A MOMENT OF POSSIBILITY: THE 1940S IN LAHORE

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In the year 1998, I began a somewhat unusual cycle of going from Delhi to Lahore every February for a few weeks each year to teach women's studies to South Asian students. A special course had been designed and executed by a few 'mad' feminists; these women were trying to create a new South Asian reality, which countered the hyper nationalisms of the South Asian nation-states, by bringing students together across borders. A large segment of the class comprised students from Pakistan and among the first striking observations in my foremost encounter with them was how similar, and yet how different, their experiences were of engaging with history. Also striking were their experiences of Partition as family narratives handed down from one generation to the other that mirrored Partition narratives from 'this side' which we hear all around us in India. I heard long sagas of migration and hardship, rebuilding broken lives, and trying to work out their relationship to ancestral homes left behind, and to the larger civilizational ethos of South Asia.

Also striking were my interactions with women and men whom I met over the many trips I have made even after the course ended in 2004. While some emphasized the bonds between us—we really are the same—and bemoaned Partition, others were irritated by these sentimental assertions of essential sameness; Pakistan was a nation and a valid one at that. There was little point in bemoaning the past and our recent histories and the mistakes the 'leaders' made in the 194os. If we were all that similar we should prove that by finding a way of living together amicably, as two nations who respected differences and found strengths in the similarities.

During these interactions and the many new friends I made, I came across a body of women's writing which dealt with our immediate pasts; that set me thinking about the ways in which Pakistani women writers wrote about events leading to the Partition in 1947. As a historian who is fixated on sources and the public archive, I found these pieces of writing to be a way of looking at women's reconstruction of the past and the manner in which they represented the search for homeland, culture, nation and identity. In this essay, I will focus on two novels written in English at

two different points of time with a special attention to the late 1930s and 1940s when history might well have taken a different turn and represented a moment of possibility for the undivided India.

The two Pakistani women's novels on the Partition that I have chosen to examine are Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1948) set in the 1930s and early 1940s. The second text is Mehr Nigar Masroor's *Shadows of Time* (1987). What is interesting is that both novels were written for an English-speaking readership in the sub-continent as a whole. As I read them I became particularly interested in the way history, personal and political, appears in these two books as they explicitly deal with the way history came to unfold on the sub-continent, leading almost inevitably to a parting of ways between the Muslims and Hindus and ending in the creation of Pakistan. Though the two books are not autobiographies in the strict sense of the term, they are deeply personalized in sentiment enabling the main women protagonists to speak for a larger community as an extension of a feminine self, which is at the centre of the narration.

SECTION I: THE NARRATIVES

The Heart Divided

Mumtaz Shah Nawaz was born in 1912 and so in a sense she lived through the most intense phase of the anti-colonial movement for nationalism that swept the sub-continent. Her family was important in the political life of the country, from the time of her grandfather; the mother was already out of *purdah* and was among the first elected representatives in the new Pakistan, and as a child she met Sarojini Naidu who was delighted to meet the budding child-poet who she announced was her adopted 'spiritual' daughter. This political and social context imbues the novel with its historical importance because the political events of the sub-continent are the larger backdrop in which the narrative of two households, one Muslim and one Hindu, is embedded, making it an unusual text that is able to address a number of themes as it criss-crosses the lives of the two families. According to her mother, Mumtaz wrote the novel between 1943 and 1948 but the novel itself ends with 1942; after that Mumtaz threw herself into the struggle for Independence, and went on to finish the novel between 1947 and 1948. When she died tragically in 1948 in a plane crash she was on her way to New York to speak on the Kashmir issue. She was also carrying the first draft of *The Heart Divided* to find a publisher for it. That copy was lost in the air crash. Fortunately, a copy had been left behind at home which the family published in 1957. The book

was republished in 1990 by a feminist publisher who had come to acknowledge its relevance somewhat grudgingly because students, especially women students, said that they found the novel a much better way of understanding the recent history of Pakistan rather than the official school text book versions with its top down focus on historical figures. Since *The Heart Divided* is a novel written by a woman, Mumtaz looks at history from that standpoint and this is what appealed to the young women studying history as they could relate to the main protagonists' political journey in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these young women asked that the book be republished so that it could circulate more widely and also be prescribed in schools and colleges. In a sense, the sub continental audience, which is the extended community of readers that the book *desired* to speak to, was fulfilled when the book was re-published in 2001 in India too. It has made some impact here in understanding political events in the sub-continent in the last two decades before the Partition, precisely because it is so historical in essence.

The 1990 republication by ASR has a striking image on its cover: against an orange background, itself divided through a green band, we have a map of pre-Partition India divided now into three parts by two roughly hewn boundaries representing India divided through its 'heart'. These political divisions are presaged by the manner in which two families, one Muslim and the other Hindu, joined together through a century of close interaction and forged anew by the young women of both families who share their growing years, begin to move apart as the struggle for independence intensifies. Zohra, the main protagonist of the novel, through whose eyes we make sense of the political events, shares a deep friendship with Mohini, a Kashmiri Pandit whose family is fully involved in the struggle for Independence and whose members have been in and out of jail for their political acts. Zohra is still in *purdah* at the beginning of the novel, but among the ways in which Zohra negotiates *purdah* is to wear the *burkha* but use it as an armour that allows her to reach an important press statement to the newspapers when Mohini is arrested.

As the friendship between Zohra and Mohini is consolidated through these early political events in the 1930s, Zohra's brother Habib, who has been studying in England, returns to India. His father wishes that Habib marry his cousin so that the property will not be divided and stay intact within the family. Habib buys time by pleading that he isn't ready for marriage and needs to find his feet first. Soon enough he meets Mohini who is in and out of Zohra's house and falls deeply in love with her. Both families are outraged and refuse to let the young ones marry, citing differences in religion, culture and custom as barriers that are impossible to surmount and violate established traditions. Finally, the young ones are

separated though they have a private pact amongst themselves that they will find a way to be together; unfortunately Mohini is stricken with tuberculosis and is taken away to Kashmir to recover. Heartbroken by the tensions, and delicate as a person from early girlhood, she dies leaving Habib bereft and Zohra without her best friend to make sense of the dramatic changes in the political sphere. The death of Mohini brings a closure to the attempts at reconciling differences between communities; and events in the novel unfold, both within the families and the two main communities, towards acknowledging unbridgeable differences between themselves, leading inevitably to thinking about a political separation of some sort which is, as yet, an inchoate idea since the novel ends in 1942. But families in a shared community are already partitioned along religious lines.

Shadows of Time

Mehr Nigar Masroor was the daughter of a well-known Urdu prose writer of his time with an acute awareness of society and its history and traditions. Mehr had an English education in Lahore and displayed varied interests: theatre, dance and choreography; she went on to produce plays and dance programmes for Pakistan TV. Both father and daughter are described in the foreword as being steeped in the cultural traditions of the sub-continent. Widowed in her mid-thirties, Mehr struggled to bring up her children and that gave her some insight into the harsh realities women faced in their working careers, turning her into an activist for women's rights.1 Her sister Farukh Nigar, who was herself associated with theatre in Pakistan, described Mehr as being consumed by a passion for the theme of liberation against 'alien conquerors' as also the need to struggle against attempts to put the clock back whether in the name of religion, culture or heritage. A familiarity with ancient and medieval history of the sub-continent and with its political and intellectual history facilitated an engagement with history as such, which, in a sense has shaped the form of her novel. It spans roughly a hundred years, beginning with Bengal during the renaissance, then moving to Lucknow and Delhi in the first quarter of the twentieth century (a shift that coincides with the capital moving to Delhi from Calcutta in 1911) and then finally moves to Lahore (without completely giving up Delhi) in the 1930s. The novel then takes us through the Partition and the time after when the new country struggles with its own internal crises ending in the eighties.

Here too a set of Hindu-Muslim sexual liaisons, romances, marriages and inevitable separations between lovers evoke a larger set of issues: the coming together of two communities and the impossibility of actually

being able to be together in the face of political, social and cultural divides that are ultimately impossible to transcend.2 The author speaks through the protagonists she creates and is able, therefore, to present completely divergent views, thus capturing the richness of the debates but also the unbridgeable nature of the divide between the two main communities leading inexorably to Partition. Once Pakistan is made, the tensions both with India and within Pakistan are presented again through different characters, but where the author herself is located in temporal terms. Thus, in the last part of the novel the author speaks more directly through the persona of Maheen whose life closely mirrors Mehr's own, culminating in a tragic end through cancer.

The style adopted in the *Shadows of Time* is significant for the span of time that the narrative is able to capture; in this it is not unique as it is a device used by other women writing on the sub-continent. It is there is Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* where the span of time is larger and magnificently used to capture a civilizational ethos as well, and in *Fireflies in the Mist*, which may have been the model for *Shadows of Time*. What is interesting is that the narrative of love, passion and tragedy is distinguished in the blurb from the *Forsythe Saga* and instead likened to a stream of consciousness technique where memories and fantasies are woven together. The sub-continental audience was important to the author as she desired its publication not in the West but the sub-continent; the first edition came out from Delhi from a mainstream publisher in 1987; its second edition was from Lahore, again like *Heart Divided* from a feminist publisher.

The geographical unit of the subcontinent, as I have noted above, is mirrored by the way the narrative moves spatially from Bengal to Lahore across North India. The Bengal moment of the novel is built around three friends around the time that the Ilbert Bill is being debated, which, in turn, is the context for the birth of the Indian National Congress. The first Hindu-Muslim relationship involves one of the friends; the unwanted child of this union is adopted by his friend and the child is brought up as a Hindu and deeply loved by her father. The third friend's son becomes a right- wing fanatic. As the respective children of the three friends grow up, a new set of tensions develops. The novel then moves to Lucknow and Delhi with another Hindu Muslim romance, which too is doomed as it cannot end in marriage because the families will not permit it. Nevertheless, a covert sexual liaison between Farhan and Sarla sustains itself through the rest of the novel with its own tragic consequences (including the birth of two children one of whom dies in the Indo–Pak war of 1965). The relationship is also fraught on both sides as neither of the protagonists can really give up on their religion and culture and the arguments of the lovers mirrors the tensions of the two communities playing out deep-

rooted antagonisms on the political front—as the Hindu woman Sarla is staunchly Congress and stands in the novel for the Hindu/Indian point of view, while Farhan becomes a Muslim Leaguer representing the Muslim/ Pakistani point of view. It is a difference that cannot be bridged because the leaders on both sides cannot agree on the fundamental principles on which Independence must be gained. Finally, the moment for a separation between the two communities, as of the two lovers, comes with Partition. Betrayals and losses are experienced both politically and personally, leading inevitably to despair and loss of hope: what has been lost is the civilizational ethos with its multiple possibilities that the narrative opens with at the turn of the nineteenth century.

It may be seen that the plot descriptions provided above mirrors an inside/outside dichotomy. This dichotomy has also informed the different segments of this essay: in the first part of the essay, I have summarized both novels from the point of view of the female protagonists, and intimate relationships, though their links to the contexts of larger events are shown as the ways in which women steer their course, in terms of the choices they make.

In the second segment, I will reverse the process and focus on the larger histories, even as they are expressed through particular characters in both novels, because the context or the wider forces of history propel events which appear to be beyond the control of the protagonists. It may be my intuitive way of linking up as well as breaking the inner/outer divide that writings about the past seem to have taken in recent years.3

SECTION II HISTORY: PAST, PRESENT AND IN THE MAKING

The two novels discussed here are about history as I have argued but they are particularly about a past with a great bearing upon a contemporary present set in the late 1930s and 1940s. The women protagonists use this past to charge them with an excitement about the present too where the events in the twentieth century sub-continent are shaping their own lives whether they directly participate in the events or are shaped by them through what is happening in the world outside. This is especially so because the men around them are being drawn into the history in the making which will lead to a transformation of the sub-continent. Simultaneously, history also presses upon the narratives in other ways: as change sweeping households, new professional possibilities, through women's struggles for education, through challenging social customs that continue to be enforced upon the younger generation desperately seeking change. Freedom from foreign rule seamlessly melds into freedom and liberation from the prison-house of custom especially for the young

women in the narratives and so for them the public world that can give them entry into the political world is structurally linked to the way the private world of the household *must* transform. The feudal Muslim household must give way to a new way of living and being.

It seems to me that the fact that the two novels are so concerned with the unravelling of history is itself a reflection of the way the late thirties and forties shaped the emergence of the Muslim woman and her growing awareness of a Muslim history that was distinct from other histories around her. Powerful forces were at work to combat received ideas of Muslim backwardness and the feudal mentalities that had paralyzed them politically and refused the forces of modernity. The Muslim woman had become the subject of public discourse from the nineteenth century onwards although the early focus of men's writing was on the need for reforms to make the Muslim woman conform to the new needs of a recast patriarchy, suitable for a new class of Muslim men who too were entering a new phase in history. Some advocated education for women and carefully schooling them for their roles in the new domestic households; others strongly opposed reform and attacked the idea that women give up the *purdah* and step into the public world as that would emasculate Muslim men. For example, Akbar Allahabadi used his skills at verse to treat with contempt the transformation of social life that he was witnessing:

> When yesterday I saw some women without *purdah*
> Oh! Akbar I sank into the ground for loss of national honour
> When I asked what happened to your *purdah*?
> They said it was covering the brains of men (Saigol 2013: 78)

This anxiety about the emasculated Muslim man in the writing of the late nineteenth century had its counter in the reformist understanding of Dipti Nazir Ahmed who wrote reformist novels for his daughters in order to ensure a good education for them so that they may be able to rise above superstition and a mindless tradition, turning them into rational modern mothers (Saigol: 62). Women themselves joined these debates by writing in journals like *Tehzeeb –e-Niswan*. By the late 1930s and 1940s, we can also see the possibility of the emergence of the political Muslim woman who joined the struggle for freedom against the British but specifically also advocated a distinctive Muslim identity that was not to be swept away in the larger struggle for freedom under the helm of Congress leadership. Shaista Ikramullah's autobiographical memoir *From Purdah to Parliament* (Ikramullah 1997) captures many of these elements. Significantly, the starting point for the possibility of the emergence of women's political agency was that women needed to decisively move out from the *zenana*,

defying the codes of *purdah* under which their mothers and grandmothers had lived. This was the very first political step that a woman must take if she wanted to be part of the political campaigns of her time.

The move out of *purdah* frames the opening of the narrative in *The Heart Divided*. Zohra, the younger daughter of a prosperous Muslim household makes her moves slowly but a point comes before the major political events in the late 1930s, when she brings *purdah* and a political life together at a debate. While she has been speaking at public debates in all-women institutions, she has never appeared in public in a mixed university space. Her sister teases her for her attempts at participating in such a debate, saying she will need to lead a suffragette movement first. Zohra cries out angrily:

> All this humbug about a woman's place being at home! I tell you it's getting on my nerves!
> 'Not such a bad place, the home,' says her sister to which Zohra says with sarcasm: A healthy husband and a child every year! No thank you. There are other things I want to do (Nawaz 1990: 230).

Finally, Zohra wangles permission to go and speak at the inter-university debate. The topic of the debate is "women's place is in the home and she should not take part in politics". Of course Zohra speaks against the motion which she does with great passion. The authorial voice says:

> She was the master of the situation…She had felt so deeply upon the subject, and now all the frustrations and longings of a girl behind purdah, aching to take a citizen's part in the happenings of the world, poured forth in a voice so full of feeling that all who heard it were visibly affected (Ibid: 234).

Once women step out of *purdah* and enter the public space, the political world beckons to them whether or not men are ready for this development. However, before we look at how women—in the novel, as outside of it—actually mediated dramatic changes in their lives we need to examine the place of history in the making of the political being—men, as well as women.

The unique history of the Muslims that went beyond South Asia and drew from a cosmopolitan history is a distinct element in the narratives that create a regenerated Muslim. What is interesting is that Allama Iqbal's focus on the Mard-e-Momin, the new Muslim man who was the bearer of modernity and a distinct historical and cultural identity, may not have had a direct bearing on women. But both novels reveal a sharp understanding of the relationship between past, present and future among

the new Muslim woman of the emerging elites, whose brothers, fathers and uncles were responding to the political mobilization around freedom from colonial rule, but also to ideas of a distinctive Muslim identity that needed its own geographical space. Their evocation of past history echoed Allama Iqbal's call to Muslim men and moved it to transform the Muslim woman who too must have a political agenda and respond to the call of history. For example in the two passages I cite here we can see how women writers with a political understanding transformed the nationalist rhetoric to work out in their notions of history. Living and writing at a time when a new nation/state appeared to be a political possibility, Iqbal wrote in his famous *shikwa* or conversation with God:

> Who picked up the sword in your name?
> Who righted the wrongs?
> We were the only ones fighting your battles
> In deserts and rivers…
> We lived for the travails of war…
> Our horses galloped in the mightiest of seas (Saigol: 86).
>
> To us belonged China, Arabia, Hindustan…
> Oh Garden of Andalusia. do you remember
> When we made our home on your branches
> Oh waves of Dajla, you too recognize us
> Your rivers still tell tales of our presence (Saigol: 92).

In *The Heart Divided* some of these sentiments provide excitement and passion in Sughra's lacklustre existence after her marriage into a conservative feudal household which is stultifying. Sughra is the counter-figure to the main protagonist, her sister Zohra. The latter, as we have seen, is drawn into the heady excitement of the anti-colonial movement represented by the Indian National Congress of the 1930s. The former dwells in the past, which is evoked by Sughra through the powerful Mughal rulers, whose visible testimony is found in beautiful architecture: the masjids the palaces, the tombs that dot Lahore and Delhi. But more importantly there are other powerful memories of Muslim glories from stories she has heard sitting on her grandfather's lap as a child. As her marriage fails and she is trapped in an uncongenial joint family, Sughra dreams of distant lands, Arabia, Syria, Turkey and she wonders if she will ever see them—the very lands whose 'history beat in her blood'. The glorious past was so different from the drab present, a reality she retreats from losing herself in dreams:

She could see the armies of Salauddin marching across the desert,

drums beating banners flying, with row upon row of knights and heroes mounted on restless chargers ready to die for the greater glory of Islam. And in front of them, always in front of them the unknown knight with the crescent banner…(Nawaz: 115).

Some years later Sughra attends a meeting of the Muslim League in Delhi where she hears a fiery speech of a young man evoking the glorious Muslim past to exhort his audience out of their apolitical inertia:

Have you forgotten your past? Cannot the walls of the Red Fort, and the minarets of the Shahi mosque remind you of the glory that was yours? Oh sons of Islam who have learnt to be slaves, what if your enemies be many and your arms be weak? Have you forgotten how Tariq landed in Spain and told his men to conquer or perish? Does not the blood of Tariq and Ghazi and Babar flow in your veins? Arise, awake and unite… (Nawaz: 337).

At this point, Sughra ceases to be merely fixated on the past—until then the past, which had goaded Muslim men onto a nationalist/pan-Islamic project had ironically enough allowed her to dream her way out of a cramped domesticity. But now, the past works its effects in the present—as she becomes deeply concerned about the fate of the Muslims in the sub-continent now and in the future. Her anxieties about growing Hindu mobilization and the leadership of the Congress in the anti-colonial movement sets her up as an interrogator of Zohra's position and allows dual positions among the Muslims to be articulated. Sughra strongly argues with Zohra about supporting the Congress, even as Zohra has her own fears, but nevertheless hopes for a way to achieve an understanding between Hindus and Muslims, given the growing divide between them, especially once the Congress assumes power in many states after the 1937 elections.

In Punjab, Congress rule had been stalled in 1937 as there was a 'secular' landholding formation bringing Muslims and Hindus, Jats and Sikhs together under the Unionist party led by Sikandar Hyatt Khan; but in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where there were substantial populations of Muslims, the Congress Ministries after 1937 generated much anxiety about the loss of Muslim identity. If the Muslims could not make for a political formation in which they were the leading element, it was evident that they would be forced to accept the terms set for them by the Hindu parties, which included the Congress (this view began to gain currency from around this period and got consolidated in the following decade).

It is clear that the late 1930s and the elections of 1937 that brought the Congress to power in many states was a turning point in the making of a separatist identity. The drive for the movement, for an independent nation-state, as a necessary homeland for Muslims, was energized and work began

in full earnest. Jinnah argued that only the Muslim League was qualified to speak for the Muslims. After the Congress ministries resigned in 1939, when Britain dragged into the war in Europe, Jinnah declared December 22 as deliverance day to be celebrated as a thanksgiving for an end to tyranny and oppression of the Congress Raj. Soon afterwards, in March 1940, the Muslim league met in Lahore and passed the famous Pakistan resolution which demanded a Muslim sovereign state in India (p. 281).

In this sense, the positions adopted by the two sisters in *A Heart Divided* are reflective of critical and ambiguous moment in the lives of the Muslims of the sub-continent—a time when fears about the implications of Hindu rule begin to crystallize among the Muslims, as the Congress party announces the Wardha resolution on education. There are rumours of children being forced to make obeisance in front of Gandhi's image and sing "Bande Mataram", all of which make even the liberal Muslims deeply anxious about the inevitability of Hindu majoritarian agendas. *Shadows of Time*, in fact, records the unease of that time with historical acuity:

> The song Bande Mataram, written in Bankim Chandra's novel *Anandmath* became the national song. This novel and the song in particular had aroused the ire of the Muslims since it had distinctly anti-Muslim tones, and the song was addressed in prayer to Kali Mata. This was intolerable to Muslims whose pride is that they pray to and before the One God. By order Bande Mataram was read in all the educational institutions every morning…and this singing became the visible sign of the Hindu supremacy…

Books were written suggesting meat should not be eaten, only vegetables; the Hindu aspects of culture should be highlighted…

Now with the advent of Congress ministries in the provinces the Hindu political and cultural supremacy seemed complete…

> The Hindus were jubilant, they had achieved power after centuries, their first actions were oriented to reinstating their own religious and cultural values… (Masroor: 257-259).

Since *Shadows of Time* is very sensitive to the details of history, the 1940s—as experienced by Muslims who were wary of Congress—is dealt with in much greater detail in this book. It is especially sensitive to the undercurrents of tensions between the two communities as they are played out through Sarla and Farhan who argue the case for each community, even as they both resist the possibilities of the division of the sub-continent. The Muslim League conference held in Lahore in 1940 is a decisive turning point, marked by great excitement amongst the Muslim community, including women from well-to-do households. They are enthralled by the recall of conquerors in the past as Muslim 'heroes' in contrast to the

portrayal of the debauched and dissolute Muslim rulers they had been taught about in their history textbooks (Masroor: 282). Begum Hamid, an incidental figure in *Shadows of Time,* standing for the elite Muslim women of her time, drawn to the Pakistan project and therefore the Muslim League, remarks to her daughters:

> A new history is being written tonight under the ramparts of the Lahore fort, besides the white domes by the river Ravi…The soil of Punjab is going to give rise to a new state…(Masroor: 282).

As an active member of the Muslim League, Begum Hamid knew that the Pakistan resolution was going to be passed at the meeting. She was an ardent admirer of the Quaid –e-Azam as he was now called.

The narrative recall of historic events in the book has already laid the ground for this heady sense of being part of a historic moment: Jinnah had already begun to propound the theory that India consisted of two nations, Hindus and Muslims and he, therefore, demanded a Muslim sovereign state (Masroor: 282).

The announcement of the imminent parting of ways is like death for Farhan who knows that he would choose Pakistan, thus, betraying his love for Sarla in return for a homeland. When he goes to see Sarla, she is dramatically dressed like a *sati* about to mount the funeral pyre. She proclaims dramatically:

> Yes indeed Farhan, I am a widow as you have all torn our beloved *piya* into many parts. You have asked for the laceration of the sacred body of Aryadesh. How could the Muslims of India demand this…The Muslims have wounded Bharat and you have betrayed me in a manner I could never imagine. Ask for Muslim rights, for more representation, more power, indeed anything, but not to tear the motherland into shreds. I loved you, we loved India together we were the final adornment of her sublime synthesis…By asking for partition you have defiled me…(Masroor: 284).

Farhan tries to bring other arguments into the angry outburst, about how the two communities can never be really separated, that it is a ploy of landlords from UP to regroup in Punjab and Bengal to hang on to power. This does not console Sarla who ends the discussion with 'we will never let you do it, never!' (Masroor: 287).

Soon the war and the famine grip the concerns of the people. Children are orphaned and there is great misery. Finally, the war ends with the dropping of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which stun the people and the authorial voice comments: The white man had chosen to perpetrate a crime against humanity in Asia, not against the Nazis he had professed to hate for so long.

For Sughra in *The Heart Divided* the depressing situation is compounded by the 'backwardness' of the Muslims, especially of their women and she

begins to do social and political work for the regeneration of the Muslim community and becomes an ardent Muslim Leaguer as does the rest of her family, especially the men.

Only Zohra remains ambivalent, still drawn to the Congress and especially to Nehru's socialism, hoping for a united onslaught on the British by Hindus and Muslims, hoping also for united India, thereafter. Her own growing personal struggle takes place against the backdrop of the political events between 1930, when the mass mobilization phase of the Congress is initiated, and 1942, when she begins to be disillusioned by the Congress. She slowly turns leftward, supporting workers struggles but the left in Lahore is also drawn towards the Muslim League (I discuss this in some detail below). Indeed, self-determination is a position endorsed by the Communist Party, and some of its cadres were officially told to join the League by the party leadership, once Pakistan becomes a reality. Though the novel ends in 1942 it presages the years immediately before the Partition as is evident in the dialogue between Zohra and Sughra where the former says:

> Oh Apa, I…for so many years believed and trusted in the Congress leadership…and now…now I…they should have risen to the occasion. They should have accepted the principle of self determination… I am so unhappy! (Nawaz: 470).

Sughra tries to persuade Zohra to join the League:

> We need people like you…the doors of the League are open to all; they've joined together for a national ideal, people of all views are there, socialists, democrats, fascists, communist, maulvis and modern men…
> All for the right of the Muslim people to assert their will in their homelands where they are in a majority (Ibid: 471).

As the events close in 1942 in *The Heart Divided*, Zohra continues to hope for an eventual settlement between the League and the Congress for which she thinks that people with goodwill on both sides will surely try. Zohra's Hindu friend Mohini's little brother is heartbroken on hearing that the settlement fails to be forged. His anguished cry decries the principle of vivisection, which is almost taken for granted by many Muslims, and he pleads with Zohra and her family not to accept separation as a political resolution to the problems between the Hindus and the Muslims: 'we shall try and keep you [the Muslims] back with love,' he exclaims. But even he can see that the moment of separation is near, the chasm between the communities is like a sea, 'a sea of blood and tears': the violence of the Partition is imminent. All ideals of a united India with the Muslims feeling secure in it are being dashed. Ironically, each of the two communities feels betrayed by the other; neither can work towards a political resolution that will allow for a way to be different in terms of

culture and religious practice and at the same time be together as a single political and geographic entity.

In the midst of the polarization between the Congress and the Muslim League playing out nationalist and culturalist differences, the only formation to hold out and rise above both is the left with its socialist agenda for the toiling masses /working class as a whole across the world. The appeal of Marxism and Communist ideals are strong among the younger protagonists in both *The Heart Divided* and *Shadows of Time*. Young women too are drawn to communism frequently through their closeness to a young man and that is a way of staying away from the Congress-Muslim league divide. Zohra in *The Heart Divided* moves away from the Congress after feeling betrayed by its actions in the late 1930s and early 1940s. As a trained teacher, she takes up a career and becomes economically independent, leaving Lahore behind and going to live in Amrtisar. There she meets Ahmed who is a Left wing activist. Rejecting a young man who is in the ICS, chosen for her by her parents, Zohra becomes involved with this young man of humble origins and the relationship meets with parental disapproval pointing to the deep stratification within the Muslim community. In her confused state, Ahmed is able to reconcile Left wing ideals with national self-determination for the Muslims with his desire for an end to oppression and exploitation. The new world that Zohra and Ahmed dream up for themselves is a utopia that has resolved the differences between communities:

> A new land—Pakistan! said the Leaguers.
> A new India—Free India said the Congressmen.
> A new world! cried the workers. (Nawaz: 427).

In *Shadows of Time* young college students hang out in various common places like the YMCA canteens on college campuses and they have mock debates and mock elections between capitalism and communism. Maheen and her Hindu male friend Ramesh meet at the People's Book stall In Lahore which is famous for its bookstores; Lahore is always full of life—Manto comes to defend himself against an obscenity charge in the forties, and just walking in its streets is a heady experience:

> Every street had a link with history; each lane carried its own story. In the narrow forgotten road off Anarkali, lay Qutb-uddin Aibak's neglected tomb. On the opposite side was the small street that housed the famous Paisa Press that brought literacy to millions of readers as much by its style and content as by its price, just one paisa. In the Urdu bazaar rare manuscripts could be found, and this stimulating world of intellect lay at the entrance of the Lahori Darwaza… Lahore lived by its books and writers…(Masroor: 302).

In Lahore, Marxist ideas have a peculiar force as the 'feudal ideas of chivalry and culture are demolished under the critique of class exploitation'. When the Communist party declares that it stands for self-determination and, thus, recognizes the Muslim peoples' right to choose their own destiny, the Communist Party appears to stand above religious differences and be capable of 'judicious objectivity' (Ibid: 304). This is the voice that seems to anchor the novel as it reflects upon the vicissitudes of history.4

Epilogue

Postwar events are captured in a sweep in the *Shadows of Time*: there is the RIN mutiny in which ships at Bombay and Karachi revolt and the sailors raise the Congress and Muslim League flags and shout "*Jai Hind*"; the British see the ghosts of the 1857 mutiny come back again. They have already been shaken by the INA's march into India and though unsuccessful in their attempt, the trial of the leaders has aroused the nation so it is clear to the British that they can no longer hold India by force of arms.

But the Hindus and Muslims, the Congress and the League cannot agree, Nehru makes impetuous statements and Jinnah gives up constitutionalism: the rains that follow the flashes of lightning the Muslim League announces Direct Action day (Masroor: 313) and the great Calcutta Killings begin: 5000 people are killed within 48 hours. It is a madness that presages the partition riots of the future. The embracing kindness of Sufi thought, the vigorous Bhakti movement, all dissolve as snow on a desert face. In some small way, the horror of the killings, the slashed breasts, women pushed off rooftops screaming their way to silence, all presaging the Partition killings is countered by a small act of defiance by a Hindu woman into whose hands a Muslim baby falls when she insists on keeping the baby against family opposition.

When Partition finally comes, it is pithily summed up by the author with the words:

'Jinnah obtained his homeland whose frontiers were mutilated by Radcliffe, and Nehru kept his tryst with destiny.' (Masroor: 321).

As the soldiers march past in celebration of the Pakistan Independence day two young college students bemoan the loss of their Hindu and Sikh friends from Kinnaird College in Lahore who have gone away. One says to the other:

It's a different country now. Do you realize Wagah is the border! The road we motored through Amritsar to Kapurthala or onwards to Delhi now leads to a different country' (Masroor: 328).

Both girls then turn away from the festive crowds and go home. The narrative voice closes the description of the day with the comment:

They belonged to the generation that graduated in 1946-47 which were the years of the greatest political upheaval and the making of two countries. Like fossils left on the shore after the sea has moved away, these two clung to that piece of land where the waters of time had left them…(Ibid: 328).

The events of the forties had played themselves out; the future was yet to unfold for these two young Lahori women but the moment of possibility was over.

NOTES

1. During the martial law years of General Zia, consciously used Islamisation as a tool for consolidating his power, Mehr Nigar used the form of a children's fable to describe the resistance of the people to oppressive regimes in the past, and linked it to the present, passing the censor because of its form and simultaneously impacting its readers when it was published.
2. Since it is rare for fictional texts to actually depict inter-community romances set in the forties in South Asia it is interesting to see how secular and communal politics are seen to converge/intersect in such relationships, the nature of conflicts generated, the arguments presented, and the bearings that the representation of such relationships might have on our understanding of the social fabric of the forties. I have been unable to examine these issues directly and fully in this essay but I would like to flag it for my readers.
3. See Partha Chatterjee. 1989. 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds) *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Delhi: Kali For Women, pp. 233-253.
4. To sum up there are three ways of looking at the past here as emanating from the authorial voice: the one symbolized by Sughra- in *The Heart Divided*—and the Muslim League, which is a sort of Pan-Islamism, in a cultural sense, and a nostalgia for a homeland that will help anchor this past. Allamma Iqbal was the most articulate and defender of this position (whom Faiz sought to counter in his poetry of another kind of universalism, pegged on the oppressed people everywhere as for example in his 1943 poem *Bol ke lab azaad hain tere* [speak! Your tongue is free as yet, Kiernan1971: 87-88]). This is also something that features in the second novel, *Shadows of Time*, where the appeal to a rich Islamic past though is undercut by the communist resolution of the national questions—with the advocacy of self-determination. The contradictions at the heart of Pakistan historically: cultural Islamism/nationalism are already presaged here. So while the sense of a shared history is invoked, both in terms of how characters relate to each other - more emphatically, it would appear in *The Heart Divided*, and more tragically in *Shadows of Time*—and in and through an invocation of communism, the religious-national divide marks the present. So, while the past and future suggest longing and possibilities, both these actually feed into what the present demands.

The second vision of the past in these novels is the critical gloss on Congress nationalism—most tragically embodied it would seem in the character of Zohra, whose life follows the twists and turns of Congress policy-making.... and her final choice of the League vindicates a Pakistani nationalist position, as it would appear today. What is interesting here is that for all the invocation of shared pasts, partition is seen as inevitable in both novels—and they do not appear to read in interesting ways (except perhaps for the RIN Mutiny) the events of the 1940s, which were unsettling, but not foregone. The authorial voice itself is ambivalent in the novels which appear to veer between a Pakistani nationalist and a broad communist position. It appears to me that for Pakistani women writers, a separate state for the Muslims was inevitable and the endorsement of a separate state by the communists reconciles for them the apparent difference between the nationalist and the Communist positions.

There is a third sort of vision of the past in both narratives and that is vision of the story-teller, who must tie up the tale, and make neat all loose ends. There are differences in this tying up between the two novels: *The Heart Divided* was written even as events were happening, and so perhaps communicates a certain urgency, whereas *Shadows of Time* was written later, and covers a longer period of time. In the first instance, fiction becomes a context for thinking about the historical present, and allows the author to show how individual and collective fates are linked, and also how the individual herself is constructed and constructs herself in both spatial and temporal terms - the past and the nation-to-be. *In Shadows of Time*, the past unfolds more deliberately and is part of a longer duree - so to speak. So, there is perhaps a greater shape to it, spatially, as it literally moves across the sub-continent, and temporally over a century.

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