

## **MOVES End of Project Conference**

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### **Memories in Transition: Dilemma of Home, Homeland and Spaces of Belonging in 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Partition Migrants in West Bengal**

#### **Abstract-**

This paper will investigate the specific affective responses of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation partition migrants related to grief, sorrow and anger when they recall their family histories of forced migration. Within the process of coming in terms with the sense of loss and unsettled identities, a continuous action of remembering and forgetting takes place in the attempt to constantly recreate the self and the surroundings. I will use the interviews of fifteen 2<sup>nd</sup> generation partition migrants to read how they respond to the current politics of a majoritarian 'Hindutva' governing system given their own histories of being identified as 'immigrants' and 'refugees', and living all their lives with a status of being outsiders. The paper will also provide a close reading of the linguistic markers of 'othering' present within the interviews by focusing on the use of certain deixis that indirectly refer to the notion of being in a state of in-between (in-between spaces, in-between identities and in-between homes). The larger purpose of reading the interviews in this light is to find the signifiers of post-memory and understand how post-memory gets re-created and relived every time the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants attempt to make sense of who they are and where do they actually belong. I also propose to explore why there is a need for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants to transfer these narratives of post-memory to their next generation and how there is an urgency to redefine oneself as the 'legitimate' citizen of the India in the current socio-political scenario. The methodological tool that I will use for the analysis of the qualitative interviews is the qualitative analysis software

NVivo. This will aid me in identifying the patterns within the larger domain of the linguistic markers of the affective responses of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants and also help me detect how orality and language becomes crucial in expressing the sense of loss of belonging in these migrants' narratives.

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A small overview for those who are not familiar with the project. The project analyzes the oral narratives of 2nd generation Partition migrants who migrated from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, to India, specifically in Delhi and West Bengal during 1947. It is claimed to be the 2nd largest forced migration in human history with millions of displaced and deaths. My focus is to shift from the political meta narrative of Partition and focus on the collective amnesia or the silences in the partition migrants and descendants. The human dimension of this event and the actual narratives of people who forcefully had to migrate has been consciously omitted out of the larger political narrative.

The framework that I have taken to read these oral narratives is Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory given in the context of Holocaust narratives. She describes "Postmemory" as the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by

narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.”

- To enter into individual histories, orality is crucial. These histories can only be accessed in the form interviews or testimonies of the generation who had witnessed Partition first-hand. The willingness to talk of those incidents becomes a way to acknowledge a history of violence, trauma and loss. It becomes the first step towards breaking the silences associated with Partition History.

- Now the question that arises is why the second generation? With the coming up of alternative historiography from the 1990s, a focus has been given to record and preserve the 1st generation narratives of partition migrants. Also, as my own subject position, of someone who grew-up in a East Pakistan Displaced People's colony allotted by the government in the 1960s, I found it strange that the narratives that were so overwhelming for the 1st generation seemed to carry a different sense of conscious silencing in the 2nd generation. It was not that they were completely unaware of the history of Partition and migration that their parents carried but I was interested to understand how it shaped their understanding of who they are and where they belong.

- When talking about the sense of loss in 2nd generation partition migrants, there is a double sense of loss. What I mean by that is, firstly, they share the loss of material property, land, Physical home and a sense of settled inheritance that the 1st generation talks about. They feel they were deprived of the identity and the position in society that their ancestors had.

However, there is a 2nd sense of loss - that is - loss in remembering or recalling the family history or narratives of displacements.

- Psychologists I.G. Cohn and N.M.V. Morrison, in reference to studying the holocaust 3rd generation families talk about how the stories of trauma generally travel from the 1st to the 3rd generation. This is because of 2 reasons, firstly, the grandparents have traditionally had a practice of telling stories to their grandkids. Secondly, the first generation consciously tries to keep the 2nd generation away from the sense of trauma and loss to somehow give them a sense of normalcy and grounding. They did not want their kids to identify themselves as outsiders. But, when it comes to the third generation, they feel a sense of finality as they in their old-age. There is a necessity to transfer the legacy of narratives of who they were and how they survived. This was evident in the interview that I collected, where the second generation constantly said, neither their parents really shared a lot with them, nor they ever found the importance of wanting to know about the past. In the present, this creates a sense of loss of narratives, home and belonging.

- This brings me to my two most important concepts - Home and the sense of belongingness. Sarah Ahemed in her attempt to define home for those in move says “The journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival.” (p 330)

There is a double process of meaning making happening when it comes to the question of home for a migrant. Home is where one feels welcomed and comfortable. This has an element of hospitality to it. The first meaning of home is what and where the migrant himself/herself wants to consider his/her home. The second layer to it is whether the host community lets the migrant

consider the new place as his/her home or if they treat the migrant as the other. This is another fundamental problem the term 'second or third generation migrants' has associated with it. How long does one need to be considered as a migrant? How long will the host community treat them as outsiders? Many of my interviewees were not only offended to be called migrants but said it questions their authentic home.

Another significant observation that Ahmed too mentions and was evident in the narratives of my interviewees is a continuous shift between the voice of a collective narrative and an individual history. The narrators often talk about the East Bengal migrants as us - "everything was forcefully taken from us". Home becomes a collective home, a collective identity. The loss is a collective loss of what it means to be originally from East Bengal.

Iain Chambers, in the book 'Migrancy, Culture, Identity' defines the state of migration more than just physical movement. Chambers says -

"Migrancy... involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming - completing the story, domesticating the detour - becomes an impossibility." (p -5)

Similarly, home also is constructed and reconstructed by history, language, identity and politics. Specially in the postcolonial sense the different ways in which home interacts with the spatial, temporal and the historiography of the narratives that give shape to what one considers as one's home.