

Review Paper

British India's Partition: Critiquing Entanglements of Memory and Catastrophe of Places

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to discover the heteroclitite and cohabitation of society comprising of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindu contemporary for centuries till the partition of British India in 1947 and birth of India and Pakistan. It posits a reading of experiences of the authors in a postcolonial nation, identifying the potential of victim's articulations of the traumatic Partition drawing upon contemporary scholarships such as the likes of Khushwant Singh, Sadat Manto, Yasmin Khan, Abdullah Hussein and Amrita Pritam. The paper deliberately avoids the conventional analysis of Partition narrowly conflating it with newly assumed religious identities of the refugees. Through this partition reading, an attempt is made to show the fissures that accompany the progressions and developments of an identity formed on the basis of religion in a postcolonial encounter, the trauma of which does not actually translate into a purely communal consciousness. By exposing religion as a force that restrained victims in the name of - honor and spirituality, writings show that identity shaped in the case of refugees is highly intricate and psychologically nuanced.

Keywords: Partition, Identity Crisis, Patriarchy, Political influence and Religious Freedom.

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of British India in 1947, was one of the first events of decolonization in the 20th century making the subcontinent sliced into two states- Hindu dominated India and Muslim dominated Pakistan. Communities, who lived together for centuries, assailed each other in a gruesome spate of sectarian violence. The bloodshed was intense with mass murders, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and savage sexual violence. Thousands of women were raped, and many of them were then blemished or mutilated in Punjab and Bengal-provinces adjoining India's borders with West and East Pakistan.

Though, the Partition of British India assured both political and religious freedom to its people, but instead, the geographical divide brought dislodgment and death,

misery and sorrow, benefitting few at the expense of the very many. The Hindus and the Muslims stood up against each other during the process of extrication. The Sikhs and the Parsis were trampled between both of them. Even in the post-independence era, it became a model of brutal conflict resolution raised and imitated by national and spiritual extremists and the hawkish politicians and enterprises of India and Pakistan. It overshadowed the significance of freedom and liberty because of its direct impact on the lives of people and with each passing year the relationship between the two states worsened more and more.

The study investigates the entanglements of memory and the catastrophe of places in the context of partition, as projected in the literary works of Khushwant Singh, Sadat Manto, Yasmin Khan, Abdullah Hussein and Amrita Pritam.

Sadat Manto's Toba Tek Singh

Sadat Manto's thinking about Partition is "of (raped women's) bloated bellies—what will happen to those bellies?" Would the offspring "belong" to Pakistan or India?"(www.livemint.com) He is perhaps one of the most sarcastic witnesses to the gruesome genocide that accompanied the birth of the two nations. Sadat Manto in Toba Tek Singh offers a sharp critique on partition through his witty and double-edged metaphor of madness. The author depicts how geography and human psychic identity shares a strong emotional relationship. Toba Tek Singh crystallizes the whole anger and philosophy of the people at this occasion. Identity is basically, intrinsically and inextricably connected to native soil. Set in a madhouse, Manto uses madness as a metaphor for sanity. A couple of years after the Partition of the country, Governments of India and Pakistan decided that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be shifted to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India. One such asylum was located in Lahore, Pakistan. The inmates of the asylum were unable to comprehend its meaning: "As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing. That was why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India? The uncertainty of nationhood is articulated when we are told that one madman got "caught up in this whole confusion of Pakistan and Hindustan and Hindustan and Pakistan that he ended up considerably madder than before"(Allen, Trivedi 352) The central Sikh character Bishan Singh had gone mad fifteen years ago and everyone in the asylum used to call him Toba Tek Singh after the name of his village. Before the partition, his family members used to visit him but after the division nobody could be seen. He frequently asked his inmates

whether Toba Tek Singh, is in India or Pakistan, but nobody knew the answer. One day, his old Muslim friend Fazal Din visits him and informs him that his family has safely gone to India to whom he again asks, "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" To which his old friend replies, "In India ... no, in Pakistan." He wanted to go back to his native village Toba Tek Singh, where he was born and "Without saying a word he walks away murmuring 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhyana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan dur fittey moun'. (Rushdie, West, 29) The transfer of inmates took place on a freezingly winter evening where Hindu and Sikh lunatics were boarded on buses and taken to the border. When Bishan Singh was asked to register, he enquired from the concerned official about his village Toba Tek Singh? The official told him that it is now a part of Pakistan. Hindustan and Pakistan are individual identities that have been intentionally created and Bishan Singh successfully confronts all efforts for any such identities to be forced upon him. Many efforts were made to make him understand that Toba Tek Singh will soon be moved to India but it had no effect on Bishan Singh. He stood up in no man's land with his bloated legs. Since he was a simple harmless old man, nobody even made an effort to move him to India or Pakistan and just before sunrise, Bishan Singh collapsed on the ground. Thus, behind barbed line on one side lay India and on the other side lay Pakistan and in between them lay Toba Tek Singh. For this reason, Manto's Toba Tek Singh is an account on how partition resulted in displacement and thus caused identity issues amongst people. The hero of the story preferred to die in no man's land rather than making a choice between Hindustan and Pakistan. In Toba Tek Singh, the author apart from questioning the two-nation theory is also calling the basic idea of nationhood as the critical basis of identity.

Yasmin Khan's the Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan

Yasmin Khan, a Politics Lecturer at the University of London In "The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan" strongly confesses how this political decision affected the lives of common masses. In the name of religious cleansing, people were forced to migrate to the other side of the border. Punjabi Muslims who opposed pressure were removed by Pakistan Military. Many people buried their jewels near their ancestral homes, thinking that they will come back to their native places once the violence will slow down. People were not ready to move as their identities were emotionally related with their native places. Eventually, partition led many migrants ending up losing their lives, homes, property and their loved ones. Once, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister Of India, who supported partition, visited a filthy refugee camp, a grief-stricken young man came to him and slapped him on his face and yelled at him. People were suffering because of hunger, medical facilities and basic amenities as local shops and hospitals were hard to find due to communal pressures and curfews. Women became targets of nationalist and religious feud. According to official estimates, 83,000 women were abducted by men of other sects. Approximately, one-third of those females who were recovered aged less than twelve years. Some had their private parts damaged badly and slogans like Pakistan Zindabad and Jai Hind carved on their breasts. Many of them committed suicide to escape rape and forced conversion. Yet amidst the amazing mayhems that accompanied partition, there were altruism moments as people helped their close ones belonging to other communities, often putting their own lives at risk. Though partition was not expected but the choice to divide British India is often accredited to the broken relationship between the anti-imperialist Indian National Congress and its former ally, the Muslim League. At the outset, the

League called for an agreement that would have allowed Muslims to exercise some self-government within a federal but united India. But the proposal failed to get acceptance in 1946 and on the contrary, riots broke out in Calcutta in which within three days at least 4,000 people died. The author highlights the division and creation of two countries as vague and amorphous as even at the dawn of independence, there were no clear cut maps outlining borders of the new born states. All these resulted in identity crisis by cutting the people all from their real roots. Partition brought into light the critical issues of nationality, patriotism, faith, and individuality and how they can be influenced by imperial powers and ambitious local politicians.

Abdullah Hussein's the Weary Generations

Abdullah Hussein's *The Weary Generations*, tastefully produced English version of Udas Naslein translated by the novelist himself for UNESCO Collection of Represented Works depicts generational weariness and comprehend the historical origins of the tensions in the Indian subcontinent. The novel gives a spectacular account of the pervasive cynicism and seismic cataclysm of the Partition era that lead to the birth of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The opening epigram of the novel quoted from *The Book of Isaiah* hints at the overwhelming sense of terror in his heart, or more aptly, in the narrator's heart 'And (The people) shall look into the earth; and behold trouble and darkness.' However, this epigram may be more analytical of the mood of the general public, and not Naim's who the main character of the novel. The protagonist, Naim, son of a peasant lost his arm while fighting for Britishers during World War I. He later marries Azra, the daughter of a rich landlord. After India's independence in 1947, his morals and ethics swept away when he realized that, Muslims have to migrate to Pakistan as they are no longer safe in their Indian homes. Naim Beg is constantly pulled away by some invisible hand, frustrating his personal sense of honor

and duty, leaving him at the end of the novel as an unnerved, unfulfilled hero. The novel is actually a representation, intended to raise the terror resulting from the awful inefficiencies of the Indian and Pakistani governments. The novel is an account of modern India reflecting the anguish of entire generations, its inertia of spirit and the misery of a battle fought, then lost due to the enemy within.

Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, describes the division of a united India into a "Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan", through an omniscient narrator. It highlights the pointlessness of blaming the other religious group for the ill-fated event "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame" (Singh 1). According to him, "*The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped*" (Singh 1). The novel opens in an imaginary village Mano Majra, a village on the Indo-Pak border, illustrating how it gets involved in the bloodshed and carnage during the partition. *Train to Pakistan* pictures an emotional description of the tragedy of Partition where initially the environment was peaceful and villagers belonging to different sects lived happily together. Mano Majra remains unaffected as the sub-inspector of police says: 'No communal trouble in the area?'... 'We have escaped it so far, sir' (Singh 20). The village has a railway junction and only three brick buildings—one to Gurdwara, one to the mosque and one to Lala Ram Lal, the Hindu money lender—stand there as monuments of religious synchronization. The villagers are farmers and coolies and only few of them pursue religion as a profession and that too because of necessity and not because of choice. Life in Mano Majra runs according with the train schedule. Train is highly symbolic of Mano Majra life. Coming of a train in the morning towards Lahore means the dawn, while the reverse ends people's daily activities. The Sikhs were basically

landowners, and the Muslims their tenants and the district magistrate is Hukam Chand, a Hindu. Infact, a perfect model of simple and peaceful life and interracial harmony. Into this calm and peaceful setting, arrives a group of dacoits who kills Lala Ram Lal and a local gunda - Juggat Singh gets detain because of his relations with the decoit, though at the time of the hapenning, Juggat Singh was with his Muslim beloved and went out of the village. Jugat Singh comes from a rowdy family but lately fells in love with Nooran who is the blind mullah Imam Bakshi's only daughter. Khushwant Singh has used the main character of Juggut Singh, a local gunda to emphasize the significance of love in saving compassion and sympathy. His relationship with Nooran, who is a Muslim girl, hints at the incompetence of the dissimilarities and hostility on the basis of religious. The days suddenly started appearing to be very bleak for the multi religion communities. "*Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as through the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it...*" (Roy,37) The village soon becomes a battleground of differing identities and with new refugees and mobs in the village. Refugee camps had come up for the Muslims so that they can be moved to Pakistan. Mano Majra is suddenly alarmed into the harsh reality of mass flight. The magistrate wanted to remove Muslims from the village. Plots started hatching; rumors of death and devastation in other towns and villages spread like fire. The train to Pakistan is concerned friends became enemies and ethnicities of brotherhood and peaceful coexistence started disappearing. In *Train to Pakistan* the social setting revealed that Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made the traditional set up of the Punjabi society in the pre-partition India. Culture, language and customs contributed to the larger Punjabi identity though at a certain level was divided into communal identity.

Apart from an identity created on the basis of religion, another identity was also created and i.e., the identity of place. Mano Manjra, is typical of the rural Punjabi life representing a religious harmony; identity and belongingness. The Hindu and Sikh villagers were told that there will be an attack on the next train to Pakistan and they have to assist. Adding to the dismay of their situation, the villagers comprehend that the next train to Pakistan will actually be carrying the Muslims from their village and the situation becomes all the more personal when Jugga came to know that Noorah is also one of the passenger. The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people-Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs were in fight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of Northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. The only remaining cases of peace were a scatter of villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier. One of these villages was Mano Majra. (Singh 1). The relationship between Jugga and Noorah and Jugga as a savior proves that, despite the death, carnage and madness, people can choose to be different, to walk a different path, even if that path might be one of self-sacrifice. The novelist while portraying the tragedy of partition also portrayed Punjabi culture and identity. It made the social sense of our nation as loutish, created a sense of retaliation and distorted the political rulings. Worst of all, it unhinged the compassionate moral rightness of the villagers. The novel taught us the lesson that pointless assassinations, pillaging and raping will not take us anywhere and the idyllic thing is to happily live together.

Amrita Pritam's Pinjar

In *Pinjar*, Amrita Pritam argues that flouting of the women on both sides of the border is parallel to how division itself despoiled the nation. The short novel is in Punjabi and is being translated in English by Khushwant Singh. The novel depicts the

position and nature of the Indian society during the time of partition of India in 1947. As part of the violence, looting and settling of scores that accompanied partition, there was mass abduction of thousands of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu women by men of the "other" sect. The abducted women were brutally raped, murdered and converted to other religion and were also forced to marry. After subsequent efforts made by the governments on both the sides to locate and moving them to their respective homes, many families didn't accept their daughters back out of the fear that they will bring disgrace to their family. Amrita Pritam very competently portrayed the status and condition of women by pouring her own experiences into the novel. The novel revolves around the protagonist Puro. The status of women in Pinjar is to represent how the nation's status was dishonored during Partition. Puro is doted on by her own brother who is a law student and Congress activist, Trilok. She is engaged to their family friend's son Ramchand by her father Mohanlal who is a musician and a liberal aesthete. But only few days before her wedding, Puro is abducted and carried off on horseback by the swarthy and dark Rashid Sheikh, who is both obsessed and bowed on to take a revenge for his family's honor. Rashid always desired a beautiful marriage with Puro but undergoes tremendous pain when Puro fails to reciprocate his genuine feelings. Mohanlal meanwhile had to Although Rashid stops forcing himself on Puro but Mohanlal in order to save his family honor quietly replaces Puro's younger sister Rajjo as bride to Ramchand, spreading the story that Puro suddenly expired. Puro, meanwhile escapes from Rashid's house one night and returns home thinking that they will accept her but to her shock and horror they tell her to go back. She numbly and unwillingly accepts Rashid as her husband and an Islamic name Hamida, which is tattooed on her arm. She further suffers from a painful miscarriage, an inexorably bitter relationship with Rashid

and the constant pain of losing her family. However, Puro finds some consolation in raising the child of a mad Hindu woman who died during childbirth, the baby after some time was taken away from her because the Hindu elders of the village did not want the child to be raised in a Muslim family. During partition, in the confusion of refugee caravans and camps, the surviving members of Mohanlal's and Ramchand's families endure the further catastrophe of a second abduction-that of the pregnant Lajo, Trilok's wife. Puro on learning about her sister in law, goes to find and save her along with Rashid. This finally leads to a nervy subplot ending in a heartrending reunion in Lahore, in which Lajo and Puro-unlike most of the abduct women of 1947-each gets to choose her own future. Authors idea of cultural community and identity confirms to a communal history of Punjab's shared cultural ciphers, images and environment. Amrita Pritam's emotional state of being a refugee and a Partition victim, acted as an impulse to her writing expressions and provided an alternative voice of history, identity and this barbaric division of the states. The fact that partition was used as a means to control and merge political power was very well acknowledged by Amrita Pritam. She very well knows that woman in this patriarchal society had no role to play in this significant cataclysm. The novel projects women as neglected section of the society, she is not accepted by the family if by chance she becomes a victim of sexual abuse or if her virginity is broke. And apart from projecting a holocaust of women's status, the novel also challenges the communalist production of clash between the Hindus and Muslims.

CONCLUSION

The Partition writers have critically analyzed the situation and projected the entanglements of memory and the catastrophe of places in almost all their novels. People were attached with their home and were not ready to shift but due to religious ethnic cleansing they were forced

to migrate. People related their identities and were emotionally attached with the places where they were living from centuries and partition acted as a set back to their identity. While migrating frequent incidents of rape, molestation, loot, murders became quiet heard of. People were only left with memories of their home, their friends and neighbors. Though many people thought that they will come back to their native places but this situation turned even worst with the passage of time.

The writer's viewpoints made sense to the 'elites', 'subaltern, the, urban dwellers and the rural folks. Hindus and Muslims were outraged, in equal measure, which portrayed that the partition, a man-made upheaval brought about by contemptuous and confrontational politicians who lacked in resolving the issues and the foresight to grab the insinuation of division along religious lines.

The writers gave a human angle to the problem of partition. They stood, in the main, for humanism, brotherhood, forbearance, harmony, respect for people of all sects, to women's dignity, inter-religious marriages, preserving the common language, culture, customs and tradition and veracity of the country. They were against the religious acrimony, and any kind of prejudices. The writings are marked by emotional outburst against this human tragedy that followed political upheavals, large-scale massacre, annihilations, displacements, and forced migrations. Most poignant are those occasions where the author is woven around the dilemma of the aged, women and children. In this sense, Jason Francisco has rightly said "The literature does what religious leaders in each community failed to do: to make communities forces for the affirmation of humanity broadly, and to forge nations-if nations are the destinies of cherished traditions-dedicated to human improvement, dedicated precisely to virtuous conduct with those of different faith (Baert, Koniordos, Procacci, Ruzza – Pg 37) Many times, what actually has not been known is

actually told by writers with their wide experience and excesses of the man's world in their narrations.

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