


Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 46
Displaced People, Abandoned Homes - I

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. So, we are talking about Displaced People and Abandoned Homes. Today, this is an example that I had cited right at the beginning of this lecture series, which tells us why partition is still a relevant topic of discussion and the apparitions of partition have not gone away; they keep looming large on the future of South Asia and South Asian politics. (Refer Slide Time: 01:07)

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia** – In May 2005, there was a report of potential eviction of Partition refugees in Rajpura, Punjab, from their temporary government-allotted accommodation called **Kasturba Sewa Ashram**, causing panic among the refugees that apprehended another displacement.
- The story was a local news and did not catch national attention – cause of eviction was shown as unsafe constructions, a reason could be that the land, whose price considerably appreciated over the years, needed to be claimed by the government – unfolding of **unofficial** History of Partition still taking place in as late as **2005**.
- **Piu Oberoi** - Those persons forced to leave their homes during Partition were seen as refugees because of the failure of available state mechanisms for effective protection for '**displaced persons**'.

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We see Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia observes that in May 2005, there was a report of potential eviction of partition refugees from Rajpura, Punjab from their temporary government allotted accommodation called Kasturba Seva Ashram, which caused panic among the refugees, who had nowhere else to go.

And, this caught the attention of local news, but did not catch national attention; it kind of remained unheard, and the cause of eviction was cited as unsafe constructions. However, one could very well assume that the price of this land in Rajpura had considerably appreciated over the years, and they needed to be claimed by the government.

So, we see the unofficial history, the parallel history of partition, which in a way goes unnoticed in the larger schema of national happenings and yet, these histories keep unfolding, they are still taking place as late as 2005. So, Piu Oberoi says that those persons forced to leave their homes during the partition were seen as refugees because of the failure on the part of the state mechanisms to protect the rights of these displaced persons.

Shuchi Kothari and Rita Kothari study the question of nostalgia and how this question or how the nostalgic renderings or nostalgic accounts change from one refugee to the other. So, record from their interviews discover or observe that for the wealthy business-class people, the nostalgia is not presented in the same way or the nostalgic accounts are not the same as for the middle class or the lower middle class.

The business class people can afford to make unsentimental admission, for example, about not going back to their homeland, because they are assimilated with the fabric of India in a successful manner, in an organized fashion. (Refer Slide Time: 04:02)

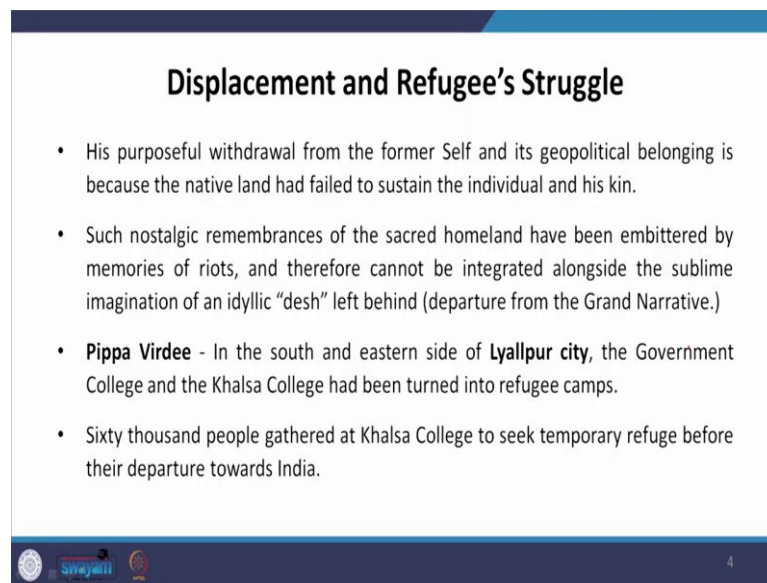
Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Shuchi Kothari** and **Rita Kothari** – record from their interviews that some wealthy business-class people can afford to make 'unsentimental' admission of not wanting to go back to their 'homeland' across the border because they assimilated in an organized fashion with the fabric of India.
- One's class position comes into play in the treatment of memory and nostalgic renditions.
- Similarly, **Anasua Basu Roychaudhury** notes how memory is used as a means of cutting off from the East Bengali past.
- Roychaudhury's interviewee Nonigopal *babu* proclaims "Our *desh* has changed."

So, one's class position becomes very important in the treatment of memory and nostalgic renditions. Similarly, in the case of Bengal, Anasua Basu Roychaudhury notes how memory is used as a means of cutting off from the East Bengali past in the case of some refugees.

So, she interviews this one Nonigopal Babu, who says in clear terms that our desh has changed. For Nonigopal, this purposeful withdrawal could be seen as also disowning one's former self in a way as well as the geopolitical belonging, the geopolitical kind of connection with the homeland, because the native land had failed to sustain an individual like him as well as his family members.

So, these kinds of nostalgic remembrances do not support the imagination of the idyll that we see in the most prominent accounts. These remembrances cannot be integrated alongside the sublime imagination of an idyllic desh. So, for some, memory of desh harbingers embittered memories of riots and so these are.. they have a different relation with the past, different way of connecting with the past. (Refer Slide Time: 05:29)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- His purposeful withdrawal from the former Self and its geopolitical belonging is because the native land had failed to sustain the individual and his kin.
- Such nostalgic remembrances of the sacred homeland have been embittered by memories of riots, and therefore cannot be integrated alongside the sublime imagination of an idyllic "desh" left behind (departure from the Grand Narrative.)
- **Pippa Virdee** - In the south and eastern side of **Lyallpur city**, the Government College and the Khalsa College had been turned into refugee camps.
- Sixty thousand people gathered at Khalsa College to seek temporary refuge before their departure towards India.

Pippa Virdee looks at the south and eastern side of Lyallpur city, where the government college and the Khalsa College had been turned into refugee camps. Sixty thousand people had gathered at Khalsa College to seek temporary refuge before their departure towards India.

Arya high school was also used as a camp, where almost 40,000 people were housed and the refugees squatted in classrooms, in verandas as well as in the playgrounds. It was

kind of an unusual situation, a chaotic situation, widespread chaos prevailed. (Refer Slide Time: 06:22)

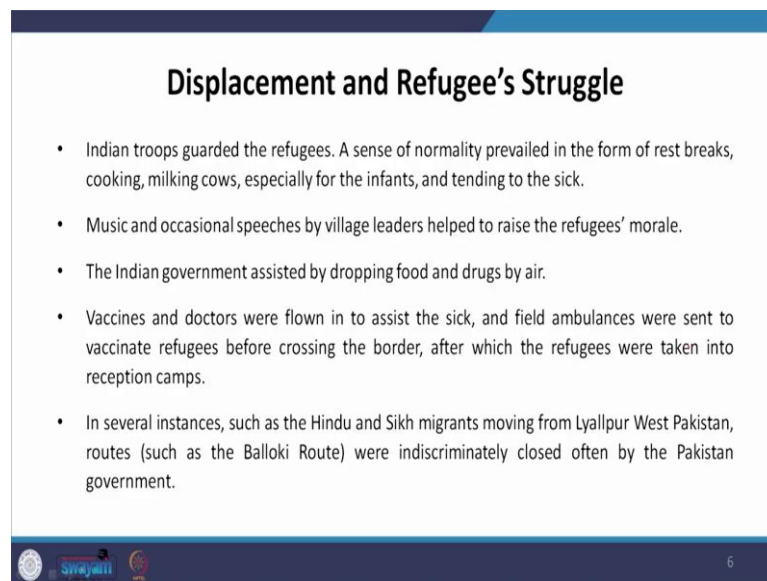
Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Arya High School was also used as a camp, housing around 40,000 people.
- Refugees were squatting in classrooms, and on *verandahs*, and playgrounds.
- Temporary refugee camps such as Khalsa College was infested with diseases like cholera and dysentery and were prone to attacks by looters and rapists.
- Convoy of refugees crossed more than 100 miles on foot along with their livestock.
- Most people walked, while those who brought their carts or *tongas* used them for transporting goods, and the sick and elderly travelled with them (Civil and Military Gazette 1947).

Temporary refugee camps such as the Khalsa College was ivfested with diseases like cholera and dysentery in the absence of sanitized conditions, and additionally the refugees were prone to attacks by looters and rapists. So, the process of migration, the process of journey from one country to the other, from one new post-colonial nation to the other was fraught with many difficulties and many resistances. It was not the same for the affluent sections, but for the ordinary people it was not an easy journey to make.

So, convoy of refugees crossed more than 100 miles on foot along with their livestock. Most people would walk; they brought their cars and used their tongass for transporting goods, and the sick and elderly would travel along with these people. So, this is the general picture of Kafila that we have in our mind, when we talk of exchange of population.

This is a popular imagination that has stayed or this popular image that has stayed with us when we talk of partition, when we talk of population exchange as a result of the partition. (Refer Slide Time: 07:55)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Indian troops guarded the refugees. A sense of normality prevailed in the form of rest breaks, cooking, milking cows, especially for the infants, and tending to the sick.
- Music and occasional speeches by village leaders helped to raise the refugees' morale.
- The Indian government assisted by dropping food and drugs by air.
- Vaccines and doctors were flown in to assist the sick, and field ambulances were sent to vaccinate refugees before crossing the border, after which the refugees were taken into reception camps.
- In several instances, such as the Hindu and Sikh migrants moving from Lyallpur West Pakistan, routes (such as the Balloki Route) were indiscriminately closed often by the Pakistan government.

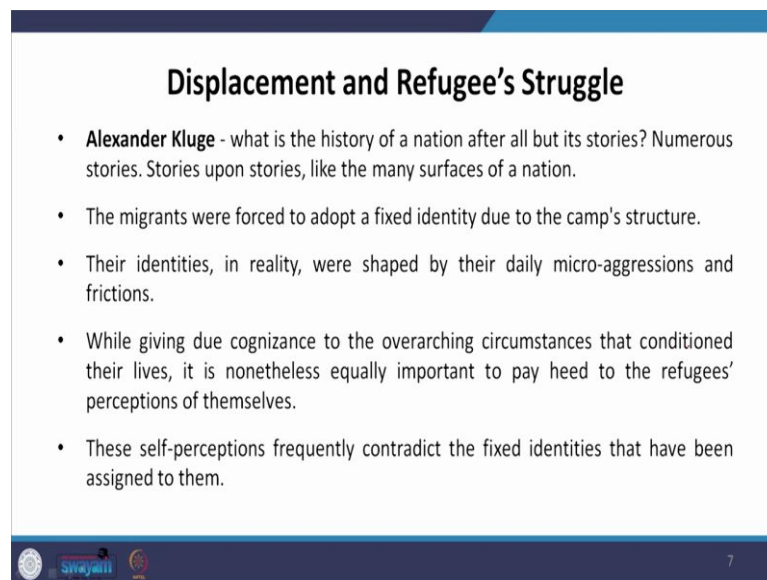
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So, Indian troops guarded the refugees and a sense of normality would prevail in the form of breaks taken to cook, milk the cows, especially for the infants and the infirm.

And so, people would try to keep up their morale, keep up their spirit through occasional speeches by the leaders and playing some music. So, people would try to frolic and try to uplift their spirit even amid such dismal situations. The Indian government assisted the refugees by dropping food and drugs by air.


Vaccines and doctors were flown in to assist the sick, the field ambulances were sent to vaccinate the refugees before crossing the border and then, the infirm refugees would be taken. So, the field ambulances were sent to vaccinate the refugees before crossing the border, following which the refugees would be taken to the reception camps.

Pakistan government, many a times, caused resistance and disturbances in the form of blocking certain routes, such as the Baloki route; these routes would be indiscriminately closed, making the process of migration further challenging, further difficult for the Hindu and Sikh migrants moving from Lyallpur West Pakistan to the Eastern side. (Refer Slide Time: 09:41)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- **Alexander Kluge** - what is the history of a nation after all but its stories? Numerous stories. Stories upon stories, like the many surfaces of a nation.
- The migrants were forced to adopt a fixed identity due to the camp's structure.
- Their identities, in reality, were shaped by their daily micro-aggressions and frictions.
- While giving due cognizance to the overarching circumstances that conditioned their lives, it is nonetheless equally important to pay heed to the refugees' perceptions of themselves.
- These self-perceptions frequently contradict the fixed identities that have been assigned to them.

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So, the migrants were forced to adopt a kind of fixed identity due to the structure of the camp in which they were initially put. Their identities would be shaped by their daily aggressions and frictions that prevailed among them. And this is also something that Ravinder Kaur says.

Once a person becomes a part of this otherwise extremely heterogeneous term 'refugee', which could have a range of meanings -- one's, you know, the ordinary acts of an individual, such as eating, resting, tending a child would become a part of that popular picture of, you know, the partition refugee.

So, the mundane human acts were seen as acts of the refugee. They became a caste in their own right; suddenly they were no longer... they became ahistorical figures -- some people that were detached from... people whose past was snapped. So, while giving due cognizance to the overarching circumstances that conditioned their lives it is nonetheless equally important to pay heed to the refugee's perceptions of themselves. How the refugees saw themselves and other members from the community?

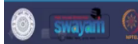
Ah so, we see when the perceptions come from the person who experienced these conditions, these hardships, the point of view contradicts, the fixed identity about the refugee, the fixed stock category of refugee or the social marker of refugee that have been assigned to them -- something that the refugee has to bear on his identity, has to carry regardless of his or her choice, because they are historical victims, victims of certain circumstance.

Since the time a person is displaced from ancestral homes on the other side of the border, everything that they do, they see and they say becomes part of the refugee discourse and the refugee's point of view, the refugee's experience. So, we need to also look at and understand the layers that exist within this discourse.

So, despite the subjective nature of memory studies, memories can serve as a rich repository of displaced people's experiences. According to the government rehabilitation, the term 'refugee' refers to a person who has been uprooted from his or her desh. (Refer Slide Time: 12:45)

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Despite their subjective nature, **memories** can serve as a rich repository of displaced people's experiences.
- According to the government rehabilitation, the term "**refugee**" refers to a **person who has been uprooted from his or her *desh*.**
- In the aforesaid notification, the Government of West Bengal defined a 'refugee' as a **person who migrated into West Bengal for reasons of safety.**



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And so the government of West Bengal defines a refugee as a person who migrated into West Bengal for reasons of safety. (Refer Slide Time: 12:55)

Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- The legal definition of a refugee, on the other hand, refers to a person who is forced to flee his or her place of origin because he or she is scared of persecution for his or her way of life or faith, in his or her native land. (Mentioned in the **UN Convention of 1951** and its **1967 Protocol** as well as the **1969 Convention** and the **Cartagena Declaration of 1984**).
- As India was not a signatory to any of the International Refugee Protection Regimes, the officials of the Government of India and West Bengal preferred to use the term '**displaced**' rather than '**refugee**' when it came to the question of rehabilitation.
- In Bengal, however, the influx continued for many years following the Partition, and is ongoing in different forms even today.

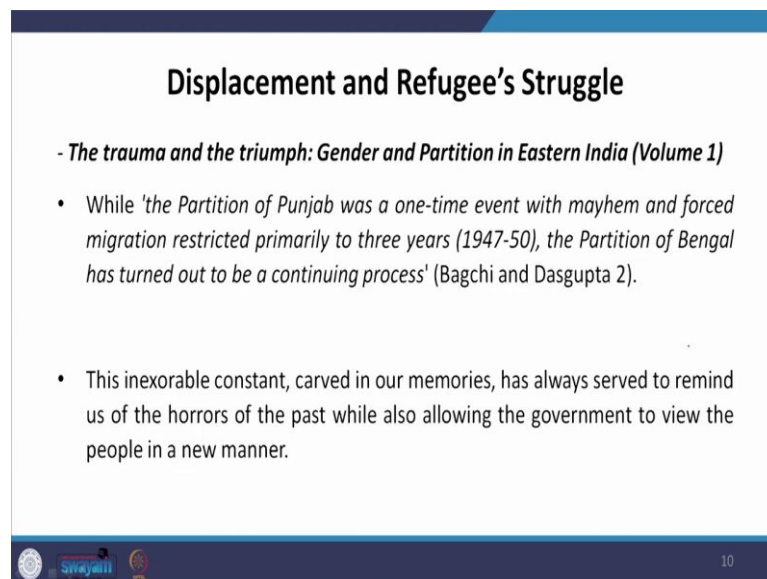


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The legal definition of a 'refugee', on the other hand, refers to a person who is forced to flee his place of origin; because he or she is scared of persecution for his or her way of life or the faith that he or she practices in the native land. This is how the refugee is defined by the UN Convention of 1951, and 1967 Protocol as well as the 1969 Convention and the Cartagena Declaration of 1984.

As India was not a signatory of any of the International Refugee Protection Regime, the officials of the government of India and West Bengal preferred the term 'displaced' rather

than 'refugee', when it came to the issue of rehabilitation and resettlement. (Refer Slide Time: 13:59)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

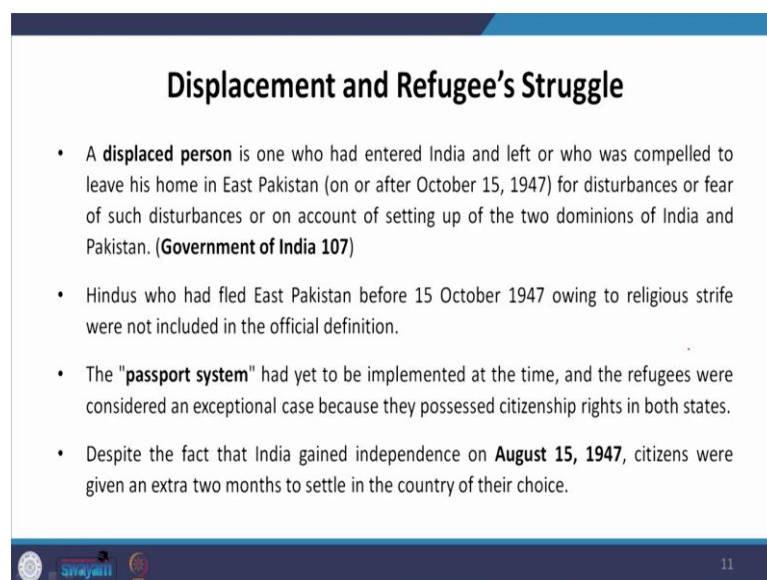
- *The trauma and the triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India (Volume 1)*

- While 'the Partition of Punjab was a one-time event with mayhem and forced migration restricted primarily to three years (1947-50), the Partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process' (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2).
- This inexorable constant, carved in our memories, has always served to remind us of the horrors of the past while also allowing the government to view the people in a new manner.

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Jasodhara Bagchi and Subharanjan Dasgupta note that while the partition of Punjab was a one-time event with mayhem and forced migration restricted primarily to 3 years, the partition of Bengal has turned out to be a continuing process.

This inexorable constant [migration] carved in our memories has always served to remind us of the horrendous past, right. (Refer Slide Time: 14:28)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- A **displaced person** is one who had entered India and left or who was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan (on or after October 15, 1947) for disturbances or fear of such disturbances or on account of setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan. (**Government of India 107**)
- Hindus who had fled East Pakistan before 15 October 1947 owing to religious strife were not included in the official definition.
- The "**passport system**" had yet to be implemented at the time, and the refugees were considered an exceptional case because they possessed citizenship rights in both states.
- Despite the fact that India gained independence on **August 15, 1947**, citizens were given an extra two months to settle in the country of their choice.

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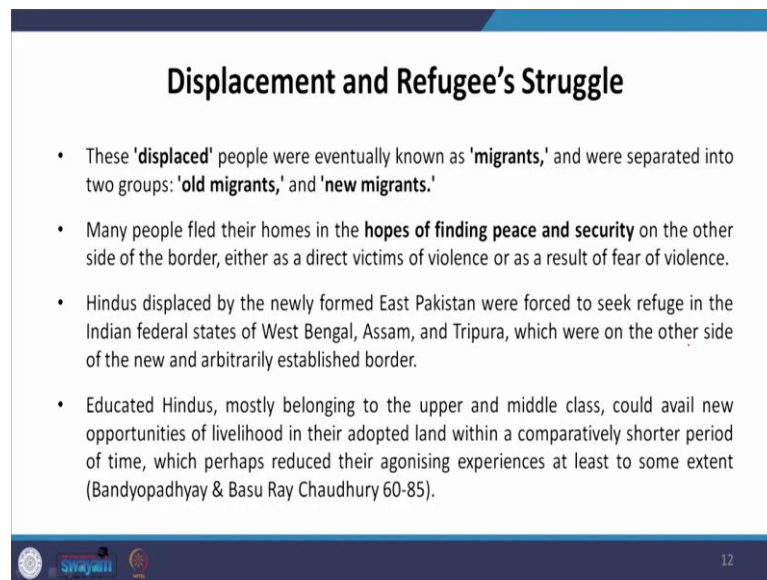
So, a displaced person is one that has entered India and left or someone that was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan on or after 15th of October 1947 for

disturbances or fear of disturbances or on account of setting up the two dominions of India and Pakistan.

So, this is the definition that we get from the government of India. Hindus that had fled East Pakistan before 15th of October were not included in this official definition. So, we have already discussed how this is an ironical situation, where a definition that involves temporal brackets, tends to leave out a certain populace who were similar victims; who were similarly victimized just because various definitions involve temporal brackets.

So, a person who was equally or more violated, but before this mentioned time bracket, does not get to become a 'displaced person' enough; cannot claim to be a displaced person. The passport system had to be implemented and the refugees were considered an exceptional case because till a point, they possessed citizenship rights in both the nation-states.

So, after the independence on 15th of August 1947, the citizens were given two more months to settle in the country of their choice. The displaced people were eventually called migrants and they were separated into two groups, the old migrants and the new migrants. (Refer Slide Time: 16:48)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

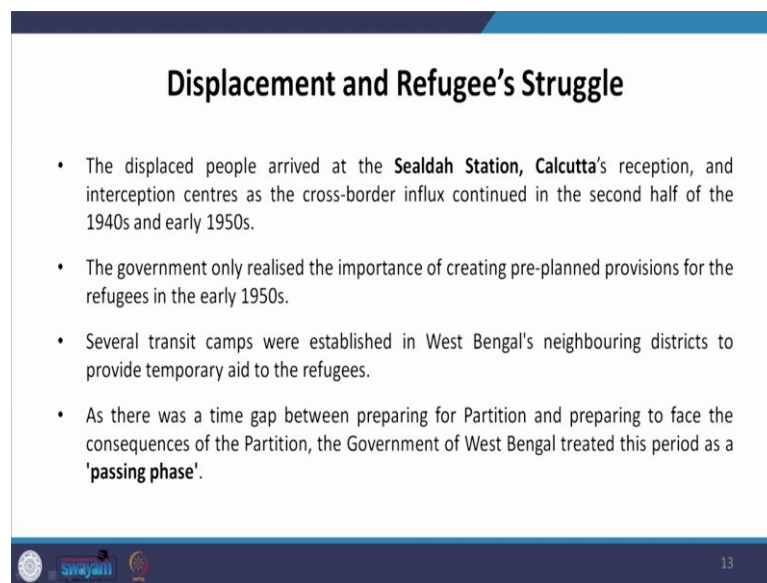
- These '**displaced**' people were eventually known as '**migrants**,' and were separated into two groups: '**old migrants**,' and '**new migrants**.'
- Many people fled their homes in the **hopes of finding peace and security** on the other side of the border, either as a direct victims of violence or as a result of fear of violence.
- Hindus displaced by the newly formed East Pakistan were forced to seek refuge in the Indian federal states of West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, which were on the other side of the new and arbitrarily established border.
- Educated Hindus, mostly belonging to the upper and middle class, could avail new opportunities of livelihood in their adopted land within a comparatively shorter period of time, which perhaps reduced their agonising experiences at least to some extent (Bandyopadhyay & Basu Ray Chaudhury 60-85).

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Hindus that were displaced from the newly-formed East Pakistan were forced to seek refuge in the Indian federal states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. And so, the population problem in these three states have remained persistent since the 1940s decades because infiltration kept happening in waves. Against the backdrop of different

communal riots, disturbances, infiltrations, migrations kept happening. Refugees kept trickling through and across the porous border and so, the population problem has persistently remained in these states, such as West Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

So, educated Hindus could avail new opportunities of livelihood and so they were settled in the new land in a comparatively shorter period of time, and had reduced experience of agony in a certain way. The displaced people among the Bengalis would arrive at the Sealdah station, Calcutta's reception and interception centres, as the cross-border influx continued in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s. (Refer Slide Time: 18:10)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- The displaced people arrived at the **Sealdah Station, Calcutta's** reception, and interception centres as the cross-border influx continued in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s.
- The government only realised the importance of creating pre-planned provisions for the refugees in the early 1950s.
- Several transit camps were established in West Bengal's neighbouring districts to provide temporary aid to the refugees.
- As there was a time gap between preparing for Partition and preparing to face the consequences of the Partition, the Government of West Bengal treated this period as a **'passing phase'**.

Swajati 13

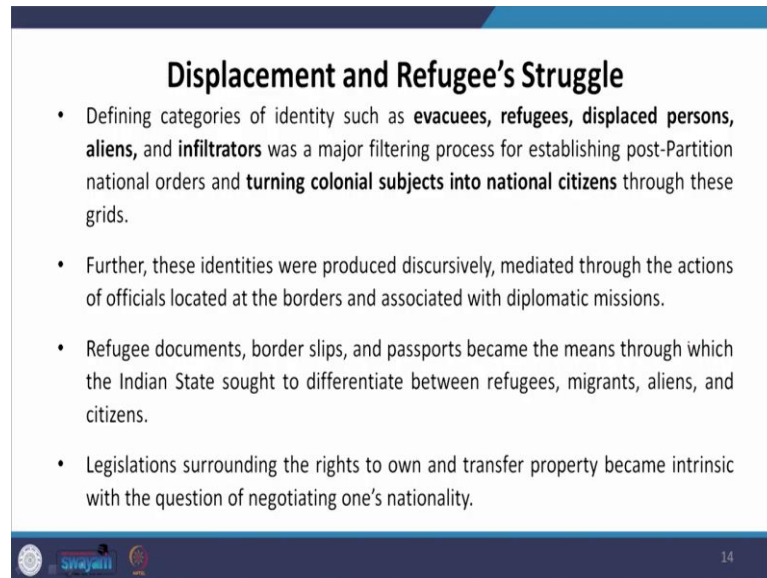
The government only realized the need of creating pre-planned provisions in the early 1950s, and not before that several transit camps were subsequently established in West Bengal's neighboring districts as a way of providing temporary aid to the refugees; and for the Bengali refugees, the dilemma was furthermore, the situation was furthermore complicated.

Some Dalit refugees especially write that they would not get rented houses. The landlords would apprehend that these tenants would go back to East Pakistan without paying the rents because they were seen as temporary evacuees. So, houses would not be given out to them on rent.

And and they would face... they could not get a land, get hold of a land where they could build their own shops or small businesses for the same reason that they might flee in a

few days' time without paying the company. So it was very difficult for the native population to trust these people.

The ones, the migrants that they saw as temporary residents in West Bengal. So, there was a time gap; between preparing for partition and preparing to face the consequences of this partition, the government had treated the initial period as a passing phase. (Refer Slide Time: 20:29)



Displacement and Refugee's Struggle

- Defining categories of identity such as **evacuees, refugees, displaced persons, aliens, and infiltrators** was a major filtering process for establishing post-Partition national orders and **turning colonial subjects into national citizens** through these grids.
- Further, these identities were produced discursively, mediated through the actions of officials located at the borders and associated with diplomatic missions.
- Refugee documents, border slips, and passports became the means through which the Indian State sought to differentiate between refugees, migrants, aliens, and citizens.
- Legislations surrounding the rights to own and transfer property became intrinsic with the question of negotiating one's nationality.

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And so, it was largely seen both by the centre and the West Bengal state governments as a temporary condition, where after things settled, a lot of the Bengali Dalit refugees especially would go back to East Pakistan and claim their lands and their homes there.

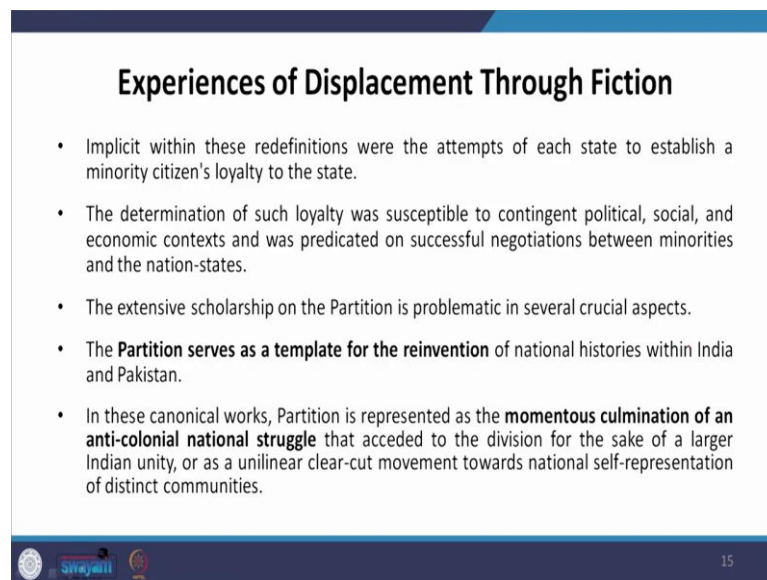
So, the Dalits were facing a different kind of disadvantage, where the question of trust would be there; I mean they had to answer people. They were all of a sudden more accountable in different ways. So, categories of identity, such as evacuees, refugees, displaced persons, aliens, infiltrators, were used as a major filtering process for establishing post-partition national orders and for turning colonial subjects into national citizens through these grids.

And these identities were produced discursively, mediated through the actions of officials that were located at the borders and associated with diplomatic missions. So, in another lecture, we will discuss how recent artworks on partition, such as Sunanda Sikdar's work *Dayamoyeer Katha* recounts the problematic or the difficult process of

crossing the border; where awkward questions would be asked even to young children coming from East Pakistan, right.

So, there was a tension-ridden or there was a tension-fraught dialogue that one had to go through at the border level, and through one's interface with diplomats. So, refugee documents, border slips, passports were means used through which...the means through which the Indian state sought to differentiate the refugees from the migrants, from the aliens, and all of them from the citizens.

So, legislations surrounding the rights to own and transfer property was closely tied with the question of negotiating one's nationality and national belonging. (Refer Slide Time: 23:28)



Experiences of Displacement Through Fiction

- Implicit within these redefinitions were the attempts of each state to establish a minority citizen's loyalty to the state.
- The determination of such loyalty was susceptible to contingent political, social, and economic contexts and was predicated on successful negotiations between minorities and the nation-states.
- The extensive scholarship on the Partition is problematic in several crucial aspects.
- The **Partition serves as a template for the reinvention** of national histories within India and Pakistan.
- In these canonical works, Partition is represented as the **momentous culmination of an anti-colonial national struggle** that acceded to the division for the sake of a larger Indian unity, or as a unilinear clear-cut movement towards national self-representation of distinct communities.

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Implicit within these redefinitions, these categories such as who is a fugitive, who is a refugee, who is an alien, who is an infiltrator or even a spy -- through these definitions there were attempts of each state to establish a minority citizen's loyalty to the state.

So, the determination of such loyalty was exposed to contingent political, social and economic contexts. And it was also dependent on successful negotiations between these minorities and the respective nation-state where they migrated. So, partition serves as a template for the reinvention of national histories within India and Pakistan.

And yet, in the canonical works or the mainstream works written from the nationalist position, the partition is represented as a momentous culmination of anti-colonial

national struggle. And so, the independence struggle is put on the fore, such that anti-colonial struggle, the struggle for independence is shown as acceding to the division for the sake of larger adjustments.

So, the anti-colonial national struggle is a way of achieving a larger Indian unity; it is represented as a necessary compromise acceded by the Indian politicians. So, the canonical works represent partition as a momentous culmination of an anti-colonial national struggle, which agreed to the division for the sake of a larger Indian unity; a kind of compromise that the prominent leaders accepted for securing the sanctity or say, for securing the kind of stability of national functioning.

So, division actually ensured that there would not be prolonged civil wars, continuous civil wars. For example, we see partition represented as a unilinear clear-cut movement in most of the mainstream narratives, which enable national self-representation of distinct communities. I will stop here today and we can discuss further in our next lecture.

Thank you.