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A Study of Partition Experience in the Writings of Select Writers of India and Pakistan

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Abstract

Partition encompasses the division of a given territory peacefully and efficiently. The Partition of India in 1947, sordidly, led to a holocaust. The Holocaust took one million lives and an equal number being either displaced or rendered *missing* or *refugee* (Mufti 55). The **Partition**, ironically, has become bread and butter to politicians and capitalists on both sides of the border. Invariably these state operators are being operated by some non-state actors residing thousands of miles away from the site of strife and safe from being suspected or implicated. Surprisingly, little fiction of considerable importance and proportion on the Partition is available. The available literature is, again, not proportionate to the effects it had on the lives of people. The problem is not indecipherable though. Partition is a significant issue in the history of India and Pakistan with an ever-evolving pertinence. Now and then it rises from its ashes and claims lives. Sometimes the losses are of catastrophic proportion. There is no particular intellectual or rational constant on which a writer can delve for a long time while handling it. Emotions have always taken the upper hand while discussing Partition. The Partition and its ever-changing algorithm are comparable with the Israel-Palestine issue in the Middle-East. This paper has steered clear of such lopsided emotional discourses and focussed on the *feel* the **universal vibes** in the writings of some prominent writers of Pakistan and India who saw the dark days of Partition and subsequently ventilated their experiences in prose and verse.

Through the looking glass of their writings, this paper will look -within the limited span of a research paper, of course- at the fate of humanity during a tumultuous phase in the history of two-nations, many partitions.

Keywords: Partition, History, India, Pakistan, Religion.

During the Partition of India, religious frenzy and bigotry occupied the Indian subcontinent. People acted like beasts and slaughtered fellow beings. Religious frenzy got the better of everything humane. Individuals from Pakistan and India killed one another. One of the poets who wrote about the trauma brought about by the Partition and the agony that humanity suffered was Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984). He was a Pakistani poet and author who lamented about the atrocities, which emanated from the Partition and how different people went through various brutalities (Mufti 58).

Muslims who lived in India had to migrate to Pakistan while Hindus who were living in the Pakistani region were forced to move to India and left behind all their belongings. They left ancestral homes, culture, as well as tradition. Women were the most considerable sufferers as



they were sexually assaulted, abused, tortured and even abducted by men who came from the opposite communities (Purohit 92).

Ahmad considered freedom of people from primitive mindset to be of similar importance as freedom from colonial rule. He wrote about the horrible killings, loss and the sad state of affairs. The mass murder occurred at the expense of innocent people appealing for sympathy during the bloodshed. The writings of Ahmad embody the sufferings of the nameless millions who had no control over their fate.

He lived in a community full of communal conflict between the Muslims and Hindus (Purohit 93). A leftist, he stood against capitalistic and imperialistic forces. He was driven to engage in reportage and literature that highlighted the plight of common masses. His writings attempted to lend society some sense of direction. He fought against political and social exploitation that was evident in his nazm.

Another novelist who wrote about the Partition was Khushwant Singh (1915-2014), an Indian novelist. One of the acclaimed novels of Singh is *Train to Pakistan*, which he wrote in 1956. In this novel, Singh talks about the Muslims and Sikhs who used to live together in peace for long periods. The story revolves around the riots between the Hindu and Muslims that occurred in 1947 following the Partition (Dar 21). The *Train to Pakistan* shows the bitter truth of independence. Singh gives information regarding the religious practices of Muslims and those of the Sikhs in the rural area of India. The methods also included Muslims and Sikhs offering their daily prayers.

The main character in the *Train to Pakistan* is Mano Majra, which is a fictional village with a railway station on the India-Pakistan border. The novel is about a man who fights against his thoughts on whether it is correct to be in front of fifty men who are armed and are waiting to kill several of his species. In the novel, Lala Ram Lal, whose is the only Hindu family in the village, is murdered by the Malli gang. Another gang plans to attack the train, which was taking the Muslims of Mano Majra to Pakistan (Dar 22). The group plans to kill the innocent, unsuspecting passengers. The magistrates and the police were not capable of stemming the rising tide of violence. They intended to save the train but feared for their lives.

The novel shows how religion and love can make people do the unthinkable. Such a stark contradiction! One makes us cry in pain, anger, hopelessness, rage, and despair; the other makes us scream in ecstasy, selfless sacrifice, hope, surprise, and disbelief. Mano Majra entangles in a quagmire where people value the lives of others based on religious beliefs, political affiliations, and the caste system. The novel depicts that love exists in followers of different religions. Love could have been used to prevent the tragedy, and loss of life could have been avoided (Dar 23).

The Sikhs who live in this border village have heard about the mass killings, gang rapes, as well as looting of the Muslims, Hindus, and the Christians. These people are enraged at how the nation has lost law and order and planned to attack the Muslims who intend to leave British India. The train has many passengers who aim at migrating to regions free from attacks and killings. Some individuals sit on the train roof with ropes tied across the bridge. Ideally, in the novel, Singh mixes satire with compassion and exposes the aspect of corruption, which is evident in India (Mufti 79).

Religious persecution is also evident as the Hindus were forced to move to India while the Muslims were to go to Pakistan notwithstanding the history of their families. It led to the displacement of some families. As refugees flee, they face violence on a range of occasions. For deportation, trains were used to deport the Muslims to Pakistan. These people could neither connect to the outside world nor engage in commerce (Hartnack 250). The trains were full of



passengers that made the village dangerous and unsafe. The community began to decay such that the people of varying religious divides like the Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs could no longer depend on one another. Some civilians were forced to assist in military attacks, which left them in a dilemma as they could help in the massacre of innocent Muslims.

Additionally, Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) was also a novelist of the Partition. She was an Indian novelist. She is the first woman poet and novelist who wrote in the Punjabi language. She has been translated into foreign languages and many Indian languages (Virdee 50). One of her works was *Pinjar* or *The Skeleton* in which Pritam talked about violence against the females and how people lost their lives during the Partition. A memorable character in this novel is Puro who is a living victim of the violent acts against humanity during and because of the Partition of India.

In the novel, Rashid, a Muslim, abducts Puro, a Hindu girl, to avenge an ancestral row. Puro manages to successfully run back to her parents from the home of Rashid. Eventually, the Hindu girl was forced into marriage away from her home. After the forced marriage, Puro gets pregnant but becomes depressed since she conceived from rape. Even though she miscarried, she learned that Rashid loved her and even repented his evil deeds. In the novel, it is evident that thugs kidnapped Lajjo and Puro is aware of the situation (Virdee 52). When Puro finds Lajjo, she joins hands with Rashid to help her escape. As such, the novel narrates the partition riots and the sufferings women faced at that time — both sides of the border experience the pain. In *Pinjar*, the violation of the destiny of women acts as a symbol - she is the mirror unto which India, the nation, can look herself. They share a similar fate of being violated. The novelist understands that the principal aim was manipulation and consolidation of political power. The women had neither voice nor choice hence confirming their mistreatment. It was the cry of women against social abuse in which they pleaded for succor. The novel is constructed at two levels -the struggle of women in the society and the Partition of India (Roy 85).

Another great writer who wrote about the burning times was **Saadat Hasan Manto** (1912-1955). He moved over to Pakistan after the Partition. A conscious and conscientious author Saadat wrote hard-hitting, choking and plaguing truths rampant in during before and immediately after the Partition on the western side of the Radcliffe Line. It may be the story on and of the eastern side as well or of every other place with a similar destiny and people with the same predicament. He dared to write the hush matters that others on both sides could only talk within the four walls or offer veiled references to in writings.

Some may not call him a writer with mass appeal but he, beyond intellectual musings, was the writer who thought about the masses, lived among the masses and wrote about the masses. His style was forceful and expression hard hitting. He believed in writing the truth in a language that was literally of the masses. The precise reason his legacy lives on. His trial for obscenity in undivided India and later in Pakistan shattered him emotionally and financially and might be the reason he left this ungrateful world prematurely. He chronicled the riots and chaos and more so everything that happens and happened in between. His stories portrayed darkness in the society and the decline in human values, which was evident during the Partition (Purohit 94). Manto's writings reflected on the innate moral-impotence and hypocrisy in the sordid saga of darkness called Partition. He could show the madness, lust, and recklessness because he wrote what he saw first-hand.

One of his first stories *Tamasha* is about the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. The event triggered violent protest across the length and breadth of the country and giving a potent reason



to take up arms against the Raj. The following years witnessed a spike in the number of ambushes and mechanized armed movement in the form of the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army).

These activities gradually crippled the British administration in India. During his period, the revolts and attacks in Bengal and Punjab increased manifold. As such, the regional administration became paralyzed.

Importantly, Manto talked about life in Bombay and the ugly beauty it showed. There was the unleashing of sectarian horrors on the streets. He experienced the eruption of communal violence in the region. Bombay Talkies fired him from the job of a screenwriter since he was a Muslim. The novelist feared for the safety of his family and was forced to flee the city where he lived to find refuge somewhere else (Tiwari 51). He moved to Lahore in Pakistan. Manto had a deep empathy for the sex workers and women who lived on the societal margins even though other people could not write about those themes at that time. The stories led to his trial charges on six occasions.

Manto was a Muslim who lived in a cosmopolitan city whose population was made up of Sikhs, Jews, Parsis, as well as Christians. In the city, workers in the textile industry huddled in cramped tenements. He spent his formative years as a film writer in Bombay. This place was full of contradiction and contrast, which is still evident in any modern city. The environment provided the writer with anonymity, which allowed him to sculpt his own identity, as well as escaping the moralization of busybodies (Tiwari 55). As the events of the Indian-Pakistani border intervened, Manto was forced to be defined by religious identity. The shock became immense to him due to the aspect of identity-based on the religion of an individual. Nevertheless, Manto did not shrink from telling the truth due to his sense of humanity and cosmopolitan bent of mind.

Manto weaved the stories about the happenings during the Partition with an uncaring bluntness. Women always suffer or are made to bear the brunt of any upheaval. He dares to question the powers that be.

He portrays the marginalized. He confronts the male hegemony. The society which allows a man to do his will should have the moral courage to face the naked reality portrayed in his writings. Most of his stories about fallen women, as well as the sex workers did not shy away from writing about the sub-human condition of their survival. In his works, he chronicled the lives of women who lived in the marginalized society. He explored the inner realms of the lives of those women (Hartnack 247) - women who are mothers, sisters, and even cousins.

The females fight battles inside and outside and go through a range of experiences as they grow up on the brink of independence of India. As they grow up, the world where they live is seen to disappear and looks vague, meaningless, morphed. The dark underbelly of man's lust becomes evident. The carnal longing waits for *partitions* to happen so it may satiate its thirst. Ironically, Manto slaps such men hard in the anti-climactic story **Thanda Gosht** (Cold Meat). This story ends with the protagonist discovering that the woman he has kidnapped with intent to rape is already dead, cold meat.

His characters traverse the identity paths in most cases. They search and break paradigms in their ways. The stories also bring out the themes of feminism and sexuality of the females. The stories give a terrifying memory of what women experienced during the Partition (Steele 109).

The pathetic case of women given away in marriage to aged men shows what miserable state they had. Their plight is reflected well in his stories. Post marriage, the old men tucked girls away in their houses like valuables. The unfulfilled physical longing of the newly married girls whose husbands cannot fulfill their desires also becomes an essential subject in Manto's stories. In



essence, women are used as protagonists to map their specific anguish as opposed to the males (Steele 112).

The rootedness of women's attachment to their families and ancestors was strong to the extent that they could be easily wrenched away across the borders of India and Pakistan. However, the reaction of most women was vehement as they did not want to leave their homes (Steele 114). They could not resist migrating anymore as they started thinking in distress about the loved ones, hence were swayed by the suffering. They could not be at peace even when they remained at home since the family members had moved to a different place.

All these writers described the problems that the poor and middle-class in India and Pakistan faced before and after their independence. An outlook of rationalism is depicted in the religious values of individuals an aspect that makes it easy for the powerful hypocrites in the society to exploit the weak. The primary aim of the works was to arouse public awareness regarding colonialism, the feudal system, corruption, as well as the freedom movement in India (Roy 78). In Manto's case, however, the statements he made in his writings were controversial making the government warrant his arrest (Roy 83). Both Faiz and Manto wrote about the views of the communists, which promoted communism. Both were harassed and humiliated by an over-reactionary and suspicious Pakistan government which was against socialists and communists. The nascent nation (Pakistan) leaned towards the US as a matter of policy because socialist USSR influenced India.

Conversely, when individuals at the border of India and Pakistan were growing up, Partition was more of a family story than a historical event. The migration and events that occurred during the time turned some of their families half into Pakistani while the remaining half was Indian. Due to the Partition, some of them could not even visit their relatives. It also forced them to live in multi-ethnic communities, which were composed of migrants (Hartnack 245).

Conclusion

Ideally, acknowledgment of the entwined nature of Partition of India needs discussion at length. Novelists, writers, and playwrights talked about it, and the complicated truths are revolving around it. The countries are stuck in violence towards their minorities, and the cause of the disorder is the Partition. Blood brothers who fought shoulder to shoulder to drive out the English and imperialism bated for each other's blood after the Partition. Two nations were born. Heroism, chivalry, brotherhood lost to distrust, resentment, and bloodbath. What they gained in the freedom they lost to Partition.

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