REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

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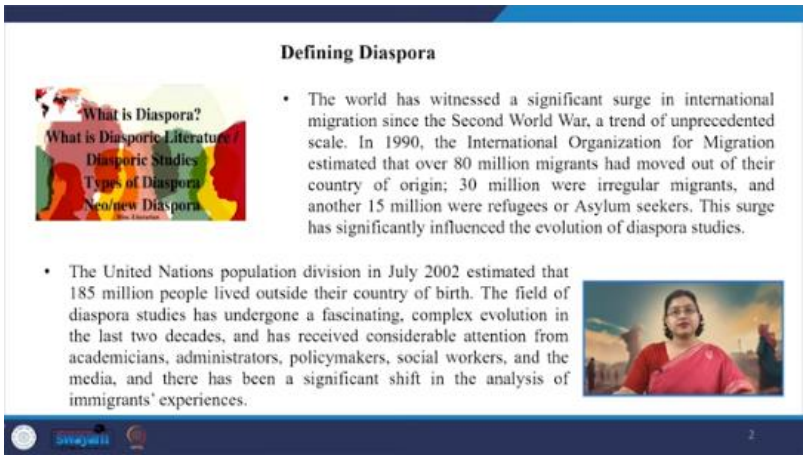
Lecture 29

Lecture 29: Historicizing and Defining Global Diaspora

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on refugees, migration, and diaspora. Today, we are going to define and historicize global diaspora. So, the world has witnessed a significant surge in international migration since the Second World War, and this is a trend of unprecedented scale. In 1990, the International Organization for Migration estimated that over 80 million migrants had moved out of their country of origin.

Thirty million were irregular migrants, and another 15 million were refugees or asylum seekers. So, this surge has significantly influenced the evolution of diaspora studies. The United Nations Population Division in July 2002 estimated that 185 million people lived outside their country of birth at that given point in time. The field of diaspora studies has undergone a fascinating and complex evolution in the last two decades especially, and it has received considerable attention from academics, administrators, policymakers, social workers, as well as the media, and there has been a significant shift in the analysis of immigrants' experiences. So as a term with well-structured theoretical dimensions, diaspora began its journey into scholarship.



So, we see this interface between diaspora as a phenomenon and scholarly intervention or diaspora's kind of interface with academia in the 1980s. This began with Gabriel Sheffer's book, Modern Diasporas in International Politics, which came out in 1986. In a later book titled Diaspora Politics at Home Abroad, which came out in 2003 at the turn of the century, Sheffer observes that his earlier book was the first theoretical, analytical, and empirical attempt toward creating a new field of study in diaspora. So historically, the term diaspora primarily refers to the dispersion of people from their original homeland. It originates from the Greek word diaspeirein, which is very close to the English word dispersion or scattering of seeds.

Until the later part of the 20th century, scholars predominantly described the Jews exiled from the Holy Land of Jerusalem, along with a handful of other scattered groups, as diaspora. So, until the later part of the 20th century or effectively until we see in the earlier part or until the mid-20th century, the predominant notion that overlapped with and corresponded to the concept of diaspora was that of the Jewish exile alongside the exile of certain other scattered groups. So, it was commonly associated with classical and traditional diasporas such as the Armenian diaspora and the Greek diaspora. However, to use Khachig Tololyan's often-cited introduction to his first volume of the journal Diaspora, I would quote Tololyan here: 'The term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.'

guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community. and so forth, unquote. So, previously it had a very reduced meaning, and now diaspora has expanded to incorporate all these categories. This expansion of the definition of diaspora caused much confusion as writers began to use the term indiscriminately and applied it to all kinds of groups and individuals, turning it almost into an all-purpose word.

To comprehend a theory and its definition, it is very important to understand the term 'route,' right? So, route or root. This term has gained prominence in contemporary discourses of migration studies. So, it has gained its currency vis-à-vis contemporary discourses of migration studies, representing one of the chief features of modern life. So, route is characterized by frequent movements both within and outside nation-states.

and its relevance to diaspora theory lies in its depiction of the paths and journeys that are taken by dispersed communities. The term route is also popularized by critic James Clifford

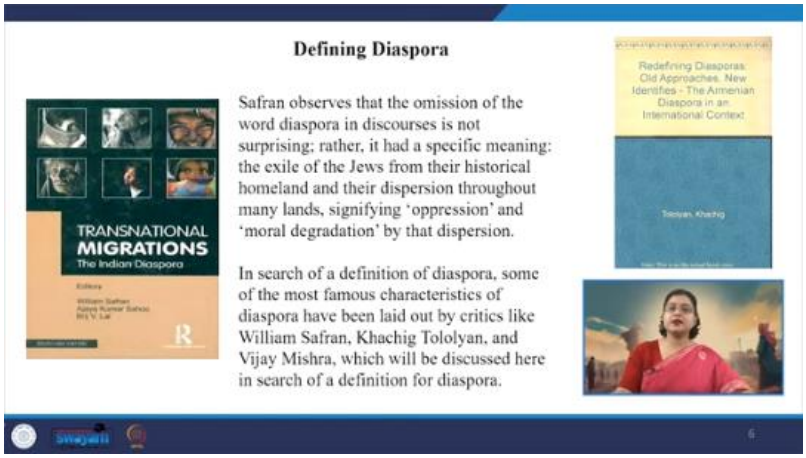
and it suggests a way of life which is sharply in contrast to the one that is conveyed by the term root, R-O-O-T root. So, we have the route or the R-O-U-T-E root and the R-O-O-T root, with the latter, you know, denoting preference for accustomed earth and relatively stable cultures that develop there. So when we talk of our roots, our origins, we are talking about a familiar and stable culture, whereas route, R-O-U-T-E, route or route is about traveling, about navigation in terms of culture, experimentation, in terms of identity.

So, the very essence of R-O-U-T-E, route or root is embedded in the term diaspora. Steeped in the spirit of history, politics and religion, diaspora was coined long ago during the classical period. This is when the whole idea of diaspora is conceived for the first time. It has now been revived as a theoretical tool as a way of denoting specific kinds of dislocations which are taking place all over the world. There was very little evidence of the presence of diaspora criticism or diaspora theory in the decades prior to the 1980s.

Regarding the absence of using this term diaspora, scholar William Safran in his article titled Diasporas in Modern Societies, Myths of Homeland and Return, which came out in 1991, refers to the omission of the phenomenon called diaspora in hitherto scholarly discussions. Till that point in time, you know, till a certain point, we see like the first half of 20th century, especially diaspora as a phenomenon has remained under-discussed in scholarship in academic fields. So Safran observes that the omission of the word diaspora in discourses is not very surprising. Rather, it had a specific meaning. So in the case of the exile of the Jews from their historical homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands,

Diaspora would signify oppression and moral degradation by that dispersion. So, diaspora would be connected with very negative outcomes or consequences. In search of a definition of diaspora, some of the most famous characteristics of diaspora have been laid out by

critics, including William Safran. Khachig Tololyan and Vijay Mishra, and we are going to take them up when we try to find a definition for diaspora. So, William Safran, in his famous article titled 'Diasporas in Modern Societies,' which came out in 1991,



discusses the concept of the formation of diaspora and the application of this term to situations or to groups other than the Jewish communities. Most notably, he is trying to understand the term diaspora vis-à-vis expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic minorities and has particularly pointed out—we see Safran points out nine key points or common features of the diasporic phenomenon. So, the first point in this context is dispersal from an original homeland.

So, diaspora, as necessarily a population or a diasporic subject, is someone who is dispersed from the original homeland, often dramatically, and the person has been relocated to two or more foreign regions. Alternatively, diaspora could also refer to the expansion or journey from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade, or in order to take forward colonial ambitions. So, expansion that has happened not out of trauma or out of force, but but that is undertaken by a social group with certain agendas, certain ambitions in their minds.

And then diaspora also refers to a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements. So, further diaspora refers to an idealization of a supposed ancestral home and a collective commitment towards maintaining, restoring and dedicating, you know, investing towards saving this home and further towards this home's prosperity and creation. So the development of a return movement which gains collective approval. Next, diaspora is understood in terms of a strong ethnic group consciousness that is sustained over a long time and is based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.

Further, diaspora could also refer to a troubled relationship with the host societies, which suggests a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility, one could also say apprehension that another calamity might befall the group. So once a group has entered a host society, especially as a political refugee, there is this possibility or at least there is this apprehension that they might face another calamity or some negative experience in the host society. Then there is the sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement. This is another very, you know, prominent characteristic, a salient feature of the diaspora.

Next, we have the possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries for the diaspora, should such a host society be tolerant towards pluralism. So, instances where the host societies show their affinity for pluralist values, they have tolerance for pluralism, there could also be a very creative and enriching life envisioned in the diaspora or envisioned or experienced by the diaspora in the new land. William Safran's definitions of diaspora came out in 1991 and then five years later, Khacig Tolonyan in Rethinking Diaspora's work that came out in 1996 suggests a tighter definition of this concept and Tolonyan puts forth the following criteria.

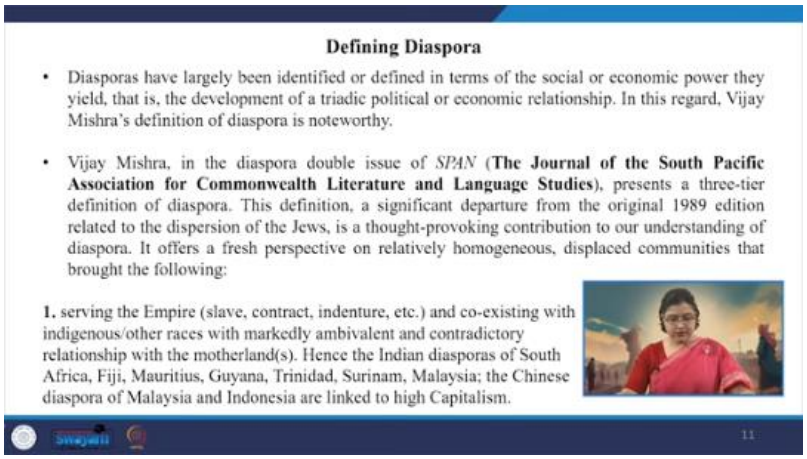
First, by Tolonyan, the diaspora has its origin in the fact that a large number of individuals were forced to leave their country due to severe political, economic, or other constraints. So, it is forceful. Second, before leaving their country, these people already shared a well-defined identity. Third, diasporic communities actively maintain or construct a collective memory, which forms a fundamental element of their identity. Fourth, these communities keep more or less tight control over their ethnic boundaries, whether voluntarily or under constraints from the host society.

Fifth, The diasporic communities are mindful of maintaining relations among themselves. And finally, they also wish to maintain contact with their country of origin, their motherland, provided it still exists. So, according to Tololyan's definitions or conditions that define the concept of diaspora, diasporas are different from other migrant communities. People are driven by their desire to remain in good relations with their own location or their ancestral land through the practice of cultivating a collective memory.

Therefore, a key point to consider in a diasporic community is group consciousness or the retention, cultivation, and fostering of collective memory. In the words of the French social scientist Michel Bruneau, the diaspora definition by Tololyan and Safran may be summed up as, to quote Bruneau, 'a conscious and factual claim to an ethnic or national identity.'

Now, diasporas have largely been identified and defined in terms of the social or economic power they wield. In other words, the development of a triadic political or economic relationship. In this regard, Vijay Mishra's definition of diaspora is noteworthy.

So Vijay Mishra, in the Diaspora double issue of SPAN, whose full form, the Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, in this journal, Mishra presents a three-tier definition of diaspora. This definition, which is a significant departure from the original 1989 edition related to the dispersion of the Jews, is a thought-provoking contribution to our understanding of the term diaspora. So, Mishra offers a fresh perspective on relatively homogeneous displaced communities that brought the following conditions to bear. The first is serving the empire.



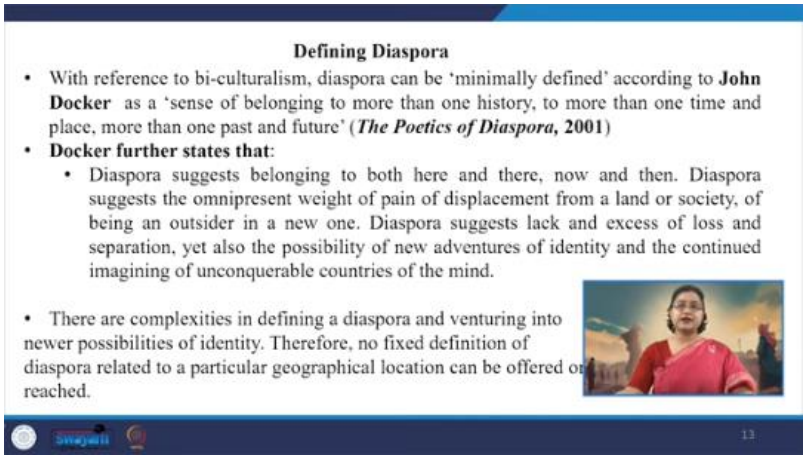
It could be as a slave under contract or under conditions of indenture as well as coexisting with the indigenous and other races with markedly ambivalent and contradictory relationship with one's motherland. So, here we are talking about the Indian diasporas of South Africa, the Indian diasporas in Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Malaysia, as well as the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia and Indonesia that can be linked to high capitalism. Next, we think of the condition of emergence of new diasporas based on free migration and linked to late capitalism.

Here we have examples, such as post-war South Asian, Chinese, Arab and Korean communities that migrate to Britain, Europe, America, Canada and Australia. The third condition he talks about could include any group of migrants that see itself on the periphery of power or excluded from sharing power. According to scholar Makarand Paranjape, being a diasporan based on free migration and its linkages to late capitalism could be perceived as a privileging situation in terms of economy, in economic terms because such a condition does not entail or does not involve an anguished state of displacement because

of further possibilities of bicultural experiences and opportunities that bicultural experiences provide, pose or posit.

So, according to critics Martinez Benet and Jana Haritatos, biculturalism is based on the formation of identity which involves two independent psychological constructs, cultural conflict as well as cultural distance, each representing unique and separate aspects of the dynamic intersection between mainstream culture and ethnic culture. So, basically the upshot, the different consequences of two cultures coming face to face or crossing roads. So, with reference to biculturalism, diaspora can be minimally defined in John Docker's terms, I quote, as a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future, unquote.

Docker further states, to quote him at length, diaspora suggests belonging to both here and there, now and then; diaspora suggests the omnipresent weight of pain, of displacement from a land or society, of being an outsider in a new one Diaspora suggests lack and excess of loss and separation, yet also the possibility of new adventures, of identity and the continued imagining of unconquerable countries of the mind." So, there are complexities in defining a diaspora and venturing into newer possibilities of one's identity. So, therefore, there is a problem in fixing the definition of diaspora related to a particular geographical location and therefore, it is very difficult to arrive at or offer and reach a fixed definition of diaspora that is related to a particular geographical location.



According to Kim D. Butler, I quote Butler, shifting the defining element of diaspora studies from the group itself to a methodological and theoretical approach, which might be one possibility to the study of the phenomenon of diaspora in human history. So, Butler suggests shifting the defining element of diaspora studies from from the group itself to a methodological and theoretical approach. This could be one of the possible ways to study the phenomenon of diaspora in human history. So, in this context, Butler in her article, Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse, which came out in 2001, has provided the following five dimensions which are unique to comprehend diasporas and which can facilitate research and studies on diaspora.

One is to understand the reasons for and the conditions of the dispersal. Second is the relationship that the diaspora has or maintains with one's homeland. Third is the relationship with the host land. Fourth is the interrelationships within communities of the diaspora. And fifth, comparative studies of different diasporas.

These five ways of approaching diaspora studies can enable us to kind of formulate or rather encompass the conditions that shape the concept of diaspora itself. To sum up, partly the historical reference to the diaspora can be seen as what Louis Jacques Dorais in his work 'Defining the Overseas Vietnamese' says. So, according to Dorais, diaspora is a way of replacing or supplementing the majority or minority binary discourse. According to Dorais, diaspora is a way of replacing or supplementing the majority-minority binary discourse.

So, the historicity of the term diaspora corresponds to a botanical process of dislocation or dispersion. It was originally used in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Holy Torah, the Holy Book of Torah of the Jews, and it was applied to the Jewish experience of exile and interpreted in ancient studies as the paradigm for both exile and

diaspora. So, this Septuagint became the paradigm for explaining exile and diaspora. In its earliest usage, diaspora carried the complex connotations of dispersal and decomposition.

According to the scholar and critic Himadri Lahiri, the Alexandrian Jewish Greek translators of the Hebrew scriptures adopted precisely the disastrous connotations of current philosophical discourse. So, diaspora was almost synonymous with a curse word, which refers to banishment by God. Diaspora would signify banishment by God. As Sudesh Mishra points out in his work Diaspora Criticism, So, I quote Mishra at length,

In the context of its appearance in Deuteronomy, this diasporic removal is associated with a curse, with perpetual otherness amid others, with blindness, madness, and defeat, with a spreading that weakens. In fact, the Hebrew word Za'avah, rendered diaspora in Greek, denotes not so much removal as a sense of fleeing in terror or fleeing out of terror. So, Sudesh Mishra also states that over time, diaspora as a term had, to quote him, accrued positive resonance as well, bespeaking a sense of tenacity, resistance, and preservation during the worst of circumstances.

So, progressively we see diaspora also accrues, also invites certain positive connotations. The term has taken a shift in its emphasis from scattering—so departure and deportation from homeland—to arrival and gatherings in the host land. So, it also talks about experiences during and after one's arrival in the host land. The host land becomes the new homeland, and that is something optimistic, you know, connoted subsequently when the term diaspora has journeyed to acquire newer situations, acquire the experiences or accumulate, assimilate the experiences of other groups, other social groups than only the Jews.

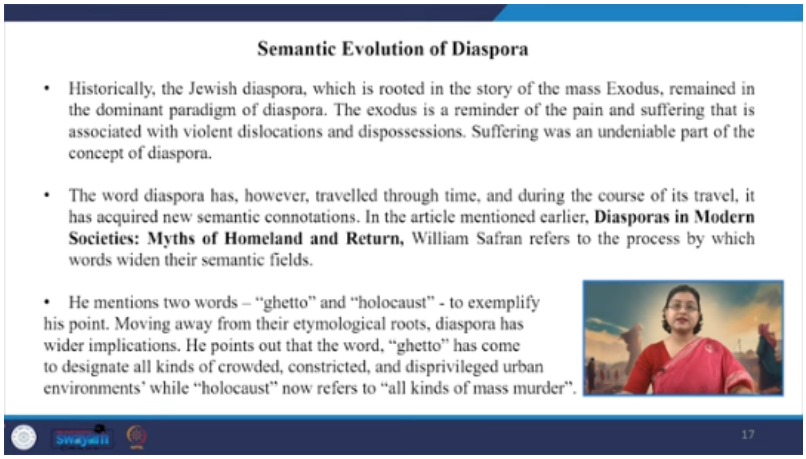
So when we look at a diaspora vis-à-vis only the Jewish experience, it is almost like a curse word. It is almost like something very negative, whereas when we expand it to understand other social groups, there is also some positivity and optimism associated with it. Historically, the Jewish diaspora, which is rooted in the story of the mass exodus, remained in the dominant paradigm of diaspora. The exodus is a reminder of the pain and suffering that is associated with violent dislocations and dispossessions,

and suffering was therefore an undeniable part of the concept of diaspora to begin with. The word diaspora has, however, traveled through time, as I was saying, and during the course of its travel, it has acquired new semantic connotations. So in the article that I have mentioned earlier, Diasporas in Modern Societies, William Safran refers to the process by

which words such as diaspora widen their semantic fields to assimilate and accumulate newer meanings.

Safran mentions two words, ghetto and holocaust, as a way of exemplifying his point. Moving away from their etymological roots, diaspora, you know, starts acquiring wider implications. He points out that the word ghetto, for example, has come to designate all kinds of crowded, constricted, and underprivileged or disprivileged urban environments. It has grown out, you know,

Out of or away from any specific context. Similarly, 'Holocaust' now refers to all kinds of mass murder, away from the original historical chapter related to the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of Jews in Germany. So, Safran demonstrates how the concept of diaspora has assimilated other connotations and become an inclusive umbrella term to refer to various groups of people, including migrants, expatriates, people in exile, refugees, and so forth. However, Robin Cohen in 'Global Diasporas: An Introduction' makes an observation on Safran and provides some social-scientific contours to the new claims rather than allowing a journalistic free-for-all to develop. So, Cohen points out that the Jewish experience and the concept of homeland remained pivotal in Safran's formulations for understanding diaspora in other cases.



According to Safran, the members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of their original homeland. They idealized their ancestral home, were committed to the restoration of the original homeland, and continued in various ways to relate and identify with that homeland. As a way of concluding, Cohen rightly underlines the need to draw generalized inferences from the Jewish tradition while also being sensitive to the inevitable dilutions, changes, and expansions of the meaning of diaspora. as it comes to be more widely applied to other conditions and cases. As a result of new developments, the term 'diaspora' now

includes both categories of people: those who move out of the nation-state willingly and those who do so under threat or force.

So, as a way of drawing our conclusion, diaspora studies have gained a significant place in academia. Today, research on diaspora is conducted from numerous academic perspectives, as debates on diaspora span a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, geography, human geography, migration studies, cultural studies, politics, international relations, race and ethnic studies, multiculturalism, post-colonialism, political economy, and communications. So, we see that diaspora studies has widened its scope, and there is much more to revisit, examine, and uncover in this field. With this, I will conclude our lecture here today.

Let us meet for a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.