

Partition and After- The Dreadful Saga

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Partition is after all only an old fortress of crumbled masonry- held together with a plaster of fiction.

Eamon de Valera.¹

It has been witnessed that, for various nations in Africa, Asia and South America, modernity has somewhat been historically criticised by the rule and dominance of native cultures by non-natives, usually by Europeans. Modernity has thus been “colonial modernity”² for many regions of the non- white world. It was an exploitative mechanism-economic exploitation of resources, the use of native people, the conquest of territory and markets based on racial, cultural, political and technological differences. The dominance was vehemently protested by the natives of these nations which resulted in massacres, rebellious movements and bloodshed. The dream of a better world proved to be the driving force for the natives. But the situations became worse after Independence.

In India, European colonial dominance was supposedly ended and the country was liberated on August 15, 1947. In return, the unity of the country was compromised and the country was divided into two independent states of India and Pakistan. The popular ideologies and discourses which were formed to eradicate colonization from India were soon directed towards the division of India which resulted in the formation of, not one Pakistan, but several Pakistans in the minds of people. The popular sentiments of the pre-Partitioned Indians against the British rule were directed towards each other and ironically, this was done by the political decisions of a handful of Indians with the help of the British rulers. The literary works and the critical approaches of the early twentieth century bring out clear images of the political scenario of pre-partitioned India.

The *Home and the World* a novel by Rabindranath Tagore is an interesting allegory of Indian politics in the early twentieth century. Being a man of clear modern thoughts and a believer of freedom in its real sense, Nikhil introduces his wife Bimala to Sandip, an active leader in the Swadeshi movement. Bimala soon becomes immersed in the revolutionary fervour of Swadeshi and finds herself torn between the duties of home and the world. Viewed purely as a socio political novel, Tagore’s ”The Home and the World” makes a sharp distinction between, Nikhilesh, representing the pure passion for constructive work in swadeshi (nationalism), and Sandip, representing its greed and destructive energy. Nikhilesh worships nothing but the truth which is greater than the country; for Sandip, the success of the moment matters and he strives to achieve it by all possible means. For Nikhilesh, the Ideal is the principal ingredient in the real; for Sandip, the Ideal is tolerable only when it is a means to attain the Real. Bimala, the central character of the novel, who has been given a large number of autobiographical narratives than the other two principle

characters, is torn between these two contending forces which exercise a powerful fascination over her mind. The *Home and the World* sharply points at the hollowness of the political ideologies when, at the end of the novel, Sandip flees the situation and it is Nikhilesh who goes to town to calm matters during the riot and is shot in the head.

Some literary works bring out the honest struggles of people to get rid of colonial dominance. While ideologies formulated to gain Independence had their own flaws, the general mass tried to follow the principles positively with the aim to stand up against the colonial torture. Raja Rao’s first novel *Kanthapura*, written in 1938, shows the struggle of Moorthy, who imbibed the principles of Gandhi and practiced them vehemently in order to bring relief to the people of Kanthapura from social struggle. Through the events in the novel, Raja Rao gives a detailed description of the struggle of Indians to fight not only the British but also the orthodox Indian principles like casteism which was prevalent in pre-partitioned India.

In some selected speeches and writings of Bhagat Singh, one can clearly identify the tone of disappointment shared by several freedom fighters on realizing the futility of the accepted ideologies. While writing an introduction to *Dreamland*, on request by Ram Saran Das, he writes: “In the political field *The Dreamland* occupies a very important place. In the prevailing circumstances it is filling up a very important gap in the movement. As a matter of fact all the political movements of our country that have hitherto played an important role in our modern history, had been lacking the ideal at the achievement of which they aimed.”³ Independence of India was the need of the hour but none was aware of the impending disasters following Independence.

The tales of the traumatic experiences suffered after the Partition of India are expressed differently in different literary texts of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 1981, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* was published which addresses the reality of the legacy of partition. Saleem, the story’s protagonist who is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15th, 1947, is handcuffed to history and becomes the perfect example of the country’s continual political victimization. After coming out of his mother’s womb, which is a metaphor for the relative comfort of British rule,

he searches for meaning that leads him to create a past that is self-centered and also holds himself responsible for the important events in national history. Nationalism was of utmost importance as it united the colonized Indian masses against the British. But soon Indians started categorizing themselves on the basis of religion. Jawaharlal Nehru's view of a New India seemed to be a disillusionment. This novel somewhat brings out the skepticism of Rushdie towards the theory of nation and nationalism. The text gives us a clear view of the hypocrisy and failure of discourses which led to widespread suffering not for a short span of time but for the years to come.

The Diasporic writer who has been able to convey, with much force and conviction, the violent ambiguities of communal conflict caused due to partition, is none other than Saadat Hasan Manto. He clearly brings out the madness of this Great Divide and also the horror and delineation caused to the people as they were uprooted from their homeland. Not only that, the slaughter of men and women, the molestations and the entire scenario of satanic inhumanity can be clearly felt through his writings. The worst sufferers were the women who became the victims of frustrations poured

out by men during the pandemonium. Through his short stories, we can hear the shrieks of these victims, the echoes of which can still be felt due to the persistence of colonial minds even during the post-colonial times.

Manto's short story *Toba Tek Singh* is a powerful satire and a bitter indictment of the political processes and behaviour patterns that resulted in Partition. The story is told by an omniscient narrator who speaks as a Pakistani and seems to be a Lahori. Based on the exchange of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu lunatics after the Partition, it brings out the relationship between India and Pakistan. *The Dog of Tithwal* gives a microcosmic view of the hateful struggle of Muslims and Hindus in India and Pakistan. The murder of the friendly dog by the leaders of Indian and Pakistani soldiers show the victimization of the innocent civilians who were suddenly alienated from their own motherland on the basis of religion. *KholDo* is one of the controversial stories of Manto depicting the effects of violence during the partition of India, especially on women. Manto does not see the perpetrators as Hindustani or Pakistani, he just sees and depicts them as human beings with all their wilderness and barbarity. *Thanda Gosht* is another such short story which shows how bestial the people had turned into, during and after Partition.

A historical novel that depicts all the political events surrounding Partition and also provides a human dimension that brings out a sense of reality and believability is Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*. This novel can be considered as a character study that gives a better understanding of the cultural and social conditions of the time and place and also shows how the corrupt political system with their false ideologies led to this sad event.

Similarly, in the works of Amrita Pritam, we find the anguish felt by her during the horrors of Partition. Born in an undivided India, she saw the evolution of the divided nation from a closer angle. In her poem, "Ajjakhaan Waris Shah Nun" (I Say Unto Waris Shah), the Punjabi poet and writer expresses the horrors of partition and her anguish caused by the massacres. She appeals to Waris Shah, the historic Punjabi poet, to rise from his grave and record the tragedies that Punjab was going through. In her autobiography named *The Revenue Stamp*, we can get an overview of the life of a woman entrapped in the horrors of Partition and the pain of leaving one's homeland not by choice but by compulsion. Even her other works equally bring out what the process of colonization has done socially, politically and mentally.

There are several other works that express the horrors of the Great Divide. While Bhisham Shahni's *Tamas* is set in the backdrop of riot-stricken Pakistan at the time of Partition and deals with the plight of emigrant Sikh and Hindu families to India, Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* is set in the Indian state of Punjab amid the mourning tension that precedes the event of Partition. In *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar, we get a detailed description of the Swadeshi Movement, the activities of the freedom fighters, the outbreak of the Second World War, the Bombay dock explosion and the division of India in 1947. *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sindhwa is the first novel by a woman novelist from Pakistan in which she describes the conditions of people in Lahore. The novel is a masterpiece as it relates the political events through the eyes of a child, thus helping in seeing the scenario from a fresh perspective. Sunlight on a

Broken Column by Attia Hosain is an autobiographical novel by a fictional character named Laila who reflects the changes an individual suffers amidst the political changes. As she herself suffers from a personal crisis, her country also suffers an identity crisis. Her revolt against the traditional values of her family represents India's revolt against its rulers while undergoing a drastic change. The novel holds a mirror to the partition politics through the character of Laila. Another work that can never be neglected is the poem "Subh-e-Azadi" by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. The poet writes it on the eve of Indian Independence with a dark note of disillusionment that he as well as the people of India suffers, when they realize that this is not the result they had wanted. This poem is a clear reflection of the disheartenment caused due to the hypocrisy of the discourses. The non-fiction book by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre named "Freedom at Midnight", gives a detailed account of the British Raj, the princely states' reactions to Independence and the massacres of Partition. This can be considered as a result of deep research which is often found lacking in the works of other historians.

The disastrous effects of partition can be explained as a psychological after effect of colonialism on the colonised. Even though colonialism was eradicated, it could not be removed from the minds of the people. It created in people, what can be termed as alterity. Indians and Pakistanis, like the citizens of other Third World Countries, felt like “the other”^{iv} and this created widespread frustration and confusion. Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* is an insight into the psychology of colonialism. Fanon argued that colonialism dehumanized the native. It drove the colonized to madness by rejecting any individual claims of the native. The Colonizer and the Colonized by Albert Memmi dissects the minds of both oppressor and oppressed and reveals the truth about the colonial situation. It shows the psychological effects of colonization, destroying the institutions and thus the memory of the colonized, cutting them off from their language and debasing it, preventing its growth. These views help us to reason the widespread havoc which started from the Partition and is continuing even today in the name of Terrorism.

Contemporary writers and activists describe the horrors of terrorist attacks prevalent in several regions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The stories of massacre of the present times are almost identifiable with the stories of massacre during and after Partition, except for the usage of a few modern weapons. The reason is almost the same. Identity crisis and lack of settlement make several people adopt ways of destruction, violence and intimidation, thus terrorizing the innocent. The life of Malala Yousafzai clearly reveals the horrifying picture that is still continuing in Pakistan. It clearly points out how women suffer the most in times of crisis and how they are the first targets of terrorization. Afghan-born American novelist and physician, Khaled Hosseini brings out the plight of innocent civilians at the hands of terrorists in Afghanistan. Similarly, Taslima Nasrin writes about the tortures on women in the name of religion, another scenario that can be witnessed since the time of Partition.

There are several questions or issues that can be raised for further study in this connection. By studying the problem of terrorism in details, we can see how the theory of existentialism can be stretched and applied to explain it. This can be done by studying the literary works that depict

terrorism. Not only that, we can also study about the wars of Independence fought in other countries and how they are similar to the War of Independence in India. A psychological study of the writers who retell the stories of Partition of India and a discussion of the theories of Post colonialism can bring light upon the contemporary problems of War. In a sense, 1947, has yet to come to an end.

ⁱSee Nicholas Mansergh, *Nationalism and Independence: Selected Irish Papers* (Ireland: Cork University Press, 1997) pg 223.

ⁱⁱSee Pramod K. Nayar, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* (India: Dorling Kindersley, 2010) pg 154.

ⁱⁱⁱSee D. N. Gupta, *Bhagat Singh: Selected Speeches and Writings* (India: National Book Trust, 2007) pg 68.

^{iv}See Clive Hazell, *Alterity; The Experience of the Other* (Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2009) pg xvii.

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