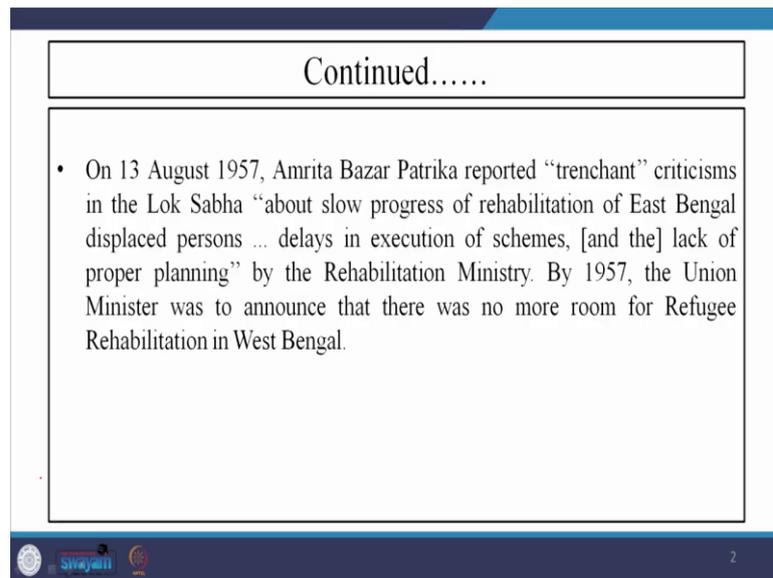


Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 42
Refugee, Desh and Nation - V

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are talking about Refugee, Desh and Nation - we were talking about the case of Bengal and the complicated situation of refugee influx in the state of West Bengal in the post-partition decades, and the situation actually persists due to the Nehru-Liaquat pact. The border was left porous and so trickling of refugees kept happening at different historical junctures, whenever there was a communal tension. (Refer Slide Time: 01:03)



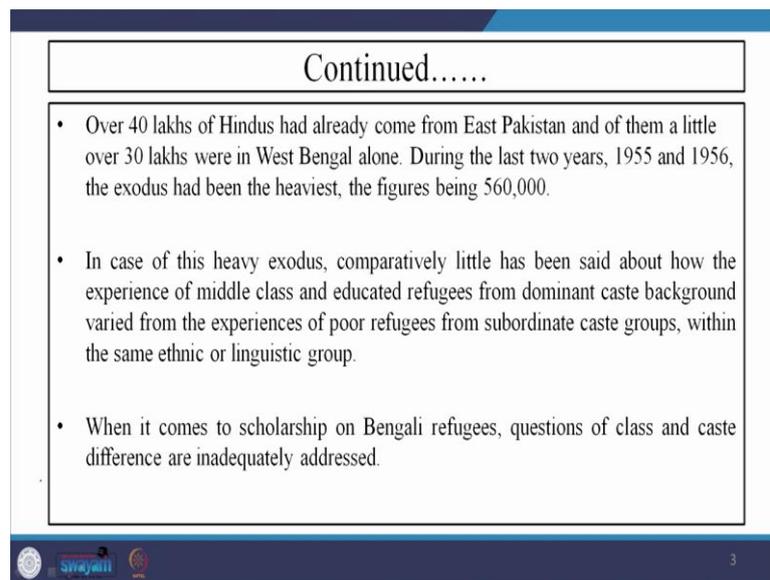
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- On 13 August 1957, Amrita Bazar Patrika reported “trenchant” criticisms in the Lok Sabha “about slow progress of rehabilitation of East Bengal displaced persons ... delays in execution of schemes, [and the] lack of proper planning” by the Rehabilitation Ministry. By 1957, the Union Minister was to announce that there was no more room for Refugee Rehabilitation in West Bengal.

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On 13th of August 1957, Amrita Bazar Patrika reported criticisms in the Lok Sabha about slow progress of rehabilitation of East Bengal's displaced persons, which delayed in execution of schemes and lacked any proper planning on the part of the rehabilitation ministry. So, by 1947 the Union Minister announced that there was no more room for refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal.

Over 40 lakhs of Hindu Bengalis had immigrated from East Pakistan and out of that population, over 30 lakhs were in West Bengal alone. (Refer Slide Time: 01:52)



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- Over 40 lakhs of Hindus had already come from East Pakistan and of them a little over 30 lakhs were in West Bengal alone. During the last two years, 1955 and 1956, the exodus had been the heaviest, the figures being 560,000.
- In case of this heavy exodus, comparatively little has been said about how the experience of middle class and educated refugees from dominant caste background varied from the experiences of poor refugees from subordinate caste groups, within the same ethnic or linguistic group.
- When it comes to scholarship on Bengali refugees, questions of class and caste difference are inadequately addressed.

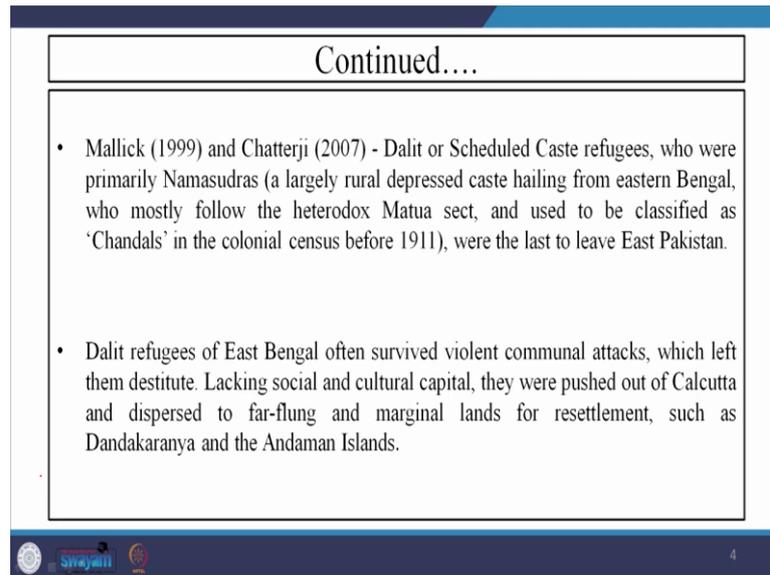
In the case of this heavy exodus, we see that little has been said about how the experience of middle-class and educated refugees were actually dominant, and so whenever we talk about the refugee experience we actually tend to refer through the prism of the middle-class and the dominant castes.

Scholarship till a long time has not examined the questions of caste and class in the case of Bengal partition so scholarship on Bengali refugees generally come from the perspective of the more privileged immigrants. So, people that came from dominant caste and class backgrounds defined the Bengali refugee experience. Although further study reveals how the experiences of the poorer sections, poorer section refugees and the subordinate caste groups were vastly different;

like I already referred Dalit or Scheduled Caste refugees who were primarily the Namasudras were the last that left East Pakistan for India, mainly for West Bengal. And so Dalit refugees arrived in India as destitutes, in completely impoverished conditions.

They faced violent communal attacks, they hardly had you know strong foothold back in their homeland. They were mainly.. they mainly earned their living as fishermen, boatmen, carpenters and peasants, landless tenants.

And that became worse after communal violence; and so, they arrived to the new land.. they arrived in the new land without much, without any social or economic capital.
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- Mallick (1999) and Chatterji (2007) - Dalit or Scheduled Caste refugees, who were primarily Namasudras (a largely rural depressed caste hailing from eastern Bengal, who mostly follow the heterodox Matua sect, and used to be classified as 'Chandals' in the colonial census before 1911), were the last to leave East Pakistan.
- Dalit refugees of East Bengal often survived violent communal attacks, which left them destitute. Lacking social and cultural capital, they were pushed out of Calcutta and dispersed to far-flung and marginal lands for resettlement, such as Dandakaranya and the Andaman Islands.

Swajati 4

And so they were not in charge of deciding where they could live; they were mostly settled in suburban in suburban areas of West Bengal, and then the government officially devised policies to disperse them to far-flung and marginal lands for resettlement, such as in the Andamans and in Dandakaranya.

Doctor Bidhan Chandra Ray's government [Chief Minister of West Bengal, 1948-1962] argued that the refugee crisis was born out of national decision to partition India, (Refer Slide Time: 04:53)

Rehabilitation of Bengali Refugees in the Andaman Islands

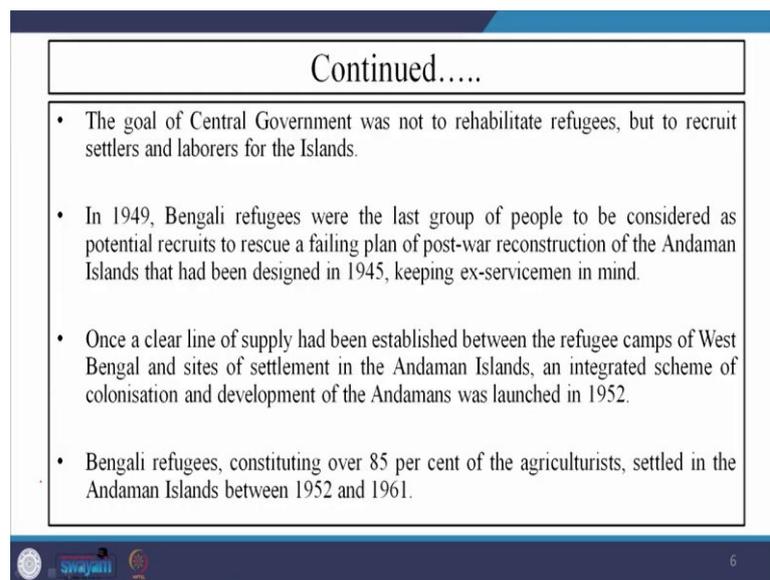
- In 1949, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy had started insisting that since the refugee crisis was born of a national decision to partition India, it would be unfair to expect West Bengal to shoulder the entire burden of rehabilitation of refugees from East Pakistan.
- The Andaman Islands were brought to the notice of the government of West Bengal by H.J. Stooks, the Deputy Secretary of the short-lived Development and Rehabilitation Board, enquiring if West Bengal would agree to send some refugees for resettlement to the Andaman Islands if a grant of Rs 1,300 was made available (Andaman Files, NAI, 1947). Dr. Roy agreed to the proposal.

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and so, it would be unfair to expect West Bengal to shoulder the entire burden of refugee populace alone. So Doctor Ray insisted that the Bengali refugees are also resettled in other states in post-colonial India.

So, the Andaman Islands were brought to the notice of the government office of Bengal by H.J Stooks, who was the Deputy Secretary of a short-lived development and rehabilitation board. And so, Stooks inquired the West Bengal government if they would agree to send if it would agree to send some refugees for resettlement to the Andaman Islands, if a grant of 1300 was made available. So, Doctor Roy ah agreed to this proposal made by Stooks.

So, goal of the Central government, like one sees subsequently, was not to rehabilitate the refugees, but to recreate labours for the Andaman Islands. So, the major argument was that these people used to be landless tenants and they used to toil in lands even before the partition. (Refer Slide Time: 06:23)



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- The goal of Central Government was not to rehabilitate refugees, but to recruit settlers and laborers for the Islands.
- In 1949, Bengali refugees were the last group of people to be considered as potential recruits to rescue a failing plan of post-war reconstruction of the Andaman Islands that had been designed in 1945, keeping ex-servicemen in mind.
- Once a clear line of supply had been established between the refugee camps of West Bengal and sites of settlement in the Andaman Islands, an integrated scheme of colonisation and development of the Andamans was launched in 1952.
- Bengali refugees, constituting over 85 per cent of the agriculturists, settled in the Andaman Islands between 1952 and 1961.

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So, there is apparently no harm in exploiting their labour to reconstruct the Andaman Islands. So in 1949, Bengali refugees were considered as potential recruits to rescue this plan of post-war reconstruction of the Andaman Islands.

So, one needs to understand that the vision here is not to resettle the Dalit refugees, but to use their labor force, their manpower to make Andaman habitable basically; and this project was initially designed in 1945 keeping the ex-servicemen in mind. So, there was a mutual agreement between the Bengal government, and so the clear line between...once

there was this clear line of supply established between the refugee camps of West Bengal and [demand from] the sites of settlement in the Andaman Islands, an integrated scheme started to be materialized. It was... the scheme of colonization and development of the Andamans was launched in 1952. And so, most of these resettlers were Bengali refugees from agriculturalist communities, and they were resettled in Andaman Islands between 1952 and 1961. (Refer Slide Time: 08:04)

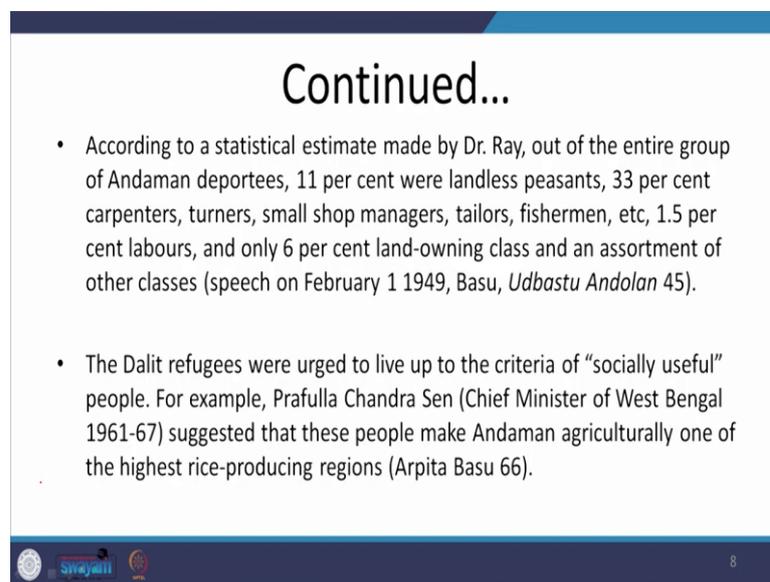
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- 1952 and 1961 - heydays of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands when 2,413 families of Bengali Hindu refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands. The vast majority of the refugees settled in Andamans came from the districts of Barisal, Jessore and Khulna in East Bengal.
- In 1956, families were sent to be resettled in the Andaman Islands and the government promised that soon “20,000 acres of forest land are to be cleared and made available for 4000 agriculturist families from the mainland” (Amrit Bazar Patrika, 11 April 1956).
- It was also suggested that the labour for clearing the forests in Andamans be recruited from among the refugees (Basu Ray Chaudhury 2000). In deporting the refugees to states other than West Bengal, the government attempted to present the problem as a ‘national’ problem.

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During this period, records suggest that around 2413 families of Bengali Hindu refugees were resettled in the Andaman Islands, and most of them had come from the districts of Barisal, Jessore and Khulna in East Bengal. So, families were sent to be resettled there and government promised that soon, 20000 acres of forest land are to be cleared and made available for 4000 agriculturalist families from the mainland.

Yet, one sees that the labors that were recruited for clearing the forest in Andamans were also to be from among the refugees. In deporting the refugees to Andamans, the government of West Bengal was attempting to present the refugee problem as a national problem and not a problem of the province. (Refer Slide Time: 09:17)



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- According to a statistical estimate made by Dr. Ray, out of the entire group of Andaman deportees, 11 per cent were landless peasants, 33 per cent carpenters, turners, small shop managers, tailors, fishermen, etc, 1.5 per cent labours, and only 6 per cent land-owning class and an assortment of other classes (speech on February 1 1949, Basu, *Udbastu Andolan* 45).
- The Dalit refugees were urged to live up to the criteria of “socially useful” people. For example, Prafulla Chandra Sen (Chief Minister of West Bengal 1961-67) suggested that these people make Andaman agriculturally one of the highest rice-producing regions (Arpita Basu 66).

So, one sees that the Dalit refugees were constantly goaded, they were constantly urged to live up to the criteria of being socially useful people, people that were actively contributing to the postcolonial nation of India. So for example, Prafulla Chandra Sen in his speech... he was the Chief Minister of West Bengal between 1961 and 1967.

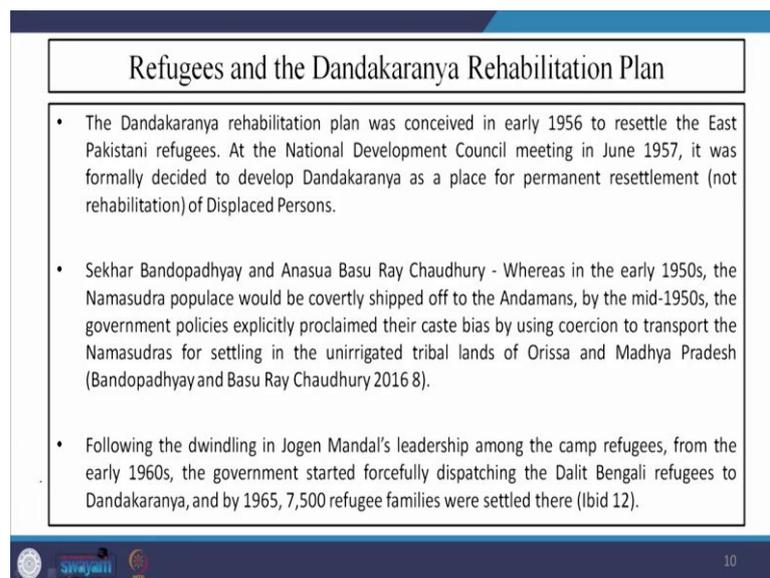
And he suggested, Sen suggested that these people (mostly the Dalit refugees are settled in Andaman) make Andaman agriculturally one of the highest rice-producing regions. So, they were not being resettled for nothing; something was expected of them in return. They were labor hands, they were clearing forests and then, that is how they were settling in places like Andaman and Dandakaranya.

And so, when...even when we look at the statistical estimate made by Doctor Bidhan Chandra Ray, out of the entire group of Andaman deportees, 11 percent were landless

peasants, 33 percent carpenters and small shop managers, fishermen etc., 1.5 percent labors.

And therefore, we see that a very insignificant small section of land-owning class being a part of this project and being deported to a faraway land. The way rehabilitation happened for the Bengalis, West Bengal was preserved and the major lands, the important lands, urban posh areas were reserved for rehabilitation of upper-caste, middle-class, upper-class refugees.

So, the caste-class politics certainly played an important role in the process of resettlement. So now, talking about the Dandakaranya rehabilitation Plan, it was conceived in early 1956 to resettle the East Pakistani refugees at the National Development Council meeting in June 1957. It was formally decided to develop the Dandakaranya as a place for permanent resettlement of the displaced persons. (Refer Slide Time: 12:05)



The slide is titled "Refugees and the Dandakaranya Rehabilitation Plan". It contains three bullet points:

- The Dandakaranya rehabilitation plan was conceived in early 1956 to resettle the East Pakistani refugees. At the National Development Council meeting in June 1957, it was formally decided to develop Dandakaranya as a place for permanent resettlement (not rehabilitation) of Displaced Persons.
- Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury - Whereas in the early 1950s, the Namasudra populace would be covertly shipped off to the Andamans, by the mid-1950s, the government policies explicitly proclaimed their caste bias by using coercion to transport the Namasudras for settling in the unirrigated tribal lands of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh (Bandopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2016 8).
- Following the dwindling in Jogen Mandal's leadership among the camp refugees, from the early 1960s, the government started forcefully dispatching the Dalit Bengali refugees to Dandakaranya, and by 1965, 7,500 refugee families were settled there (Ibid 12).

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And according to Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury's research, in the early 1950s, Namasudra population would be secretly shipped off to the Andamans. But this trend was eventually, this trend was gradually changing by the mid-1950, when the government policies became more explicit, they explicitly proclaimed the caste bias and coercive methods were used to transport the Namasudras, the Dalit refugees for settling in the arid tribal lands of Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Bandopadhyay notes this happens more in the absence of Jogen Mandal's leadership; Jogen Mandal was a

prominent leader among the Dalit refugees and he held a position in the Ministry of East Pakistan.

So, he had his political agency and awareness to inform, to guide the Dalit displaced population. Yet in his absence, in the absence of his leadership, among the camp refugees early 1960 onward we see that the government starts forcefully dispatching the Dalit Bengali refugees to the Dandakaranya. And so by 1965, almost 7,500 families are resettled there. (Refer Slide Time: 13:52)

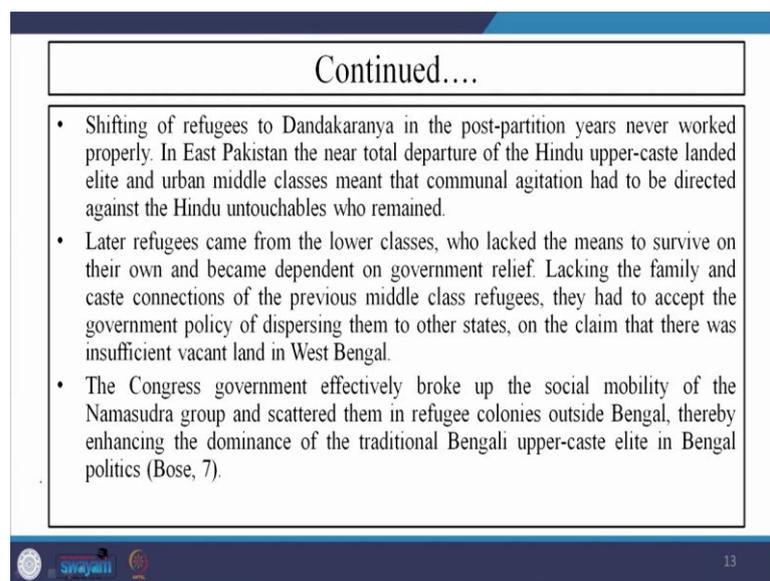
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- A large number of refugees, who were deported to Dandakaranya had to face a hostile, inhospitable, alien environment, and in Dandakaranya, desertion became a regular feature. The government also utilised the manpower and cheap labour of the refugees to develop a backward area (Gupta 1999; Ghosh 2000; Das 2003).
- Dandakaranya, scheme - plot of 6.5 hectares was given to each family and loans were disbursed for building houses and purchase of bullocks and agricultural implements. But it was clear from the start that the refugees had to “make do with the worst lands, hitherto regarded as uncultivable”
- S.K. Gupta – In Pharasgaon zone, “6% of the plots were basically unfit for agriculture, 32% were poor and sub-marginal, 53% could be of medium quality if their moisture retention capacity could be improved, and only 9% were of good quality.”

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The Dandakaranya scheme was as follows - a plot of 6.5 hectares was given to each family; loans were disbursed for building houses and for purchasing of bullocks and agricultural goods, agricultural equipments, and yet, feedback would come from the settlers that the refugees had to make do with the worst lands which were hitherto regarded as uncultivable, absolutely arid lands.

So, these people that were deported to Dandakaranya had to face inhospitable environment, an alien environment, and desertion became a regular feature. So, government was utilizing manpower and cheap labor of the refugees to develop this backward area. S. K Gupta states that in Pharasgaon, 6 percent of the plots were basically unfit for agriculture, 32 percent were poor and sub-marginal, 53 percent could be of medium quality if the moisture retention capacity could be improved, and only 9 percent land was of good quality. (Refer Slide Time: 15:13)



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- Shifting of refugees to Dandakaranya in the post-partition years never worked properly. In East Pakistan the near total departure of the Hindu upper-caste landed elite and urban middle classes meant that communal agitation had to be directed against the Hindu untouchables who remained.
- Later refugees came from the lower classes, who lacked the means to survive on their own and became dependent on government relief. Lacking the family and caste connections of the previous middle class refugees, they had to accept the government policy of dispersing them to other states, on the claim that there was insufficient vacant land in West Bengal.
- The Congress government effectively broke up the social mobility of the Namasudra group and scattered them in refugee colonies outside Bengal, thereby enhancing the dominance of the traditional Bengali upper-caste elite in Bengal politics (Bose, 7).

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Shifting of the refugees to the Dandakaranya was to an extent... it could be called as a fiasco, it was never successful, hardly an organized and systematic process. The refugees revolted and resisted greatly. So, in East Pakistan the near total departure of the Hindu upper-caste landed elite and urban middle-classes meant that the communal agitation had to be directed against the Hindu Untouchables. So, like I have already said, the upper-class, the elite section refugees had migrated on both sides of the border.

Their migration and resettlement was mostly self-rehabilitation, more organized, more systematic without state intervention. They could exchange their property and they faced

the least violence. Many of them associated with the national politics, and so they had idea of how things would turn out. They had migrated even before partition had taken place, not so in the case of the Untouchables and the Dalits.

So, they had to face the brunt. The ones that lacked the means to survive on their own became dependent on government relief, and so they did not they could not choose a good land, say in Calcutta, in the mainland of Calcutta. They had no choice basically; they had to resettle wherever the government wanted them to. So, lacking any caste connections, lacking networking, lacking education and fiscal power, they had to accept the government policy of dispersing them to faraway lands.

So, the government claimed that there was insufficient vacant land in West Bengal and so, this process of dispersal of the Namasudras was a way of unmaking their social mobility. Their unity was broken and so, they were scattered in refugee colonies outside of Bengal. And so Bengal politics in the post-Partition period is dominated by the traditional upper-caste elite.

When we talk of partition. we generally look at the aspect of religion without so much paying attention to the caste-class politics that deeply influenced... and so caste-class factors actually determined so many decisions, [many] decisions revolved around these two factors. The Bengal politics, like I said, in the post-partition period was dominated by the Bhadraklok section, both during the Congress regime and then during ...in the regime of the Communist party. (Refer Slide Time: 18:34)

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- The land of Dandakaranya where the untouchable refugees were settled in other states was forests in the traditional territory of tribal people, who resented this occupation. The conditions in many resettlement camps were deplorable, and grievances led to resentment and movement, which began at Mana group of camps in Dandakaranya and the refugees decided to launch a national movement for resettlement at Sunderbans area of West Bengal.
- Pannalal Dasgupta - Dandakaranya had fallen prey to the miscommunication among the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh state governments and the Dandakaranya Development Authority.
- The infrastructure, promised vociferously by the Indian Government, also failed to materialize. Electricity was not available over large areas and there was often an acute shortage of drinking water. The lack of medical services and the rough terrain led to frequent epidemics with a high rate of child mortality that unsettled the refugees.
- Dandakaranya, the mythological place of the "dark forests" where Ram was exiled, appeared to the new settlers less as a land of hope than a place of banishment. It was not surprising that, within 1964, cases of desertion began to appear in local dailies and reported in the national press.

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So, the land of Dandakaranya posed its own problem; they were originally the territory of the tribal people who resented this occupation. They did not like sharing their lands... the tribal people resented sharing these lands with the newcomers. So, the resettlement camps were deplorable; grievances led to movements and this began at Mana group of camps in Dandakaranya, where the refugees decided to launch a national movement, and they sought resettlement in the Sundarban area of West Bengal.

One of such deportees, Pannalal Dasgupta, says that the Dandakaranya project had fallen prey to the miscommunication among the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh governments and the Dandakaranya Development Authority. The infrastructure also failed to materialize. Electricity was hardly available, there would be acute shortage of drinking water, there would be lack of medical services and frequent epidemics broke out with high rate of child mortality, which unsettled and scared the refugees further.

So, we see that the refugees who were mostly illiterate people... they have their mentalscape... almost the illiterate, unlettered Dalit refugees have a way of imagining a nation, which does not always overlap with the modern machinations. They understand India as Bharatbarsha.

At the mention of Dandakaranya they would think of Ramayana. Ramayana is a popular text that everyone, regardless of one's caste, social, economic belonging understands in India. So, mention of the dark forests of Dandakaranya would immediately remind one of the mythical story, where Rama was exiled in the Dandakaranya forest.

So, it is the mythical reality that shapes the unlettered mind, the popular imagination that we have to understand. So, we have to understand that the refugees saw themselves as banished, they were as ill-fitted as the exiled Ram. By 1964, cases of desertion began to appear in local dailies and they were reported in the national press. (Refer Slide Time: 21:47)

Dandakaranya Episode through Shaktipada Rajguru's *Dandak theke Marichjhapi*

- Shaktipada Rajguru's novel, 'Dandak Theke Marichjhapi' (From Dandakaranya to Marichjhapi; Rajguru 1996), set in the 1970s, follows a group of camp refugees who are taken to Malkangiri in the Dandakaranya area. The novel opens with description of inmates in Mana transit camp:

"...uprooted from far away Bengal and like flotsam and jetsam have stopped at the infertile Mana's banks. Twenty years ago they had come, like waves, in the hope of rehabilitation in the soil of Dandakaranya. Some among them, the fortunate ones, got homesteads, but a few thousand families were left behind who were still living within the surrounding areas of the Mana camp. (Rajguru 1996, 1)"

For people that do not have, that have never participated in the mainstream political ongoings/ political happenings, mainstream political machinations happening in the larger schemes...their way of thinking merges with the mythical realities that shape the space called India. I mean they would think of India (like I said) more as Bharatvarsha and in terms of the characters and the worldview that is depicted in the two epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Dandakaranya actually harkened the notion of the banished, the exiled Rama and that is how they would see themselves. Shaktipada Rajguru's novel *Dandak Theke Marichjhapi* is set in the 1970s, and it follows a group of camp refugees who were taken to Malkangiri in the Dandakaranya area. And the novel opens with a description of the inmates in Mana transit camp. It says - "...uprooted from far away Bengal and like flotsam and jetsam have stopped at the infertile Mana's banks. Twenty years ago they had come, like waves, in the hope of rehabilitation in the soil of Dandakaranya. Some among them, the fortunate ones, got homesteads, but a few thousand families were left behind who were still living within the surrounding areas of the Mana camp" (Rajguru 1996, 1). (Refer Slide Time: 23:28)

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- In Shaktipada Rajguru's novel *Dandak Theke Marichjhapi*, Sarat Das, a camp inmate says: "For seven years we have lived on the charity doles ... what is the good of reducing us to beggars? Instead of making the entire race beggars, give us land, a little homestead, let us work and earn our keep. In these last years of our lives, let us live as cultivators as we were born. We don't want to live like beggars."
- The frustrations and aimlessness of the camp life is demeaning to human dignity, saps energy and creates a new class of people, born and raised in the camps who live a "life of charity and joblessness in the tents and sheds, in its incipient darkness of frustrations and lethargy" (Rajguru 1996, 2).

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So, one of the camp inmates in this novel says - "For seven years we have lived on the charity doles ... what is the good of reducing us to beggars? Instead of making the entire race beggars, give us land, a little homestead, let us work and earn our keep. In these last years of our lives, let us live as cultivators as we were born. We don't want to live like beggars."

So, this is dilemma, this is a quandary that faces the Dalit refugees. This is a kind of situation that emerges after partition; they were cultivators, they did not have much, but they had something.

Being reduced to beggars, the lack of dignity posed by the new life or the new circumstances, the new difficulties posed by the new life, the new difficulties posed by this life as a refugee lacked any respect, any dignity, any human dignity. And so frustrations and aimlessness and the demeaning camp life actually saps energy; it creates a new class of people.

Actually a new class of beggars, who were born and raised in the camps, who lived a life of charity, life of joblessness in tents, in sheds. So, their lives are fraught with frustrations and lethargy. We see that this is something that keeps coming back in the writings of first generation Dalit refugees, how their parents were treated, how they lost whatever little they had and they were living in sub-human conditions, inhuman treatments were meted out to them, they were seen as leeches, as social parasites on state resources that would only take from state resources without having anything to give back.

Such pejorative associations made with the image of the Dalit refugee actually paralyzed any sort of/ any kind of mobility, any kind of positivity among them. Like Rajguru notes, the darkness of frustrations and lethargy chiefly informed their existence both in the suburban areas of West Bengal and in faraway lands. So, in the next lecture, we see how this lead to further repercussions. We talk about the occupation of...how the Dalits occupy the Marichjhapi area and the state-sponsored massacres as a result of that. I end my lecture today.

Thank you.