

The Continued Pain of Refugees: The Study of Selected Partition Narratives

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Abstract

1947 Partition is one of the most crucial events of the Indian History which has divided a country into two: India and Pakistan that is followed by violence, forceful migration, massacre, rape, abduction but unfortunately 'official history' does not record the personal experiences of ordinary people who have to endure trauma and sufferings due to partition. There are umpteenth of writers such as Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, Qurratulain Hyder, Yashpal, Bapsi Sidhwa and others who have projected the pain and trauma of millions that how macro - political events affect the micro lives.

During Partition, many people were uprooted from their homeland, thousands of women were abducted and raped and millions of people were killed hence, it's difficult to weave their stories. In Partition narratives, multitudinous writers have portrayed the pain and agony of refugees who have been forcibly migrated and have to leave everything behind. However, ironically, histories don't record their trauma. The present paper will focus on the psyche of refugees of 1947 Partition to understand the trauma and sufferings of those who have been the victims as well as the witnesses of such horrendous event.

Keywords: 1947 Partition, Official History, Trauma, Victims.

Easy to divide land
but to break the heart in two
is the devastation of a lightning strike.
Such exile!
Not only land,
Our ancestry, culture, history forever lost
Like a political orphan cast aside,
Sometimes here, sometimes there,
Never knowing what my fate will be.

Arjan Shad's "The Blind Smoke"
(Pandey 376)

The 1947 Partition had divided and truncated united India on the basis of religion that is followed by massacred, arson, rape, abduction and, displacement. Millions of people were uprooted, thousands of women were raped, abducted and, a million people died in the span of a few months. Consequently, the 1947 Partition is considered one of the gory events of world history. The scars of the event are still unhealed even after seventy years of the Partition. Therefore, the wounds of the event are still fresh as its outcomes could be felt in tragic events such as the Indo-Pak war, the Kargil war, terrorist attacks, demands for separate lands like Khalistan and Gorkhaland. No other event has left such a huge impact than 1947 Partition and it is still instilled in the collective minds of the people.

Undoubtedly, the people from both sides were hugely affected and it's an arduous task to express their trauma and sufferings. Alok Bhalla remarks: "The violence it unleashed was unprecedented, unexpected and barbaric" (vii). Alok Bhalla has aptly remarked as how someone could forget the violence that has made him homeless and lost his friends, family, and relatives. One should wonder if Partition was such a horrendous event then why 'official history' not gave the space to the voices of ordinary people. Why were they marginalized in official accounts? Was it a deliberate attempt as it's impossible to forget those who had suffered the most in the process of nation-building?

The outcomes of Partition have influenced umpteenth of writers such as Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, Yashpal, Chaman Nahal, Bapsi Sidhwa, Qurratulain Hyder, Krishna Sobti and others to

highlight the other side of independence which is ignored by historians. Thus, literature keeps aside history and tries to dig out the event from the spectacles of ordinary people. It doesn't deal with the causes of the tragedies but focuses on the consequences and results of the event. Neena Arora writes: "If one looks deeply at the whole gamut of Partition literature, it appears that apart from portraying the ordeal of Partition, or expressing their sense of rage, anguish, hatred, anger or loss, the writer seems to questioning the ultimate benefit or validity of such events to the mankind" (17). The perspective of each writer may vary from each other but they all condemn the barbaric acts perpetrated on innocents. The present chapter is the critical study of two characters such as Lala Kanshi Ram from Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Kamal from Qurratulain Hyders' *River of Fire* to focus on the trauma of refugees during 1947 Partition. The chapter projects the plight of Hindu refugees through Lala Kanshi Ram and Muslim refugees through Kamal.

Lala Kanshi Ram is the protagonist who belongs to a Hindu family of Sialkot. He becomes the mouthpiece of Chaman Nahal as he and his family suffer in the same way the writer had gone through during Partition. The idea of Partition disturbs Lala Kanshi Ram's peaceful and composed life. He has a deep attachment with his homeland and the thought of leaving it scares him. The thought of Partition saddens him. He contemplates about his hard work and how he built his home and toiled to make a comfortable life for his family. He remarks despondently, "Everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created" (Nahal 39).

The thought of the separation of the country makes him deplorable. Lala Kanshi Ram's trauma becomes the national trauma as millions of people have suffered the same fate in 1947 Partition. Nahal portrays Lala Kanshi Ram's trauma of leaving his homeland where he is born and thereupon, his pain becomes inexplicable and inconsolable. He writes: "Lala Kanshi Ram could not sleep at all that night. It became clear to him how vulnerable the minority community was and that soon he too might have to leave. 'Refugee, refugee, indeed!' he shouted, when he understood the word, 'I was born around here, this is my home – how can I be a refugee in my own home?'" (Nahal 130). His memories with his home and his homeland perturb him. He feels as an outcast and to live as a refugee would be the most traumatic phase of his life. The writer depicts the emotional plight of Lala Kanshi Ram and his attachment from his roots where he is born.

Through Lala Kanshi Ram, readers witness the barbarities perpetrated on gullible such as his daughter and son-in-law were killed in Partition violence, Hindu women's naked parade, looting, and killing are such examples of brutalities perpetrated on innocents. Lala Kanshi Ram and His wife, Prabha Rani loses all the hopes after the news of their daughter's murder and being the witness of endless attacks on ordinary people however, they successfully reach to India. In Delhi, Lala Kanshi Ram endures the same situation and humiliated by officers who are unable to provide the place where he could stay with his family. He ignores his self-respect and pleads again and again, "Sir, I'll will be ruined if you don't come to my rescue. I only want a small little shop, to be allotted to me" (Nahal 362). Through Lala Kanshi Ram, Nahal focuses on the plight of refugees and how they suffer after forceful migration.

Lala Kanshi Ram successfully sets himself in Delhi by opening a small grocery shop and Sunanda also gets independent by sewing the clothes for others. The consequences of Partition made Lala Kanshi Ram crestfallen and he also stops to wear turban which is considered the symbol of Sikhs' pride. Nahal writes: "It hurts Lala Kanshi Ram no end. From the time he set up this little shop, he had stopped wearing a turban. A turban was a sign of respect, of dignity. He had no dignity left. He now wore of a forage cap. Or he sat bare headed, advertising his humble position to the world" (Nahal 366). At the end of the novel, the author shows the transformed attitude of the protagonist who has accepted the cost of *Azadi* that everyone has to pay in the form of violence, rape, murders, and abduction. He becomes philosophic and shows no hatred against Muslims who have made him homeless and snatched his daughter, Madhu. Nahal ends his novel on a positive note with the hope of the restoration of humanity again.

The second section of the paper deals with the plight of Muslim refugee, Kamal of Hyder's *River of Fire*. Hyder has been the part of the first generation of Partition, hence being the witness of scenes of carnage that affects her immensely which could be seen in her writings. In her novel *River of Fire*, she exemplifies the relations amongst communities before and after the Partition and highlights the impacts of Partition that bring the cataclysmic change in Indian history. She writes: "Things were happening too fast and much too violently, and the world seemed to have gone quite mad" (Hyder 263).

Therefore, 1947 Partition is not merely the division of boundaries but the division of hearts too. The words such as fraternity, friendship, love, neighbourhood, and others have lost their meanings during Partition which used to tie people together.

Kamal in Hyder's *River of Fire* is represented as a patriot who loves his motherland and gets disturbed with the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims. For him, a nation is like a mother that can't be discarded like a shoe. Hyder projects how the ideology of Kamal changes with the reality of Partition. In the novel, Hyder depicts the causes which influenced Muslims to migrate to Pakistan and leaving everything behind in India. Kamal keeps in contact with Talat and others through the letters and suggests them: "continue working in London, join the Indian diaspora, but don't go to Pakistan" (Hyder 371). Kamal struggles in finding a job but he doesn't give up while he is suggested to move Pakistan by multitudinous people.

Kamal gets astonished when he is informed about the job of Harishankar in India whereas Kamal struggles in finding a suitable job for him even after being well educated. Such condition of the minority in his country makes his love diminishes for his country, therefore, he decides to go to Pakistan as his country has no opportunity to give an educated man like him. Amir Reza suggests him to come to Pakistan as this country has various opportunities for educated young people. Finally, Kamal decides to leave India and his home is also evacuated by the Indian government because it is the property of Amir Reza who has gone to Pakistan. The decision of Kamal shocks the readers but at the same time shows the plight of Indian Muslims who are disillusioned by the reality and their belonging. With heavy heart, he informs Talat about his migration to Pakistan and writes about Karachi: "Capital of the fifth largest state in the world" (Hyder 374).

Kamal meets Cyril in Pakistan who gets mesmerized with the beauty of Pakistan. Both of them plan to go to India so that Kamal could finish remaining paper works. The depiction of Kamal's journey from Pakistan to India is very symbolical as it projects how someone becomes a foreigner in his country and treated as an outsider. While before entering into India, Kamal checks his documents properly so that his presence could not be suspected. It is important to focus the psychic state of Kamal when he enters into India. Hyder writes: "... hurting through a strange, unknown land. A year ago, this was his own country, the land of his forefathers. Today, he was a foreigner here. He felt as though people were looking at him suspiciously. "You are a Pakistani," ... "Come to the police station. You ought to be in the lock up. You are a Pakistani- Muslim spy- Muslim spy" (Hyder 396).

Through Kamal, the writer shows the pangs of millions of people who have to migrate from their homeland and how their identity and country have changed by only one political decision. Kamal's situation reminds the readers his conversation with Champa who was in favour of the formation of Pakistan but scolded by Kamal, however, ironically its Kamal who leaves his country, not Champa. After coming to India, Kamal goes the home that does not belong to him but he recalls his cheerful days which he has spent with his friends and family. His memory disturbs him and takes him back to those days when he used to be the happiest person. As he enters into his house where he used to live before Partition, he "felt as though he had stepped back into the India of 1938...Exile, exile...Oh my god, why did you let me become an exile..." (Hyder 389).

Kamal's journey to India becomes one of the most emotional episodes of the novel. It depicts the pangs and trauma of an ordinary person who has to leave his motherland. Kamal's heartbreaking situation reminds the character Puri from Vishnu Prabhakar's short story "My Native Land" who comes to Lahore to refresh the memories of his homeland which he had to leave after Partition. He fills with overwhelmed emotions when he looks at his house in Lahore. The author writes: "Suddenly, he saw his house hovering in sight...He too was born there. His own children had seen the light of day her. The story of his life was all there. He got so absorbed recalling these episodes that he became totally oblivious of his surroundings" (401).

Kamal gets nostalgic and all his memories come in front of his eyes. After visiting his house, Kamal meets Champa but he finds Champa of a new India who prefers to live in her country. She becomes more beautiful, educated and wiser that makes Kamal envy to her. He also meets Tehmina and Lazo but avoids to meet Gautam and Harishankar and goes back to Pakistan. Apart from leaving India, Hyder also points out the problem of Indian Muslims in Pakistan where they are treated as 'muhajir'. Hence, they belong to neither India nor Pakistan and it is the most traumatic situation when people find that they belong to nowhere. Kamal remarks: "I am in Pakistan. I have come from India. Refugee. Muhajir. Dispalced...Muslim from Uttar Pradesh... how terrifying... Refugee... displaced..."

homeless” (Hyder 419). The above line highlights the trauma of millions who suffer from an identity crisis and for the freedom of their country is a doom rather than a blessing.

The study of two characters like Lala Kanshi Ram of Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* and Kamal of Hyder’s *River of Fire* projects the plight of both the sides of the borders. At the one side, Lala Kanshi Ram represents thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who were forcibly migrated and resettled themselves at the unknown place while on the other side, through Kamal, Hyder depicts the pangs of the Muslim community who were treated as a minority and not given the equal treatments like Hindus and Sikhs that forced them to migrate to Pakistan. Thus, the critical study of the following characters provides the pictures of the reality of Partition that has affected micro lives the most and its impact could be felt even after seventy years of it. Though the tragic past couldn’t be forgotten, through the retelling of the stories and formation of the groups could heal the deep wounds of the Partition.

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