

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 45


Refugee, Desh and Nation - VIII – Agency/Lack Thereof for the Immigrant Women

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. Today, we will be discussing something related to our previous lectures, related to the refugee experience.

Today, we will specially focus on the agency of the immigrant woman or the lack thereof. So, we will discuss a very important work by Udit Sen, who looks at the different stereotypes that are formed around the figure of this immigrant woman. She examines the case of post-partition West Bengal, where these stereotypes are formed and these stereotypes thrive and flourish in the society without verifications. Sometimes, they are baseless, ungrounded; this is something Udit Sen has to submit in her essay. (Refer Slide Time: 01:31)

Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Udit Sen – There are four stereotyped images of the refugee woman – (a) bodies vulnerable to rape and dishonour, (b) economically and socially marginal members who could, by definition, not be rehabilitated, (c) unequal participants in the refugee movement whose contributions were seen as inspirational and symbolic rather than substantive, (d) bread-owners who transgressed the proper roles of homemakers.
- The Bengali *bhadralok* society's reaction to refugee working women – (a) lamenting their fate by highlighting their deprivation as spinsters (b) pointing to their dishonour of 'sinking' to prostitution. The woman's genuine agency is absent from this rhetoric.



So, the different stereotyped images of the refugee woman were formed, such as their bodies vulnerable to rape and dishonor, the fact that they were economically and socially marginal members who could not be rehabilitated by definition and then they were largely seen as unequal participants in the refugee movement, whose contributions were mostly inspirational and symbolic rather than substantive; and finally, they were viewed

as bread-owners or bread earners, rather who transgressed the proper roles of homemakers.

So, in a bid to earn, in a bid to participate in the public sphere, they transgressed their social rules, or so it was assumed. So, we see this obsession, this fixation around the woman's body is not a new thing. In India, it always existed in the pre-partition times. Subhasri Datta's scholarship reveals the discomfort around the body or the presence of the Hindu widow, which in a way goes on to justify the practice of burning the widow, the sati practice/ the practice of performing sati (dying in the pyre of one's husband).

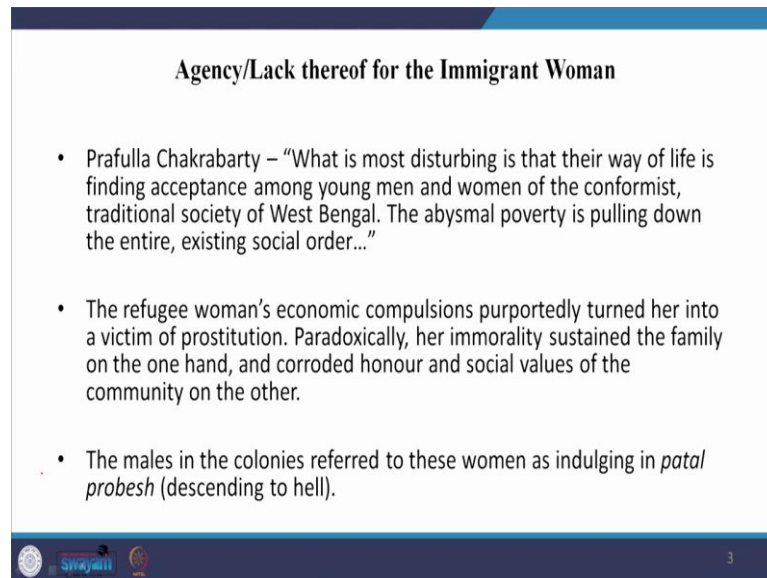
So, the sexuality of the woman, the excess of the woman always needs to be curbed and so, there are certain ideals that are fixed by the society, certain pre-given mores to which the woman is required to subscribe. So, her ideal role in any movement, be it the anti-colonial movement, the nationalist movements or later on the refugee agitations were expected to happen from within the precincts of home, carrying the domestic values, and they were required to participate as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and as partners, as co-workers with the male protagonists supporting the male cause.

So, their roles were ideally seen - I mean their roles were expected to be you know inspiring the men rather than taking part substantially as an actor in her own right. Similarly, the image of the female bread-earner was fraught with anxiety - someone who is doing a path-breaking work. Either she was on a positive side, she was doing some path-breaking work, she was doing...she was being the pioneer, a kind of role that was unprecedented, or she was doing she was involved in some kind of degraded job, which pulled the social values down with her.

So, these were some of the stereotypes that we see around the woman. The Bengali bhadralok society was inclined to treat the refugee woman under a few stock categories. So, there were certain stock reactions or stock understandings of the refugee working woman; one would be lamenting her fate because she could never get married, she could never have her own children and her own home, her deprivation as a spinster.

It has been a time immemorial, almost you know, lamented, celebrated..and there is almost a halo around this image...it becomes surreal almost the way it is [projected]. In the process of lamenting how the Bengali middle-class patriarchal society actually celebrates the sacrifice of this woman.

So, the other image would be diametrically opposite to this goddess-like female's figure. So, the other image is that of the refugee woman turned into a prostitute; she is 'sinking' to prostitution. The remarkable thing in this entire process of stereotype formations is that the genuine agency on the part of the woman is absent; this rhetoric is shaped entirely through the male voice. (Refer Slide Time: 06:35)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Prafulla Chakrabarty – “What is most disturbing is that their way of life is finding acceptance among young men and women of the conformist, traditional society of West Bengal. The abysmal poverty is pulling down the entire, existing social order...”
- The refugee woman’s economic compulsions purportedly turned her into a victim of prostitution. Paradoxically, her immorality sustained the family on the one hand, and corroded honour and social values of the community on the other.
- The males in the colonies referred to these women as indulging in *patal probesh* (descending to hell).

So, Prafulla Chakrabarty's very important [work] *Marginal Men* says, "What is most disturbing is that their way of life is finding acceptance among young men and women of the conformist, traditional society of West Bengal. The abysmal poverty is pulling down the entire, existing social order. So, it would not be very wrong to say that the refugee woman paradoxically played the same insider-outsider's role vis-a-vis the patriarchal order which shaped the refugee community as the refugee man himself played vis-a-vis the order of the new nation-state, where he had to resettle himself.

Just like the refugee man, the refugee citizen you know was... we have already discussed how the refugee citizen is an insider and an outsider at the same time. So, the as they rhetoric or the as they died can hardly be overcome how the what makes the refugee citizen enough ah and this is the same ah problem the same dilemma that we see with respect to the refugee woman.

What are the values she should imbibe in order for her to be adequately part of and and you know adequately serving the purpose of rebuilding/refurbishing the refugee community. Just like the refugees were expect to refurbish the nation, nation building

process the refugee woman was required to serve the process of building the refugee community.

So, this is a kind of interesting analogy that we can see in both cases. We see figures of insider-outsider you know at one level (it is the refugee-citizen); at the other level it is the refugee woman. So, the refugee woman's economic compulsions supposedly turned her into a victim of prostitution. Many a times we see the figure of this and not all of this is a stereotype, there were certain facts coming from the real society which subscribe to this, but there was also a lot of anxiety by the male members of the community. The anxiety coming from within, which enabled this stereotype to perpetuate, to kind of stay forever. It would not go.

So, on the one hand like I said, for those women that actually had to choose prostitution because they did not have other means of earning, their supposed immorality was sustaining the family. They had no other means of earning and so, they were resorting to flesh trade and yet, although they were helping the family to survive, their choice of occupation actually corroded or polluted the honor and the social values of the community all together.

So, we see this tendency also where the males, the refugee males and the larger society have a tendency to compare the woman's dilemma or to bring the woman's problem on to a different pedestal... I mean a different pedestal she is treated as a goddess, the infallible. Whenever, the moment we start treating the woman as the goddess she is the infallible. So, this is a trend we have seen right, from the time where the figure of the Bharat Matha emerged. So, the woman is either the Durga or the Kaali; there are certain superlative qualities that she is expected to repeat, she is expected to take after.

So, Gandhi has always treated or always inspired women; the Gandhian feminism is inspired by the figure of Sita. So, the long-suffering sacrificing woman, the loyal woman; Gandhian feminism draws a lot on the figure of Sita. Gandhi would urge women to be inspired by her figure, and this is the rhetoric that lingers even in the post-partition times, in the refugee community.

Women who had to choose prostitution were seen as, were referred to as indulging in 'Patal Pravesh'; they were seen as descending to hell. (Refer Slide Time: 11:37)

Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Another stereotype of middle-class refugee woman is the self-sacrificing unmarried educated girl, who is the chief bread-earner of the family and 'doomed' as spinster.
- Ironically, besides ruing their fate, not much was done to improve their conditions. The refugee woman was denied the authority of the earner in larger society, nor was there any consideration for the well-being of their health as of the male breadwinner → active without agency.
- While displaced children's schools were state-run, women were helped only by isolated interventions of charity and welfare work.
- These stereotypes were pointed to the working women, who were perceived as destabilizing the orthodox and patriarchal Bengali middle-class value system.

So, the other stereotype like I said was that of the self-sacrificing unmarried educated girl, who went on to become the chief bread-earner of the family and was doomed as a spinster because she could not have a family of her own and not her own children and so forth.

However, besides reviewing her fate, not much was done to improve her conditions. For example, not much is talked about her living conditions; how or whether at all it was possible to improve her way of living, give her a better space within domesticity, a more comfortable space within domesticity, whether at all she was ... whether she was given the authority of the earner in the larger society or even within the unit of family.

And if there were any considerations for her personal well-being, well-being of her health, as there would even be in the poorer families for the male bread-winner.

So, here something comes back, which we have discussed several lectures back; the question of the woman's activism, socio-economic escalation, whatever we may like to call it without much agency. So, activism and agency do not go in tandem; they do not go hand in hand. One does not ensure the other, and one could very well happen without the other.

So, we see this in Ghatak's classic *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-capped Star), where the woman is the bread-earner; she is even giving money to her elder brother who does nothing apart from, you know, honing his own talent. He wants to become a great singer,

which he becomes subsequently, but in the current time-space of the story where we see the narration happening the point from where the plot starts unfolding,

the brother is jobless and then the younger brother gets a job in a factory all of a sudden, and then the equations in the family change. The protagonist Nita had been... I mean the protagonist Nita is shown as sacrificing for the family, and it is her sacrifices, the female protagonist Nita's sacrifices are normalized/ naturalized in the family. They are not celebrated, no one talks about that.

But the moment the youngest of the siblings, Montu, starts going to a factory, he wants to earn; and even before that when he wants to pursue his career as a sportsperson, his diet his food habits his upkeep are all, you know, taken care of by the mother -- the mother who is supposed to be equally close to all her children, but we see that Nita is actually neglected.

So, this is something I was trying to get at -- the fact that although the woman was resourceful to the family, her personal well-being would hardly be taken care of. So, we see instances where even the displaced children, the children who are not a maker of the society per se, they are not the enactors in the society. Even the displaced children's cases were considered by the state. There would be schools that were state-run for the displeased children, and yet in the case of the women, the refugee women, there would be only isolated interventions of charity and welfare work.

So, we see these stereotypes of either the woman as the pioneer or the doomed spinster or the prostitute as pointed to the working woman who came out of her domicile, you know, her domestic space for the first time, and they were largely seen as destabilizing [the values]. So, the orthodox and patriarchal Bengali middle-class value system. (Refer Slide Time: 18:04)

Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Sen - These images hardly reflected the lives and choices of the refugee women. These stereotypes rather pointed to the anxiety of the Bengali male refugees regarding their social status, ideals and traditions that had, in many cases, seen as a 'fall' or were going through trying times.
- The male anxiety transcribed to women's body, causing lament of imagined and sometimes real transgressions of ideal social roles.
- Sen cautions against celebrating Partition and dislocation as a harbinger of women's emancipation in WB. Census record hardly shows any significant changes in the livelihood of the middle-class Calcuttan women. A myth is formed around the refugee woman's image that either blows up or diminishes her beyond proportion.

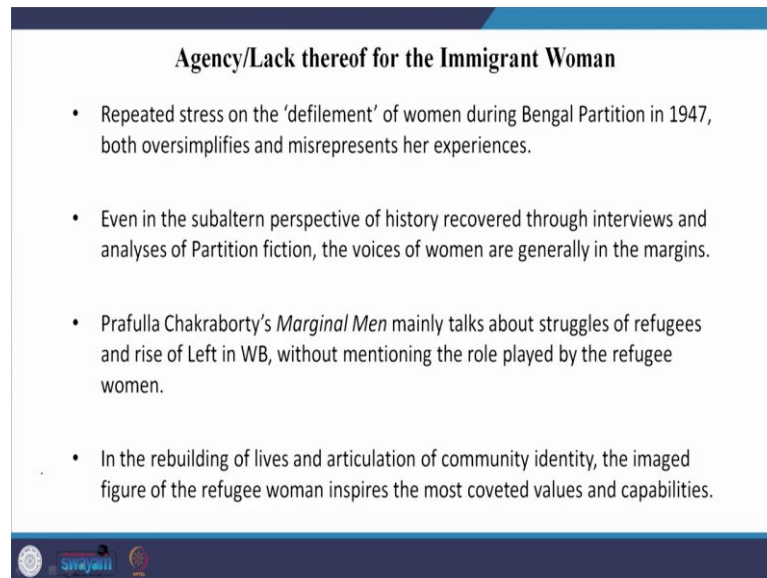
So, Udit Sen notes that these images hardly reflect the lives and choices of the refugee women. These stereotypes rather would point to and they would rather highlight the anxiety of the Bengali male refugees regarding their own social status, their own ideals what they wanted to celebrate and worship, the traditions and also the trying times they were going through.

There was parallelly the stereotype about the fall of the middle-class refugee male from the erstwhile, you know, East Pakistan they had come from. Most of them boasted a very easy and a more comfortable existence back in East Pakistan, compared to which they had a socio-economic fall after arriving in West Bengal.

So, we see that their own anxiety, the anxiety of the refugee male would be many a times transcribed onto the female, and it would shape the male's perception about the female. This anxiety transcribed to the woman's body and it caused lamentation of imagined and sometimes real transgressions of ideal social roles.

So, Udit Sen in this regard cautions against celebrating partition and dislocation as a harbinger of women's emancipation too. So, just like there is no real fact backing the popular claim that all the women were doomed, similarly there is hardly much truth in the claim that these women were pioneers, they were harbingers of women's freedom or women's emancipation. So, census record hardly shows any significant changes in the livelihood of the middle-class refugee women. A myth is formed around the refugee

woman's image, which either blows up or diminishes her beyond proportion. (Refer Slide Time: 19:42)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Repeated stress on the 'defilement' of women during Bengal Partition in 1947, both oversimplifies and misrepresents her experiences.
- Even in the subaltern perspective of history recovered through interviews and analyses of Partition fiction, the voices of women are generally in the margins.
- Prafulla Chakraborty's *Marginal Men* mainly talks about struggles of refugees and rise of Left in WB, without mentioning the role played by the refugee women.
- In the rebuilding of lives and articulation of community identity, the imaged figure of the refugee woman inspires the most coveted values and capabilities.

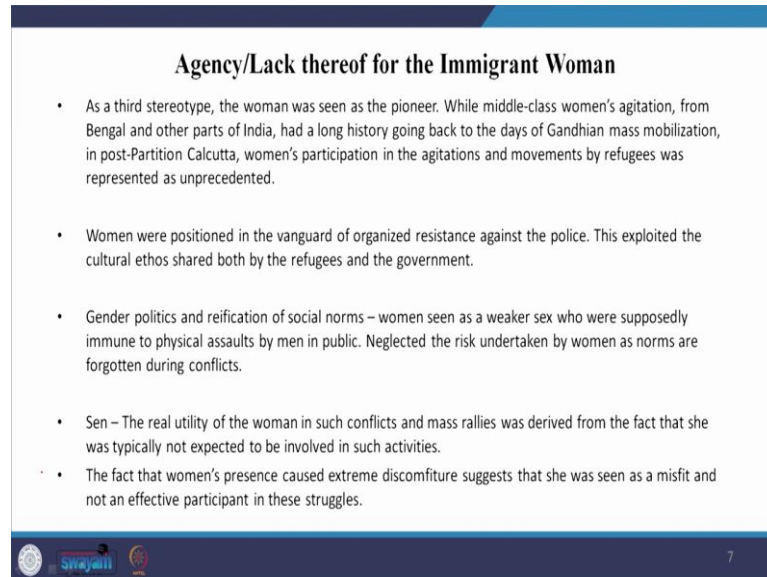
Repeated stress on the [emancipation] of women during Bengal partition both oversimplifies and misrepresents her experiences. We see that even the subaltern perspective of history does not so much cover the voice of the woman. Even in the partition fictions that center the interviews and analysis from the grassroots point of view, the voices of women remain left out. Even Prafulla Chakrabarty's quintessential work 'Marginal Men' mainly talks about struggles of refugees and rise of left in West Bengal without mentioning the role played by the refugee woman.

So, we see that in shaping the woman's, the refugee woman's ideal image, just like in shaping the idealized image of the refugee man, the most coveted values, the superlative values and capabilities were invested. So, this emotional investment, this expectation of the refugee woman and her capabilities had to be matched by every woman in an ideal situation. If they did not they would further aggravate the picture of fall of the middle-class refugee man.

They would do nothing at least to alleviate that picture. So, this is once again... a very clear parallel can be drawn between this situation and the dialogue between the refugee and the new nation-state, the successful refugee.

A lot of you know positive qualities were invested in this mythical figure of the perfect model refugee. Who is the model refugee? Someone that enables the nation-state to

flourish, that helps in the building of the nation-state and that is the refugee that successfully becomes citizen. Because that refugee has actually contributed to nation formation, formation of the new nation, post-colonial nation. (Refer Slide Time: 23:03)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- As a third stereotype, the woman was seen as the pioneer. While middle-class women's agitation, from Bengal and other parts of India, had a long history going back to the days of Gandhian mass mobilization, in post-Partition Calcutta, women's participation in the agitations and movements by refugees was represented as unprecedented.
- Women were positioned in the vanguard of organized resistance against the police. This exploited the cultural ethos shared both by the refugees and the government.
- Gender politics and reification of social norms – women seen as a weaker sex who were supposedly immune to physical assaults by men in public. Neglected the risk undertaken by women as norms are forgotten during conflicts.
- Sen – The real utility of the woman in such conflicts and mass rallies was derived from the fact that she was typically not expected to be involved in such activities.
- The fact that women's presence caused extreme discomfiture suggests that she was seen as a misfit and not an effective participant in these struggles.

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So, like I have been suggesting after the figure of this spinster and prostitute, after the stereotypes of the refugee woman as a spinster, the refugee woman as a prostitute, the third stereotype that we have is the woman as the pioneer. So, this is also you know something that can be problematized, which can be something that can be revisited, something that can be revisited because women's agitation both from Bengal and from every other part of India actually goes back; it traces a long history and goes back to the days of Gandhian mass mobilization,

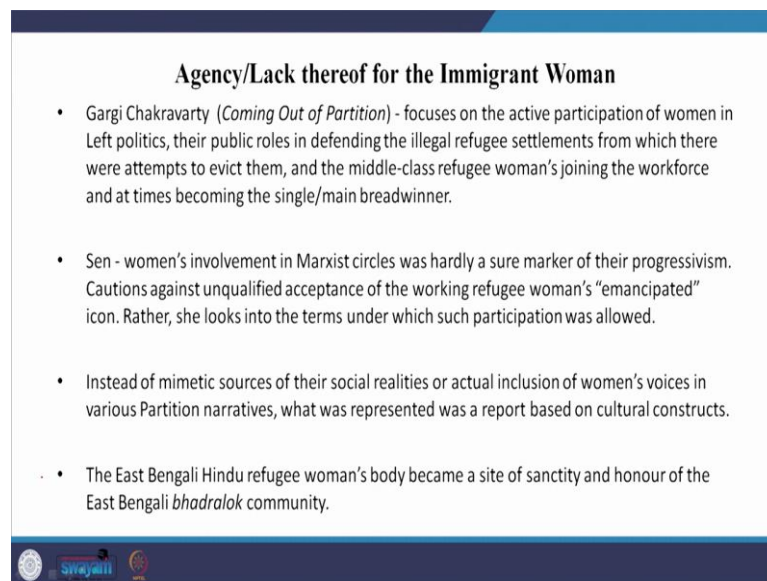
such that women's participation in refugee agitations and movements was hardly a new thing. It was certainly not unprecedented, but that is how many popular accounts represented.

So, we see how the women actually... there are women who get to participate in refugee agitations, in mass mobilizations by the refugees, but under certain conditions, and these conditions are not really very emancipating; they are positioned in the vanguard of organized resistance against the police, and this exploits the cultural ethos shared by both the refugees and the government.

Both the refugee masses and the West Bengal government are, you know, they cherish certain patriarchal values. So, we see that in positioning the women in the vanguard of

these organized resistances there is gender politics; there is reification of social norms, where the idea is that the woman is a weaker sex. So, the police would not... even in the worst of the conflicts, the police would not hurl physical assaults to the woman; at least not in the public. This neglects the risk undertaken by these women because norms are oftentimes forgotten during conflicts. The real utility of the refugee woman in these agitations, as Uditi Sen would argue, was derived from the fact that she was typically not expected to be involved in such activities. So, here is the figure of the weaker sex in a kind of activity, where she is not supposed to be, which involves conflict, which involves physical interface. And so, people would concede, people would in a way refrain from at least physically abusing the woman; the police would actually not lathi-charge the woman. That was the idea of putting the woman in the front row of these rallies.

So, the fact that women's presence caused or could cause extreme discomfiture suggests that she was, after all, ...she was after all seen as a misfit and not as amply effective; not an amply effective participant in these struggles. (Refer Slide Time: 26:28)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Gargi Chakravarty (*Coming Out of Partition*) - focuses on the active participation of women in Left politics, their public roles in defending the illegal refugee settlements from which there were attempts to evict them, and the middle-class refugee woman's joining the workforce and at times becoming the single/main breadwinner.
- Sen - women's involvement in Marxist circles was hardly a sure marker of their progressivism. Cautions against unqualified acceptance of the working refugee woman's "emancipated" icon. Rather, she looks into the terms under which such participation was allowed.
- Instead of mimetic sources of their social realities or actual inclusion of women's voices in various Partition narratives, what was represented was a report based on cultural constructs.
- The East Bengali Hindu refugee woman's body became a site of sanctity and honour of the East Bengali *bhadralok* community.

So, an important work by Gargi Chakravarty called 'Coming out of Partition' focuses on the active participation of refugee women in Left politics, their public roles in defending the illegal refugee settlements from which there were attempts to evict them by the government.

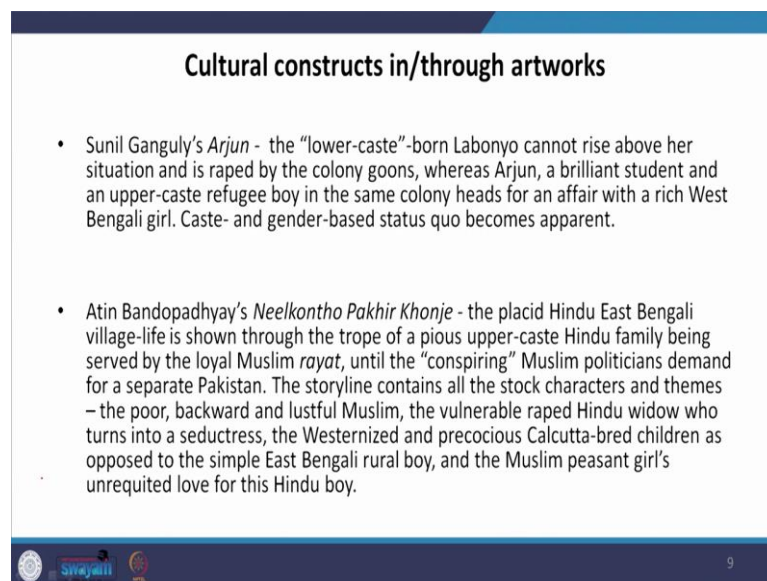
And the middle class refugee woman joining the workforce and at times becoming the single or the main bread-earner in the family. There is this hallow inscribed around the

refugee woman through such writings as 'Coming out of Partition', which celebrates the agency, the purported agency of the refugee woman.

Uditi Sen questions the reader against such unqualified acceptance of the refugee woman's emancipation. Women's involvement in Marxist circles was hardly a sure marker of their progressivism. So, Sen questions against unqualified acceptance of the working refugee woman's emancipated or progressive...her icon as a progressive woman.

So, she is not ready to accept that; rather, she wants to study the terms under which...I mean the terms under which such participation was allowed. Instead of mimetic sources of the refugee woman, social realities or even actual inclusion of women's voices in various partition narratives, what we see is a report based on cultural constructs.

So, even the fictions are informed by these constructs; more than how things were back then, what really informed or inspired the writers, many of whom were themselves from the refugee community hailing from the upper- or upper middle-class upper-caste is the desire how they would like the woman to be. They would reconstruct the woman through the lens, through the prism of such ideals, such qualities. So, that might not always correspond with the truth; the truth might be more layered, more complex and so, the refugee woman's body becomes a site of sanctity and honour for the bhadralok or the refined class refugee community. (Refer Slide Time: 29:11)



Cultural constructs in/through artworks

- Sunil Ganguly's *Arjun* - the "lower-caste"-born Labonyo cannot rise above her situation and is raped by the colony goons, whereas Arjun, a brilliant student and an upper-caste refugee boy in the same colony heads for an affair with a rich West Bengali girl. Caste- and gender-based status quo becomes apparent.
- Atin Bandopadhyay's *Neelkontho Pakhir Khonje* - the placid Hindu East Bengali village-life is shown through the trope of a pious upper-caste Hindu family being served by the loyal Muslim *rayat*, until the "conspiring" Muslim politicians demand for a separate Pakistan. The storyline contains all the stock characters and themes – the poor, backward and lustful Muslim, the vulnerable raped Hindu widow who turns into a seductress, the Westernized and precocious Calcutta-bred children as opposed to the simple East Bengali rural boy, and the Muslim peasant girl's unrequited love for this Hindu boy.

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We have a few examples here. So, we see in Sunil Ganguly's work a prominent work called 'Arjun', the lower-caste born female called Labonyo. Labonyo cannot rise above

her situation and in the end, she is raped by the colony goons; however, Arjun who is a brilliant student and an upper-caste refugee boy from the same colony heads for an affair with a rich West Bengali girl.

So, here the gender and caste status-quo becomes apparent. Sunil Ganguly is very clearly chalking out stereotypical destinies or through chalking out the destinies of these two characters Arjun and Labonyo, he is reinforcing the stereotype, the caste- and gender-based status quo.

Atin Bandopadyay's Neelkontho Pakhir Khonje is also shaping certain stereotypes -- the placid Hindu East Bengali village life. The idyllic village life is shown through the trope of the pious upper-caste Hindu family being served by the loyal Muslim Rayat, until certain conspiring politicians from outside demand for a separate Pakistan. Otherwise this kind of hierarchy is normalized, even you know celebrated in these writings.

The storyline contains all the stock characters and themes. So, the 'lustful poor backward Muslim', the 'vulnerable raped Hindu widow' who later on turns into seductress, the precocious Calcutta-bred children as opposed to the simple rural East Bengali boy, and then the Muslim peasant girl's unrequited love for the Hindu boy -- all these are themes or tropes that keep coming back in the canonical opus, the opus that forms the canon in Bengal partition works, and to some extent we see this kind of commonality in fictions written about both sides of the border.

We have a work... this clearly reminds me of a relatively recent film, such as *Gadar Ek Prem Katha*, which is full of such stereotypes about the nice Sardar and the wicked Muslim man who goes and settles in Pakistan, and so forth. So, there are certain cultural constructs through which we want to visit our memory of the past, our memory of partition. (Refer Slide Time: 32:28)

Cultural constructs in/through artworks

- Qurratulain Hyder's *Fireflies in the Mist* - the communist terrorist groups of Bengal as highly elite and patriarchal coteries, which hold out memberships to the educated middle-class women, but locate them at the fringes of the revolution, using them only as pawns. As the most heretical of the females commit suicide, whereas others become either vain *bhadramahila* or unfortunate victims of men's disloyalty, the setting of the plot points to an aristocratic and conservative milieu.
- Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* - Nita is the symbol of Goddess *Jagaddhatri* (the Mother Giver) and the domestic courtyard a site of collective yearnings of her family members, which materialize to the detriment of her well-being. None of the corresponding male characters – her elder brother Shankar, her father, her fiancé Sanat or her younger brother Montu – are shown in similar mythological shades. In most cases, the *bhadramahila* refugees' good-natured compliance with and assistance to the fundamentally patriarchal nature of refugee struggles adhere mythic perfections to an image of woman, rather than grounding her within her current reality.
- In Ghatak's *Subarnarekha*, the female protagonist commits suicide because she marries a Dalit boy against her elder brother's wish, who is the figure of a patriarch.



Qurratulain Hyder's 'Fireflies in the Mist' looks at the communist terrorist groups of Bengal as being highly elite and patriarchal factions. They hold out memberships to the educated middle-class women. But these women are only located at the fringes of the revolution and they are never part of the master plan. They never carry out or they never devise the master plan really; they are used as pawns.

So, we see the most heretical of the females committing suicide in the story, in the plot whereas, there are other examples of vain *bhadramahila* or the vain refined-class woman who are unfortunate victims of men's disloyalty. All these women are rendered a passive, inert status and so, the plot points to an aristocratic and essentially conservative milieu.

Next, Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* shows the figure of Nita as a symbol of Goddess *Jagaddhatri* or the Mother-giver and the domestic courtyard as a site of collective yearnings of her family members, which she keeps on fulfilling; and all these fulfillments of the yearnings materialize to the detriment of her own well-being. In the end, Nita dies.

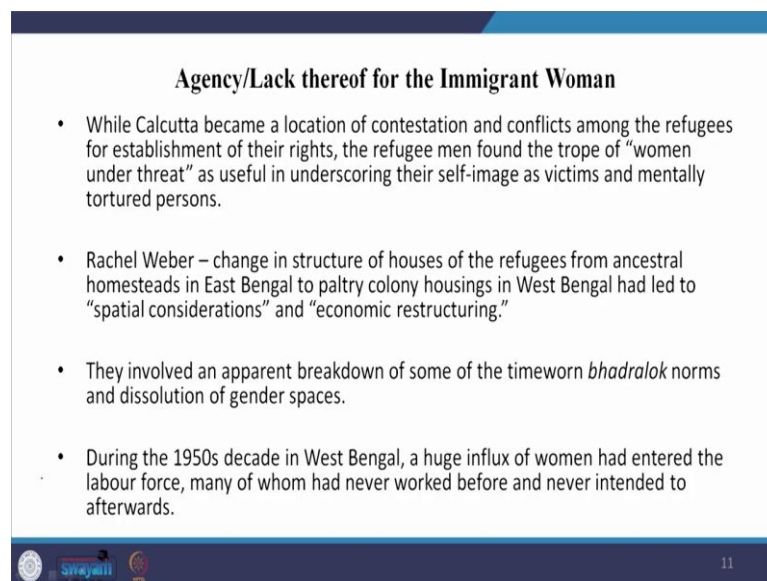
None of the corresponding male characters are shown in similar mythological shades. They are located in the modern time-space of post-colonial India. So, they are not correspondingly seen as gods, right. They are not seen as the give-it-all kind of figures.

So, the *bhadramahila* refugee's good-natured compliance with and assistance to the fundamentally patriarchal nature of refugee struggles, adhere certain mythic perfections

to the image of this woman -- blows her out of proportion rather than grounding her within her current reality.

Similarly, we see in Ghatak's other film *Subarnarekha* -- a very important film where the protagonist, the female protagonist Sita commits suicide because she married against the wish of her elder brother who is a patriarchal figure. She marries a Dalit boy. She being a woman from an upper-caste marries a Dalit boy against her elder brother's wish and so, in *Subarnarekha* we see that this defiance costs Sita her life, this defiance costs Sita her life.

So, the female protagonist commits suicide because she marries a boy of her choice who comes from the lower rung of the society. He is a Dalit and her brother who is a patriarchal figure is defied and she has to pay with her own life for this choice, for this act. It is a very conservative message that we get from such artworks. (Refer Slide Time: 35:57)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- While Calcutta became a location of contestation and conflicts among the refugees for establishment of their rights, the refugee men found the trope of “women under threat” as useful in underscoring their self-image as victims and mentally tortured persons.
- Rachel Weber – change in structure of houses of the refugees from ancestral homesteads in East Bengal to paltry colony housings in West Bengal had led to “spatial considerations” and “economic restructuring.”
- They involved an apparent breakdown of some of the timeworn *bhadralok* norms and dissolution of gender spaces.
- During the 1950s decade in West Bengal, a huge influx of women had entered the labour force, many of whom had never worked before and never intended to afterwards.

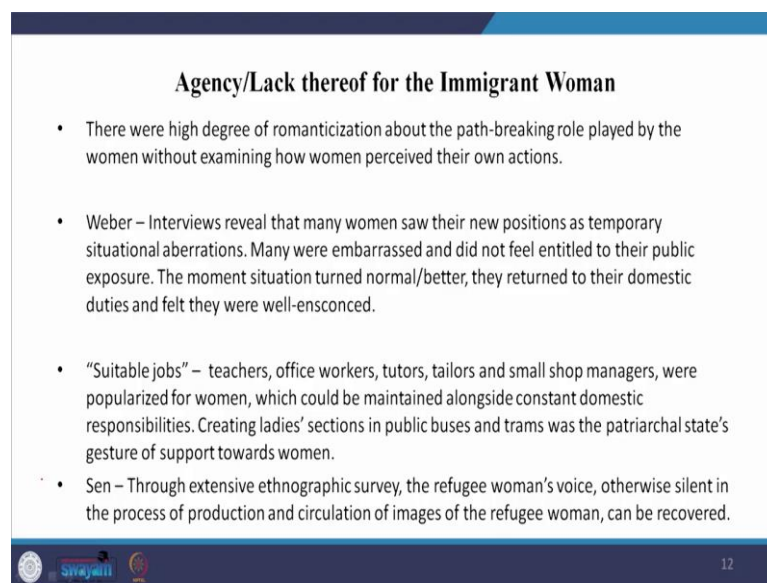
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So, while Calcutta becomes the location of contestation and conflicts among the refugees for establishment of their rights, the refugee men many a times push this trope of the woman under threat as useful and as a way of underscoring their self-image as victims and mentally tortured persons back in East Pakistan.

Rachel Weber notes that the structure of houses changed drastically for the refugees from their ancestral homesteads in East Bengal after [migration]. So, Rachel Weber notes that there was a change in the structure of houses for the refugees from ancestral homesteads

in East Bengal to the small or modest colony housings, where they had to live in West Bengal; and so, this led to certain spatial considerations and corresponding economic restructuring economic restructuring. They involved breakdown of some of the time-worn bhadralok norms and dissolution of gendered spaces.

So, I have already discussed how the aristocratic homes... I mean homes of the aristocrats would have the Ander Mahal and the Baithak. All these spaces for the woman and the man would be dissolved and during the 1950s decades, a huge influx of women entered the labor force. In fact, many of whom had never worked before and never intended to work afterwards. (Refer Slide Time: 37:49)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- There were high degree of romanticization about the path-breaking role played by the women without examining how women perceived their own actions.
- Weber – Interviews reveal that many women saw their new positions as temporary situational aberrations. Many were embarrassed and did not feel entitled to their public exposure. The moment situation turned normal/better, they returned to their domestic duties and felt they were well-ensconced.
- “Suitable jobs” – teachers, office workers, tutors, tailors and small shop managers, were popularized for women, which could be maintained alongside constant domestic responsibilities. Creating ladies’ sections in public buses and trams was the patriarchal state’s gesture of support towards women.
- Sen – Through extensive ethnographic survey, the refugee woman’s voice, otherwise silent in the process of production and circulation of images of the refugee woman, can be recovered.

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So, there were high degrees of romanticization about the path-breaking role, about the path-breaking role played by the women, without examining how women themselves perceived the part they played, how women perceived the part they played. So, Weber's interviews reveal that many women saw their positions in public spaces, their contributions in public spaces as temporary, situational aberrations. They were embarrassed to relate to their participation. They did not feel entitled to their public exposure and the moment situation turned better or so-called normal, they wanted to return to their domestic duties and that is where they felt more comfortable.




So, the rhetoric of a suitable job... what jobs are suitable for the woman and jobs that do not lead the woman to transgress their traditional roles was something discussed at this point. So, teachers, office workers, tutors, tailors, small shop managers were popularized

for women. So, women were gaining some foothold, but the entire process was under strict supervision of the patriarchal society. Women were being channelized into certain roles and they were required to limit themselves to these you know... playing these parts.

Creating ladies' sections in public buses and trams was the patriarchal state's gesture of support towards women. So, Uditi Sen proposes you know extensive ethnographic survey which would reveal and recover the refugee woman's voice, which has otherwise remained silent in the process of production and circulation of images of the refugee woman. (Refer Slide Time: 39:52)

Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Archit Basu Guha-Roychoudhury examines the complex nuances of freedom and oppression, which define the figure of refugee *bhadramahila* in post-Partition West Bengal.
- Despite being recurrently treated as a symbol of female emancipation, the working *bhadramahila* refugee's self-liberation was secondary to her duty of supplementing financial depression at home.
- Even as a political drive among the Dalit refugee women was observable in their coming forward to join the CPI-initiated Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti (MARS, 1943), there was no such strong indication of radicalism with respect to the *bhadramahila* immigrants.
- Coming out of the domestic confines meant struggling at a socio-cultural level with West Bengalis and at gendered and economic levels with men in general, which many middle-class-bred migrant women detested → Public exposure as compulsion bereft of choice.

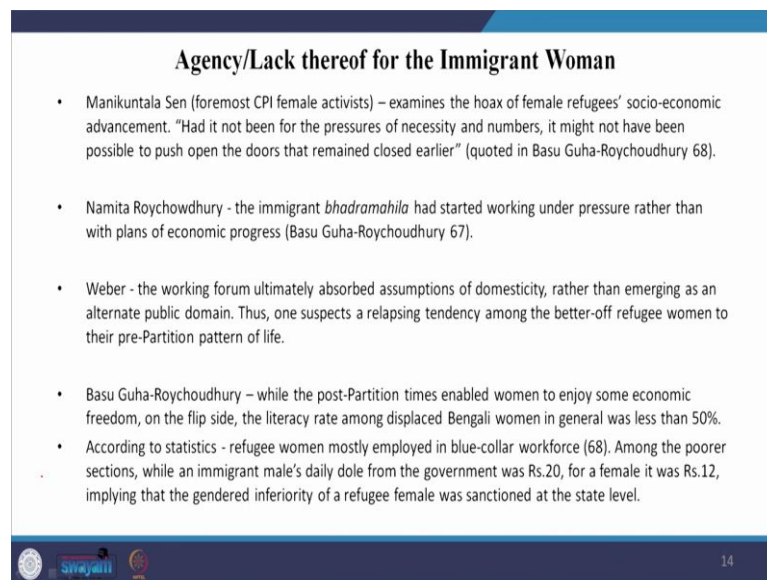


Archit Basu Guha Roychoudhury examines the complex nuances of freedom and oppression which define the refugee *bhadramahila*. So, despite being recurrently treated as a symbol of female emancipation, the woman's self-liberation was secondary to her duty of supplementing financial depression back at home.

So, even as a political drive among Dalit refugee women was observable and which enabled them, which pushed them to join the CPI-initiated Mahila Atmarksha Samiti which was formed in 1943, there is no strong indication of radicalism with respect to the middle-class or the *bhadramahila*, the refined-class immigrants in this regard.

So, the influx or the upsurge in workforce, the huge number of women joining the workforce that we see, and even joining CPI-initiated Mahila Atmarksha Samiti are from Dalit backgrounds. They are not so much from among the middle-class.

So, coming out of the domestic confines meant for these women struggling at the social cultural level with the West Bengalis at large and with men in general. So, this is something they loathed; public exposure was a compulsion, which was happening without their personal choice. (Refer Slide Time: 41:28)



Agency/Lack thereof for the Immigrant Woman

- Manikuntala Sen (foremost CPI female activists) – examines the hoax of female refugees' socio-economic advancement. "Had it not been for the pressures of necessity and numbers, it might not have been possible to push open the doors that remained closed earlier" (quoted in Basu Guha-Roychoudhury 68).
- Namita Roychowdhury - the immigrant *bhadramahila* had started working under pressure rather than with plans of economic progress (Basu Guha-Roychoudhury 67).
- Weber - the working forum ultimately absorbed assumptions of domesticity, rather than emerging as an alternate public domain. Thus, one suspects a relapsing tendency among the better-off refugee women to their pre-Partition pattern of life.
- Basu Guha-Roychoudhury – while the post-Partition times enabled women to enjoy some economic freedom, on the flip side, the literacy rate among displaced Bengali women in general was less than 50%.
- According to statistics - refugee women mostly employed in blue-collar workforce (68). Among the poorer sections, while an immigrant male's daily dole from the government was Rs.20, for a female it was Rs.12, implying that the gendered inferiority of a refugee female was sanctioned at the state level.

Manikuntala Sen who is the foremost CPI female activist examines this hoax of female refugees' socio-economic advancement. She says, had it not been for the pressures of necessity and numbers, it might not have been possible to push open the doors that remained closed earlier.

Namita Roychowdury similarly notes that the immigrant bhadramahila had started working under pressure rather than with plans of economic progress or even personal development or personal achievement. Rachel Weber sees that the working forum ultimately absorbed the assumptions of domesticity rather than emerging as a radical field, as an alternate public domain.

So, the public domain did not change; it became a continuum of the domestic values. One suspects when looking...when seeing this one suspects a relapsing tendency among the better off, the more affluent refugee women who went out to work during these upheavels, during these unusual times, and basically there was no new benchmark being set or new goals being achieved, but rather the values from pre-partition patterns of life, the pre-partition patterns of life being kind of brought back.

So, while the post-partition times enabled women to enjoy some economic freedom, on the flip side the literacy rate among the displaced Bengali women was not very high; it was less than 50 percent. So, according to the statistics, refugee women were mostly employed in blue-collar workforce, and this section was from among the Dalits that participated, not the well-to-do women among the poorer sections. Also, there was gender discrimination.

So, while an immigrant male's daily dole from the government would be 20 rupees per day, for a female it was 12 rupees a day, implying that the gendered inferiority of a refugee female was sanctioned and legitimized at the level of the state. So, this is where I am going to stop today and we will continue again in our next lecture.

Thank you.