

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY AND MEMORY: PARTITION NARRATIVES IN TRANSLATION

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These savageries pass as much in the outside world as in India under the name of communal trouble or Hindu-Muslim rioting. But these expressions have become the clichés of a stale journalese, which convey no real sensation of the phenomenon they purport to describe. Nor am I able to suggest a better alternative. I have weighed nearly all the words and phrases which the murderous ferocity of man, as distinct from his warlike ferocity, has contributed to the vocabulary of European peoples: massacre, pogrom, lynching, fusillade, noyade, St Bartholomew, Sicilian Vespers, Bloodbath of Stockholm, Bulgarian atrocities, Armenian massacres, Belsen, genocide, etc., etc., but find all of them inadequate. Their vividness has worn off. Instead of evoking horror, they would rather throw a veil of historical respectability on spectacles of mass murder, rotting corpses, gutters choked with human bodies emitting stomach-turning stench.

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI
Thy Hand, Great Anarch! (835)

Apart from its apparent socio-economic and political implications, the 1947 Partition of India carried with it germs of further change and deeper alterations. It turned the triumphant jubilation of Indian independence into an eerie experience of lament and anguish—of suffering at the loss of innumerable lives, homes and unrealised hopes, of dishonour and shame, of the pain of exile and forced mass migration, of emotional and psychological trauma that a whole generation could not overcome.

Naturally, for creative literature to capture the nuanced complexities of the experience of Partition both at personal and collective levels is a different proposition altogether from what government/institutionalised documentation or historical analysis

intends to achieve. It has a wider canvas and a greater imaginative liberty not only to depict how something happened but also to intuit, assume and predict the multilayered meanings, influences, inferences of the event from different perspectives. The short stories dealing with the various thematic concerns of Partition are, likewise, diverse in nature. They are short and pungent in thrust, focusing more on the immediate and the now—horror, bewilderment, incomprehension, sterile anger and exhausted resignation marking the passage from ignorance to self-knowledge, faith to disillusionment, disintegration to reconciliation.

Stories of Partition range from simple to complex—tales of communal riots, rape and butchering, of courage and cowardice, of loss and repentance gradually make room for stories trying to answer fundamental philosophical questions about life and death, about violence and humanity, about remembrance and forgetting, as Gyanendra Pandey (2001) succinctly sums up:

What the violence of 1947 did was to create new subjects and subject positions... After Partition, individuals, families and communities in the subcontinent remade themselves in radically altered settings. They had to struggle to overcome new fear, to gradually rebuild faith and trust and hope and had to conceive new histories—and new ‘memories’ that are in some reckonings, ‘best forgotten’. (15-16)

Temporal and psychological distancing seems to add a different edge and perspective in narration. These tales, therefore, may be broadly categorized as:

- (a) short fiction of immediate response—violence and violation find expression in these stories; anger and retribution, fear and vengeance reign supreme in these tales of communal hatred, mass insanity, individual acts of kindness or degeneration; and
- (b) short fiction that looks at Partition in retrospect and valorizes survival strategies—these are tales of acceptance, compromise and coping and dealing with the survivors of Partition atrocities who try to come to terms with the past in order to build a future for themselves.

Moving somewhat away from the categorization of Partition short stories by Alok Bhalla [in his introduction to *Stories about the Partition of India* (1999)], these two strands of stories focus primarily on the immediacy of the response they generate. The first strand foregrounds violence and its resultant emotions of terror, panic

and a blind prayer for safe escape deriving out of indiscriminate killing, looting and destruction of 'enemy' property, butchering of children, abduction and rape of women whose bodies became a site for communal contestation, mass exodus and a frenzied flight for safety across the border.

Though the larger section of the stories in the first category portrays the inhumanity latent in carnage and genocide, a handful of them such as Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's 'Parmeshwar Singh', Ghulam Abbas' 'Avtar: A Hindu Myth', Krishna Sobti's 'Where is My Mother?', 'The Coin was Transformed', Azeez Ahmad's 'Dark Nights' or Hayat Ullah Ansari's 'Grateful Eyes' direct their sympathy towards a particular community. The structural-thematic orientation of these tales foregrounds the pain and sufferings of a particular community, thereby marginalizing the 'other' community. The child protagonist Akhtar in Qasmi's 'Parmeshwar Singh' is projected as a naturally pious boy whose Muslim ideology wins over Parmeshwar Singh, whose name and figure both caricature the strength and faith of a Sikh gentleman. The story reserves its sympathy exclusively for Akhtar who, in the face of cruelty and mockery from his Sikh neighbours and friends, moves on to the Pakistan border—resplendent in the glory of Islam, alone but brave. Ghulam Abbas' 'Avtar: A Hindu Myth', similarly, shows how the Hindu Lord Vishnu, the preserver, decides to take his last Kalki incarnation as a Muslim youth to shield the minority community's interest in the immediate post-Partition period in and around Moradabad district. The perpetuation of anti-Muslim feelings by Hindu rioters and their superstitious beliefs are justifiably criticized by the resplendent figure of Kalki—on a white horse, wielding a bright sword. In these stories, Qasmi and Abbas redirect readers' sympathy to the victimized Muslim masses against Sikh or Hindu atrocities through the use of prayers from the Koran and the subversion of Hindu mythology itself.

In an exactly reversed pattern, Krishna Sobti's 'Where is My Mother?' and 'The Coin was Transformed' draw Muslim faith and integrity into question. Yunus Khan, the fearless Pathan protagonist of 'Where is My Mother?' who has witnessed the bloodbath with exultation and has participated in it, is haunted by the queries of the little Hindu girl, just as the figure of the old hapless lady of the other story, betrayed by her Muslim neighbours, continues to haunt the readers' memory.

These stories, thus, tend to overlook the fact that hatred, cruelty and self-interest are not to be associated with a specific religious

faith and its teachings, because all religions are founded on the principle of love and sharing. Rather, times like Partition help in revealing the best as well as the worst qualities in an individual. Thus, the larger section of stories in this category attempts to capture the immediate gravity of a situation and time that have thrown to the winds all order, morality and sanctity of relationship. Khushwant Singh, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ibn-e-Insha, Ibrahim Jalees, S.H. Vatsayan, Kamleshwar, Umm-e-Ummara, Kulwant Singh Virk, K.S. Duggal, Bhasham Sahni narrate with righteous anger and disbelief the horrors of the times. A cryptic use of language, a note of dark humour, a structured pattern of irony and sarcasm mark the style of these writers. Besides condemning shameless human conduct, these authors also harp on the insensitivity of a thoroughly orthodox society. Manto's stories, especially, are full of incisive directness and self-criticism that often leads to fearful realization about the hidden human propensity for evil and violence. M. Asaduddin, in his introduction to *Black Margins: Sa'adat Hasan Manto Stories*, comments on Manto, the storyteller:

The areas of human experience and the liminal spaces that he focused on relentlessly, shocked people out of their complacency into a new awareness of the reality around them. This is particularly true in the context of his writings about the partition of India...he alone had the capacity to take a hard, impassioned look at the slaughter and senseless violence let loose on the eve of India's independence, without ideological blinkers, pious posturing or the slightest trace of communal prejudice. And that is why, after half a century of independence and partition, when history is being rewritten from new perspectives and magisterial nationalist narratives are being deconstructed, the creative writer most frequently alluded to is Manto. (Memon, 2001: 9-10)

Manto's continued preoccupation with the female body, its abuse and dismembering brings the focus back to one of the major thematic concerns in these tales, namely the vulnerability of and easy access to the female body and its commoditization during periods of sporadic violence. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in their *Borders and Boundaries* (1998) and Urvashi Butalia in her *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) discuss the process of women's victimization during and after Partition. How the veiled but pre-possessive male gaze on the female body, guarded and curbed as it is otherwise by the legal, moral, social or hierarchical bounds of a society, might turn vicious at such outbursts of lawlessness is touchingly narrated in stories like 'Mozel', 'Open it' ('Khol Do') 'Cold Meat' ('Thanda Gosht') and the small skits in *Siyah Hashye*.

'Open It' is a story of pain and helplessness of an old father who kept faith in a group of young rescue volunteers to find his lost daughter Sakina during Partition-time upheavals. The grim reality suddenly unfolds as the bruised and tortured body of the unconscious girl is found nearby and brought to the camp hospital. The apparently trustworthy rescue volunteers had actually picked the girl up a long time back, raped and abused her and then left her to die by the roadside. The direct, precise narration with least authorial intrusion or comments, the structural irony invested in depicting the course of events develops a scathing edge:

One day, as they were returning to Amritsar to help a few more refugees, they saw a girl standing by the roadside. The moment she heard the truck, she began to run.

The social workers stopped the truck and ran after her.

They caught her in a field—she was beautiful and had a large mole on her right cheek.

One of the young men said to her, "Don't be frightened. Is your name Sakina?"

Her face became even paler. She didn't reply. The other young men reassured her, only then did she admit that she was indeed Sirajuddin's daughter.

The eight young men were very kind to Sakina. They fed her, offered her milk, helped her into the truck...

Many days passed—Sirajuddin received no news about Sakina... Sirajuddin again prayed for the success of the young men, and felt a little relieved. (Bhalla, 1999: 360-361)

Before the unbelieving eyes of the distraught father Sirajuddin and the bewildered doctor, the sound of male voices, especially the words 'khol do' (the doctor asking the window to be opened) makes the body move and the girl opens her legs, her almost lifeless hand moving to untie the cord of her salwar. The other story 'Mozel' is about a loud, liberal-minded, inhibition-free Jewish girl who helps the Sikh narrator save his beloved Kirpal Kaur in a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood. She had often made fun of the Sikh religion—the turban and the beard, but at the time of crisis doesn't think twice to sacrifice her own life for that of an unknown girl. 'Cold Meat', on the other hand, is a brutal story of aberrant action affecting

human psychology. In this story, Ishwar Singh (the name is as ironic as Manto's Tirlochen Singh in 'Mozel' or Qasmi's Parmeshwar Singh) is almost driven mad by his memory of dishonouring a girl already dead. However, Manto's most acclaimed short story 'Toba Tek Singh' looks at Partition-time madness through the eyes of the so-called insane inmates of a mental asylum. The irony in this story works through the various layers of allegory—the fluidity of a territorial border to demarcate and ward off emotional attachment to one's 'homeland', the 'madness' for power and authority that led to the division of the country and the symbolism of the No Man's Land where Bishen Singh breathes his last. The story raises doubts and queries regarding the judiciousness and sanity involved in partitioning India.

Yashpal's 'A Holy War', K.S. Duggal's 'Kulsum', Khwaja Ahmed Abbas' 'Revenge', S.H. Vatsayan 'Ajneya's 'Postbox', Kamleshwar's 'How Many Pakistans?' and Qudrat Ullah Shahab's 'Ya Khuda' unravel other facets of anger, pain, suffering and humiliation with reference to women and children. Questions of faith, trust, staunch religious belief, failure of inter-community communication and revenge as a means of getting even are foregrounded again and again. Moolan Tai in Yashpal's tale is killed by her Muslim neighbours as she tries to flee Lahore with the stone idol of her god. Kulsum in Duggal's story or the little boy Roshan in 'Postbox' waits expectantly for deliverance but are brutally disillusioned at the end. Bano in Kamleshwar's story remains a shadow from the narrator's past who continues to haunt his memory as her helpless suffering changes first to anger and then to contempt. The chance meeting of the narrator with his once-beloved Bano at a Bombay brothel makes him realize, "Pakistan is everywhere. It inflicts wounds on you and me. It humiliates us. It defeats us everytime..." (500) Avenging the past, for many of the Partition victims, thus, turned out to be a process of self-deprecation and self-denial.

Bhisham Sahni's 'The Train has Reached Amritsar' and 'Pali', K.A. Abbas' 'The Death of Sheikh Burhanuddin', Ibrahim Jalees' 'Grave Turned Inside-Out', Umm-e-Ummara's 'More Sinned Against than Sinning' and Attia Hosain's 'After the Storm' attempt to depict the earnest need for dialogue, negotiation and understanding between warring religious communities and their sectarian/regional identities. These stories derive their significance from a worthwhile understanding of justice, morality, the sense of right and wrong at the personal/individual level. Though often incapable of turning the tide of hatred, such subjective assessment

can rise above mass fanaticism and show jingoism, communal extremism, forced conversion, hatred for and suspicion of the 'other' community in true light. Bhisham Sahni's 'Pali' is about a little child who becomes a pawn in the hands of religious fanatics who convert him back and forth from Hinduism to Islam at their own sweet will. His Hindu parents and adopted Muslim family are touched by the trauma the child has to go through though they must submit to the whimsical diktat.

K.A. Abbas' story narrates in first person the unreasonable, almost pathological aversion of Sheikh Burhanuddin for Sikhs. The reader comes to realize that the seed for this contempt for the 'filthy' bearded clan was sown in his mind by a Punjabi friend from Rawalpindi called Ghulam Rasul. Burhanuddin, in his zeal for his new country Pakistan and his 'great leader Jinnah', keeps a safe distance from this 'stupid and idiotic' race. But ironically enough, during a riot in New Delhi, a Sikh neighbour saves the life of Burhanuddin and his family members. A repentant and deflated Burhanuddin discovers to his shame and discomfiture that the Sardarji has given up his own life for a Muslim because he wanted to repay the kindness of a Muslim called Ghulam Rasul back in Rawalpindi who protected the life and honour of his family. It reminds one of Jason Francisco's classification of Partition stories into *rupture and loss—betrayal and protest—repair and memory* (Hasan 2000: 371-393) format. He too realizes that literature is necessary because it performs the function of defeating 'the urge to lay blame, which keeps animosity alive...The literary work on the partition affirms that the subject of the partition was first the human being—not the Hindu human being, nor the Muslim, not the Sikh.' (ibid.: 392)

The stories of Ibrahim Jalees and Umm-e-Ummara focus on the difficulty of acculturation which, irrespective of a family's religious affiliation, is rooted in the soil and tradition of a place and ambience one is brought up in. The Bihari Muslim families which migrated to Bengali-speaking East Pakistan after Partition were shocked as the ideal of holy Islamic brotherhood fell to pieces and they, even after years of migration, are persecuted as outsiders. Like Munni, Ayesha too in Jalees' story realizes that "she was not really Bengali—that she was a Bihari—that she was not the daughter of the soil—that even after twenty-four years, she didn't belong there—that she was stateless." Laws and rules are found not to be the same for Bengali Muslims and their Bihari counterparts. In *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (1995), Mushirul Hasan also refers to an incident

from *Hindustan Times* to substantiate the allegation of ethnic tension among Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims during the phase of post-Partition migration of Muslims from different parts of the country to Dhaka and other parts of East Pakistan.

Ibn-e-Insha's writing, on the other hand, is fragmentary and visionary in nature. It elevates Partition from a merely physical experience to a metaphorical one by insinuating discussion on Hindu and Muslim nationalism, the 'Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan' propaganda as opposed to Jinnah's forceful declamation that the state language in Pakistan is going to be Urdu. Ibn-e-Insha's short stories (significantly enough, the anthology is called *Urdu Ki Akhbari Kitab*) such as 'Our Country' and 'Pakistan' point at the futility of all attempts to separate the different communities in India who are so inextricably intermingled in the cultural, socio-political, territorial, historical and even linguistic texture of the nation.

The second category of tales shifts the focus from what happened during Partition to the memory of the survivors and the past as it is filtered through time and place. These tales, therefore, emphasize ways of remembering and strategies of forgetting Partition not merely as a lived experience but as reconstructed and etched in the mind of a generation scarred by it. Whereas some try to come to terms with the sense of loss through intentional forgetting, others brood and ruminate—comparing and contrasting the good, old days to the changed circumstances of the post-Partition reality. The complexities of a composite cultural milieu in the Indian subcontinent have been historically located by Asim Roy (2004) in his Introduction to *Living Together Separately*:

A close examination of the historiography of composite culture reveals its strong linkage and responsiveness to its changing political contexts. Clearest evidence of this political relevance lies in the fact that the bulk of its literature belonged to the last six or seven decades, when nascent Indian nationalism, liberalism, and secularism had been seriously engaged and challenged, both intellectually and politically, by religious nationalists anchored in either political Islam or political Hinduism or other religious faiths...It is not surprising, therefore, that the year before India's Partition saw the publication, in 1946, of the two most powerful articulations and defences of the composite culture, namely Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and Humayun Kabir's *The Indian Heritage*. (2-3)

'Exile' by Jamila Hashmi, 'I shall Live' by Vishnu Prabhakar, 'Lajwanti' by Rajinder Singh Bedi, 'Separated from the Flock' by Syed Mohammad Ashraf, 'Weeds' by Kulwant Singh Virk and stories

by Ismat Chughtai try to envisage the implications of Partition on the life and mind of the survivors beyond the days of carnage and bloodbath.

'Exile' by Jamila Hashmi employs the epic tale of the abduction of Sita by Ravana as its overarching narrative framework. The long exile of the epic heroine, the closely-guarded pain of displacement, dishonor and loss of trust seem to become a metaphor for the life of the female protagonist of the story. As the once-abducted Muslim woman looks back at her past, she can neither forget nor forgive the cruelty involved in her abduction, rape and consequent keeping in the house of Gurpal without any social/religious sanction. Years later, now accepted as the accomplished daughter-in-law in her abductor-turned-husband's family, as she moves about in the Dussehra (interestingly, signifying the conquest of good over evil) fair in company of her little daughter, she is still haunted by images from the past. Time seems to stand still with the woman to whom the mother-in-law's endearing 'bahu' still remains a term of abuse and who still hopes that her brothers would come to rescue her and take her back home. In Rajinder Singh Bedi's story, the abducted Lajwanti or Lajo's rehabilitation into the family of Sunderlal, likewise, is fraught with symbolic nuances. She is venerated as *devi* by her husband Sunderlal, who zealously preaches in favour of accepting the abducted womenfolk into the fold of the traditional Hindu families once again. But Lajo finds her new role suffocating as Sunderlal, in spite of his studiously polite behaviour to his wife, refrains from listening to her experience and suffering. Women's experience during Partition has, thus, mostly remained unspoken and ill-documented through this turbulent period and beyond, as Urvashi Butalia (1993) points out:

A resounding silence surrounds the question of women and Partition. It may seem a truism to say this, but it bears remembering that at least half of the millions who were dislocated, killed, uprooted were women. A substantial portion of the task of reconstruction and rebuilding fell on women...many women figured in the negotiations that preceded and followed the breakup of India into two countries... in particular Mridula Sarabhai, Premvati Thapar, Rameswari Nehru and others. In addition, women experienced this event in particular ways: thousands of women on both sides of the newly-formed borders (estimates range from 25,000 to 29,000 Hindu and Sikh women and 12,000 to 15,000 Muslim women) were abducted, raped forced to convert, forced into marriage, forced back into what the two states defined as 'their proper homes', torn apart from their families once during Partition by those who abducted them, and

again, after Partition, by the state which tried to 'recover' and 'rehabilitate' them. (WS 13-14)

Syed Mohammad Ashraf's story 'Separated from the Flock', on the other hand, utilizes both as background and a symbolic paradigm the analogy of duck-shooting at a lake in Pakistan where two old friends, long uprooted from their native village in India, meet again. They traverse down the memory lane to discover with pleasant astonishment their shared interests and friendship holding them in strong bonding. Their acquired identity, however, holds them back. Though they wistfully hope, they can now no longer go back to their roots. They continue to live at dual planes—the outward worldly self cleverly concealing the longing for the motherland and the romantic nostalgia of the inner self.

Intizar Husain, Qurratulain Hyder, Asif Aslam Farrukhi look further into the vortex of time and keep faith with the reconstructive power of memory. A lingering faith in human understanding and realization, recognition of guilt and repentance would restore the order in an old country, beginning its new journey afresh. Laments are to be replaced by new allegiances, sympathy for the weak and the victimized be consolidated into active rebuilding of the nation. Intizar Husain, for example, falls back upon the myths and legends of the undivided India enriched by the vision and creative passion of Abul Fazl, Amir Khusrau, Dara Shikoh, Kabir, Mirabai and the prophetic Sufis to direct us to sanity and rationality once again.

His 'An Unwritten Epic' is about the headstrong wrestler Pichwa of Qadirpur who was motivated into action by the idea of a separate Muslim state—Pakistan. Pichwa, a formidable figure for his strength and fan-following, starts patronizing the idea of Pakistan with the secret hope that Qadirpur (given its name) should go to Pakistan. When his hopes do not materialize, the world crumbles for him. The picture of Pichwa on the Pakistani soil—pleading for a job and a roof over his head—is a sorry one. Pichwa comes back to Qadirpur and commits suicide by hanging himself from the peepal tree where years ago he tried to raise the Pakistani flag. Asif Aslam Farrukhi's 'The Land of Memories' is pitched on the generation gap between the aged Abbajan and his two sons as they go to India to visit their father's birthplace at Fatehgarh. They can neither share the rapture nor the dejection of the old man as he continues to discover old acquaintances and friends and comes across favourite haunts of childhood that have drastically changed. Surendra Prakash's 'Dream Images' like the tale of Farrukhi gives us an impressionistic account of the narrator's journey (though in a dream) to the past, to the

Pakistan of his childhood. He tries to contact old acquaintances, wants to go back to the ancient family home but cannot recognize the way. This reminds one of Gani Miyan in Mohan Rakesh's 'The Owner of Rubble' coming back to that lane in Amritsar where seven-and-a-half years ago his whole family was killed and his house burnt down to a heap of rubble during Partition violence. Ashfaq Ahmad's 'The Shepherd' again celebrates the spirit of goodness, kindness and enlightenment in the figure of the old, benevolent Dauji whose goodwill cuts across all religious borders and boundaries.

Bengali Partition tales constitute a remarkable but little-discussed segment of narratives. Salil Chaudhury, Manik Bandyopadhyaya, Samaresh Basu, Narendranath Mitra as well as Prafulla Roy have analyzed the Partition experience and the widening breach in Hindu-Muslim relationship from a culture-specific perspective, with the astonished gaze of an onlooker who remembered only too clearly the united effort of both communities in freeing the country from foreign rule and the long history of religious coexistence. A feeling of anguish at the betrayal of trust and the consequent sense of being forlorn and lost pervade the short story scenario. But the loss is not without an aspiration of reclaiming what is past and gone by.

The times when Rajmohan and Maqbool were an ideal master-servant pair (in 'The Four-Poster Bed' by Narendranath Mitra), Rahim and Amal were good friends (in Salil Chaudhury's 'Dressing Table') or Indira and Halima were loving neighbours (in Manik Bandyopadhyaya's 'Childishness') change swiftly but also imperceptibly with the gradual but steady visualization of the segregation of Bengal into a 'Muslim' east and a 'Hindu' west. Rajmohan, once blind with his position of power and jealousy, tries to snatch away the four-poster bed he had once given away to Maqbool but later realizes the meanness of it all. Maqbool's two emaciated children sleeping on the bed fills the old man with love and humility and he finally decides to drop his claim to it. Samaresh Basu's 'Adab' also focuses on Partition atrocities in which neither Hindu nor Muslim, but humanity is defeated. In Salil Chaudhury's tale, the sensitive painter Rahim goes mad after losing his wife Amina, unable any longer to tolerate the communal frenzy raging everywhere. One is astonished to read the newspaper report on the mad painter who moves about aimlessly at the Howrah station in search of a human being. Was not Rahim a painter too? Is not this whole attempt at initiating a discourse on Partition through literary endeavour aimed at salvaging the 'humanity' of man? Dipesh

Chakrabarty, in an article on the nature of the plight in Bengal during Partition as depicted in a set of essays, locates the trauma of the experience at the inexplicable breaking down of the emotional bonding; that is precisely how literature captures the emotive-psychological implications of historical events that history fails to fathom:

The authors express a sense of stunned disbelief at the fact that it could happen at all, that they could cut adrift in this sudden and cruel manner from the familiar worlds of their childhood. There is nothing here of the explanations of Hindu-Muslim conflicts that we are used to conceive from historians—no traces of the by-now familiar tales of landlord-peasant or peasant-moneylender conflicts through which historians of ‘communalism’ in the subcontinent have normally answered the question. Why did the Muslim population of East Bengal turn against their Hindu neighbours? Here the claim is that this indeed is what cannot be explained. (111)

Bengali short stories, thus, strike a distinct note in representing the emotional/psychological setback the divide created. The Hindu-Muslim anxiety and suspicion pervade the atmosphere but there were lucid intervals when the hatred appears to be futile and meaningless. Manik Bandyopadhyaya in his short story ‘Childishness’ (like Khushwant Singh in ‘The Riot’) shows how trivial, otherwise negligible, incidents often assume inordinate proportions at such times. Tarapada’s household is not much different from Nasiruddin’s. As neighbours they had long shared their anxiety, hope and aspiration with each other. But the uncertainties, hardships and constraints of the time of Partition embitter their friendship. As the two children from these two families secretly continue playing with each other, unperturbed by these developments, the relation between the families starts declining. The sudden disappearance of the children leads to an eruption of violence and each family starts accusing the other of abducting their child. The late discovery of the children playing peacefully on the terrace helps one see the essential ‘childishness’ of the whole affair.

These short stories on Partition continue to remain preoccupied with the realities of Partition and its after-effect. For the second and third generation population, growing up without a first-hand knowledge of Partition, memory has very little to offer. So Lilia, in Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine’, born and brought up in America, does not understand how Mr Pirzada, though Bengali like her father, belongs to a different country Pakistan and not India:

“Mr Pirzada is Bengali, but he is a Muslim,” my father informed me. “Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India.” His finger trailed across the Atlantic, through Europe, the Mediterranean... “As you see, Lilia, it is a different country, a different color,” my father said. Pakistan was yellow, not orange...

“Lilia has plenty to learn at school,” my mother said. “We live here now, she was born here.” She seemed genuinely proud of the fact, as if it were a reflection of my character. ... “How can you possibly expect her to know about Partition?” (26-27)

Still, humanism wins over and Lilia prays for the well-being of Mr Pirzada’s family during the turbulent years of East Pakistan’s War of Liberation; she is jubilant to get the news of their safe tiding over. The young Sikh brothers in Bapsi Sidhwa’s story ‘Defend yourself against Me’, the narrator in Qurratulain Hyder’s ‘When the Prisoners were Released, the Times had Changed’ or the young Bibi in Attia Hosain’s ‘After the Storm’ decide to move ahead, leaving behind the dark stigma of Partition days. Lilia’s story, similarly, shows how the basic human feelings of sharing others’ sorrow, extending a helping hand to people in distress or being able to forgive others’ shortcomings make the younger generation an integral part of the older generation’s feelings and experiences.

Thus, these stories in translation portray Partition as a historically-defined event with far-fetched influences on both individual and collective life of the Indians. It not only changed the course of life in the subcontinent but even modified the standards by which we judge or understand such changes. Morality and understanding, rationality and the social values, customs, beliefs—everything has undergone changes in the post-Partition decades. These stories give us a picture of these changes coming over the society during and after Partition.

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