

Class Analysis of the Experience of Migration during the Partition of India

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Abstract

The paper conducts a class analysis of the human experience of migration during the Partition of India using a dataset constructed from 1000 recently published oral narrations of migrants from across the Indian Sub-Continent. The dataset collates and maps information on four key variables: 1) origins and destinations of migrants; 2) class background of migrants; 3) the mode of transport used during migration; and 4) their experience of direct or indirect violence. The paper uses satellite mapping and network analysis to develop an empirically grounded cartographic understanding of the relationships between the aforementioned variables. The results point to a sharply hierarchical story. Differences in class backgrounds are not only closely correlated with differences in the modes of transport, choice of destinations, but also the timing and intensity of a violent episode. Most importantly, experiences of migrants show greater affinity within class backgrounds and regionalities rather than religious groups. Thus, not only are discussions based on the conceptual binary of religion unable to account for the large variations in the experiential aspects of Partition, they are also unable to connect these experiences to the broader social structure of the colonial polity in the Indian Sub-Continent. By reinstating class to as an analytical category, the paper seeks to improve our understanding of the humanitarian costs and consequences of the Partition of 1947.

Keywords: Class and Migration, Partition, Partition Experience, Oral History.