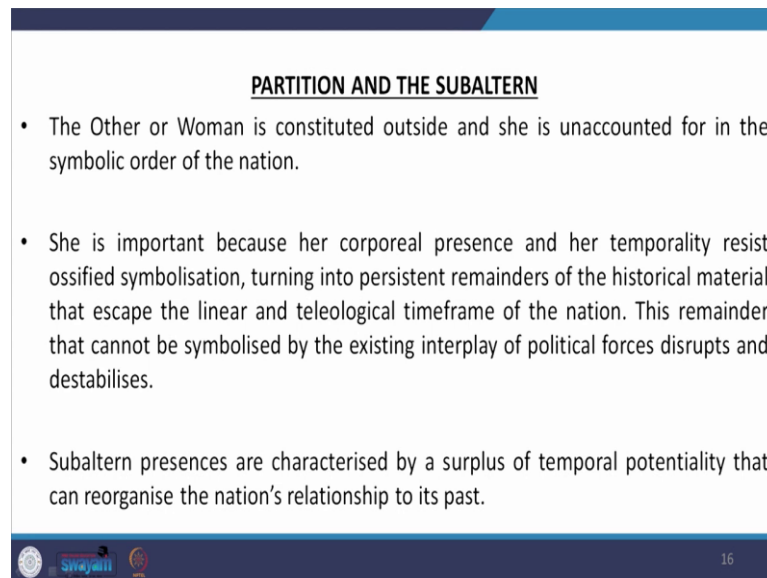


Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
Prof. Sarbani Banerjee
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 10
History and Alternative Memory Writings - III




Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. Today, we are going to discuss about the Subaltern and her role, her presence in the larger discourse on Partition. So, how [does] the subalterns' understanding destabilizes the traditional making or formation of historiography?

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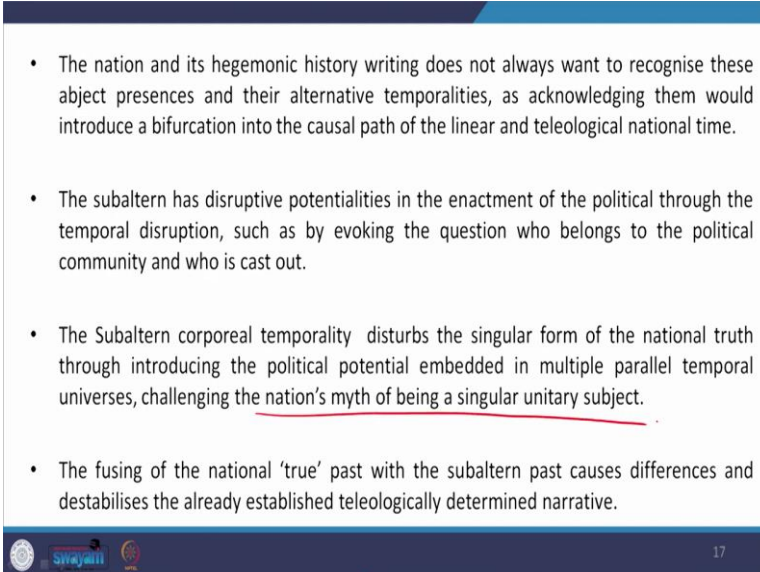
PARTITION AND THE SUBALTERN

- The Other or Woman is constituted outside and she is unaccounted for in the symbolic order of the nation.
- She is important because her corporeal presence and her temporality resist ossified symbolisation, turning into persistent remainders of the historical material that escape the linear and teleological timeframe of the nation. This remainder that cannot be symbolised by the existing interplay of political forces disrupts and destabilises.
- Subaltern presences are characterised by a surplus of temporal potentiality that can reorganise the nation's relationship to its past.

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The Other, [such as the] Woman is constituted outside and so, in the symbolic order of the nation, the subaltern Other is not seen as an active agent. The subaltern is important, the subaltern's corporeal presence, and temporality. This remainder cannot be symbolized by the existing interplay of political forces. The subaltern is characterized by a surplus of temporal potentiality; the perspective of the subaltern, the subaltern's reality can reorganize the nation's relationship to its past.

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- The nation and its hegemonic history writing does not always want to recognise these abject presences and their alternative temporalities, as acknowledging them would introduce a bifurcation into the causal path of the linear and teleological national time.
- The subaltern has disruptive potentialities in the enactment of the political through the temporal disruption, such as by evoking the question who belongs to the political community and who is cast out.
- The Subaltern corporeal temporality disturbs the singular form of the national truth through introducing the political potential embedded in multiple parallel temporal universes, challenging the nation's myth of being a singular unitary subject.
- The fusing of the national 'true' past with the subaltern past causes differences and destabilises the already established teleologically determined narrative.

Now, the nation and its hegemonic history writing traditionally does not recognize the abject figure of the subaltern. Who is the subaltern? Any person that does not participate in the writing of the national history or historiography, such a person could belong to the grassroots, could be the woman or the specially abled, the juvenile. So, they are acted upon by the history and are not actors.

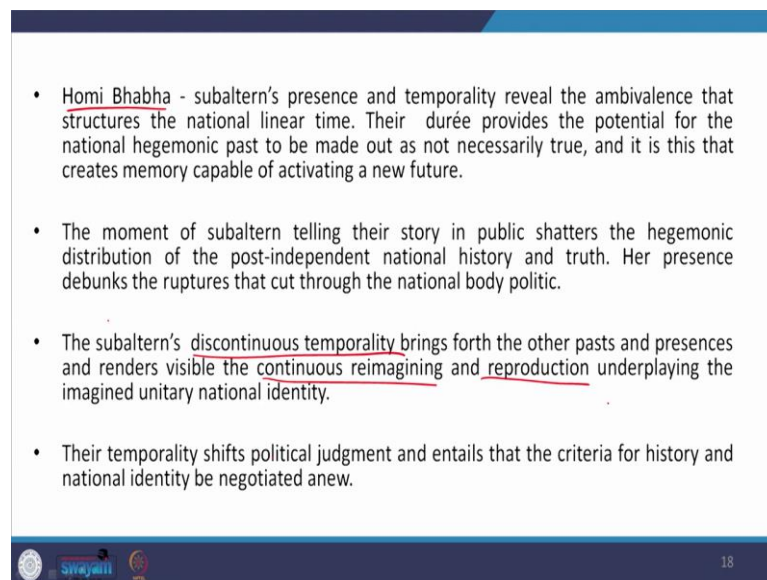
I was also talking about the relation between activism and agency. We need to understand that the subaltern's agency is not always available in her or his activism. Sometimes, the subaltern's activism feeds the purpose of the mainstream nation-building. Acknowledging the subaltern introduces a bifurcation into the causal path of the linear and teleological national time.

The subaltern has disruptive potentialities; they essentially disquiet the safe and unified meaning of nation and nationality in the enactment of the political through the temporal

disruption. The inclusion of the figure of the subaltern raises a question, such as who belongs to the political community and who is left out.

The subaltern corporeal temporalities disturbs any form of singular national truth through recourse to multiple parallel temporal universes. So, the presence of the subaltern challenges the nation's myth of being a singular unitary subject, through bringing in multiple parallel temporal universes and meanings. The fusion of the national 'true' past with the subaltern past causes differences and moments of destabilizations that question the teleologically determined narrative.

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- Homi Bhabha - subaltern's presence and temporality reveal the ambivalence that structures the national linear time. Their durée provides the potential for the national hegemonic past to be made out as not necessarily true, and it is this that creates memory capable of activating a new future.
- The moment of subaltern telling their story in public shatters the hegemonic distribution of the post-independent national history and truth. Her presence debunks the ruptures that cut through the national body politic.
- The subaltern's discontinuous temporality brings forth the other pasts and presences and renders visible the continuous reimagining and reproduction underplaying the imagined unitary national identity.
- Their temporality shifts political judgment and entails that the criteria for history and national identity be negotiated anew.

Homi Bhabha would say that the subaltern's presence and temporality reveal the ambivalence that structures the national linear time. Subaltern's relationship with a given space and time provides the potential for revisiting the national hegemonic past. The presence of the subaltern's memory that is capable of activating a new future.

The moment of a subaltern telling his/her story in public is a way of breaking the hegemonic distribution of post-independent national history and truth. So, the subaltern's accounts expose and debunk the ruptures that cut through the national body politic.

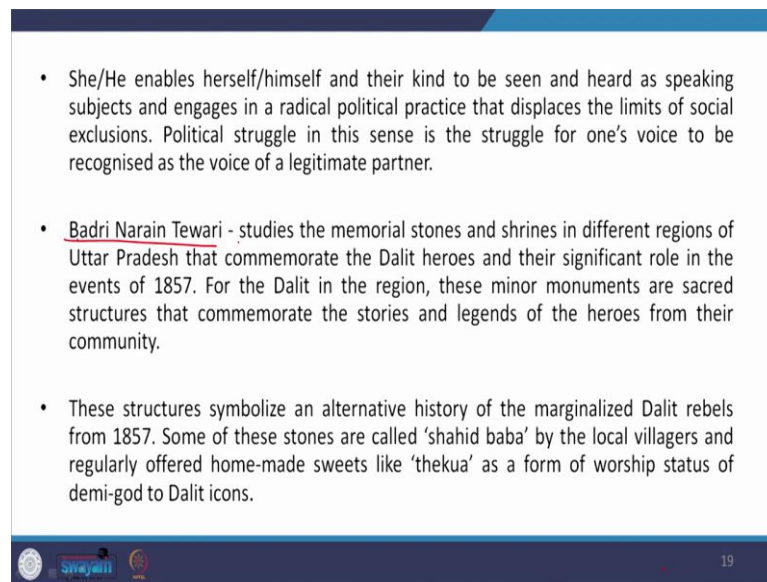
The subaltern's version of past renders discontinuous temporalities and brings forth the other pasts and presences, that have hitherto not been attended by formal historiography. So, there is a continuous re-imagining [and] reproduction underplaying the imagined

unitary national identity. Their [the subaltern's] temporality shifts political judgment and entails that the criteria for history be negotiated anew.

The subaltern enables himself or herself to be seen and heard as speaking subjects. Through having the subaltern's version in history, their invisibilized position is revisited, it is problematized. One understands that the subaltern's invisibility is not natural; it needs to be questioned.

So, the subjects in the new form of history that is written from below –

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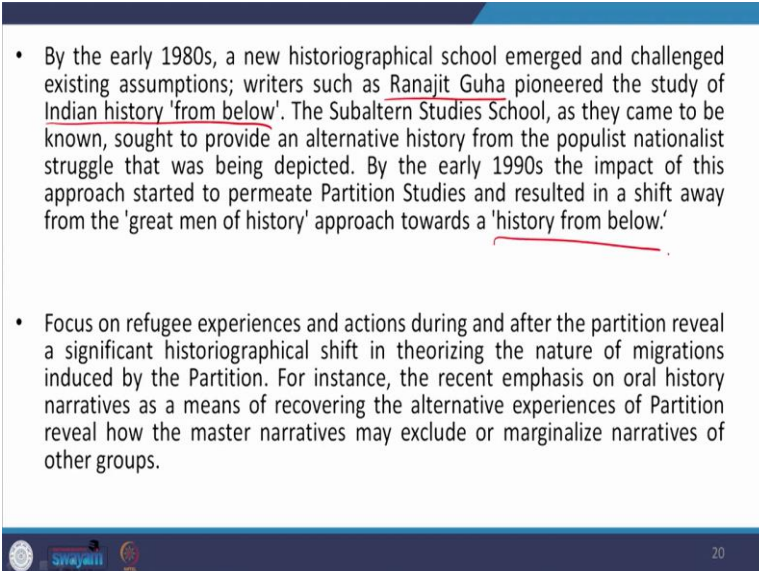


- She/He enables herself/himself and their kind to be seen and heard as speaking subjects and engages in a radical political practice that displaces the limits of social exclusions. Political struggle in this sense is the struggle for one's voice to be recognised as the voice of a legitimate partner.
- Badri Narain Tewari - studies the memorial stones and shrines in different regions of Uttar Pradesh that commemorate the Dalit heroes and their significant role in the events of 1857. For the Dalit in the region, these minor monuments are sacred structures that commemorate the stories and legends of the heroes from their community.
- These structures symbolize an alternative history of the marginalized Dalit rebels from 1857. Some of these stones are called 'shahid baba' by the local villagers and regularly offered home-made sweets like 'thekua' as a form of worship status of demi-god to Dalit icons.

The subjects engage in radical political practice that displaces the limits of social exclusions. Let us look at example of subaltern histories. So, for example, Badri Narain Tewari studies the memorial stones and the shrines in different regions of Uttar Pradesh that commemorate the unsung Dalit heroes from 1857 - their roles in the Sepoy Mutiny.

For the Dalits in these regions, these minor monuments - the stories they attest to, the stories and legends of the heroes from their own community and these local Dalit heroes in UP villages are deified. And so, these marginalized Dalit rebels are commemorated through the stones that are called Shahid Baba by the local villagers, and they are offered homemade sweets and worshipped as Dalit icons. They have a demi-god status in their localities and among the local Dalit populace.

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- By the early 1980s, a new historiographical school emerged and challenged existing assumptions; writers such as Ranajit Guha pioneered the study of Indian history 'from below'. The Subaltern Studies School, as they came to be known, sought to provide an alternative history from the populist nationalist struggle that was being depicted. By the early 1990s the impact of this approach started to permeate Partition Studies and resulted in a shift away from the 'great men of history' approach towards a 'history from below.'
- Focus on refugee experiences and actions during and after the partition reveal a significant historiographical shift in theorizing the nature of migrations induced by the Partition. For instance, the recent emphasis on oral history narratives as a means of recovering the alternative experiences of Partition reveal how the master narratives may exclude or marginalize narratives of other groups.

So, we see that by the early 1980s, a new historiography school emerges that challenges the existing premises of formal historiography, and we have historians writing about peasant revolts, about the different experiences, the different stances of people from the grassroots. So, we have writers, such as Ranajit Guha, who pioneered the study of Indian 'history from below.'

The Subaltern Study school provided an alternative history from the populist nationalist struggle, and by the early 1990s, the impact of an alternative history from the subaltern's point of view started to permeate Partition Studies. There was a new trend being set to move away from studying only the nationalist heroes and understanding 1947 only in

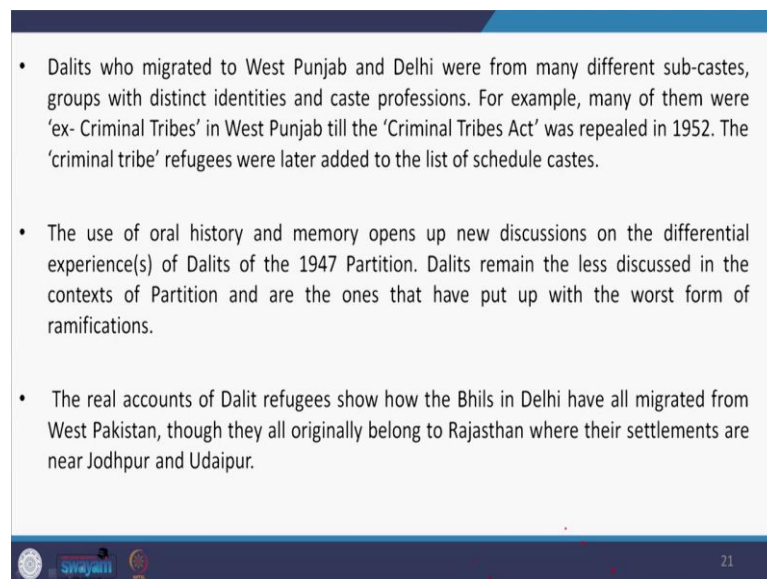
terms of India's independence from British rule, and so the approach towards history was essentially 'from below'.

There was renewed focus and interest on refugee experiences and actions during and after Partition, which revealed a significant historiographical shift in theorizing the nature of migrations. The experience of the refugees, the process of the journey of the refugee into becoming a citizen.

The recent emphasis on oral history is also a part of the subaltern studies. Its means of recovering the undiscovered, the under-researched areas of Partition, the untold experiences go on to reveal how the master-narratives are created through excluding or marginalizing narratives of other lesser powerful groups.

Dalits that migrated to West Punjab and Delhi were from different sub-castes, for example, some of them were from 'ex-Criminal Tribes' in West Punjab. The 'criminal tribe' refugees were later added into the list of the Scheduled Caste. So, these are the facts that were being more discussed under the School of Subaltern Studies.

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- Dalits who migrated to West Punjab and Delhi were from many different sub-castes, groups with distinct identities and caste professions. For example, many of them were 'ex-Criminal Tribes' in West Punjab till the 'Criminal Tribes Act' was repealed in 1952. The 'criminal tribe' refugees were later added to the list of schedule castes.
- The use of oral history and memory opens up new discussions on the differential experience(s) of Dalits of the 1947 Partition. Dalits remain the less discussed in the contexts of Partition and are the ones that have put up with the worst form of ramifications.
- The real accounts of Dalit refugees show how the Bhils in Delhi have all migrated from West Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur.

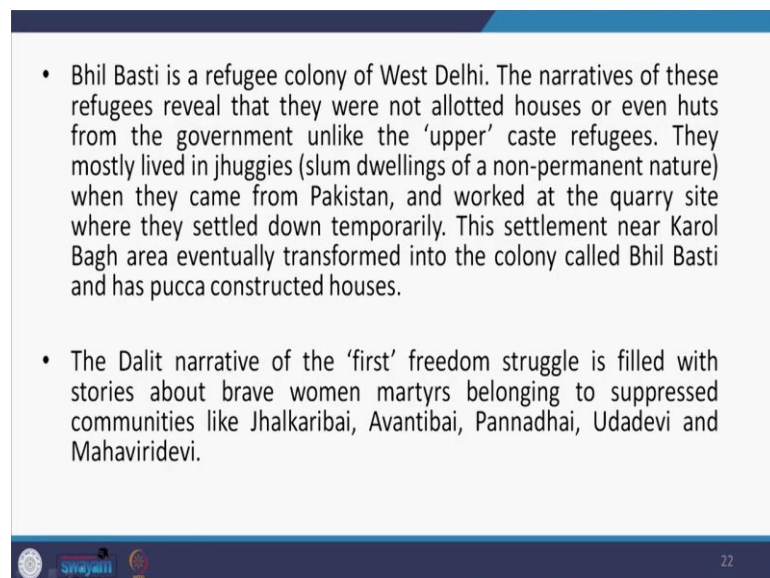
The use of oral history and memory opens up new discussions on the differential experiences of the Dalits against the backdrop of 1947 Partition.

So, Dalits start writing their own autobiographies - Dalits write autobiographies and memoirs, which add a greater complexity to the existing Partition discourse. It makes the

entire discussion well-rounded and more symmetrical, and more nuanced. So, more layered. Dalits had remained less discussed in the context of Partition, and yet they were the ones that had put up with the worst form of ramifications.

One sees the real accounts of the Dalit refugees in the case of, for example, the Bhils in West Delhi that have migrated from West Pakistan although they were originally all from Rajasthan and their settlements were close to Jodhpur and Udaipur. These are the many narratives that the historians get interested in; they discuss about the lesser figures and their roles, their perspectives vis-a-vis Partition.

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- Bhil Basti is a refugee colony of West Delhi. The narratives of these refugees reveal that they were not allotted houses or even huts from the government unlike the 'upper' caste refugees. They mostly lived in jhuggies (slum dwellings of a non-permanent nature) when they came from Pakistan, and worked at the quarry site where they settled down temporarily. This settlement near Karol Bagh area eventually transformed into the colony called Bhil Basti and has pucca constructed houses.
- The Dalit narrative of the 'first' freedom struggle is filled with stories about brave women martyrs belonging to suppressed communities like Jhalkaribai, Avantibai, Pannadhari, Udadevi and Mahaviridevi.

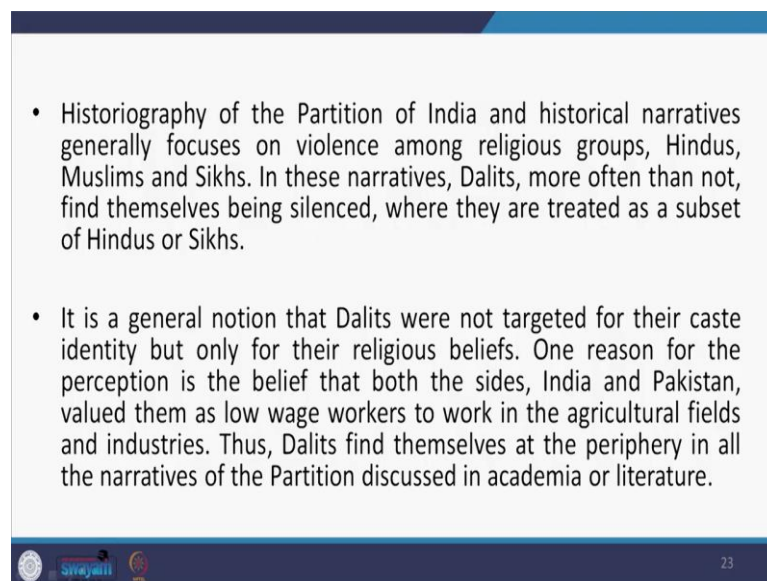
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The case of Bhil Basti in West Delhi - it is a refugee colony and the narratives of the refugees in Bhil Basti revealed that they were not allotted houses. So, their way of resettlement was much different from the upper-caste refugees. They lived in shanties and they worked at the quarry sites, and that is where they would settle down temporarily.

These settlements near Karol Bagh eventually transformed into pucca constructed houses, and that is how the colony of the Bhil Basti dwellers was transformed. Celebrated stories about women, the female martyrs that belong to suppressed communities - names such as Jalkhari bai, Avanti bai, Pandadhai, Udadevi and Mahaveri devi are actually narrated in the context of the first freedom struggle and the roles of the Dalits.

The Dalit narrative of first freedom struggle includes a number of women martyrs from the suppressed communities and so it adds new meanings to the image and imagination of martyr itself. Martyr does not necessarily mean a person coming from an upper-caste or from an elite background or even that the person is a male.

So, all these conceptions are revisited when we have the subalterns taking part and becoming agents in the formation...the project of shaping the post-colonial history. (Refer Slide Time: 15:40)



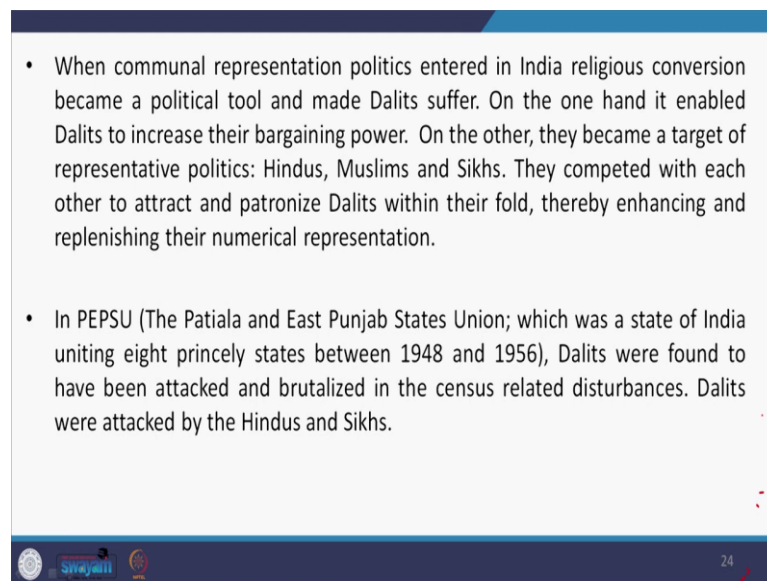
- Historiography of the Partition of India and historical narratives generally focuses on violence among religious groups, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In these narratives, Dalits, more often than not, find themselves being silenced, where they are treated as a subset of Hindus or Sikhs.
- It is a general notion that Dalits were not targeted for their caste identity but only for their religious beliefs. One reason for the perception is the belief that both the sides, India and Pakistan, valued them as low wage workers to work in the agricultural fields and industries. Thus, Dalits find themselves at the periphery in all the narratives of the Partition discussed in academia or literature.

Historiography of the Partition of India and historical narratives generally focuses on violence among religious groups. So, Partition is synonymous with violence among

major groups like Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. And in these narratives, Dalits find themselves silenced and there is a general notion that Dalits were not targeted, there were no caste-based conflicts in Partition, but the divides were only in the line of religion. One reason for the perception is that both the sides, India and Pakistan, used the Dalits, exploited the Dalits as low-wage workers in the agricultural fields and in the industries.

The possibility of Dalits entering the space of academia, academic discussion and etching their own representation in literature was initially thought as impossible. So, Dalits who belonged traditionally to the fringes, to the peripheries of each society, each community did not have any experience to tell -- that was the general assumption. So, the narratives by the Dalits, the violence that they faced during Partition actually disquiets the existing nationalist narrative that we have.

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- When communal representation politics entered in India religious conversion became a political tool and made Dalits suffer. On the one hand it enabled Dalits to increase their bargaining power. On the other, they became a target of representative politics: Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. They competed with each other to attract and patronize Dalits within their fold, thereby enhancing and replenishing their numerical representation.
- In PEPSU (The Patiala and East Punjab States Union; which was a state of India uniting eight princely states between 1948 and 1956), Dalits were found to have been attacked and brutalized in the census related disturbances. Dalits were attacked by the Hindus and Sikhs.

When communal representation politics entered in India, religious conversion became a political tool. We have already spoken about how communities were suddenly looking at numbers and there was competition in numbers. So, the revivalists, the reformists were thinking of... in the case of the Hindus, Brahminizing the Dalits and taking them back into the fold of the Hindu community. That was seen as urgently important.

So, religious conversion was a political tool and the Dalits were suffering. The Dalits were rendered a passive status in this entire process. On the one hand, the Dalits did have some bargaining power and on the other, they became a target of representative politics.

The Dalits got sucked into these dyadic or rather triadic communal fights, these three communities - the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were competing with each other to attract and patronize Dalits within their fold. Dalits were suddenly becoming important in terms of the numbers that they could add to an existent major community in India. Even in the recent times, one sees the violence on the Dalits in PEPSU, PEPSU meaning the Patiala and East Punjab States Union. So, that is where the Dalits experience violence and they are attacked and brutalized in the census-related disturbances.

Dalits have time and again been subjected to forced conversion, they have been attacked by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs alike and yet these sub-narratives, if we may, actually disappear in our bid to celebrate the larger pictures and the highflown names, the lofty images and the heroic ideals. In a bid to lionize the nationalist heroes, we tend to disremember, we tend to obfuscate the alternative histories of the lesser powerful that also constitute a significant population in India.

With this, I would like to conclude today's lecture, and let us meet again for the next round of discussions.

Thank you.