

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 23
Woman in the Context of Partition - III

Good morning and welcome back to my lecture for the course Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. Today, we are going to continue our discussion on Women in the Context of Partition. So, we talk about the roles of the newspapers. Actually, newspapers, journals and different media played a major role/pivotal role during the partition times.

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Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Newspaper journalists and attorneys, particularly the government-backed ones, dramatised and elaborated the situation, turning communal tensions into a daily problem.
- K.K. Mitra presided over the founding of the **Women's Protection League**, which was preceded by a meeting of the **Indian Journalists Association**. P.K. Sankar of the newly formed **ABP** and **Basumati** expressed homage to those who helped in the anti-abduction campaign.
- Through their headlines, newspapers with a monopoly on the portrayal of the daily happenings effectively created a **typical homogenous paradigm of diverse abduction incidents**.

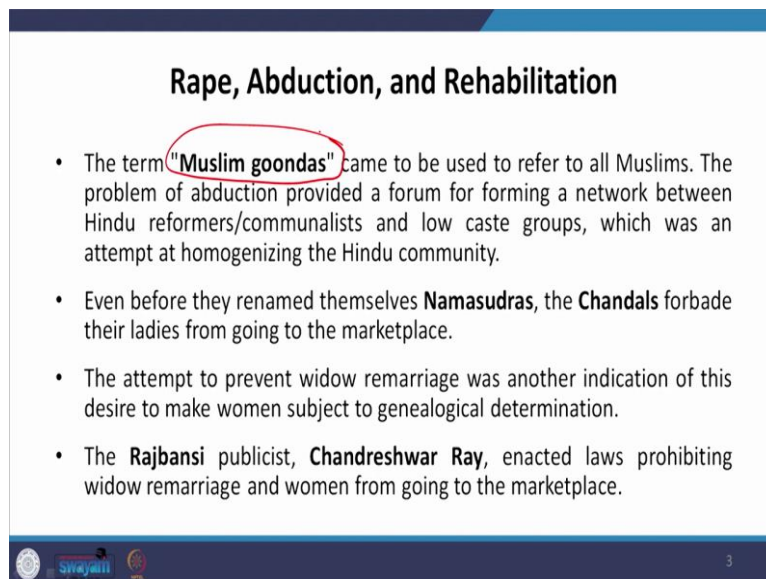
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The journalists and attorneys, particularly the ones that had a greater influence by virtue of being sponsored by the larger parties,

[they] had a lot of money, were backed by governments and different political parties. These newspapers could dramatize and elaborate the situation, blow it up beyond the proportion, and they had a very crucial role in turning communal tensions into a daily problem. It became almost a bread and butter for the newspapers. K.K. Mitra presided over the founding of the Women's Protection League, which was preceded by a meeting of the Indian Journalists Association.

P.K. Shankar of the newly formed Anandabazar Patrika and Basumati expressed homage to those who helped in the anti-abduction campaign. Through their headlines, newspapers with a monopoly on the portrayal of the daily happenings effectively created a typical homogeneous paradigm of a situation that was in reality diverse, layered and more nuanced and complicated.

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Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- The term "**Muslim goondas**" came to be used to refer to all Muslims. The problem of abduction provided a forum for forming a network between Hindu reformers/communalists and low caste groups, which was an attempt at homogenizing the Hindu community.
- Even before they renamed themselves **Namasudras**, the **Chandals** forbade their ladies from going to the marketplace.
- The attempt to prevent widow remarriage was another indication of this desire to make women subject to genealogical determination.
- The **Rajbansi** publicist, **Chandreshwar Ray**, enacted laws prohibiting widow remarriage and women from going to the marketplace.

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There [was] a coinage (thanks to the popular media) there [was] this term Muslim goonda that came to be used to refer to all the Muslims.

The problem of abduction provided a forum for forming a network between the Hindu communalists or reformers and the Dalit groups. This was an attempt in turn to homogenize

the Hindu community. The elites were building their own communities in a very homogeneous way.

We understand that the formation of Pakistan [and] the idea of Two-nation theory was fanned at a very elite level and it was sent vertically downwards. It actually fanned the sentiments of the masses and they got sucked into these whirlpools, these larger politics and similarly the Hindus were systematically sucking in the support of the Dalits as an attempt to homogenize the Hindu community. So, even before they renamed themselves as Namastudras, the [community of] Chandals would forbid their women from going to the marketplace.

There were attempts to prevent widow marriage. We see that the Dalits, as a result of coming in touch with and through the process of Shuddhikaran (through Brahmanization of different Dalit groups) had actually started taking on the sacred thread and they claimed becoming one of the upper-castes - either Brahmin or Kshatriya.

And so, they would actually take after and define themselves in terms of the casteist values of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. The community would be reshaped, would be remodeled through the activities of the women, through policing the activities of the women and through remolding the activities of the women.

So, we see that as the Dalits are drawn into the mainstream, they exert a greater control over the Dalit women. Rajbanshi publicist Chandreshwar Ray enacted laws that prohibited widow remarriage and the women from going in the public space, such as the market. In this regard, there have been important studies - one by Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, who would note that a traditionally "lower-caste" man asserts his sign of social mobility or social improvement [for] going up the social ladder.

His economic success [happens] through adapting to the cultural behavior and mannerisms of the upper-castes and so, the starting point of such assertion, the expression of such change starts through the body of the woman. The experimentations with the changes in a particular community, even among the Dalits, starts with the body of the woman; the starting point is the woman's body.

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Women's Caste and Gender

- **Joanna Liddle** and **Rama Joshi** - a traditionally "lower-caste" man asserts his signs of social improvement and economic success by adapting to cultural mannerisms of the "upper-caste," and its starting point is the body of the woman.
- Liddle and Joshi - increased upward mobility among individuals or a group is directly proportional to greater control over women's bodies.
- Such control manifests through "women's disinheritance from immovable property in the form of land, and their exclusion from productive economy, involving removal from public life to the domestic sphere of the home in the form of seclusion or purdah."

Liddle and Joshi would also note that increased upward mobility among individuals or a group is directly proportional to a greater control over the women's body. Once a person escalates the social ladder, the gender values are more conservative. So, the control could be manifested through mannerisms, such as women being disinherited from immovable property such as the land, and their exclusion from productive economy, their removal from public life and the women being limited to the domestic sphere of home and they being secluded through the system of *parda*.

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Women's Caste and Gender

- **Hutton** – stepping up in terms of caste is purely a male-centric benefit, at the cost of greater hardship for women, such that the meaning of caste practices does not apply uniformly to all members of a given group.
- The *Chandala* is ranked the lowest in the Indian caste hierarchical ladder because the group originates from sexual union between a Sudra ("low-born") man and a Brahmin ("high-born") woman. *Chandala* is the symptom of the greatest possible subversion of patriarchal rules that safeguard "social exclusiveness" and "biological purity."

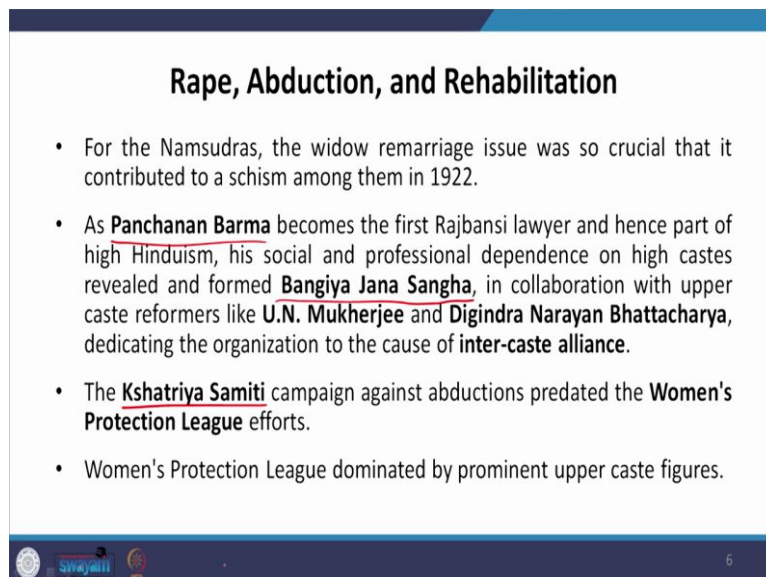
Further, [John Henry] Hutton would say that the stepping up in terms of caste is purely a male-centric benefit, something that is in continuation to what Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi

had to say. The stepping up the caste is a benefit that happens at the expense of greater hardship being imposed on women, such that the meaning of caste practices does not apply uniformly to all members of a given group.

Change in the society of the Dalit that advantages the male could, at the same time, disadvantage the female counterparts. So, we understand that in the traditional Hindu caste-system, Chandal is ranked as the lowest (in the Indian caste hierarchical ladder).

[This is] because the group originates through a sexual union between a Sudra man and a Brahmin woman. Chandal is a symptom of the greatest possible subversion or violation, a rapture or a deviation from the patriarchal rules which safeguard caste distinctions/demarcations and social exclusiveness as a way of maintaining biological purity.

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Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- For the Namsudras, the widow remarriage issue was so crucial that it contributed to a schism among them in 1922.
- As **Panchanan Barma** becomes the first Rajbansi lawyer and hence part of high Hinduism, his social and professional dependence on high castes revealed and formed **Bangiya Jana Sangha**, in collaboration with upper caste reformers like **U.N. Mukherjee** and **Digindra Narayan Bhattacharya**, dedicating the organization to the cause of **inter-caste alliance**.
- The **Kshatriya Samiti** campaign against abductions predated the **Women's Protection League** efforts.
- Women's Protection League dominated by prominent upper caste figures.

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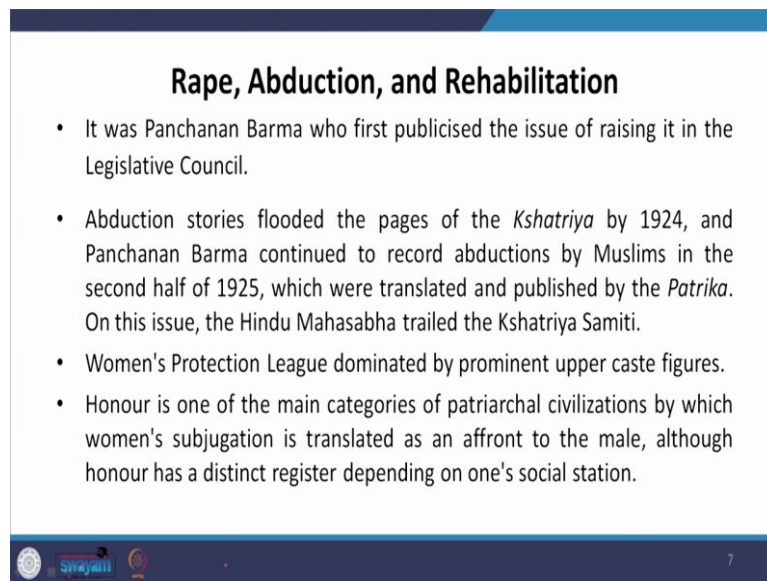
We see that the Namasudra is conservative in terms of reshaping their policies, their social modes. The widow remarriage issue became very crucial and it contributed to a schism/ to a rift among the Namasudras in 1922.

And a figure like Panchanan Barman [emerges]. Panchanan Barman is symptomatic of the upper-class or the elite Dalit figure. He is [from the] Rajbanshi [community] that became a barrister. And so, he espoused high Hinduism; his social and professional dependence was entirely on the high-caste Hindus and so, he was an important figure in the formation of Bangiya Jana Sangh in collaboration with other upper-caste reformers, such as U. N

Mukherjee, Digindra Narayan Bhattacharya and he dedicated the organization to the cause of inter-caste alliance.

Formation of the Kshatriya Samiti and his campaign against abductions predated the Women's Protection League's efforts. Women's Protection League was an initiative, an enterprise that was dominated mainly by the prominent upper-caste figures.

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Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- It was Panchanan Barma who first publicised the issue of raising it in the Legislative Council.
- Abduction stories flooded the pages of the *Kshatriya* by 1924, and Panchanan Barma continued to record abductions by Muslims in the second half of 1925, which were translated and published by the *Patrika*. On this issue, the Hindu Mahasabha trailed the Kshatriya Samiti.
- Women's Protection League dominated by prominent upper caste figures.
- Honour is one of the main categories of patriarchal civilizations by which women's subjugation is translated as an affront to the male, although honour has a distinct register depending on one's social station.

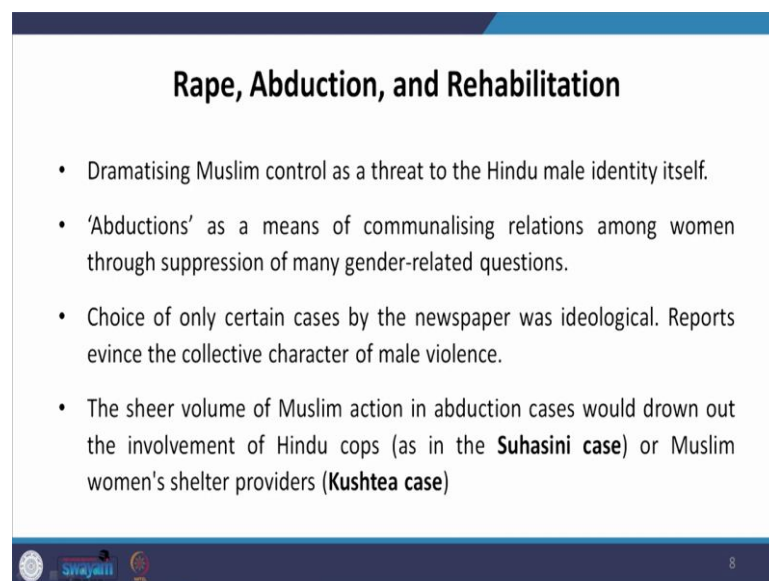
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Panchanan Barman first publicized the issue of raising the question of abduction in the Legislative Council. Abduction stories were flooding the pages of *Kshatriya* by 1924, and Barman continued to record abductions by Muslims in the second half of 1925 and they were translated and published by the *Patrika*. So, Hindu MahaSabha was trailing behind the *Kshatriya* Samiti on this issue. It would be wrong to suppose that the elite, the well-off Dalits were any less conservative as compared to the upper-caste Hindus.

Once the Dalits had become economically more ensconced, they played the same role in shaping the homogeneous image of the Muslims and so, they were participating in this larger communal discourse and the larger communal divide that informed the entire period before, after and during the partition. The Dalit leaders were also equally conservative.

Honour is one of the main categories that defines patriarchal civilization, by which women's subjugation is already always a humiliation and an affront to the male, right. This becomes all the more amplified, if the dishonoured woman belongs to a man from the refined class and

upper-caste. Generally when a Dalit is violated not much is at stake, but if an upper-caste woman is violated it becomes big news. (Refer Slide Time: 13:38)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Dramatising Muslim control as a threat to the Hindu male identity itself.
- 'Abductions' as a means of communalising relations among women through suppression of many gender-related questions.
- Choice of only certain cases by the newspaper was ideological. Reports evince the collective character of male violence.
- The sheer volume of Muslim action in abduction cases would drown out the involvement of Hindu cops (as in the **Suhasini case**) or Muslim women's shelter providers (**Kushtea case**)

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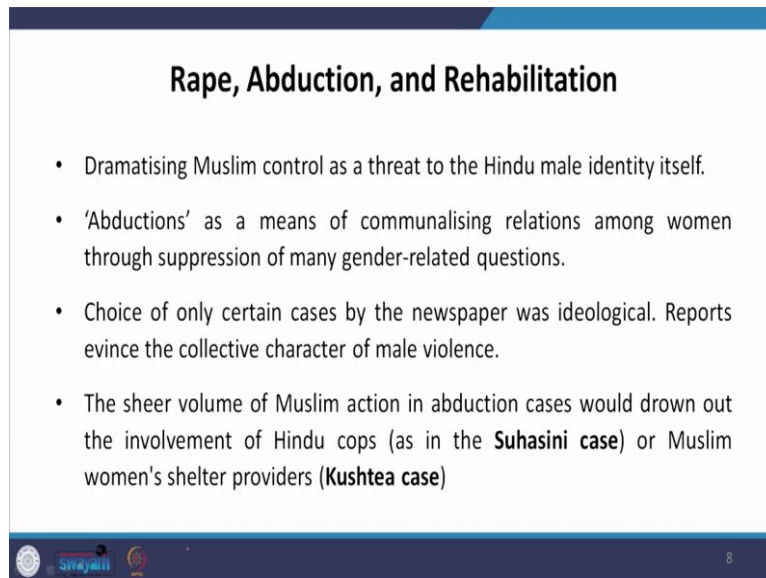
Dramatizing Muslim control as a threat to the Hindu male identity was rampant, and it was conducted methodically through these popular media, such as newspapers and journals. Abductions were seen as a means of communalizing relations through suppression of many gender-related questions.

So, when these different groups that were also formed through homosocial bondings talked frequently and commonly about abductions, they were actually going back to the Hindu-Muslim dyad and the Hindu-Muslim debate and the question of one community being superior than the other and so forth, and this happened through suppression of many gender-related issues. The blowing up [of] the question of abduction happened through suppressing other choices - the questions of women's choice and rights.

Choice [also includes highlighting] only certain cases by the newspapers. Newspapers being selective was because these newspapers had their certain ideology; they had their own ideological inclinations. So, reports evince the collective character of male violence and so, the sheer volume of Muslim action in abduction cases would drown out the involvement of Hindu cops too.

There were exceptional cases that were selectively being muffled and silenced, such as the Suhasini case where the Hindu cops were abetting the crime that was committed by the

Muslims, or the Kushtea case about the Muslim women's shelter providers... (Refer Slide Time: 15:11)

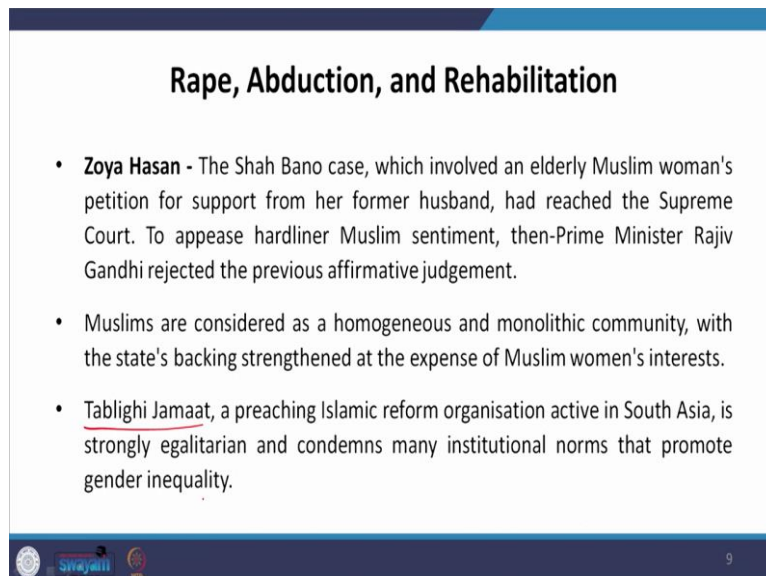


Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Dramatising Muslim control as a threat to the Hindu male identity itself.
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the case where Hindus provide shelter to Muslim women. These exceptional cases were not so much being looked at. (Refer Slide Time: 16:01)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

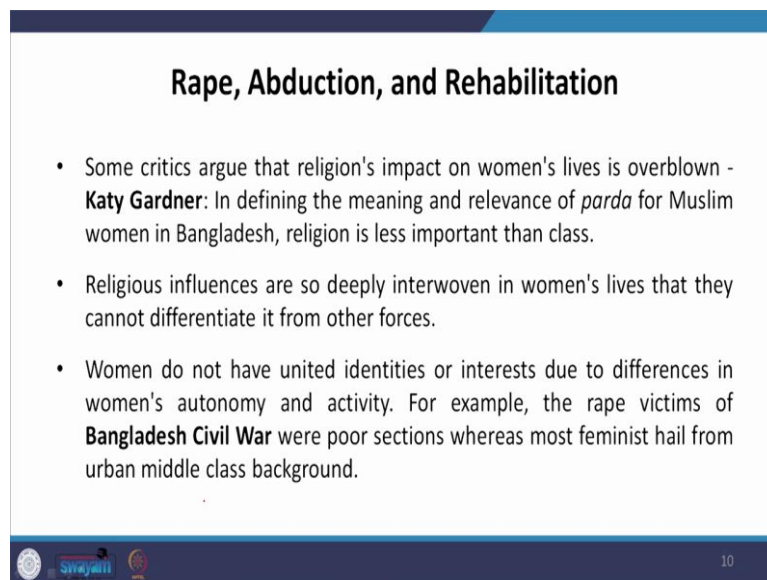
- **Zoya Hasan** - The Shah Bano case, which involved an elderly Muslim woman's petition for support from her former husband, had reached the Supreme Court. To appease hardliner Muslim sentiment, then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi rejected the previous affirmative judgement.
- Muslims are considered as a homogeneous and monolithic community, with the state's backing strengthened at the expense of Muslim women's interests.
- Tablighi Jamaat, a preaching Islamic reform organisation active in South Asia, is strongly egalitarian and condemns many institutional norms that promote gender inequality.

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Zoya Hasan talks about the fabric of India in the post-colonial times. She discusses the Shah Bano case, which involved an elderly Muslim woman seeking alimony from her former husband after divorce, and she appealed to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to sanction her plea, but her plea was actually rejected; it was turned down. This was because Rajiv Gandhi had to appease the hardliner/ the orthodox Muslim sentiment.

We see that this was not just one isolated case; we see that in these situations the patriarchal values regardless of/ beyond communal lines actually play a major role. So, a single woman cannot be appeased at the expense of riling the entire community's sentiment. So, Muslims are often considered as a monolithic community with the state's backing, [duly] strengthened at the expense of Muslim women's interests.

So, Muslims are considered homogeneously as orthodox, such that it is commonly understood that if a Muslim woman's interest is attended it would go on to enrage the entire community. The idea of a monolithic or a homogeneous Muslim, for example, does not take into account the more liberal Islamic factions, such as Tablighi Jamaat, a reformist organization active in South Asia that is strongly egalitarian. It condemns any institutional norms which promotes gender inequality. (Refer Slide Time: 17:50)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- Some critics argue that religion's impact on women's lives is overblown - **Katy Gardner**: In defining the meaning and relevance of *parda* for Muslim women in Bangladesh, religion is less important than class.
- Religious influences are so deeply interwoven in women's lives that they cannot differentiate it from other forces.
- Women do not have united identities or interests due to differences in women's autonomy and activity. For example, the rape victims of **Bangladesh Civil War** were poor sections whereas most feminist hail from urban middle class background.

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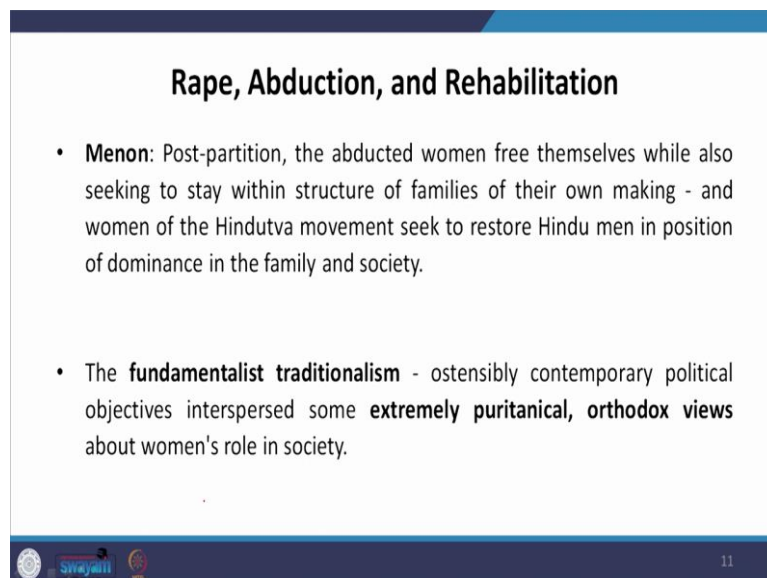
Critics such as Katy Gardner would go on to argue that religion's impact on women's lives are overblown; what counts more is the question of class. So, Gardner would say that in defining the meaning and relevance of *Parda* for the Muslim women in Bangladesh, religion becomes

less important as compared to her class. Religious influences are so deeply interwoven in women's lives that we cannot, after a point, differentiate it from other equally pertinent

and equally forceful determinants - one being the class [and] the other being the caste. It would be important to notice and remember in this regard that in the South Asian context the Muslims, after having coexisted for many hundreds of years with the Hindus, have also internalized the caste practice or the caste gradation.

Even among the Muslims, we see that certain families that traditionally practice, let us say, that are traditionally in blue collar jobs, that are artisans or blacksmiths, would never get married to high-caste aristocratic Muslim families. For example, the families of the priests such as the Sayyads. So, the the caste rationale has been ah long since internalized also by the Muslims it would be wrong to say that only the Hindus in this subcontinent practice caste.

May be it originated with the Hindus but ah even the Muslims the Sikhs it has the Muslims at least have the caste ah practice among them in terms of occupational and general socio economic differences. So, women do not have any unified identities or interests due to differences in ah their autonomy and activity. We see that the victims of Bangladesh Civil War were commonly from the poorer sections, whereas most of the feminists hail from the upper- or middle-class backgrounds. (Refer Slide Time: 20:38)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

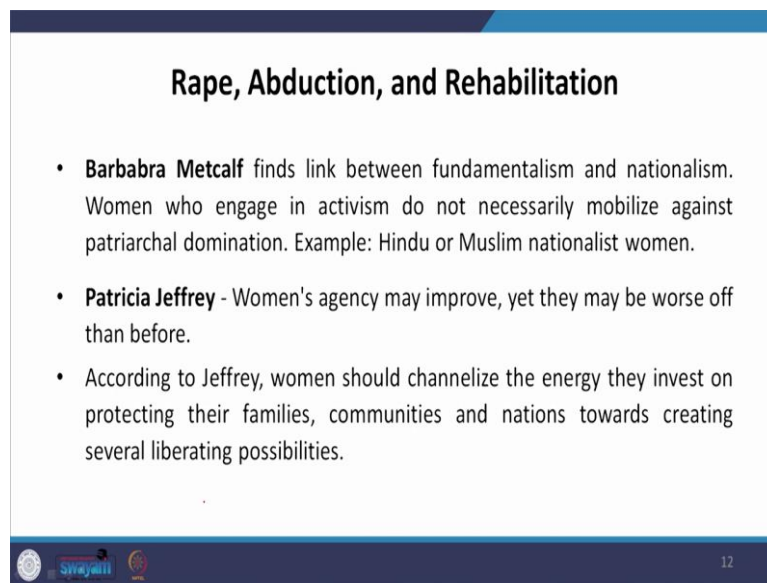
- **Menon:** Post-partition, the abducted women free themselves while also seeking to stay within structure of families of their own making - and women of the Hindutva movement seek to restore Hindu men in position of dominance in the family and society.
- The **fundamentalist traditionalism** - ostensibly contemporary political objectives interspersed some **extremely puritanical, orthodox views** about women's role in society.

Swajani 11

Ritu Menon would say that post-partition, the abducted women free themselves and yet they stick to the traditional values in the making of the family. So, women of the Hindutva movement, for example, seek to restore the Hindu men in position of dominance in the family


and in the society. This would apply also in the case of a woman from the Muslim community that support the communalist, the fundamentalist factions. Women that kind of enable the the ideas of fundamentalism.

We see in the post-Partition era something that Menon calls as fundamentalist traditionalism. Something that is ostensibly giving women some freedom and referring to contemporary political objectives, and yet [intervening] these modern objectives with extremely puritanical orthodox views about women's position in the society. (Refer Slide Time: 22:03)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

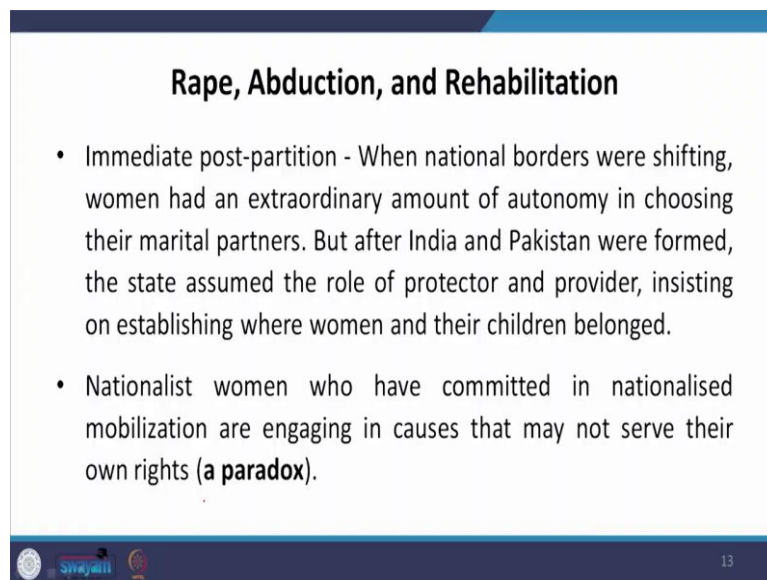
- **Barbabra Metcalf** finds link between fundamentalism and nationalism. Women who engage in activism do not necessarily mobilize against patriarchal domination. Example: Hindu or Muslim nationalist women.
- **Patricia Jeffrey** - Women's agency may improve, yet they may be worse off than before.
- According to Jeffrey, women should channelize the energy they invest on protecting their families, communities and nations towards creating several liberating possibilities.

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Barbara Metcalf finds link between fundamentalism and nationalism. They are like doppelgangers; they are doubles and so, women that engage in activism do not necessarily mobilize against patriarchal domination. So, activism and agency in the case of a woman are not directly proportional. So, the Hindu or the Muslim women or even the Sikh women...women that support the nationalist, the ardent fervent nationalist position and sacrifice themselves, that preach the values of female sacrifice, female docility are actually supporting a very orthodox [position] or let us say they accept the limited space that have been traditionally given to women in all the societies.

Patricia Jeffrey would say that women's agency may improve, yet they may be worse off than before. So, to what end are the women using their agency? Are they employing the agency towards their own freedom or are they fighting for a cause which would not make them visible, which would further marginalize their position? Are they fighting for a masculinist cause? Are they adopting the values of patriarchy and reinstating those values?

So, according to Patricia Jeffrey, women should channelize the energy that they commonly invest on protecting families, protecting communal familial and national values towards creating possibilities that liberate the women [themselves]. (Refer Slide Time: 24:13)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

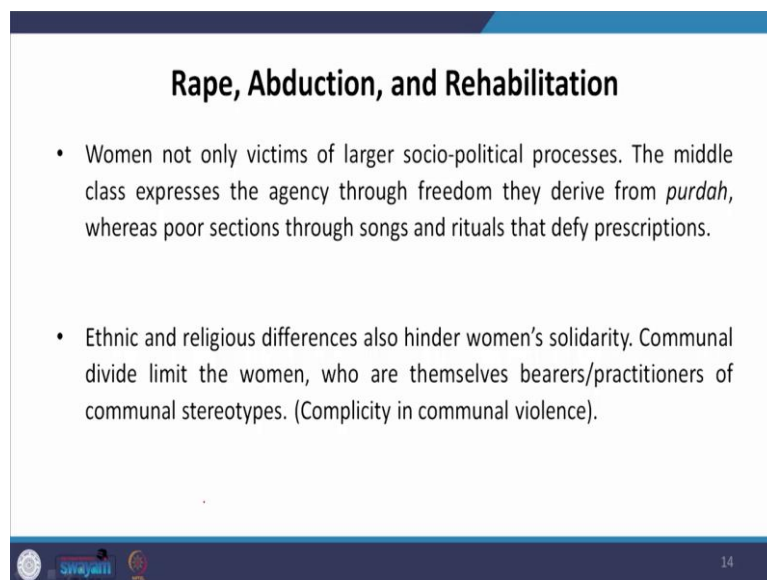
- Immediate post-partition - When national borders were shifting, women had an extraordinary amount of autonomy in choosing their marital partners. But after India and Pakistan were formed, the state assumed the role of protector and provider, insisting on establishing where women and their children belonged.
- Nationalist women who have committed in nationalised mobilization are engaging in causes that may not serve their own rights (**a paradox**).

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So, immediate post-Partition decades see that when the national borders were fluctuating and not really hardened, women had an extraordinary amount of autonomy suddenly and they could choose, for example, their marital partners.

But after India and Pakistan hardened their boundaries, we see the states assumed the role of protector and provider and women's freedom along with the children were curbed. So, the nations were formed through establishing systematic control and dominance on women and children. The new nations insisted on establishing where the women and the children belonged.

And so, it is a paradox that the nationalist women who have committed in nationalized mobilization are engaged in causes that may not serve their own rights. So, nationalism and women's rights do not conventionally go hand in hand. (Refer Slide Time: 25:35)



Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

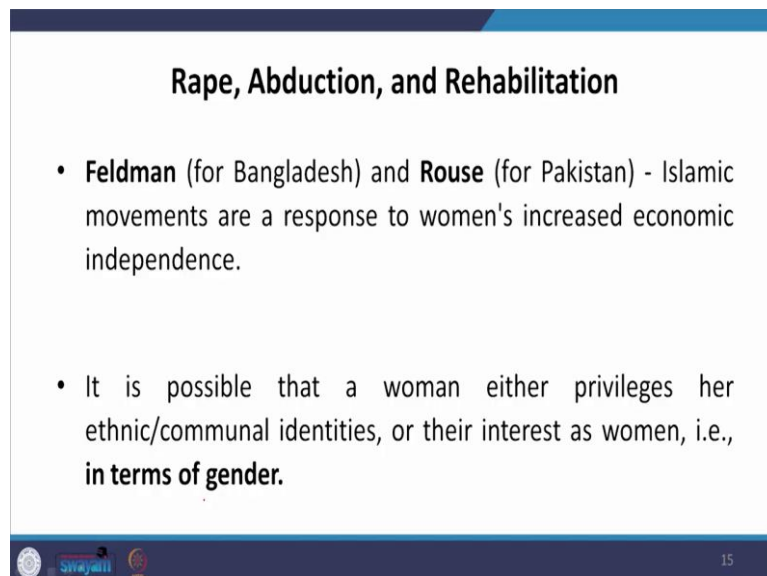
- Women not only victims of larger socio-political processes. The middle class expresses the agency through freedom they derive from *purdah*, whereas poor sections through songs and rituals that defy prescriptions.
- Ethnic and religious differences also hinder women's solidarity. Communal divide limit the women, who are themselves bearers/practitioners of communal stereotypes. (Complicity in communal violence).

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Women are not only [and uniformly] victims of larger socio-political processes; the middle-class expresses the agency through freedom they derive from purdah, whereas for poorer sections the concept of liberty, the concept of agency are different. [Liberty and agency are] differentially understood across the different classes and different castes. For the middle-class people, the expression of agency is through their ability to practice purdah. So, freedom is derived through purdah, whereas for the Dalit women freedom is enjoyed through songs and rituals that defy any kind of control and prescription on them, through practices and rituals that defy prescriptions and control.

And so, ethnic and religious differences hinder women's solidarity, and communal divide limit the women who are themselves practitioners of communal stereotypes. So, what one is trying to get at here is that in the process of belonging to a particular community and becoming practitioner of communal stereotypes, women from one community [are] turned against the other, and this does not benefit women from either of the community. It benefits the homosocial discourse at large. So, women's complicity in communal violence ends up harming them the most.

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Rape, Abduction, and Rehabilitation

- **Feldman** (for Bangladesh) and **Rouse** (for Pakistan) - Islamic movements are a response to women's increased economic independence.
- It is possible that a woman either privileges her ethnic/communal identities, or their interest as women, i.e., **in terms of gender.**

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Studies are conducted by Feldman and Rouse in Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively, where they see Islamic movements as response to women's increased economic independence. We have already talked about the policies that different government regimes actually adopted and

so, the more liberal leaders would let women come out and take up jobs and participate in the public arena, [whereas] orthodox governments would punish women for the same act.

And so, modernity is seen as a threat that actually vitiates the traditional values that are defined through women's activities. So, it is possible that a woman either privileges her communal identities or her interest as an individual woman (in terms of gender).

The communal interest and the woman's individual interests commonly do not in most times/in most cases, they do not go hand in hand. They have an anti-relationship; they have a kind of inverse relationship. So, with this I would like to stop here and I would like to conclude today's lecture.

Thank you.