

**Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema**  
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**Lecture - 44**  
**Refugee, Desh and Nation - VII**

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We were discussing Refugee, Desh and Nation in our last class. We have discussed in detail on the Marichjhanni incident, which remained under-discussed till a long time after it happened. I also talked about the curious tendency or inclination that we see in current scholarship, which is showing its interest, which [we will discuss in] this chapter in details.

Since the recent past, many questions, many new observations that have emerged through new observations, new perspectives, that have emerged through interviews, through testimonials and confessions, as well as you know highlighting of official reports, official recordings actually open up a new vista of knowledge, open up new meanings about the Dalit experience, new meanings about Dalit refugee's experience about the caste-class politics in West Bengal. (Refer Slide Time: 02:05)

**Punjab Partition and Refugee Resettlement**

- The 1947 forced migration across the Punjab borders is one such instance wherein the notion of 'roots' – as fixed, unchanging, and stable – is challenged.
- The role of the various state agencies in addressing the 'refugee problem' has been painstakingly recorded in the Government publication of 1948 entitled *Millions on the Move*.



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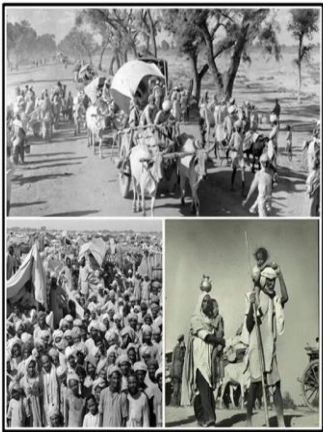
Today we are going to look at the Punjab partition and refugee resettlement in the Western side. So, the 1947 forced migration across the Punjab borders actually challenged the question of roots. The fact that a person could ever have a permanent root

or a permanent sense of belonging, anything, any category being fixed, unchanging and stable is questioned, is unsettled through the process of partition.

And we see this a lot in fictions also; once again, it reminds us of the character of Amma in Jadein, Ismat Chughtai's short story, where she says that Watan has become like... in one part, Amma says that the Watan has become like the shoes in my feet, which we are required to wear and take off on command from above or whenever we desire. We can actually embrace and then disown the Watan, is it like that, is it the kind of existence that we anticipated, is this why we fought for independence? So, Watan the question of Watan the question of one's own home did not remain a fixed category - something that would not change.

And it had actually shaken the fundamental beliefs, I mean, or it had shaken the.. let us say, the basis of human faith and faith to humanity, faith to human relationships. Everything had become impossible at one point. So, the role the government publication of 1948 entitled millions on the move painstakingly recording this refugee problem. And it draws attention to the various state agencies and their roles in this process of migration. (Refer Slide Time: 04:38)

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- *Millions on the Move* initiated the vision of a uniform refugee migration experience. This became associated with iconic images of *kaafilas* – Punjabi men, women and children with their heavily laden bullock carts travelling across tracks of ground inundated by the monsoon rains; of trains with running boards and roofs, packed with refugees.

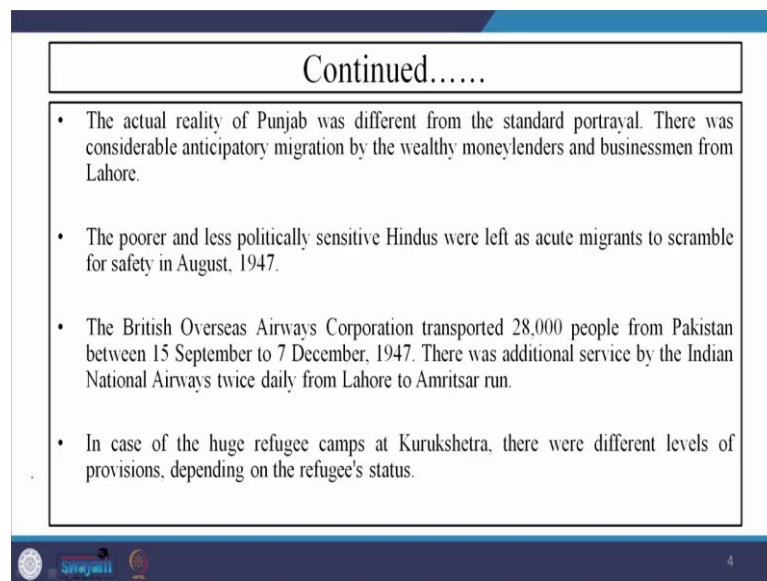
Swajail 3

So, "Millions on the Move" initiates this as the vision of a uniform refugee migration experience. And that is something which is being challenged by the recent scholarship both on Punjab partition and Bengal partition. We can now see the layers which were

kind of glossed over, the layers which were overlooked through the picturisation of a uniform refugee experience.

So, "Millions on the Move" associated the idea of migration with, or the process of migration with iconic images of kaafilas. Kaafilas were men, women, children migrating, walking on foot with their heavily laden bullock carts, travelling across tracks of muddy soil. So, travelling in sun, traveling in scorching heat, and inundated by the monsoon rains.

And we have... so, on the one hand, we have the image of these kaafilas; on the other, we have the trains that are overloaded with people perching on the roofs, people sitting on the running boards, and the trains that are otherwise packed with refugees. So, actual reality, however, was different from this standard portrayal. Partition is synonymous with such overloaded trains and and kaafilas. (Refer Slide Time: 06:45)



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- The actual reality of Punjab was different from the standard portrayal. There was considerable anticipatory migration by the wealthy moneylenders and businessmen from Lahore.
- The poorer and less politically sensitive Hindus were left as acute migrants to scramble for safety in August, 1947.
- The British Overseas Airways Corporation transported 28,000 people from Pakistan between 15 September to 7 December, 1947. There was additional service by the Indian National Airways twice daily from Lahore to Amritsar run.
- In case of the huge refugee camps at Kurukshetra, there were different levels of provisions, depending on the refugee's status.

However, on further study, on further examination, we see that anticipatory migration had happened and they were initiated by the wealthy sections, such as the moneylenders, the businessmen especially from places like Lahore and Rawalpindi. The poorer and politically less mobilized sections of Hindus were, you know, struggling till the end and struggling to find a space of safety. They suffered the most in the process of exchange of population, and they were struggling till the end. For the richer sections, the wealthier sections, the British Overseas Airways Corporation transported 28000 people from

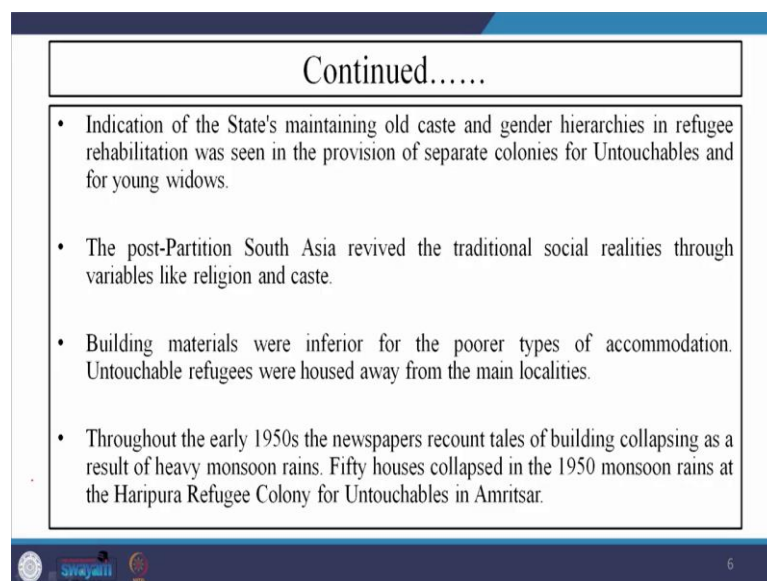
Pakistan between 15 September to 17 December 1947. This was an operation service available to the affluent sections.

So, additionally, service was rendered by the Indian National Airways twice daily from Lahore to Amritsar. In case of the huge refugee camps at Kurukshetra, there were different levels of provisions depending on the refugee's status. Both in Punjab and in Bengal, we observe the class, caste, profession-based gradations being reified, being brought back even in the camp situations.

So, the upper-caste people who were especially from white-collar backgrounds, such as the doctors, professors, engineers and other government officials would consciously maintain this gap or this distance with the Dalit refugees.

So, rehabilitation I mean indication of the state maintaining... and in fact, the state policies abetted such, you know, maintenance of hierarchies... hierarchies in terms of caste, in terms of gender, in the process of refugee rehabilitation. This is visible, for example, in the provision of separate colonies being made for the Untouchables and for the young widows.

Post-partition South Asia as it was, the post-colonial countries in South Asia as it was, as they were reviving from the shock of partition, they were also espousing the traditional social realities through the variables, like religion and caste. (Refer Slide Time: 10:03)

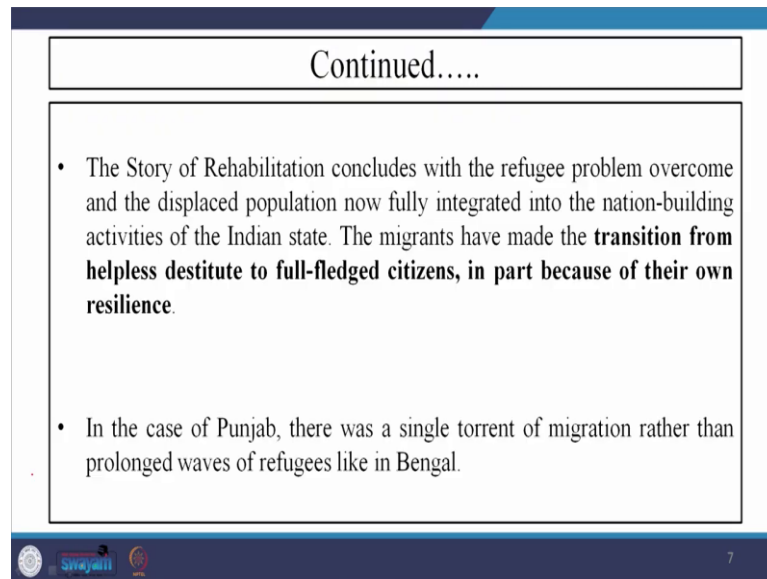


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- Indication of the State's maintaining old caste and gender hierarchies in refugee rehabilitation was seen in the provision of separate colonies for Untouchables and for young widows.
- The post-Partition South Asia revived the traditional social realities through variables like religion and caste.
- Building materials were inferior for the poorer types of accommodation. Untouchable refugees were housed away from the main localities.
- Throughout the early 1950s the newspapers recount tales of building collapsing as a result of heavy monsoon rains. Fifty houses collapsed in the 1950 monsoon rains at the Haripura Refugee Colony for Untouchables in Amritsar.

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The basic attitude of the government abetted this process; so, building materials were inferior for the poorer types of accommodations made for the Untouchables, and their accommodations would be housed away from the main localities used by the elites. So, throughout the early 1950s, news were rife about buildings collapsing as a result of heavy monsoon torrents, and fifty houses for example, had collapsed in the 1950 monsoon rains at the Hari Pura refugee colony for Untouchables in Amritsar. (Refer Slide Time: 10:57)



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- The Story of Rehabilitation concludes with the refugee problem overcome and the displaced population now fully integrated into the nation-building activities of the Indian state. The migrants have made the **transition from helpless destitute to full-fledged citizens, in part because of their own resilience.**
- In the case of Punjab, there was a single torrent of migration rather than prolonged waves of refugees like in Bengal.


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So, we see this story of rehabilitation as it is being parcelled and sealed off at the governmental level, at the official level concludes that the refugee problem was finally overcome once and for all. It gives a rosy picture, in fact, of the displaced people who had [migrated to the new land]. It was asserted that they were eventually integrated, fully integrated into the nation-building process. They were assimilated into the nation-building activities of the Indian state. And then, we have the standard picture of the resilient refugees, who had transitioned from their helpless destitute status to become the full-fledged citizens. And this was accomplished largely as a result of their own resilience, because of their own resilience. There is... I mean we see that in the official account, despite not wanting to engage with


or focus on the failures of the rehabilitation process as well as the inadequacies the setbacks of these processes, these policies. The official accounts do point out how the refugee problem is interspersed with the question of nation-building and how the

political atmosphere has since developed throughout the subcontinent in all the post-colonial nations. (Refer Slide Time: 12:03)

### Punjab Partition and Refugee problem

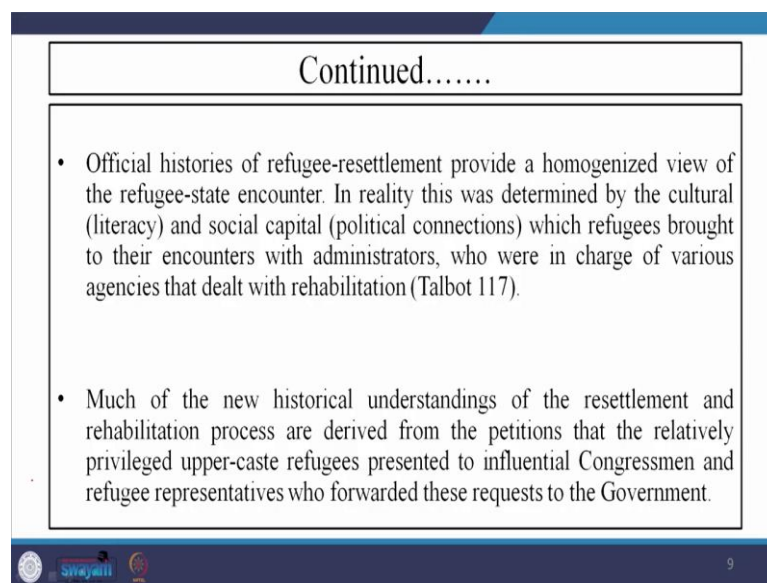


- Despite its failures to address the intricacies and inadequacies of the rehabilitation process, the official account points to the fact that the solution of the refugee problem impacted heavily on nation-building and political development throughout the subcontinent.
- Ravinder Kaur - “The duration of the journey and the means of transport used to undertake the journey are crucial indicators of the class differences that significantly alter the experiences of the displacement.”

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So, like I said, the latest scholarship is interested in focusing on/ in studying the nuances and the differentials that explained the migration process. Ravinder Kaur notes that the duration of the journey and the means of transport used to undertake the journey are crucial indicators of the class differences that significantly alter the experiences of displacement.

So, the mode of commuting how much one could afford to take with oneself and how much one could spend in the process of migration; where one could buy a land, whether one could buy a land at all - these things determined, they actually reflected one's foothold in the new society. (Refer Slide Time: 13:26)



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- Official histories of refugee-resettlement provide a homogenized view of the refugee-state encounter. In reality this was determined by the cultural (literacy) and social capital (political connections) which refugees brought to their encounters with administrators, who were in charge of various agencies that dealt with rehabilitation (Talbot 117).
- Much of the new historical understandings of the resettlement and rehabilitation process are derived from the petitions that the relatively privileged upper-caste refugees presented to influential Congressmen and refugee representatives who forwarded these requests to the Government.

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So, official histories of refugee resettlement provide a homogenized view of the refugee state encounter. In reality, like I have already stated several times now, this process was determined by factors, such as one's literacy, social capital, political connections. And so, the experience was different for each individual, depending on where they came from.

The new understandings, the new historical understandings of resettlement and rehabilitation process are derived from the petitions or the dialogues that happened chiefly between the privileged upper-caste refugees and the Congressmen. So, the concepts, the meanings of resettlement/ rehabilitation emerge from or they draw their meaning from this dialogue.

A dialogue that is happening at the top level of power, at the level top level of power and influence. So, through the dialogue happening between the privileged upper-caste

refugees and the influential political people; dialogue happening between refugee representatives that were obviously elite people and the government officials.



So, Ian Talbot notes that partition brought increased government controls and temptations for officials and so, post-partition India saw a rule, I mean informally and unofficially speaking, it saw the rule of an influential section of people known as a license permit raj. So, who could create license and for whom, and in this regard we cannot ignore a very important film - Satyajit Ray's film, Jana Aranya. So, we cannot ignore Satyajit ray's film Jana Aranya; in English, it's called The Middleman.

The emergence of this middlemen against a backdrop, where there is a scarcity of job. So, an employable population and educated youth is seeking a job in a country that is in a complete tumult, in a completely chaotic situation. There is a section of furious youth that are qualified, educated, and yet not finding jobs, and that is when a new job is kind of invented -- the job of the middleman.

And there is a scene that is invested with a lot of irony, where a man is actually looking to a sell a circus elephant. So, how one could... the power of persuading to sell something, even if it had to be an elephant. And given the situation, given the poverty where people could not cover their own backs, their own basic needs, who would buy an elephant? I mean it is a scene invested with a lot of irony and dark humour, if we could call it so. (Refer Slide Time: 17:34)

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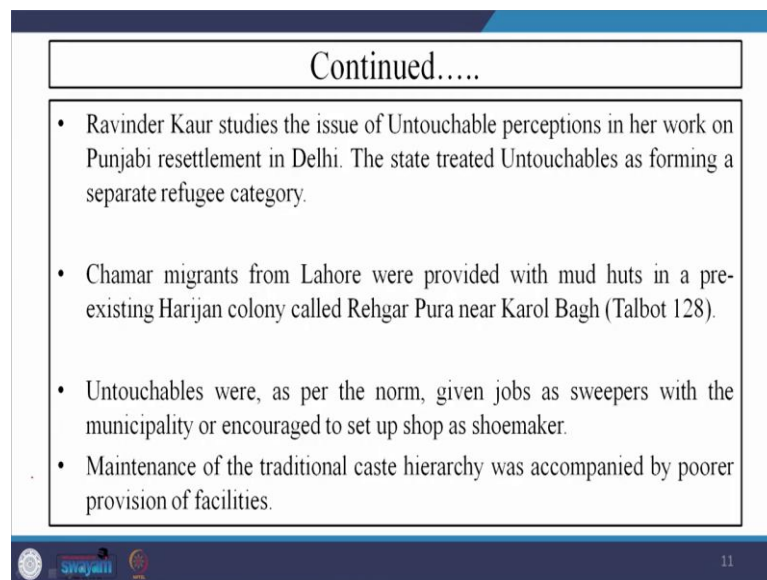
- Ian Talbot - Partition brought increased government controls and temptations for officials with the beginnings of what became known later as the 'license permit Raj' ("Punjabi Refugees' Rehabilitation and the Indian State: Discourses, Denials and Dissonances").
- A large number of refugees experienced corruption and nepotism with respect to the allotment of the vast amounts of abandoned property, including shops, houses and factories.
- While some refugees sought to exploit the system by exaggerating their losses in order to receive excessive compensation, the worst abuses involved locals who sought to pass themselves off as refugees, officials who accepted bribes and politicians who tried to lay their hands on property.

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So, it became, like Ian Talbot calls, license permit raj. A large number of refugees were involved in promoting corruption, nepotism with respect to allotment of vast amounts of abandoned property that were lying after the Muslim populace had emigrated. And people would forcefully, sketchily... I mean people would forcefully and illegally occupy shops, houses and factories.

So, refugees...there were many cases of refugees exploiting the system through exaggerating their losses in order to receive excessive compensation. Yet the worst abusers involved the locals; actually posing as refugees, they were passing themselves off as refugees. And in a bid to get some benefits from the government and officials that were involved in accepting bribes, politicians that tried to lay their hands on property. (Refer Slide Time: 18:42)



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- Ravinder Kaur studies the issue of Untouchable perceptions in her work on Punjabi resettlement in Delhi. The state treated Untouchables as forming a separate refugee category.
- Chamar migrants from Lahore were provided with mud huts in a pre-existing Harijan colony called Rehgar Pura near Karol Bagh (Talbot 128).
- Untouchables were, as per the norm, given jobs as sweepers with the municipality or encouraged to set up shop as shoemaker.
- Maintenance of the traditional caste hierarchy was accompanied by poorer provision of facilities.

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There is this chaotic scene very effectively portrayed by Bhisham Sahni in Tamas, where the refugee's have come from West Pakistan to India, to Amritsar, and there is this accountant, who is trying to chart out or document the losses; he is trying to document the losses of people. And he is doing it very mechanically; he is not interested in personal narratives. He has no time, he only records and recognizes numbers, number of family members that died, the amount or the figure of money.

So, the entire/ the total sum of money that was lost or the value of the property that was lost/ left back in West Pakistan. And there is a point, where a leader comes and says how

this accountant is actually jotting down. The [accountant] says that I have columns on my register book in terms of community; so, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and so forth.

And to this, the honest man, the honest politician or the honest leader... he is not a politician, he is an activist, he suggests that there should be just two columns on the register. One recording how much the wealthy sections have lost, and the other that records the loss of the poorer sections.

And that would, in fact, expose as he urges it would expose how much more disadvantaged the poorer people were as compared to the rich. So, the divisions along or recording along communal lines was a farce; what mattered in the immediate post-partition phase was one's economic clout, one's political and economic clout.

So, Ravinder Kaur studies the issue of Untouchable perceptions in her work on Punjabi resettlement in Delhi, and how the state treated the Untouchables and made them to form a separate refugee category. So, they were provided with mud huts in a pre-existing Harijan colony called Rehgar Pura near Karol Bagh.

So, Untouchables were given jobs, the society was resuscitating.. I mean, the society was bringing back all the caste-class grids as soon as the initial storm had passed, and it was...so, the status quo came back. The Untouchables would not be given more lucrative jobs than that of sweepers, cleaners in the municipality, or they were encouraged to set up shops as shoemakers.

So, these were the traditional occupations. They had... and nothing changed for better in the case of the Untouchables by and large. So, a maintenance of the traditional caste hierarchy was accompanied by poorer provision of facilities for these sections. So, a common people that are sympathetic and try to understand the plight of the refugee in the generic sense

hardly pay attention to this fragmentation. These layers of meanings, you know, are inscribed in the process of the refugee experience. So, they cannot they have not been able to discover or identify the social differences within the migrant population. Upper-class refugees could, in general, I mean generally speaking they could meet their everyday needs of food and shelter on their own, and even could maintain their normal lifestyle in exile.

So, the regret that we hear about losses and the speculations about the disturbances -- something that come from the elite sections, as Ravinder Kaur argues, may not be based on direct knowledge. So, the elite sections were more spectators than actors in the partition drama; although they had of course, they had mobilized the situation to begin with, I mean they were the enactors and then the spectators, not so much in the receiving end. (Refer Slide Time: 24:15)

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- The needs and strategies of the elite refugees were different from those of the ordinary refugees. The common thread was the emotive frame of being 'refugee', despite differing experiences, which prefaced demands for houses, promotions and easy loans.
- The idea of self-rehabilitation carried within it two seemingly complementary processes – of being made independent of the state upon the state's insistence, and becoming self-reliant through one's active efforts.
- Both processes worked simultaneously towards a common goal of relocating the newcomers on the citizenship map.

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So, the needs and strategies of the elite refugees were different from that of the ordinary refugees; and yet all, I mean the emotive frame of refugee prefaced this common demand -- demand for houses, promotions, and loans. So, the idea of self-rehabilitation carried two complementary processes, one was being made independent of the state upon the state's insistence, and the other becoming self-reliant through one's active efforts.

The goal was the same, but the push was coming from two different ends or two different directions. In one case, the government would urge people to become self-reliant, and then in another, the urge was coming from within, and this was related to the question of self-respect and upper-caste pride, where a section of these people both from Punjab and Bengal would loathe the idea of taking money from the government.

So, one's own active efforts as well as goading by the government, they went hand in hand and they worked in tandem, worked simultaneously towards the common goal of relocating the newcomers on the citizenship map. (Refer Slide Time: 25:45)

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- Ravinder Kaur in her paper, "Distinctive Citizenship Refugees, Subjects and Post-Colonial State in India's Partition" mentions the case of a refugee who did not have any kind of resource to self-rehabilitate himself.
  
- Kewal Ram belonged to the category of refugees who did not grow out of the shadows of the state. **While the officials at the resettlement office found his pleas a waste of time and categorized him a failure, it was hardly a matter of debate that the state had failed him not only by not focusing on his needs, but also by thwarting his attempts to begin small-scale independent ventures.**

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Ravinder Kaur talks about this particular case; she studies the case of Kewal Ram, a refugee who did not have any kind of resource to self-rehabilitate himself,

and Kaur notes that while the officials at the resettlement office found his pleas as a waste of time and categorized him as a failure. it was hardly a matter of debate that the state had failed him not only by not focusing on his needs, but also by thwarting his attempts to begin small-scale independent ventures. (Refer Slide Time: 26:21)

**Refugee, Citizenship and State**

- Being labelled 'refugee', and a self-reliant one at that, was to be given a desirable identity that helped integrate the newcomers in the upper echelons of the host society.
- This way one could draw upon the moral capital invested in the imaginary of refugee – without having experienced the hardships and struggles popularly associated with it – and yet be seen as an ideal example of a self-reliant refugee based on one's own social capital.
- Kaur – one's position as a post-colonial citizen was shaped by the relationship one had with the state: the greater one's ability to be self-reliant, the better one's chances of gaining a firm foothold in the new citizenry.

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So, it was actually prestigious when seen from a different angle to be called a self-reliant refugee; it carried the rhetoric of loss. So, for the elite people there was this pride inscribed and hidden in this rhetoric of being or becoming a self-reliant refugee on the one hand. This narrative implicitly celebrated the positions that they had back in their homeland. It wanted one's traction, the traction that one enjoyed back in pre-partition India.

The status that one enjoyed, the traction that one enjoyed back during the pre-partition times. And then one's capability, one's merit was also being, you know, greatly celebrated through the story of how one rebounded, how resilient the upper-caste people were. And to have achieved and recovered everything that they lost back in their homeland.

So, the status that had been razed was, once again, being recuperated, was once again being you know revived. Such narratives of success helped integrate the newcomers in the upper echelons of the host society. So, the moral capital that was invested in the

imaginary of refugee would automatically make the the upper-class, upper-caste people as the protagonists in the migration process.

Yet these were the people that did not have much experiences of hardships and struggles that are popularly associated with the refugee experience, with refugeeness. And yet, they were the ones that were seen as the ideal example of refugee -- the self-reliant refugee that should be emulated and modelled by each and every displaced person, someone that could manage with one's own social capital. So, one's position as a post-colonial citizen was shaped by the relationship one had with the state.

The greater one had the ability to be... the more one was able to be self-reliant, the better one's chances of gaining a firm foothold in the new citizenry. So, the Untouchables were at the bottom of the ladder; they could hardly bargain. They had to make do with whatever they were getting. Discriminations were made in terms of the accommodations, the employment prospects that were opened up for this section of refugees.

And yet, in their testimonies, the credit for their social and economic success is duly given to the government. For the little or whatever the government has done for the Untouchables, they credit the government policies; and the welfarist measures that were taken are acknowledged by the Dalit refugees.

So, the refugee problem actually reshuffled for once for a very short period after partition. It was threatening, it was tending to threaten social order, where especially the upper-caste upper-class people felt insecure. On both sides of the border, they felt insecure that they might be conflated with the Dalits. And so, the refugee problem might end up in the dislocation of caste, class and gender hierarchies. (Refer Slide Time: 30:40)

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- The refugee problem threatened social order and the dislocation of caste, class and gender hierarchies. The early post-independence Indian state devoted considerable resources to deal with the situation.
- The production of official accounts such as The Story of Rehabilitation was crucial to this legitimization process. While such writings produced a standardized account of refugee experience which obfuscate a far more complex reality, they were not merely rhetorical productions.
- A large amount of resources devoted at the national and state level to address the Punjabi refugee crisis.

And so, this is something that post-independence Indian state actually considers with a great deal of precision; and wants in a way to bring back the gaps, bring back the differences. So, the early post-independence Indian state devoted considerable resources to deal with this situation and erect one's original position, one's traditional position in the society.

So, the story of rehabilitation, the official accounts that we hear through the story of rehabilitation legitimized this process of hierarchisation at the level of gender, class and caste. Such writings standardize the account of refugee experience through strategically obfuscating, not so much focusing on the complex reality, the layered reality.

And so, what we get is almost...so, it is basically obfuscating the complex reality. We are going to stop today's lecture at this point, and we are going to continue in the next class with more discussions on other topics on partition. Let us stop at this point and we are going to continue with further discussions in our next lectures.

Thank you.