in India before the commencement of the Constitution.
- However, the influx of refugees continued well beyond 1950 and informed subsequent discussions on citizenship.
- The question of refugee belonging re-emerged as a dominant concern in 1955, molding the tenor and texture of the debate around the Citizenship Bill.

Sreyas Sri Jayacharya 6

So, in 1950, the refugees [that] belong to India were enshrined in the constitution. Article 5 allowed citizenship through registration to all such individuals that had migrated to India from Pakistan, provided that they had arrived in India before the commencement of the Constitution. Yet, we see that the influx of the refugees continued well beyond 1950 and informed subsequent discussions on citizenship.



So, this is also something that critics have time and again questioned -- how we can define the abducted person or the refugee. Who is a refugee who is not; who is legitimate, who is a real claimant, who is a justified claimant to the government's welfare policies or government doles, who is not, and how such definitions of the abducted person and then the refugee can be tied to and bracketed within certain dates.

So, people before and after this date do not subscribe to the criteria of being an abducted person or a refugee, although they have experienced the same situation, although they migrated under similar conditions if not the same. So, tying the definition to specific dates is something that has been problematized by scholars. The question of refugee belonging re-emerged [in] 1955, which molded the texture of the debate around the citizenship build further. (Refer Slide Time: 15:27)



The Refugee Question

- Representatives from West Bengal, such as B. K. Das, criticized the bill for demanding a cumbersome and bureaucratic process of registration from destitute refugees, who might not have possessed the necessary papers.
- Instead of registration, Das wanted the bill to provide a definition for displaced persons that would declare all displaced persons as citizens of India.
- Pandit Pant of the United Provinces insisted that registration was necessary to avoid confusion. However, he clarified that the bill did not propose to endow partition refugees with a new right, or monitor their eligibility for citizenship.
- India's Citizenship Bill formally acknowledged the contradictory category of the citizen-refugee. For displaced Hindus from Pakistan, being seen as refugees or displaced persons by the Indian state opened up a pathway to citizenship through registration (Sen).

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Representatives from West Bengal, such as B. K Das, criticize the Citizenship Bill for demanding a bureaucratic process of registration from the poorer refugees and more. So, this is actually questionable because the the destitute refugees in most cases would not possess the necessary papers expected of them.

So, instead of/ in lieu of registration, B. K Das wanted the bill to provide a definition for displaced persons that would declare all such persons as citizens of India. Now, Pandit Pant of the United Provinces had a different take; he insisted that registration was indeed necessary in order to avoid confusion, and yet he clarified that the Citizenship Bill did not propose to endow partition refugees with a new right or was not meant to monitor their eligibility for citizenship.

So, India's citizenship bill formally acknowledges the contradictory category of the citizen refugee. So, refugee as a category remains an oxymoron, where (this is something we are going to talk about more in our subsequent lectures).. where the memory from a homeland left behind greatly shape their culture, their psyche and yet, there is constantly a struggle to establish themselves in the present, in the current situation, in the current geopolitical space.

There is a dealing with temporal-spatial reality left behind and a temporal-spatial reality that they inhabit in the present. So, there is a kind of interesting interaction between the two, which churns out the identity of the refugee. We will also see/we will also note how the refugee experience,

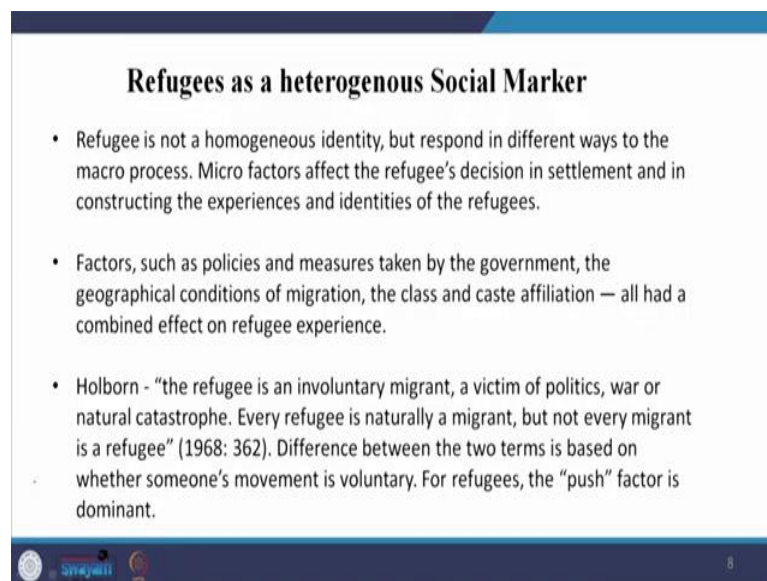
like I said, is heterogeneous, diverse, and there is a class-caste connection - the class and caste of a given refugee determines how much they can lay claim on and how much they can celebrate their culture from the land that they left behind. So, it has been researched and argued that refugees from the upper echelons (who are rather immigrants) could celebrate and maintain.. celebrate/ preserve the cultures that they had inherited from their homeland, from their desh. We see this in both sides of the border. So, for example, re-establishing their family business in the host land and through the name of the shop, one commemorates the land that one belongs to, the land that one comes from.

In Calcutta for example, there are so many business enterprises/ establishments /commercial enterprises that are named after Dhaka. So, the elite immigrants are capable of celebrating/ commemorating the past; they celebrate and commemorate their roots.

We see similar commemoration on the western side, in Punjab, where people name the shops, their enterprises after Lahore, after Rawalpindi. So, the places that their ancestors actually came from. So, and yet on the other hand, the Dalit refugees cannot really afford to do that.



The celebration of one's ethnicity, of one's culture, of one's specific linguistic-ethnic belonging is greatly boosted by economic surplus, economically advantaged position -- not everyone can do that; the Dalit refugees tend to merge with/ camouflage with the host land's culture.

They are not, commonly speaking... they are not very assertive about their culture, their desh that they left behind; their language they try to merge and unlearn in a way... unlearn about their desh. We see that refugee is not a homogeneous identity, but respond in different ways to the macro-schema, the ongoing in the nation. (Refer Slide Time: 21:11)



Refugees as a heterogeneous Social Marker

- Refugee is not a homogeneous identity, but respond in different ways to the macro process. Micro factors affect the refugee's decision in settlement and in constructing the experiences and identities of the refugees.
- Factors, such as policies and measures taken by the government, the geographical conditions of migration, the class and caste affiliation — all had a combined effect on refugee experience.
- Holborn - "the refugee is an involuntary migrant, a victim of politics, war or natural catastrophe. Every refugee is naturally a migrant, but not every migrant is a refugee" (1968: 362). Difference between the two terms is based on whether someone's movement is voluntary. For refugees, the "push" factor is dominant.

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And the micro-factors affect the refugee's decision in settlement and

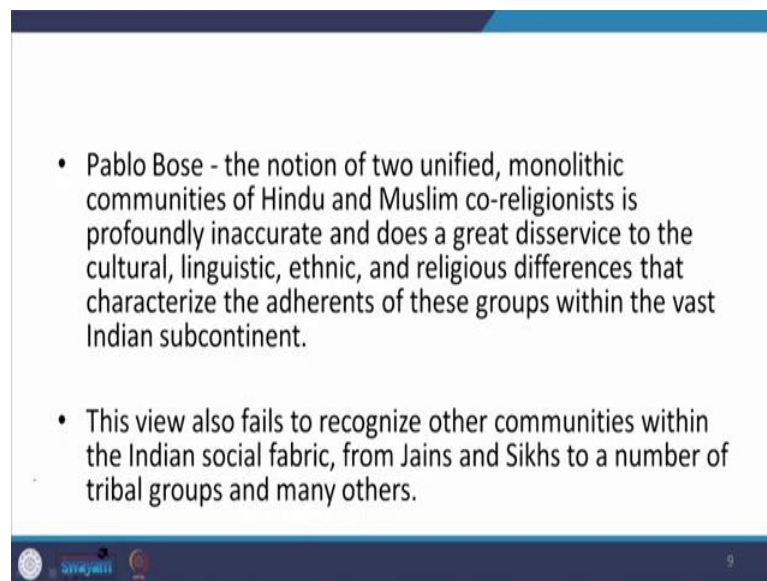
so, the larger factors affect the refugee's decision in settlement and in constructing the experiences and identities of the refugees. These factors include policies and measures taken by the government, the geographical conditions of migration.. then the caste and class affiliation -- all of which combine to form the refugee experience.

So, Holborn gives us the definition of refugee; according to Holborn, the refugee is an involuntary migrant, a victim of politics, war or natural catastrophe. So, every refugee is naturally a migrant, but not every migrant is a refugee. Difference between the two is based on whether someone's movement is voluntary.

For refugees, the push factor becomes important or becomes dominant; it determines their displacement. Push factor meaning something that has an unpleasant event, a political happening that propelled them to shift, to move their base from one nation-state to another.

That is a push factor, versus there are alleged pull factors, where a person moves to another land in search for greener pasture. So, for socio-economic [opportunities]/upward mobility, one chooses to become citizen in another nation - that is the pull factor.

So, in the case of the partition of India, the push factor largely determines the displacement of a large population belonging to different communities. (Refer Slide Time: 23:25)

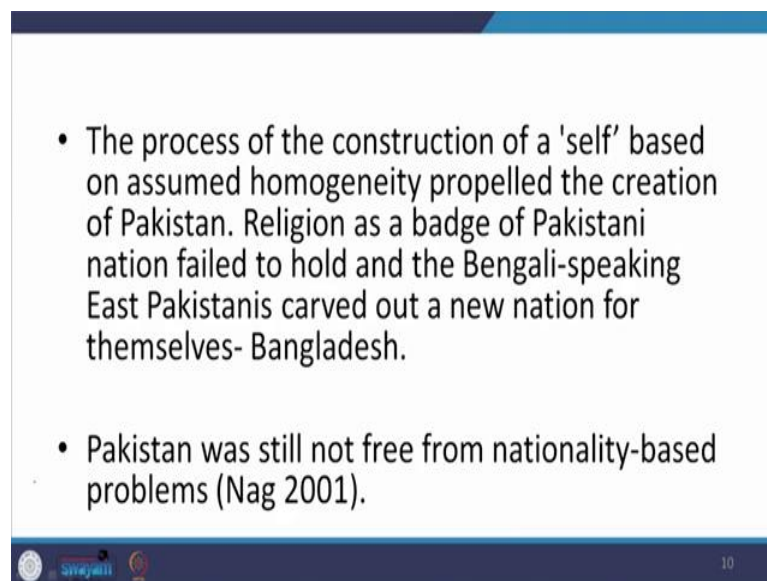


- Pablo Bose - the notion of two unified, monolithic communities of Hindu and Muslim co-religionists is profoundly inaccurate and does a great disservice to the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious differences that characterize the adherents of these groups within the vast Indian subcontinent.
- This view also fails to recognize other communities within the Indian social fabric, from Jains and Sikhs to a number of tribal groups and many others.

Pablo Bose notes that the notion of two unified, homogeneous, monolithic communities -
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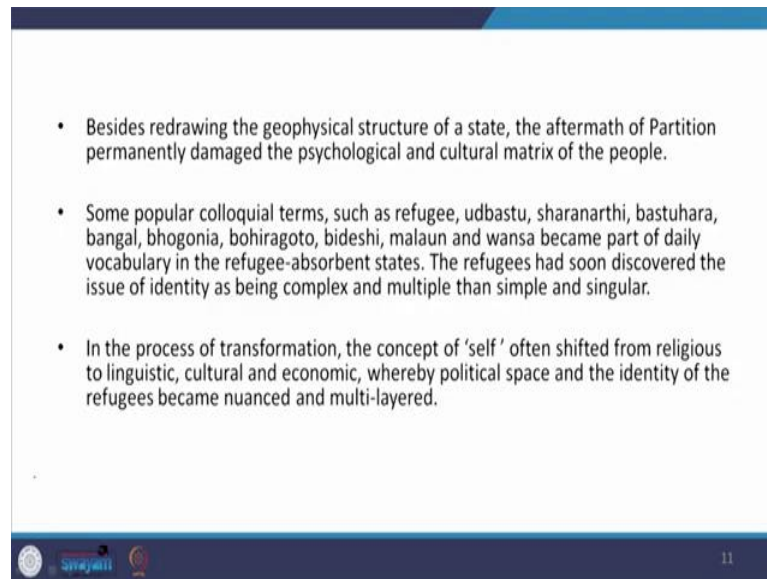
the Hindus and the Muslims, and their relationship as co-religionists is profoundly inaccurate, and such imagination actually invisibilize so many other people that are also coexisting in the subcontinent. It does a great disservice to the cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious differences, and thereby the complex multilayered texture that defines India or that defines South Asia.

So, for example, when we talk only about these two communities and even the decision of partition that gave undue importance, that, in a way, amplified the presence of these two communities, such treatment, such undue visibility being rendered only to the Hindus and the Muslims happen at the expense of failing to recognize that other communities also exist. People such as the Jains, the Sikhs and so many other... many other tribal groups. (Refer Slide Time: 25:06)



- The process of the construction of a 'self' based on assumed homogeneity propelled the creation of Pakistan. Religion as a badge of Pakistani nation failed to hold and the Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis carved out a new nation for themselves- Bangladesh.
- Pakistan was still not free from nationality-based problems (Nag 2001).

So, the process of the construction of a self based on assumption of homogeneity had actually led to the formation of Pakistan, and yet one realized that the Muslims (which I keep repeating in so many... I have already stated this in my earlier lectures) the Muslims in South Asia are not a monolithic group, a homogeneous group; and this is something realized through further tearing away [or separation] of Bangladesh from Pakistan on the grounds of separate ethnicity, separate culture, and separate language. (Refer Slide Time: 25:51)



Besides redrawing the geophysical structure of a state, partition permanently damaged the psychological and cultural matrix of the people. For example, the partition engendered a permanent refugee crisis in South Asia, permanent refugee crisis that remained open-ended and unresolved to a great extent.

So, some of the popular colloquial terms that one uses for the refugee in South Asia, such as Udbastu, Sharanarathi, Bastuhara, and then there are terms, such as...for the Bengalis there is a term called Bangal, for the Punjabis there is the term called Muhajir, and then Bohiragoto, Bideshi; for the Hindus the Muslims use a term which could be read as a slang (it's Malaun). All these terms became part of daily vocabulary in the refugee-absorbent states; it brings/ it tells us about the grudge of the natives.

And also the counter-grudge; it leads to the question of the grudge by the native populace on the refugees and the counter-grudge; and there is a point where these terms are being owned. It echoes the black movement or the feminist movement; the radical feminist

movement, where the abusive terms are owned and become a point of strength for a given social group.

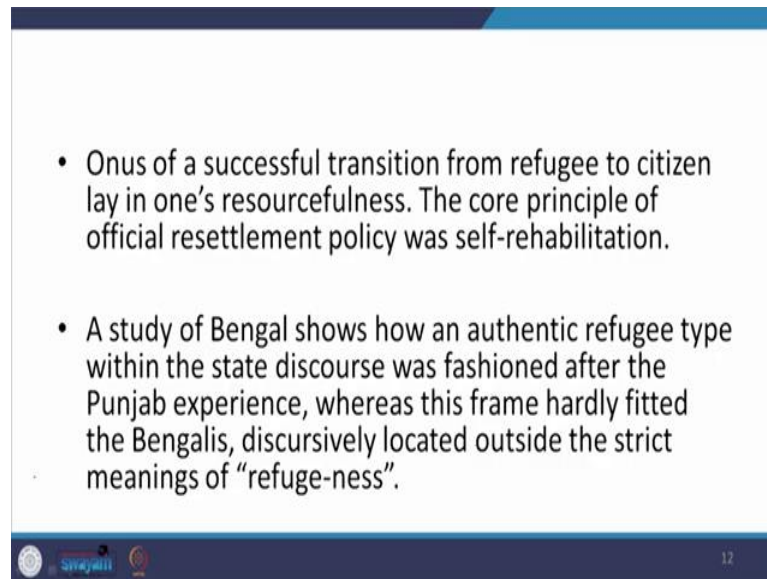
So, people say yes I am a black, I am a whore or a slut. It is a response to slut-shaming. In the same way, people would say in Bengal, for example, there was a very powerful slogan formed by the refugees [bastuhara/sharanarathi] - "Who are we? we are refugees!" We are the ones that have lost our lands, our homelands.

The refugees soon discovered the issue of identity as being something very complex and multiple and so, in the process of transformation, the concept of self would often shift from religious to linguistic to cultural and economic, such that the political space and identity of the refugee became really complicated and nuanced; it was never,

I mean, it is very difficult in the South Asian context... it is very difficult to put the case and the question of the refugee in a straitjacket. So, owners of a successful transition from refugeness to citizenship lay in one's resourcefulness. Depending on how much of social, economic, cultural capital one brought with oneself, one would be successfully rehabilitated/ resettled in the new land.

So, the core principle of official resettlement policy was self-rehabilitation, and the populace/ the section of immigrants that could self-rehabilitate themselves were seen as the assets of the host land, assets in the host land. They were not seen as economic or social abusers.

Otherwise there were pejorative expressions or pejorative ideas associated with refugees; there were some in the common parlance... refugees would be described as people that did not constructively contribute to the making of the post-colonial society. (Refer Slide Time: 30:21)



- Onus of a successful transition from refugee to citizen lay in one's resourcefulness. The core principle of official resettlement policy was self-rehabilitation.
- A study of Bengal shows how an authentic refugee type within the state discourse was fashioned after the Punjab experience, whereas this frame hardly fitted the Bengalis, discursively located outside the strict meanings of "refuge-ness".

So, a study of Bengal shows how an authentic refugee type within the state discourse was fashioned after the Punjab experience, and yet this was a fiasco since the frame of Punjab, the process of partition in Punjab, and the process of rehabilitation and resettlement in Punjab hardly informed and hardly fitted the reality of Bengal.

In Bengal, the notions of refugeness, the understanding of refugeness lay outside the strict meanings or the strict definitions that were etched at that time. So, when we look at the case of Bengal we realize that there ought to be...that the case of Bengal entails dissolution and redefinition of the term refugee.

Because of a very different process of displacement, a very different process of immigration, the reality where one sees that Bengali refugees keep trickling across a porous border, a border that was never sealed because of the Nehru-Liaquat pact.

And so, the definition falls short of the strict meanings of refugeness; fall short to contain the case of Bengal. We will talk more about this and I will meet you again with another topic in another lecture.

Thank you.