

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

Lecture - 50
Displaced People, Abandoned Homes V

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India and Print Media and Cinema. We are talking about Displaced People and Abandoned Homes. So, in this context, we are going to talk more about trains and train journeys. Trains have a momentous or [train journeys] are quintessential.

They could be seen as the synecdoche of the violence that partition entailed. When we think... whenever we have a popular imagination or we think of partition as a popular text, the partition as a popular text can be understood not without imagining the trains. Overcrowded trains, the pictures, the overly accessed and overly (kind of) focused... the overly-focused image of the train.

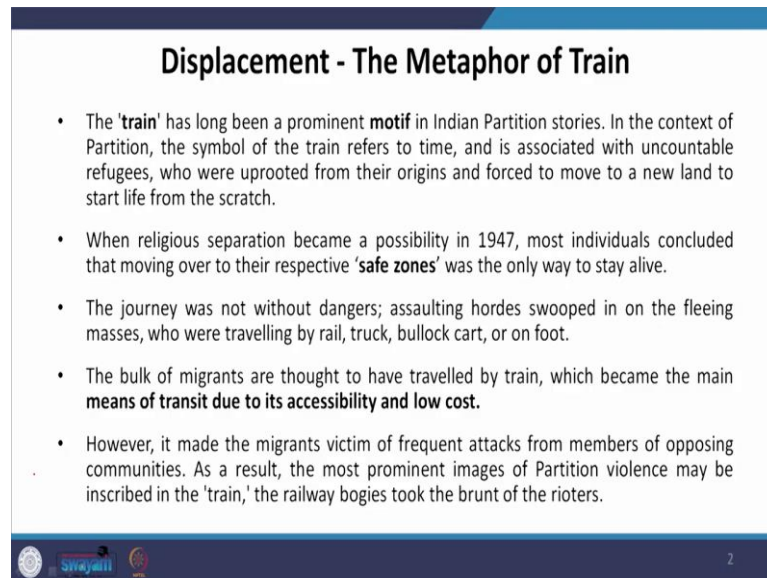
So, this is something that always comes within the purview of discussion, whenever we are talking of partition. So, train has been... has long since and it has always been a prominent motif in Indian partition stories, Indian partition studies. Because train is mobile, it carried the people across border; and in many cases, it failed to carry them across the border. Many people died in the train, which led to further cases of murder and incendiary.

So, in the context of partition, one could link the symbol of train with time. So, this is to say that it had become cumbersome, you know, or it was just like the trains.. the time would not move. The time had become stagnant during the partition... at the time of partition.

A train, just like time, is supposed to move, it is supposed to transport goods and people...rather people and goods from one point to the other, but the stagnation, because of the set-off [or conflict] between different communities, had led to moving nowhere. People were not able to reach their destination.

So, it was a kind of vicious circle of hatred, where the train was not leading to anywhere although it was moving. Sometimes, it was stopping dead on the tracks, and this is

something that Ghatak has very successfully shown in Komal Gandhar. Sometimes, it would reach laden with dead bodies and parts of human bodies and so, we see that time and the train, in a way, had become...they can be seen as metaphors of one another. And they can be seen as metaphors of many incomplete stories. (Refer Slide Time: 04:18)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- The 'train' has long been a prominent **motif** in Indian Partition stories. In the context of Partition, the symbol of the train refers to time, and is associated with uncountable refugees, who were uprooted from their origins and forced to move to a new land to start life from the scratch.
- When religious separation became a possibility in 1947, most individuals concluded that moving over to their respective '**safe zones**' was the only way to stay alive.
- The journey was not without dangers; assaulting hordes swooped in on the fleeing masses, who were travelling by rail, truck, bullock cart, or on foot.
- The bulk of migrants are thought to have travelled by train, which became the main **means of transit due to its accessibility and low cost**.
- However, it made the migrants victim of frequent attacks from members of opposing communities. As a result, the most prominent images of Partition violence may be inscribed in the 'train,' the railway bogies took the brunt of the rioters.

Many stories that never saw, you know, maturation...uncountable [stories] that did not realize a fruitful end. Trains as artworks depict...many trains would mean separation of lovers. So, there would be no reunion. It would mean a separation of neighbors, of friends that one would never see.

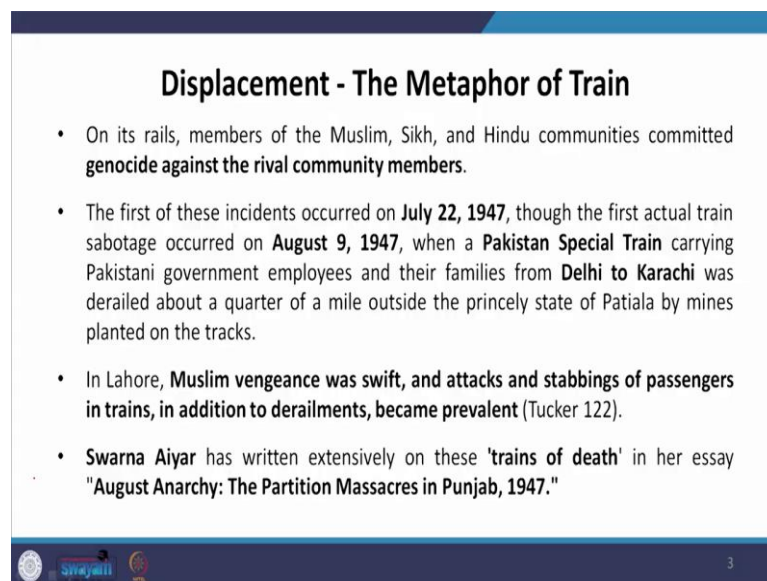
So, it was taking a person to a place of no return..to a place from which one could never come back. So, we see that the train is associated with uncountable... picture of uncountable refugees who were uprooted from the origins and forced to move to a new land and start life from the scratch.

When religious separation became a possibility in 1947 and even before that, the reality was somewhere.... it had dawned in the horizons for the politically aware classes from different communities and different regions, and that is when most individuals concluded moving over to a safer zone, to a geographical location where the majority, their communal majority would be staying. This was the only way to stay alive, and to stay protected, save their property and honor. So, the journey was not without dangers, like I already said. Assaulting hordes from rival communities would swoop in on the fleeing masses. So, these people would generally travel by... they would, the people would use

different means for travelling, such as rails, trucks, bullock-carts or for the poorest lot, it would be on foot. The bulk of migrants are thought to have travelled by train, however. The bulk that comprises the range... a social range between the upper middle-classes and the lower middle-classes and mostly the middle-class as well as the poorer sections thought that the train was the main means of transit.

This was because of its accessibility and its inexpensive cost, something that everyone could afford. So, due to its reasonable cost that people could afford and its accessibility, train would be the chief means of transit or transport for people. So, there were rife cases of frequent attacks from opposing communities.

And so, the most prominent images of partition violence are inscribed in the train, in the rail bogies, and we see... we also remember the burnt bogies; the bogies that were burnt by the rioters. These are some of the popular images that we have in our minds about partition. (Refer Slide Time: 07:55)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- On its rails, members of the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities committed **genocide against the rival community members.**
- The first of these incidents occurred on **July 22, 1947**, though the first actual train sabotage occurred on **August 9, 1947**, when a **Pakistan Special Train** carrying Pakistani government employees and their families from **Delhi to Karachi** was derailed about a quarter of a mile outside the princely state of Patiala by mines planted on the tracks.
- In Lahore, **Muslim vengeance was swift, and attacks and stabbings of passengers in trains, in addition to derailments, became prevalent** (Tucker 122).
- **Swarna Aiyar** has written extensively on these '**trains of death**' in her essay "**August Anarchy: The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947.**"

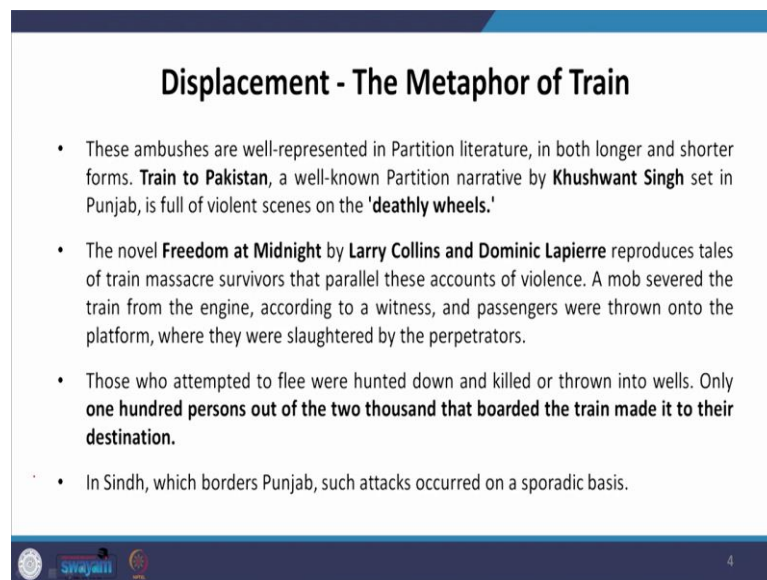
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So, on its trails members from different communities committed genocide against rival community members.

The first of such incidents is to have occurred on July 22nd, 1947, although the first actual train sabotage occurred on 9th of August, 1947 when a Pakistan special train was carrying the Pakistani government employees and their families from Delhi to Karachi, and it was derailed about a quarter of a mile outside of the princely state of Patiala by mines that were planted on the tracks.

So, in Lahore, Muslims avenged this incident very swiftly and they attacked and stabbed the passengers in trains that were travelling to Eastern Punjab, and they also derailed... the cases of derailing trains, the cases of derailments became prevalent, more frequent. Swarna Aiyar in her work August Anarchy, The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947 has written extensively on these trains of death.

So, in her essay August Anarchy, The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947 Swarna Aiyar extensively writes on these train death cases.. of train deaths and mishaps happening in and centering the train. (Refer Slide Time: 09:48)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- These ambushes are well-represented in Partition literature, in both longer and shorter forms. **Train to Pakistan**, a well-known Partition narrative by **Khushwant Singh** set in Punjab, is full of violent scenes on the 'deathly wheels.'
- The novel **Freedom at Midnight** by **Larry Collins and Dominic Lapierre** reproduces tales of train massacre survivors that parallel these accounts of violence. A mob severed the train from the engine, according to a witness, and passengers were thrown onto the platform, where they were slaughtered by the perpetrators.
- Those who attempted to flee were hunted down and killed or thrown into wells. Only **one hundred persons out of the two thousand that boarded the train made it to their destination.**
- In Sindh, which borders Punjab, such attacks occurred on a sporadic basis.

The violence that are aroused. The violence that are spread in the society, the deaths happening or the murders happening inside the trains.

We also see a lot of these ambushes... these ambushes, these violence....violence being, you know, depicted in partition literature both in longer works as well as in short stories.

So, Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is full of violence scenes on the deathly wheels, and it is also the story of the lover and the beloved -- how the train, an entire train is saved by the male protagonist, because his lover.. his beloved is inside the train and he wants the train to reach its destination.

The novel Freedom at Midnight by Larry Collins and Dominic Lapierre reproduces tales of train massacre survivors, which parallel the popular accounts of violence. So, a mob severs the train from the engine according to a witness, and the passengers are thrown onto the platform. They are slaughtered by the perpetrators who are a majority in that given region.

Those that attempt to flee are hunted down and killed in many cases. They are thrown into wells and so, 100 persons in a specific case of Freedom at Midnight, (which, in fact, simulates the real instances)...only 100 persons out of 2000 are able to board the train and make it to their destination alive. In Sindh, such attacks would occur during, before and after partition. Such attacks would occur on a sporadic basis on and often. (Refer Slide Time: 12:05)

Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- **September 1947** - Non-Sindhi Muslim refugees, most likely the **mohajirs**, attacked and plundered a train transporting Hindus from Punjab travelling through **Nawabshah** (Kothari 75).
- **The Grand Trunk Express**, also known as the Great Indian Peninsula Express, was assaulted by rioters after Partition in September 1947. **Aziz Ahmad's** Urdu story "**Kali Raat**" ['**Black Night**'] depicts the **tragic journey** of a Muslim family travelling by this train from **Delhi to Hyderabad**.
- The personified train in **Krishan Chander's** Urdu fiction "**Peshawar Express**" narrates its horrendous tale of corpse-laden voyage unleashed by killings en route at **Taxila, Rawalpindi, and Wazirabad**.
- The story "**The Train Has Reached Amritsar**" (Hindi, also translated as "**We Have Arrived in Amritsar**") by **Bhisham Sahni** has a similar setting and plot, inspired by the author's own experiences while travelling by train from **Peshawar to Delhi** on the eve of Independence.

Swajathi 5

September, 1947 Non-Sindhi Muslim refugees... most likely they were mohajirs or refugees...so, they were mohajirs and they attacked and plundered a train that transported Hindus from Punjab, and these Hindus were travelling through Nawabshah.

The Grand Trunk Express, also known as the Great Indian Peninsula Express was assaulted by rioters.. were assaulted by rioters after the partition in September, 1947. So,

Aziz Ahmad's Urdu story *Kali Raat* or *Black Night* depicts the tragic journey of a Muslim family that is travelling by this train.

This story develops against the backdrop of this real incident on Grand Trunk Express, and it depicts the journey of a Muslim family travelling by this train from Delhi to Hyderabad and how the passengers get assaulted. So, the personified train in Kishan Chander's Urdu fiction *Peshawar express* is something we always discuss when we talk about trains in the context of partition.

So, it narrates... the train is the narrator here and it tells us about the horrendous accounts of corpses. The train's corpse-laden voyage and the killings that happened at different stops, such as in Taxila, in Rawalpindi and in Wazirabad.

The train is traumatized after the entire journey and it does not want to come out of the shed in Bombay until situations, you know, situations revert to normalcy. So, the story 'The Train has Reached Amritsar' or it is translated in Hindi also as 'We have Arrived in Amritsar' by Bhisham Sahni has a similar setting and plot, and it's inspired by the author's own experiences while travelling in train from Peshawar to Delhi on the eve of the independence.

So, it tells us about how an ordinary person, the character of Babu goes on to become a murderer, from which there is no coming back. He is mocked at by a few Pathans, who call him an effeminate person just because he does not eat meat and he takes... because he cannot squarely face, he cannot face or fight against a group of men.

He separately takes it out on a Muslim man who tries to board the train, and who has nothing to do with the incident of his humiliation, the previous incident of his humiliation. We see that the Babu, you know, procures a rod from somewhere and kills this Muslim man, does not allow him to board the train. So, this is an abysmal pit, it's an abysmal pit from which people can hardly re-emerge, where people see other people only in terms of their community.

They see a human as a Hindu, Muslim or a Sikh, in terms of their external signifiers. In this regard, it might be helpful to also think of the external signifiers and how people played with these signifiers. So, Hindus would remove [their signifiers]. We understand religion is a superficial...you know, it's superficially worn on our body through skullcaps,

through a tilak and through turbans, and people would shave...so, the Sikhs would have to shave and take off their turbans so that they are not identified with their community or as member of a community and so forth. For Muslims and Hindus, we see how, I mean in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, there is the character of Roopa, a Sikh girl, who is able to escape by showing an Urdu tattoo, a Persian tattoo on her hand and the Muslims take her to be someone from within the community and so, they let her go.

Towards the end of Deepa Mehta's film you know, 'Earth' that is based on Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Cracking India', we see that the Christian gardener is forced to untie his pajama and display his circumcision. So, he has to display circumcision in order to convince the mob that he has indeed become a Muslim. He has converted into a Muslim.

Such was the case and in one of the recent movies, a relatively modern work by Mani Ratnam - the film called *Bombay*, we see that the children acquired this consciousness about how these external signifiers are glib and they can actually catch the attention of the wrong people. So, there is a point where the grandchild removes the tilak from his grandfather's forehead so that he is not attacked, he is not identified as a Hindu and attacked by the Muslim mob. So, we see all these things and finally, in this discussion I would (just before I once again go back to the topic of train), because I am talking about the physical markers, [I would discuss] the markers on the body that represent one's community, belonging to/one's sense of belonging to one's community or subscription to a community.

We might think of Manto's story, where a Jewish woman is trying to save her Sikh lover - Mosel. So, the Jewish...the Jew woman who has a Sikh lover wants to save his you know counterpart, a Punjabi woman, a Sikh woman and in the end, she is a symbol of belonging nowhere, to no community. She is a woman that has no connection with any man or with any religion.

She is the real free individual, she is a free individual in the true sense and she mocks cloth, the turban cloth of her lover, saying that he is a hypocrite and [later], she undresses herself to cover up his Sikh wife.. something like this. So, coming back to the topic of train, the metaphor of train in Bengal, the rare occurrences of train violence were limited to the August, 1946 riots. (Refer Slide Time: 20:48)

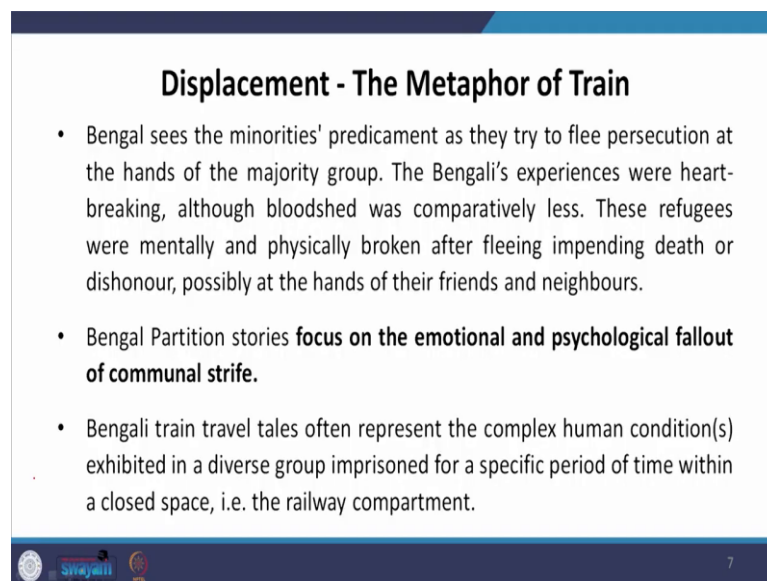
Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- In Bengal, the rare occurrences of train **violence** in the province were limited to the August 1946 riots.
- **General Francis Tucker** (Head of the Eastern Command in Calcutta) – describes the province's only railway riot:
 - *'A local train carrying largely Hindu babus (clerks), which had halted near Entally on a regular basis for the driver to throw out a present of coal for his village, was assaulted by Muslims at this spot, and one Hindu was slain.'*
- The next day, eleven Muslim passengers were **slain** when a train was stopped by Hindus (Tucker 422). As a result, the Bengal Partition stories mostly associate emigration journeys with **agony and misery** than violence.

So, in Bengal, we do not see much instances of riots centering trains.

General Francis Tucker who was the head of the Eastern Command in Calcutta describes the province's only railway riot as follows - So, local train carrying largely Hindu babus, the clerks, which had halted almost entirely on a regular basis for the driver to throw out a present of coal for his village, was assaulted by Muslims at this spot. And one Hindu was slain. The next day 11 Muslim passengers were slain when train was stopped by Hindus.

As a result, the Bengal partition stories mostly associate immigration journeys in terms of agony and misery, rather than physical violence and bloodshed. So, Bengal sees the minority's predicament in terms of the fleeing persecution at the hands of the majority group and so, the Bengali's experiences are more ...they are better understood as heart-breaking, as heart-rending, although bloodshed is comparatively less. (Refer Slide Time: 21:51)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- Bengal sees the minorities' predicament as they try to flee persecution at the hands of the majority group. The Bengali's experiences were heart-breaking, although bloodshed was comparatively less. These refugees were mentally and physically broken after fleeing impending death or dishonour, possibly at the hands of their friends and neighbours.
- Bengal Partition stories **focus on the emotional and psychological fallout of communal strife.**
- Bengali train travel tales often represent the complex human condition(s) exhibited in a diverse group imprisoned for a specific period of time within a closed space, i.e. the railway compartment.

swayam 7

These refugees are mentally and physically broken after fleeing impending death. And suddenly, you know, just about escaping with their honour and some property, at times no property, and the heartbreaking part is because... it is due to the fact that most often, the aggressor would be a neighbour, a long standing neighbour, you know, and a longstanding friend.

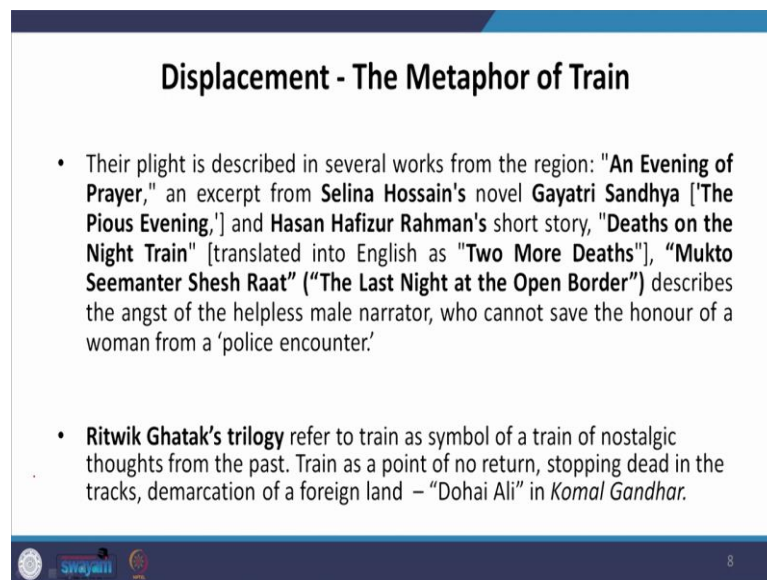
So, the question of betrayal would break one's heart, forever. It would break a person. Bengal partition stories focus on the emotive aspects, the psychological aspects of

communal [tensions]. Rather than showing a murderer, death, it shows the emotive and psychological fallout [resulting from] communal strifes.

So, the Bengal train travels often represent the complex human conditions that are exhibited in a diverse group, that were imprisoned for a specific period of time within a closed space. So, when we talk about the Bengal train travel, the complexity of human conditions is at the heart of the discussion.

How people would thrive in a space such as a railway compartment within a specific period of time; it would be overcrowded and people, you know, from diverse groups would have to coexist [at] the Sealdah railway platform, where you know hordes of refugees would come on a daily basis at one point of time.

They would arrive and they would have to live in the station amid dismal conditions, because they had nowhere else to go, they did not know Calcutta. And these were once again the poorest sections of refugees; so, in the case of Selina Hossain's novel *Gayatri Sandhya* or the *Pious Evening*, we see the plight of the refugees. (Refer Slide Time: 24:33)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- Their plight is described in several works from the region: "**An Evening of Prayer**," an excerpt from **Selina Hossain's** novel **Gayatri Sandhya** [*The Pious Evening*,] and **Hasan Hafizur Rahman's** short story, "**Deaths on the Night Train**" [translated into English as "**Two More Deaths**"], "**Mukto Seemanter Shesh Raat**" ("**The Last Night at the Open Border**") describes the angst of the helpless male narrator, who cannot save the honour of a woman from a 'police encounter.'
- **Ritwik Ghatak's** **trilogy** refer to train as symbol of a train of nostalgic thoughts from the past. Train as a point of no return, stopping dead in the tracks, demarcation of a foreign land – "**Dohai Ali**" in *Komal Gandhar*.

8

In several works, such as ... we also see this discussion in Hasan Hafizur Rahman's short story *Deaths on the Night Train*, which is translated into English as *Two More Deaths*. A work called *Mukto Seemanter Shesh Raat* by Satyendra Prasad Biswas, *The Last Night at the Open Border* describes the angst of the helpless male narrator.

So, the narrator witnesses a woman being 'encountered', the Bengali Hindu woman that wants to cross the border and come to India is 'encountered'. Encountered by the Bangladeshi you know the police... the police in Bangladesh. And she is taken away, she is taken aside for encounter and for search, and when she comes back, she is in such a condition that she is now unable to stand. She has been tortured so much physically, tortured so much that the woman is unable to stand after the police encounter. The man [witness] blames himself for the rest of his life and the writing is like a form of confession that he had witnessed this entire atrocity without being able to do anything for this female survivor of rape and violence. Then we have Ghatak's trilogy, the very famous works of Bengal partition.

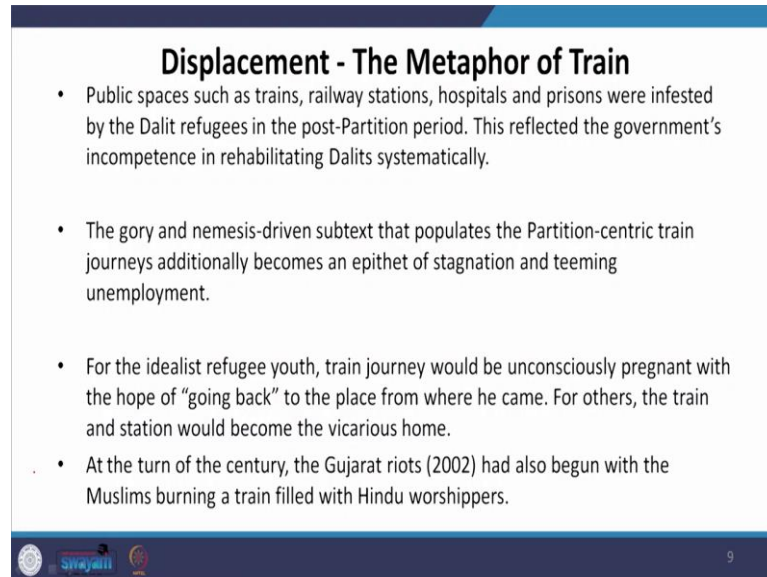
The 3 films - *Megha Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha*, then we have *Komal Gandhar* - the 3 films that refer to train as a symbol of nostalgic thoughts from the past. So in fact, in *Komal Gandhar* we have the train you know, we have a very powerful scene of the train moving on the ...a very powerful scene of the moving train that stops dead at the tracks.

And in the background, we have the a kind of incantation or you know, a collective prayer being chanted; 'Dohai Ali' is a kind of chant that the fishermen community usually make before they embark on their catch or before they start their day so their business goes well.

So, it is a call of survival kind of, because if they have a good catch it enables them to live, it supports a livelihood; and so, *Dohai Ali* in *Komal Ghandar* is, you know, chanted in the background, till the train stops dead in the tracks and one understands that the stopping of the train demarcates,

it signifies that it cannot move. The train will not move further, and it signifies, you know, demarcation of a foreign land. That is where India's border stops and Bangladesh or you know East Pakistan begins. So, public spaces such as trains, railway stations, hospitals, prisons -- all these spaces would be, they would be infested with.. they would be infested by the Dalit refugees in the post partition period.

And this stagnation that... the fact that the poorer refugees had nowhere to go also pointed to the government's failure and incompetence in rehabilitating the Dalits systematically. (Refer Slide Time: 28:47)



Displacement - The Metaphor of Train

- Public spaces such as trains, railway stations, hospitals and prisons were infested by the Dalit refugees in the post-Partition period. This reflected the government's incompetence in rehabilitating Dalits systematically.
- The gory and nemesis-driven subtext that populates the Partition-centric train journeys additionally becomes an epithet of stagnation and teeming unemployment.
- For the idealist refugee youth, train journey would be unconsciously pregnant with the hope of "going back" to the place from where he came. For others, the train and station would become the vicarious home.
- At the turn of the century, the Gujarat riots (2002) had also begun with the Muslims burning a train filled with Hindu worshippers.

Swrajit 9

So, the nemesis-driven subtext that populates the partition-centric train journeys additionally become an epithet of stagnation, of joblessness. Teeming unemployment is the next question, and we see this very, you know, this very efficiently depicted in Satyajit Ray's film.

In Satyajit Ray's trilogy, especially his works *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya*. So, we see that the idealist.. for an idealist youth the train journey would be unconsciously pregnant with the hope of going back to the place from where he came, and yet for others the station would become the vicarious home. In this context, it might be beneficial to remember two important works by contemporary Dalit authors, Adhir Biswas and Manorajan Byapari. So, Adhir Biswas had come from Magura; Magura which is in Jessore and which went on to become a part of East Pakistan. As a youth, as a teenager when he has a tiff with his father (they are poor people living in a slum-like area in Calcutta), he suddenly takes a train and he does not know anything about the train's destination and yet it is a wishful journey. He wishes that the train takes him back to his village, to Magura. So, that is one aspect of train journeys, where one wants to travel aimlessly and... like one wants to travel aimlessly and they have a kind of hoping against all hopes that they would reach their homeland thereby, in this way.

On the other hand, we see train journeys for Manoranjan Byapari are fraught with cases of individuals, you know, throwing him out of the train, giving him some food out of pity and then, there would also be men that approached the child for molestation. Manoranjan Byapari actually spent a significant phase of his life in stations.

He would make [friends]...he had many people that he knew in and around Jadavpur station, where he constantly lived for a certain time of his life. Train journey would mean for these people... train journeys were made with the hope that they would go to a better land, but in the case of Manoranjan Byapari, we see that he is disembarked many a times and he always lands from one problematic or one difficult situation to another.

So, the train fails to transport them to a meaningful destination, to a meaning... and can hardly be a meaningful journey for them. It is a question of stagnation, it is a question of the vicious circle, of being victimized, of being cheated, and of expectations being failed that inform the train journeys of the Dalit refugees. Having said that, we also need to understand that for some Dalits, paradoxically they are so poor, (and it is written in a humorous way by writers like Adhir Biswas, with a sense of satirical humor), they say that we would land in train, we would board trains without tickets, hoping that the ticket-checker would throw us into the prison.

And there we could get a square meal because that was the condition of the Dalit refugees. At homes, they would often have a big family, and many mouths to feed and so, some of them would intentionally like to be landed, you know, taken to the prison so their basic upkeep is taken care of. Before concluding today's lecture, we might want to think of or we might want to remember a recent case that happened at the turn of the century in 2002 - the Gujarat riots and it had also begun with a violence, with a case or with an instance of violence inside the train. It had begun with the Muslims burning a train filled with Hindu worshippers, which had later on taken a very ugly shape, as we all know.

So, with this, I would like to stop today's discussion and we will come back again for another lecture next day.

Thank you.