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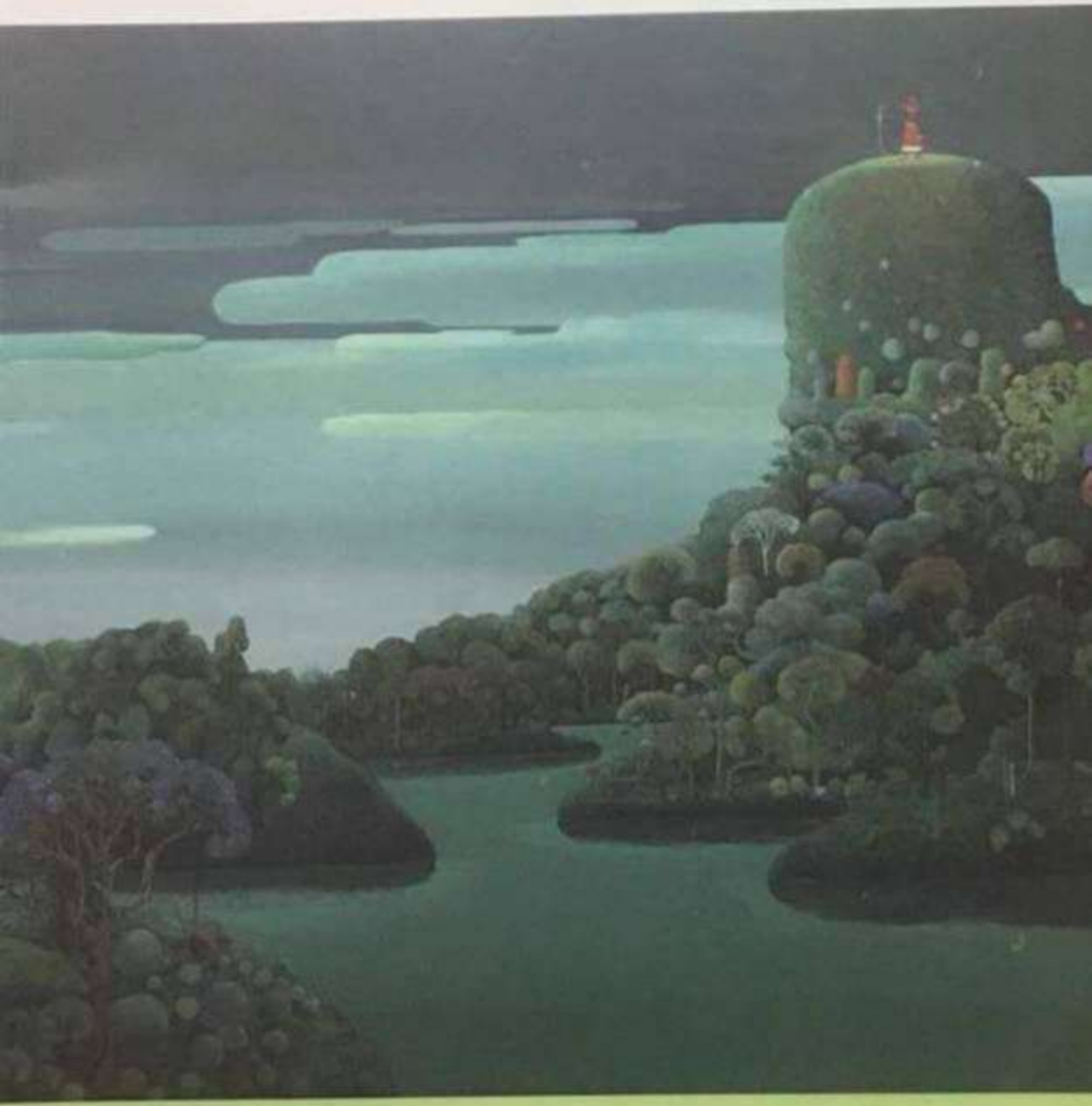

LITTCRIT

An Indian Response to Literature

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Debasri Basu

Small Screens, Big Broils: Indian Television and Religious Polemics

Abstract

This paper examines the polemics of religious identity triggered by televisual medium in India. A critical study of two television programmes whose broadcast led to formidable controversies under this rubric has been undertaken to illustrate the phenomenon that engages with issues of hegemony and counter-currents. The inquiry also necessitates an exploration of the 'production' and 'consumption' of these media texts, manifest in the varying responses they have evoked in the subcontinent. Incidentally, both of them–*Tamas* and *Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam*–depict events surrounding the 1947 Partition of India, which had wreaked havoc on the South-Asian people. That these serials could engender inflamed passions among the masses even after all these years is a sad indication that the wounds of internecine strife are still raw at places and require a resolute effort on behalf of all parties concerned to heal.

Keywords: Indian Television, Representation, hegemony

India has come a long way from the inglorious days of its colonial bondage, taking major developmental strides in the decades past. As a nation, however, it still remains subject to occasional turbulence, owing mainly to the heterogeneous nature of its populace which proffers a fertile bed for spawning differences. As such, any topic that veers towards the tense interrelation between diverse societal groups is deemed sensitive, with the potential to lead to veritable conflicts–a prospect which at times obliges cultural practitioners to follow a self-imposed moratorium. Bhisham Sahni, famed litterateur and author of the Hindi novel *Tamas* on which the tele-series of the same title is chiefly based, could consolidate his thoughts on such a subject and write about it years later, in 1971–despite having witnessed religious violence during the 1926 carnage of Rawalpindi as well

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as the Lahore conflagration in 1947. In neighbouring Pakistan, the eminent Urdu writer Sa'adat Hasan Manto who, haunted by the human tragedy associated with the Partition, castigated the politics of religious division in his stories was compelled to face lawsuits in 1948–on charges of obscenity. Such a trend was noticeable in the realm of movies too: Salil Sen's 1955 Bengali film *Natun Yahudi* [New Jew] and M.S. Sathyu's 1973 Urdu movie *Garm Hava* [Hot Winds] had to encounter official hurdles when the Indian Censor Board posed objections to these films, though eventually both were released to much critical acclaim.

Television, the audio-visual medium which was once considered a poor cousin of cinema but has garnered huge ratings in recent times, had a tentative start in India in 1959; it was much later, in 1982, that national transmission commenced. Those initial years saw a solitary player on the field: the state channel Doordarshan, or 'DD' in common parlance. Under aegis of the central government, it broadcast programmes with an explicit emphasis on entertainment tempered with information and education. These were lapped up by the viewers, not only because they provided a means of recreation to those who could not visit cinema halls, but also facilitated social cohesion, more so when watched on community-television sets. The first serial to take up the theme of Partition on Indian small-screens was *Buniyaad* (Dir. Ramesh Sippy and Jyoti Sarup), but its account of the fortunes of a Punjabi Hindu family from Lahore who had to seek refuge in India did not cause any unrest; and in fact, it was appreciated even in Pakistan. However, the telecast of *Tamas* in 1988 and its discursive interpretation of the Partition disturbances struck the first dent in the universal acceptance of television programmes in India. Sahni's novel denoting 'darkness/ignorance' in Sanskrit and Hindi, as also a couple of his short stories–"Sardarni" and "Zahud Baksh", provided the source for its plot-line. It was directed by the eminent 'art-house' film-maker Govind Nihalani and shot on 35 mm film as a movie, but due to its extraordinary length of almost five hours, it could not have a regular release in cinema halls. Therefore, the show was broadcast on television in the format of a mini-series, split into several episodes. Its airing on the official channel implied the approval of the authorities at Mandi House–the national headquarters of Doordarshan–as all programmes were regulated by the bureaucracy in those years of state monopoly.

As it turned out, *Tamas* found itself caught in the midst of a burgeoning tumult soon enough, as a section of the audience took umbrage at scenes portraying Hindu characters in a disparaging light, for instance the once-harmless boy Ranvir getting metamorphosed into a cold-blooded killer through the indoctrination of Masterji Devbrat. Lal Krishna Advani, the then-Bhartiya Janata Party [BJP] President, remarked that the serial was a distortion of history because of its interpretation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh [RSS] and Arya Samaj cadres as "beastly fanatics," reducing Muslim *League members to "mere ruffians," and turning Congress Party functionaries* into "anaemic nincompoops" (qtd. in Singh and Rahman, n.p.). The timing of Nihalani's series happened to be another key aspect in the unfolding of events, as it coincided with the Ramanand Sagar-directed *Ramayan*, a televised Hindi adaptation of the Indian epic *Ramayana* shown during 1987-88. Since its protagonist Rama was revered as a Hindu god-king, the programme had an unprecedented impact on the public psyche and, inarguably, played an instrumental role in rousing religion-induced zeal. Right-wing groups, spotting an opportunity in the disapprobation arising out of *Tamas*, latched onto the bandwagon and organised agitations on the streets of Indian cities to protest its anti-Hindu slant. Vijay Malhotra, then Secretary of BJP argued: "Everyone knows that in those areas [western Punjab] the riots were started by Muslims. In this serial, it has been claimed that the riots were started by Hindus involving a slaughtered pig. This is absolutely imaginary" (qtd. in Tempest, n.p.). Pramod Nawalkar, a leader of the Maharashtrian political party Shiv Sena–traditionally an electoral ally of the BJP–criticized it for shielding the Muslims in the very first episode where the culprit is named "Choudhary". That in Sahni's novel, it was the Muslim Murad Ali who had persuaded the animal skinner Nathu to kill the pig, brushing off the poor man's reluctance by thrusting five rupees in his hand, was a fact that could not be easily ignored. One is intrigued by this tweak wrought into the screenplay of *Tamas* whereby Ali gets transformed into Choudhary–a sinister figure whose religious affiliation is kept vague. It is worthwhile to mention here that in Sahni's reckoning, Choudhary is simply "an agent provocateur" and hence his "religion is utterly irrelevant. The question is not whether he is a Hindu or a Muslim, for such a person has no religion" (qtd. in Singh and Rahman, n.p.). Interestingly, the serial ruffled the feathers of a Muslim citizen as well: a businessman from Bombay [modern-day Mumbai] named Javed Ahmad Siddiqui sued to have it banned on the ground that it "would poison the minds of the people" (qtd. in Tripathi, n.p.) since the Muslims were "shown in a bad light" (qtd. in Sarkar 253). The telecast of *Tamas* was temporarily halted when the Bombay High Court initially put a stay order in its judgement of 21 January 1988, ruling that it threatened "public order and morality" (qtd. in Tempest, n.p.). However, in its subsequent verdict of 23 January 1988, Justices Bakhtawar Lentin and Sujata Manohar overruled the interim order and permitted its screening. The judges declared that the serial attacked fundamentalists in both communities equally: "The message is loud and clear," they added, "directed as it is against the sickness of communalism, the extremists stand exposed when realisation dawns on both communities who ultimately unite as brothers" (qtd. in Tripathi, n.p.). The dispute ultimately reached the Supreme Court of India, which also refused to put any injunction on the serial, upholding the primacy of the country's Cinematograph Act of 1952.

Although the Indian televisual arena has witnessed controversies arising out of an array of issues–regressive themes, abusive dialogues, excessive violence, vulgarity, violation of privacy, as well as transgression of women, child, and animal rights–it is usually seen that history and religion educe the most strident feedback, possibly owing to their distinctive capacity to mobilize the masses. It is within this volatile matrix of dialectical currents which inter-animate religious communities in the Indian subcontinent that the uproar over the transmission of the Pakistani television series *Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam* on Indian air-waves needs to be situated. Like *Tamas*, this too is an adaptation of a novel–the Urdu *Bano* written by Pakistani author Razia Butt. It depicts the tribulations of its eponymous female protagonist during the Partition violence in eastern Punjab, a province where Muslims were outnumbered by Sikhs and Hindus. Scripted by Samira Fazal and directed by Haissam Hussain, it was shown in Pakistan on Hum TV, a private television channel, in 2010 under the title *Dastaan* [A Tale]. It comprised of 23 episodes, but was subsequently converted into a 35-episode series by the erstwhile television channel Zindagi, which has now shifted to an exclusively online platform. This Indian satellite channel, part of the Subhash Chandra-owned Zee group, initially had the phrase '*Jodey Dilon Ko*' [Connecting Hearts] for its tagline, emphasizing its professed aim of forging links between people. Any investigation that proposes to appraise the manner in which the various arms of media impact society also requires taking heed of the reverse mechanism. Television experienced a revolution from the early 1990s when private participants made a foray into the sector, in tandem with the advent of economic liberalisation. The focus moved to electronic capitalism with an express objective of harvesting the untapped market of teeming millions by means of catering to their taste-cultures. Not surprisingly, prior to the telecast in India during May 2015, Zindagi chopped parts of *Dastaan* in an attempt to turn it suitable to Indian sensibilities; it was evident that the channel management had anticipated opposition from certain quarters, and had taken steps to pre-empt it. The preliminary plan was to run the serial under the title *Lakeerein* [Lines], which was later amended to *Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam* [Ravages Wrought by Time] in a bid to remove the divisive connotations of the earlier label and render it more lyrical, infusing it with elements of the tragic-romantic, and thereby underscore the vicissitudes faced by the star-crossed Bano and her fiancé Hassan. However, these efforts proved futile as the changes were inadequate and protests started pouring in quickly. While some of the complaints charged that the serial eulogised the Indian Muslim League and its leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah as valiant heroes waging a holy war against the Indian National Congress for their discrimination against Muslims, majority of the criticism rose out of the portrayal of Hindus and Sikhs as villains of the piece. The common clamour was that the show was "inflammatory in nature and promoted Pakistan's narrative of the Partition" (Dhawan, n.p.).

The core grievance against *Waqt Ne Kiya Kya Haseen Sitam*, henceforth referred to as *WNKKHS*, pertained to Episodes 15 and 16 telecast on 8-9 April 2015, though not quite limited to these two, as evinced in the Order of Justice (Retd.) Mukul Mudgal who was appointed to look into the matter by the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council–an organ of the Indian Broadcasting Federation, an independent regulatory body of television channels in the country. If one scrutinises their contents [Episodes 9 and 10 of *Dastaan*], the reasons become all too clear–depiction of murder and mayhem perpetrated by Hindu and Sikh characters on Muslims in Ludhiana. Rioters from these two communities attack Bano's house and slaughter several family members, including her father Rashid as well as brothers Saleem and Faheem. Once they are done with the menfolk, they turn their vile attention to the women who had been hiding on the roof. Seeing her husband dead, Saleem's pregnant wife Suraiya jumps off and falls near his lifeless body. Even in her grievously injured state, she tries to hold his hand but is cruelly stabbed in the womb by a Sikh with a spear [the image of this impaling act was, however, omitted by Zindagi authorities], thus killing her as well as the unborn child. This was bound to draw ire, despite the fact that such butchery of foetuses belonging to the 'rival' religion was not unheard of during the Partition massacres. As Bano's mother Bibi tries to strangulate her daughter in a bid to 'save her dignity', two of Saleem's friends–Ram and Ravi–arrive and dissuade her, swearing to protect them. The representation of Hindus in this show is further problematized when Ram, who was Saleem's childhood friend, turns out to be a knave of the worst kind. Not only had he chosen to shy away earlier when Saleem had come to his house for help, he later betrays the faith reposed in him and tries to rape Bano–after dissembling as a saviour. He brings the two women to an empty house on that fateful night and then signals Ravi to restrain the mother so that he can have his way with the daughter. Although his heinous conduct is timely offset by Ravi who stabs Ram to death–moved by Bano's screams and Bibi's frantic appeals to Ravi to save her modesty since Bano regarded them as brothers and used to tie Rakhis on their wrists–Ram's attempt was provocative enough and surely must not have gone down well with some of the Hindu viewers. They were offended by such a projection of Ram's character, and considered it an intentional affront to the image of Maryada Purushottam Rama, hero of Maharshi Valmiki's epic *Ramayana* who is held in great esteem by the Hindu community. Moreover, periodic commentaries by a male voice in the background intersperse the narrative, blaming Hindus and Sikhs for raging 'genocide' against Muslims during this phase. Such accusations are substantiated by illustrations on the map to establish that Punjab and Bengal, inspite of being Muslim-majority provinces, were unfairly divided into two blocs so as to accommodate the demands of the 'cunning' Hindus. Black-and-white file photographs of British statesmen are shown, chiefly of Viceroy Lord Mountbatten who

is held squarely responsible for conspiring with Indian politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to harm Pakistan's interests. The voice-over also alleges that Hindus and Sikhs had plotted to wipe out all Muslims from 'Hindustan' and had committed 'mass-murders' to achieve their mission. They had pressed their military into service for this purpose, and even deployed fighter planes–resulting in the Indian Muslim population to drop from '25%' to just '9%' after the Partition.

Not content with mere statistics, the serial displays successive atrocities faced by Muslims in the region. The caravan heading towards Pakistan, which Bano and Bibi had joined, is made to undergo extreme suffering at the behest of non-Muslims. When Bano sees a road-side well, she rushes for a drink but is warned that the water has been poisoned. As if such auxiliary stratagems were too tepid, the Hindus and Sikhs eventually ambush the convoy that night; many are killed by sword-wielding men, Bano is raped and Bibi meets her death at their hands. Following this debacle, the storyline shows Bano rescued by a kindly Sikh man the next morning who also gives Bibi's body a burial. He puts the girl aboard a train travelling to Lahore but, unfortunately, Bano's hardships continue unabated as the train is waylaid by a Sikh gang. One of the assailants, Basant Singh, seizes and brings her to his house; he and his mother Paramveer make for a particularly debauched duo who gloat over decimating 'generations of Muslims' in Kapurthala and Amritsar. Basant sexually assaults Bano, and forcibly converts her to Sikhism after naming her Sundar Kaur ['beautiful woman' in Punjabi]; married to him in a hasty ritual, she in due course gives birth to a son. It is only Basant's accidental death from falling off the roof in an attempt to save this son that provides Bano a fortuitous chance to finally be free and reach Pakistan. In defence of *WNKKHS*, it may be said that these events are recounted from the standpoint of a Muslim protagonist, hence the preponderance of incidents stressing the crimes unleashed on her religious community by its opponents. Supporters of the serial could also assert that Pakistan is not shown to be vice-free either.[1] Kalim Sahab, a local political figure, echoes Bano's condemnation of lewd practices prevalent there, thereby winning over her trust. In the next Episode, this same Kalim reveals his true stripes by trying to outrage Bano's modesty in a deserted office. She, in a fit of rage, stabs him to death with a pair of scissors, though even this climax is lent an incendiary tone–Kalim appears to her in the persona of 'Basant Singh', thus embodying the avatar of her Sikh rapist who had enslaved her for more than five years. The insinuation of such a branding was not lost on the audience in India, for the very fact that even a Muslim assaulter being envisioned through the name and face of 'Basant Singh' was tantamount to typecasting the entire community of Sikhs as guilty.

It is crucial to remember that works of art pitting two or more religious groups against each other have had differing responses over the years. Literature–be it novels, short stories, plays, poems, memoirs or essays–have

seldom educed sharp or swift reactions, barring Manto's case. Movies and audio-visual programmes, on the other hand, have been periodically targeted–either by the state apparatus through censorship or public censure. Sahni's novel, which was published in 1974, had not been judged inflammatory at that time; it was almost a decade and a half later when the novel was filmed that it stirred up the proverbial hornet's nest. When delved deeper, one realises that this seeming incongruity may be attributed to the mode of transmission and the concomitant levels of permeation. The written word has a limited penetration in India where the literacy rate still hovers between 60-70%, and even those who are technically 'literate' do not always procure books to read. Conversely, electronic media–including films, television programmes, dramas, songs and speeches–have a much wider and potent reach, and can incite people over literary works which had remained outside the radar for even centuries, as revealed in the fracas over the cinematic adaptation of the Padmini legend.[2] Bhaskar Sarkar in the chapter "*Tamas* and the Limits of Representation" explicates the phenomenon thus: "This televisual assemblage of cultural memory, and the impassioned response it evoked from several generations of viewers, brought to the fore the complexities of mass-scale mediations of social trauma" (230). Television, being a highly popular medium, enabled the dissemination of the series on a much larger scale vis-à-vis the novel. Consequently, it got in the crosshairs of a section of the audience who were riled at the depiction of Hindus as being responsible for igniting communal fires.

Notwithstanding these objections, *Tamas* was telecast in its entirety and elicited praise from critics and commoners alike; it is regarded as a classic and continues to enjoy a high recall quotient even in the present. Offering a somewhat parallel to this is *Dastaan*, which too had received positive reviews in Pakistan and was ranked as the second best drama of 2010 according to a poll conducted by the Pakistani Urdu TV channel Dawn News. The native spectators greatly applauded the serial, perhaps as much for the romance of Bano and Hassan, as for its rendering of the miseries of Muslims during the Partition. Regarding the rumpus that it generated in India, director Hussain said in an interview that there is nothing anti-Indian in it, and viewers will just get to see a good 'unbiased' love story (IANS, n.p.).[3] That there is some truth to this statement cannot be denied, since the makers did intend to promote it as an emotional love saga, adduced from the change brought about in the story's finale. In the novel, Bano dies and Hassan goes insane, while in the serial Hassan and his cousin Rabia tie the marital knot after Bano receives a life-sentence for the murder of Kalim and is forced to live the rest of her days in a lunatic asylum, the cumulative ordeal of her travails having taken a gross toll on her mental health. This revision was effected in an endeavour to lessen the pathos of the acutely tragic conclusion in Butt's original. In any case, modifying the content to make it agreeable to

the target audience is a common practice in film and television industries. This can be fashioned both at the storyboard stage when the screenplay is written or a literary work is adapted for dramatization, as well as executing cuts at the editing table before the telecast, as exemplified in *Dastaan* and *WNKKHS* respectively. Nonetheless, a careful analysis of the serial throws up some startling revelations about the way non-Muslims have been presented. It is mostly unflattering, with only a few cursory figures offering a modicum of counterbalance here and there. Most of them are portrayed as stock characters, with little individuality to differentiate them. They are dressed in red or saffron clothes–be it the turban and *kurta* [tunic-like upper garment] of Basant Singh, the influential Hindu Diwanji, his sons Ram and Ravi and or the ochre saree of women like Savitri who, being Bibi's neighbour and childhood friend, feels pity for Bano's family but is unable come to their aid. Moreover, the Hindus viz. Diwanji, Ram, Ravi, and even the man who ravishes Bano during the night raid are invariably shown to be sporting red-coloured *'tilaks'* [religious marks] on their foreheads. The use of these symbols and colours to intensify community stereotypes could have been less pronounced, and best avoided. Such indexicalities did not pose any difficulties in Pakistan because the country has a miniscule religious minority population, and living in a theocratic state they do not quite enjoy the liberty to express their innermost feelings.[4] Muslims constitute an overwhelming majority there, and critiquing voices being few and far between, writers and artists do not have the imperative to cater to a fractured populace. Therefore, *WNKKHS* and other programmes of its ilk do not, in fact need not, conform to a discursive and nuanced structure, since it can celebrate its religious nationalism in overt terms without being mindful of contentious rhetoric. Hassan's friend Nadir is the lone voice who in Episode10 alludes, in passing, that riot was raging also in Rawalpindi, and not just in eastern Punjab as reiterated time and again by rest of the dramatis personae.

The *Tamas* dispute had led to considerable frenzy caused by the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Yuv Morcha who wanted the ban reimposed.[5] Records of the time reveal that there was a great deal of discussion and deliberation as well–through public meetings; in newspaper columns and letters sent to editors; at homes, offices and buses whether the ban should have been lifted (Mankekar 318). Two and a half decades later, the dispute involving *WNKKHS* too generated ample heat, though there was no violent protest this time around. Most of today's viewers belong to the 'hinge generation' and are temporally insulated from the immediate horrors of the Partition. The fervent arguments were largely confined to the digital world where people either in favour or against the show vented their thoughts through online forums. Surely, there were some who lodged formal complaints to the channel authorities, the BCCC as well as the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. However, by the time Justice Mudgal issued a notice to Zindagi and summoned its officials for a hearing on 22 May 2015,

all episodes of the programme had already been broadcast. So even though the final verdict stated that the serial should not have been shown because it has "the potential of causing unrest as the theme seems to be inimical to Indian interests", and also that the channel could not repeat its episodes "under any circumstances again", it only amounted to the blocking of any repeat telecast (Mudgal 3). The ruckus died down afterwards, reaffirming the adage that public memory is short. Across the border, the response to this entire affair was one of circumspection; while director Hussain did not mind the alterations executed by Zindagi, some Pakistani reviewers did assess *WNKKHS* as a toned-down 'neutralized' version (Bhutto, n.p.). Purnima Mankekar's observation that "memories of the past are constructed differently according to one's sociohistorical location"–made in the context of the *Tamas* debate–holds valid with respect to the *WNKKHS* controversy as well (330). Read in conjunction with Umberto Eco's postulation about the framework of cultural references that constitutes the receivers' patrimony of knowledge and value-system, it corroborates the role of positionalities responsible for the variance in responses to cultural productions. This becomes all the more palpable in cases which involve contested ideas and adversarial groups whose inter-relations are often under strain. The negotiated and oppositional codes of Stuart Hall in his 'Encoding and Decoding' model of communication–invoked in reference to television discourse–are also instructive here, for they not only correspond to the reaction of Indian audiences to these two shows but also serve to correlate social milieu with collective action, as crystallised in the resultant public outcry. India having a mixed viewership has had a long, if chequered, track record of counter-discourse. Over the last few decades, multiplicity of views–contingent upon caste, creed, sect, class, language, ethnicity and ideology–have periodically emanated from different corners of this country. Undoubtedly, these are important markers of a socio-political environment which permits divergent voices to have their say–a feature to which Ritu Menon draws attention in connection with the hullabaloo over *WNKKHS*: "What happened in 1947 was a 'partition' for India but the creation of a homeland for (Pakistani) Muslims. So, for India it was a sense of loss and betrayal but for Pakistan, a sense of gain....It's a good idea to learn about the experiences of the other side rather than have just the nationalist point of view, which is how Partition is mostly shown in films and TV shows" (qtd. in Sukanya, n.p.). The enormous expansion in means of communication has facilitated a concurrent growth in the circulation of views and sentiments, and though this is gauged to be mostly constructive, we must simultaneously ensure that dissent and remonstration do not manage to repress the liberal arts to any significant extent, nor are institutional, ideological and commercial filters imposed for narrow gains. India's pluralistic society has substantially contributed to its prevalence as a viable democracy, and the onus rests on its citizenry to sustain it through the many challenges that it encounters in both the present as well as future times.

Notes

1. In Episode 34 of *WNKKHS*, Bano is shocked at the sight of women dancing before men in Rawalpindi; it is a rude jolt to her long-cherished vision of a '*pak*' i.e. pure Pakistan.
2. Sanjay Leela Bhansali chose to render the Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi's Awadhi epic *Padmavat*, about the yearning of Delhi's sultan Alauddin Khilji for Chittor's queen Rani Padmini, into the Hindi movie *Padmavati*. The poem dates back to 1540, but its transcreation provoked the Rajput group Karni Sena only in late 2017 when the film was on the verge of release, prompting the Indian Censor Board to suggest a change of title and some deletions.
3. "Partition has been a tragic history in the sub-continent....The only thing which people will get to see in this show is the love story of Hassan and Bano in an unfortunate time," Hussain said via video conference from Lahore. Actor Ahsan Khan, who played the role of the 'pro-Indian' Saleem, too emphasised that "the show was not made with an intention to hurt anybody's feelings" (IANS, n.p.).
4. Most of the Hindus and Sikhs, totalling 4.4 million, had to leave the two arms of Pakistan during and after the Partition due to mounting insecurities (Boyle et al, 26).
5. In the Indian capital of New Delhi, around three thousand demonstrators had broken into the Doordarshan Kendra in January 1988 before the police could drive them back. The southern city of Hyderabad witnessed agitators burning government vehicles and files at the TV station in February 1988, resulting in fifteen people getting injured, of which ten were policemen (Tempest, n.p.).

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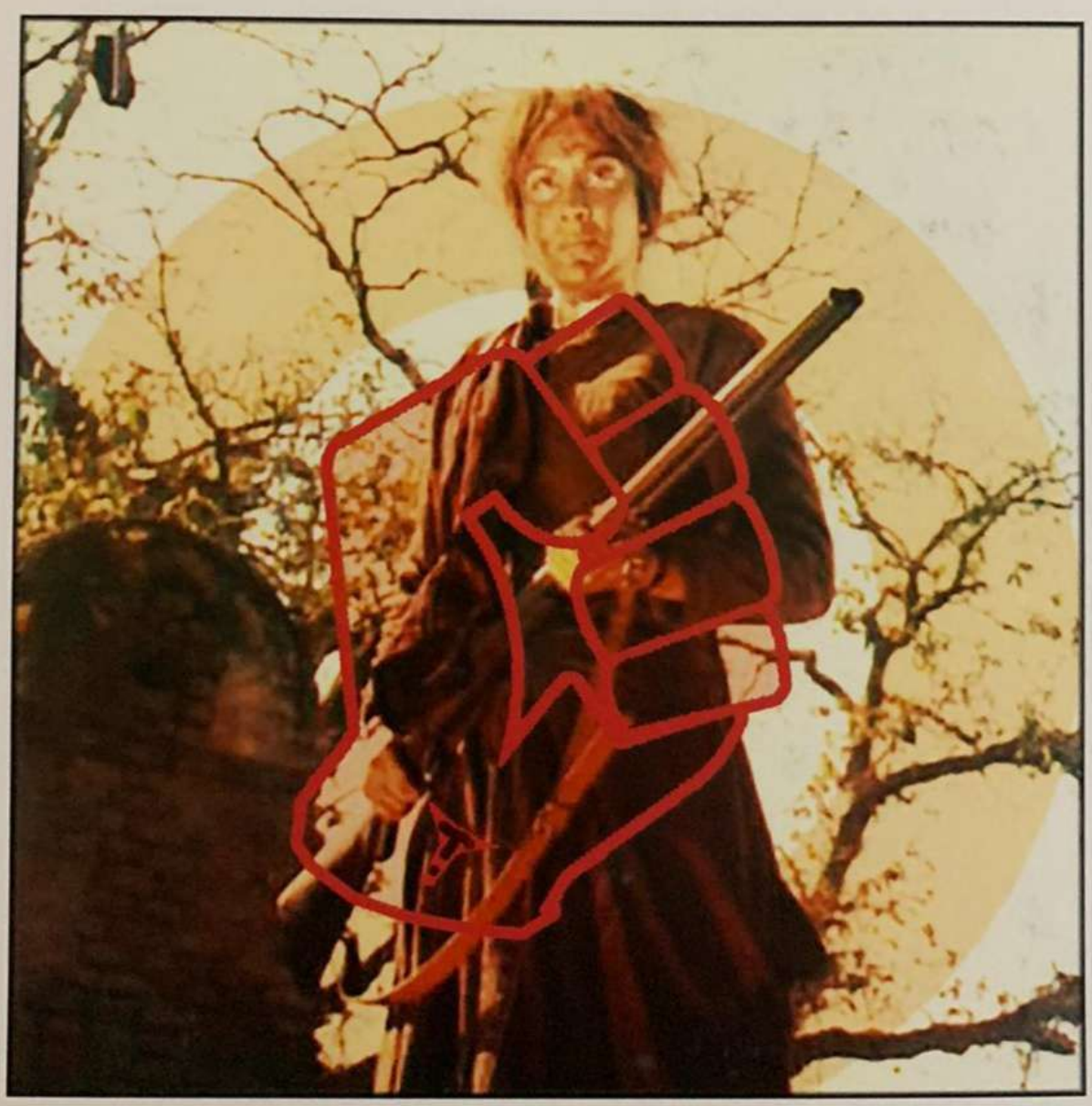

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Post-Colonial Nostalgia: Literary Ruminations from South Asia

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The history of the mid-twentieth century exhibits a dichotomous phenomenon–the catastrophe of a major war alternating with the euphoria of political deliverance in large parts of the colonized world. The process of decolonization in South Asia began with India and Ceylon gaining their sovereignty from British Rule in quick succession–1947 and 1948 respectively. Liberation from colonial yoke after years of struggle, under the aegis of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, ushered in jubilations in the Indian subcontinent. For the newly-created country of Pakistan, it took on an additional connotation of emancipation from the clutches of both 'foreign' British and 'Hindu' Congress hegemony. History has predictably highlighted the celebratory character of this occasion in its extensive tomes;[1] however, it must be remembered that any homogenized depiction denies a vital facet of this event its due importance in the annals of time–for the 1947 independence was coeval with the partition of the subcontinent on grounds of religion. Those who found themselves on the 'wrong side' of the dividing line after Sir Cyril Radcliffe's Boundary Commission announced its decree on 17 August 1947 could not share the festive mood, their responses contingent upon the dual factors of religious identity and territorial location. It was life-altering for these groups, more so when involving the element of duress. Literature, in both the indigenous languages and English, has endeavored to reflect the thoughts and reactions of those who were thus affected. These are primarily in the genres of fiction and memoir, and have served to disseminate the multilayered experiences of survivors. Alongside, there has also emerged a body of miscellaneous writings that sheds newer light on the emotive legacy of this fateful occurrence. The present paper seeks to delineate the claim of nostalgia on the South Asian populace–particularly in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh–as evinced in selected short stories from the region, to probe the sundry ways in which this crucial chapter exercised its impact irrespective of putative differences based on nationalistic affiliation. Interestingly, post-colonial nostalgia has been observed amongst not just the once-colonized, but also in Britain, the foremost imperialist power in modern history; it manifests itself through glances at the past glory of the empire.[2]

Home, which symbolizes one's provenance, holds a special significance in human life; consequently, relocating to another land is a

momentous occurrence for most people. That a vast number of the migrants had to flee their dwellings in the face of extreme hostility can be estimated from the magnitude of violence during those tumultuous years in the subcontinent. Consequently, the freedom gained in the realm of 'high politics' with the departure of colonial powers must have appeared rather hollow to such beleaguered men. This sentiment is particularly noticeable amongst those whose lives were reasonably stable under the previous disposition. The British Raj had managed to offer a modicum of systematic administration in India, which was duly supplemented by introducing basic amenities. A segment of the population did get to benefit from these infrastructural initiatives, albeit in varying degrees. Partition and the attendant turmoil inflicted a severe blow to them, virtually signaling an abrupt end to their moderately settled lives. Their tribulations in the post-Partition era, due to indifference of a section of the Indian and Pakistani state machinery as well as resentment from private citizens in their host societies, induced them to view their past with a sense of loss. Such pensive glances back to those days of relative contentment have constituted a prominent trope in post-colonial literature from the region, notwithstanding the fact that this past was also riddled with signs of colonial oppression.[3] In this respect, Hasan Azizul Haq's "Hearth and Home", translated from Bengali, depicts the miseries of a rural Hindu family who are reduced to penury and also lose one of their children to malnutrition. The father Ramsharan wonders aloud: "Independence my ass!....Don't get anything to eat, children die of starving, stand in the queue like a naked fakir [ascetic], go begging from door to door....I had a house once, now I have nothing. How can anyone call me independent?"(Haq 19). His bafflement at this apparent freedom would have struck a chord with all those who, even during the colonial rule, had a 'hearth and home' as well as a steady means of livelihood which they were dispossessed of after the Partition.[4]

It may be worthwhile at this point to analyze the conceptual dynamics of nostalgia, and assess its manifold ramifications. The term was earlier used to denote a mental ailment mainly seen in seamen, soldiers and students who stayed abroad for long stretches of time. Etymologically, it was derived from the Greek words *nostos* [return home] and *algos* [pain], the coinage made in 1688 by a Swiss physician named Johannes Hoffer (Margalit 272). Though its lexicographical meaning is homesickness, in modern times it has come to imply an fervent pining for the past, encompassing both space and time. Christopher Lasch propounds that "[N]ostalgia appeals to the feeling that the past offered delights no longer obtainable. Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost and for that reason timeless and unchanging" (Lasch 18). The Bengali words *desh* or *dyash* and the Urdu term *watan*, apart from signifying one's

official country, also have the connotative implication of provenance. Not surprisingly, these words have been a recurring fixture in post-colonial narratives, for they foreground the rhetoric of nostalgia in popular life. Such intense yearnings find reflection in Samaresh Dasgupta's "Home, Sweet Home!", translated from Bengali, where the narrator Bilu longs for his native place near the Mynamati Hills in eastern Bengal, a province that had turned inimical to his religious community around the time of the Partition. He recollects his childhood when he used to spend "hours observing the waves and the flow of the river Gomati" (Dasgupta 313). The allusions to "birds, trees, flowers, river and the countryside" that prefigure in his description project his village as a utopia, suggested in the story's title, as also in these lines: "I was thinking of my homeland. The concepts of 'mother' and 'mother's land' are greater than Heaven! Have I lost Heaven; have I fallen from Paradise?" (Dasgupta 319). There are snatches of the famous Rabindranath Tagore song "*Amar sonar Bangla, ami tomai bhalobashi*" ['My golden Bengal, I love you'–which was later adopted as the national anthem of Bangladesh] redolent with the earthy flavor of rural landscapes, as also the Sanskrit *shloka* [verse] "*Janani Janmabhumischa Swargadarpi Gariyasi*" [Mother and motherland are greater than Heaven] interspersed in the text (Dasgupta 315, 320). Bilu, a painter, can no longer reconcile to a settled existence after leaving his previous habitation and ends up as a drifter. His intrinsic restlessness and eventual nomadic life get mirrored in the highly fragmented structure that Dasgupta chooses for his narrative.

Stories emanating from Sindh[5] are also permeated with this enduring nostalgia, a sentiment that could appear in sharp contrast to the pragmatic image of Sindhi Hindus as primarily a business community in the public domain. One may explain this by the fact that unlike Punjab and Bengal, Sindh in its entirety went to West Pakistan as per Radcliffe's Boundary Award. "Lost Nations" by Gulzar Ahmed, translated from Sindhi, enunciates this ardent pining for home that has been forever lost to the religious 'other'–a classic case generating nostalgia, since there was no 'Indian' part of Sindh that the Sindhi Hindu refugees could hope of finding shelter in, resulting in a total dislocation. This story, incidentally written by a Sindhi writer from Pakistan, contains a frame-within-a-frame device, with the unnamed narrator's friend Abu-al-Hussain recounting to him a stirring experience during his trip to Hong Kong. He had met a Sindhi Hindu young man named Shyam who was settled there and owned a souvenir store. On learning that Hussain was from Karachi,[6] Shyam and one of his Sindhi acquaintances kept inquiring about Hyderabad, Larkana, Shikarpur and Sukkur–places in Sindh whose names reverberated in their memories despite having migrated far away from the subcontinent. Later in the afternoon, they invited him to a gathering of diasporic Sindhis who

were equally delighted to meet him. One of them even requested Hussain to visit his natal home in Shikarpur and send a leaf from his ancestral mango tree through post, the nostalgia dripping from his quivering voice. It is striking that they felt a sense of fraternity with Hussain based on a shared milieu despite his being not a born-Sindhi but a Mohajir.[7] When it was time to bid adieu, Shyam got emotional and told him to pray so that he could see his "homeland some day", because he had spent "sleepless nights longing for it" (Ahmed 62). To these uprooted people, the word 'home' carried a special fervor, and they tried to sustain a bond with their origins through all available means. It is relevant to point out here that forced exile for the Sindhi Hindu community led to the deprivation of not just territory but also language and cultural heritage. Harping on this loss is, for that reason, a common refrain amongst them, and often assumes an acute dimension in their chronicles.

Added to the onslaught of the past is the curiosity which impelled quite a few migrants to harbor dreams of visiting their 'homes' and gauge the present. Syed Mohammad Ashraf's "Separated from the Flock", translated from Urdu, touches upon this aspect through such inherent wishes nurtured in the hearts of its multiple characters. The unnamed narrator is struck time and again by memories of his previous village located between the rivers Ganges and Jamuna in United Provinces [present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India]. It would be pertinent to mention here that this region is representative of the famed Ganga-Jamuni *tehzeeb* [culture], characterized by co-existence of diverse religious communities even in post-independent India. In Ashraf's story, as the two friends lie in wait for ducks during their hunting trip, the narrator starts vaguely wondering about the abode he had left behind. Majority of the migrants could not foresee at the time of their departure that they would never be able to return. They had hoped to come back to their residences in the near future, perhaps when the riots were over and the situations had normalized. However, with citizenship becoming rigid, travel between the two countries grew complicated from 1952-53 onwards when visas were introduced, thereby effectuating a fundamental transformation of the heretofore porous border. Due to belligerent relations between these two countries, particularly from 1965, even short-terms visas became tough to acquire. The narrator in "Separated from the Flock" is sorely conscious that he will never be granted permission to come to India again due to the nature of his job–his being a West Pakistani government officer, that too a superintendent of police. When he happens to go to his driver Ghulam Ali's house, Ali's wife Jameela pleads with him to arrange for an Indian visa so that she could visit her former home in Hardoi, also in Uttar Pradesh. The narrator can relate to her deep attachment, but only inwardly; aware of Ali's reluctance towards her travel, in public he is

obligated to reject her entreaty citing legal hurdles. Earlier, he had been informed about Ali's friend Vaziruddin's wife who similarly wanted to go to her village in India and had even procured a permit, only to have it stolen and burnt by her husband. The narrator, although ashamed of his own subterfuge in Jameela's case, cannot condone such a heartless attitude on the part of Vaziruddin or Ali. Towards the end of the story, he equates his predicament to that of migratory birds shot and their wings broken, as a result of which they "can never fly back to those fields of desire" (Ashraf 30).

Writings evocative of such nostalgic yearnings have figured in both the eastern and western sectors of the subcontinent. The politico-religious distance between the two countries, both actual and hyped, had nullified their physical proximity, and although the condition on the eastern border was not as perilous as the west, yet communication could be just as problematic. "Home, Sweet Home!" calls to attention the troubles arising from the inimical relations between the two neighbors, touching upon the matter of legal travel during the East Pakistan phase. Unable to himself go and meet his kin across the border on account of visa difficulties, the narrator requests his mother, who with other elders of the family had stayed back there, to come to India via Burma or Ceylon [modern-day Myanmar and Sri Lanka respectively]. Even correspondence across this 'great divide' entailed complications for lack of any express lawful conduit. All letters from India had to be routed through some neutral, preferably western address like London or New York, and then redirected to East Pakistan–a scenario that makes him rue: "Britain is so far away. Yet communication with her is so simple. Why is Dhaka so far away?" (Dasgupta 318).[8] The state of affairs which requires immediate neighbors to take recourse to long, circuitous paths in order to meet and communicate with each other is iterated in Intizar Hussain's "A Letter From India", translated from Urdu. The narrator Kurban Ali, who is also the writer of the letter indicated in the story's title, is forced to send mails to his nephew Kamaran in Karachi through relatives and acquaintances living in distant Kuwait and London, while Ali's other nephew Imran who intended to travel from India to West Pakistan could only do so via Kathmandu in Nepal. The labyrinthine procedures described here are an index of the severe obstacles encountered by them owing to the border that arbitrarily came up and disrupted their hitherto placid lives.

Even if such visits could materialize, there was a veritable risk of physical harm from members of the purported 'rival' community, as exemplified in Vishnu Prabhakar's "My Native Land". Translated from Hindi, it is the moving tale of Puri, a successful Lahore lawyer who was compelled to migrate following the riots. Despite having shifted to India, the past still has him in its grip–making him return to Lahore several times under the guise

of a Muslim. He wanders through the city's Anarkali *bazaar*, the Mall and the High Court attired in a *tehmad* and a *fez* [sarong-like cloth wrapped around waist, and cap respectively–clothes normally associated with Muslim males], in a bid to avoid being detected. When his wife confronts him about these frequent Lahore visits, he confesses: "The secret of my life lies hidden in its soil. The story of my life is inscribed in the breeze of that place" (Prabhakar 131). On one such trip when he had gone to see his old Law College, he is recognized as a Hindu by a former acquaintance–a Muslim–who suspects him to be a spy and quickly shoots him to death. But Puri does not regret his decision and even in his dying moments says: "I never went from here. I just can't. This is my country, my native land" (Prabhakar 135). The stock image of a pristine ancestral place is thus demolished in the face of grim reality. Prabhakar puts the motif of return through a critical lens, steering clear of trite sentimentalism that is often the drawback of many such accounts.

It was only after the passage of decades that travel restrictions between the two countries became less stringent. Surinder Prakash's "Shadowlines", translated from Urdu, charts the visit of a Muslim family to their ancestral house in Lucknow years after the Partition. The patriarch Jahandida Husain, being a stout supporter of the Pakistan Movement, had sold his property to a Hindu migrant from Lahore named Kripa Ram and relocated to Karachi. His son Ayub along with his family who were now settled in London decide to come to India–"the land of his forefathers" in a sign of inherited nostalgia; when they finally reach their 'home', some of them "burst into tears" while others become "sorrowful" (Prakash 277). Such passion, more so in the case of the hinge generation is worth noting, for those who have never had the opportunity to live in the land of their forefathers but merely heard anecdotes from their elders might not always be able to connect on a personal level or grow receptive to such suggestions. Asif Aslam Farrukhi's "The Land of Memories", translated from Urdu, depicts an almost similar setting as "Shadowlines", it being the story of a Muslim family coming to the Indian town of Fatehgarh thirty years after having migrated to Karachi. The sight of this hometown triggers an instantaneous torrent of memories in the father Abbajan: "...as soon as the train stopped at the station, he jumped down, knelt on the ground, picked up a bit of dust and applied it to his forehead like a *tilak*" (Farrukhi 614, emphasis added). That a Muslim man here emulates the Hindu rite of smearing a holy mark on his forehead in a gesture of reverence accentuates the profound sense of attachment that he held for his native land–the soil where his umbilical cord was buried. His two sons, however, show scant regard for the town, or members of their extended family who had remained in India. Being exposed to western ways and more comfortable with their cousins living in Europe and Canada, they eye these Indian relatives disparagingly, and deem them backward. This shocks their father, and he realizes that the proverbial generation gap has caught up with

his family too. Prafulla Roy's "Roots", translated from Bengali, illustrates a striking parallel to this scenario, here involving members of the third generation and set in Bengal. Rajmohan and Abdul Karim had exchanged their houses at the time of Partition, such transactions betwixt evacuees having taken place throughout northern and eastern India. The two aged men in this story have been cherishing memories of their native lands for decades. Even in the twilight of his life Rajmohan reminisces about his former residence: "... he dearly wished to go back to Dhaka one day. Last year he had turned seventy, so if he did not go soon he would never be able to go" (Roy 234). When Karim comes to Kolkata after more than forty years, accompanied by his two teenaged grandchildren Shamim and Tahamina, he takes them to Rajmohan's place with the intention of showing them their ancestral house where his last three generations had lived. Rajmohan welcomes them heartily, but Karim is aggrieved that the children barely show any interest in their heritage and instead spend most of their time sight-seeing in and around the metropolis with Rajmohan's teenaged grandchildren Raja and Buna. Karim shares his sadness with Rajmohan at the time of their leave-taking, ruing that "'[T]hey are an utterly rootless lot'" (Roy 248). This disconnect is perhaps more visible in families where the migrants managed to sufficiently flourish in their adopted countries, the entailing success considerably weakening the ties of yore.

Keeping in mind the ethnic nature of the division, it is but natural that non-Muslim refugees would lament the loss of their ancestral lands that had now become part of a different country. What emerges as remarkable is that some Pakistani authors too have meditated on the issue, manifest in their assorted writings. The feeling of a languid pensiveness is palpable in Altaf Fatima's story "Do You Suppose It's The East Wind?", translated from Urdu, which shows the unnamed female Muslim narrator rewinding to her childhood spent in the company of the young Robby Dutt, son of a Hindu Brahmin. Having migrated to Pakistan, her remembrance of those carefree days is triggered by the blowing of the east wind–indicating the geographical position of India vis-à-vis West Pakistan: "It seems someone has filled space itself with a sweet, melancholic beauty. A cool breeze has finally started to blow, after much heat and sun. Could it be the east wind?" (Fatima 179). The dreamy weather puts the narrator, who is now a professional writer, in an indolent mood; she cannot concentrate on the mundane work at hand, since "the weather is absolutely delightful and the grapevine is maddeningly beautiful" (Fatima 179). The east wind sets her on a trip down the memory lane, "trekking back on the past's interminable highways" (Fatima 180). Such recollections, comparable to those in "Home! Sweet Home!", stress the similarity in the essence of most nostalgic portrayals irrespective of their origins. Fatima's narrator imparts emotionalized touches through the fond mention of tying a *rakhi*[9] and expressions of brotherly love for Robby–moments that

she now sorely misses. The Muslim League had successfully managed to conjure up the dream of an ideal Islamic homeland to a sizable chunk of Indian Muslims, following which the vision of Pakistan had developed a life of its own. As such, the migration of the narrator was voluntary; even so it could not spare her the bouts of wistfulness that she experiences in later years. Her response assumes significance when juxtaposed with that of others who had shifted from India, more so in the current political climate when professing excessive attachment to one's erstwhile land could be construed as betraying the cause of the 'homeland' and draw the ire of bigots. The above strain of nostalgia also seems to be generally absent in the narratives of Bengali Muslims since they received a better deal from the change in political equations: "Most of the marginal migrants seemed to be beneficiaries of exchange; they had more than enough to start a new life with a new identity", and hence "largely expressed a sense of autonomy in their new nation-state" (Ferdous 3). This can be attributed to the fact that the flow of non-Muslim refugees from eastern Bengal to India was much higher than that of Muslims to East Pakistan; therefore there was no dearth of houses and lands for the latter to occupy, deserted by the Bengali Hindus.[10]

Yet another unique approach to the topic is to be found in Hussain's "A Letter to India", as it depicts the nostalgia of those who did not migrate but chose to continue in their homes after the Partition. Tales of longing often involve refugees who, having undergone various hardships, were encumbered with the uphill task of starting from a scratch in their new countries. The financial impoverishment and corresponding decline in societal status inevitably occasioned a predictable splurge of memories. Frustration with their current privation made these people cling all the more to reminiscences of past 'happiness' in the pre-Partition period. This is especially characteristic of much of Partition literature composed by Bengali Hindus owing to certain historical factors. The province had been the base of British administrators in India since the eighteenth century, first housing the office of the East India Company and later the imperial government. The region, thereby, enjoyed a position of privilege for almost two hundred years, suitably augmented by the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. With the shift of the Indian capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, it lost a slice of its political prominence; even so, the place remained an important seat of learning and culture. The carving of East Pakistan out of Bengal in 1947 dealt a further setback, since it resulted in a drastic decrease in resources. However, Hussain's tale reverses the stock-pattern of migrants indulging in nostalgia; here it is Kurban Ali who laments the loss of his family's eminence in the locality because most members of the next generation had left India and relocated to the two wings of Pakistan. He complains in his eponymous letter that their *haveli* [mansion] had fallen into disrepair. With hardly any finances to spare, he can only grieve for the

passing of a bygone age when they still lived as a joint family in affluence. As a last resort, he requests his nephew Kamaran to send some money for the much-needed maintenance of their familial property.

At this juncture, it would be germane to take cognizance of Sean Scalan's caveat that "[L]ike forgetting, nostalgia also has the property of meandering away from the truthful, historical, or the precise (4). In the context of these post-colonial accounts, the workings of a selective memory could lead to dubious fallouts, for reading about the past blissful lives in some of them conveys the sense of a pre-lapsarian state of affairs when all was right with the world. The narrator in "Home, Sweet Home!" reminisces about his motherland, embodied in the Gomati river, that gave him "a lot of peace and contentment" and proved to be the source for his artistic inspiration (Dasgupta 313). An element of romanticism creeps in, and the period is likened to "a spiritual retreat" when he felt "a quietness within and out, as though there was no strife in the world, no cause for sorrow or pain" (Dasgupta 313). Such depictions give the impression that there was no discord between the different communities in those early days, following which musings of the uprooted against this serene backdrop appear like man's perpetual yearning for a 'Paradise', now beyond reach. Historically speaking, such an assessment is inaccurate as the subcontinent did witness signs of religious friction much prior to its eventual vivisection.[11] In this respect, "Do You Suppose It's the East Wind?" is noteworthy since it does not evade the unpleasant features of the past. Along with the customary dosage of nostalgia, there are hints of socio-cultural stereotyping which had further widened the rift between religious groups. For all his participation in Islamic rituals like *milad* and *sijdah*, the Hindu Brahmin boy Robby is shown to be lacking in physical strength, supposedly because he ate *dal* [lentil] instead of *gosht* [meat]. These dissimilarities were blown out of proportion after 1940 to stoke the fires of sectarianism and promote the 'Two Nation' theory. The proliferation of nostalgia has, therefore, prompted many to put it under the scanner and make a careful appraisal of its upshots. Taking a cue from its seventeenth century connotation, late twentieth-century critics like Susan Stewart have termed it a "social disease" (23), and its castigation by Timothy Reiss as "functionally crippling" (193) finds an echo in the context of the Partition too. One is reminded of the oft-bandied allegation against Hindu Bengali refugees wallowing in excessive pathos, dragging the process of rebuilding their lives in India vis-à-vis other refugee communities, and thus staying dependent on doles from the Indian government (Kaur 165). However, it is important to note that such an estimation flounders in the face of a comprehensive assessment of the unusual circumstances in the eastern sector where the stream of refugees continued to pour into West

Bengal, Assam, and other north-eastern states of India for many decades after the Partition.[12]

The pervading influence of nostalgia is palpable in non-fictional accounts as well; one of the better-known memoirs on this theme is a collection of essays entitled *Chhere Asha Gram* [The Abandoned Village] published serially in the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar* from 1950 to 1953. These were penned by the common folk belonging to the Hindu community, and not professional writers. Similar mournfulness has been expressed by refugees and survivors in course of interviews too, as evinced in the numerous testimonials that have been gathered through 'oral history projects'. For instance, Darshana Rani–a woman in her eighties living in Delhi–still recalls her days in Rawalpindi and then in Lahore, both of which had been allotted to West Pakistan. She believes that the unbridled sense of freedom which she could sense previously had disappeared after arriving in India: "Hindustan aa to gaye par watan to uthe hi hai [we came to India but our home remains there]....How much I want to go and see how it is today?....I want to go there and cry endlessly" (qtd. in Bhardwaj 84). In later years, such interviews became instrumental in not only taking a measure of the nostalgia but also unearthing many lesser-known aspects of this division. Notable amongst these is *Partition Dialogues*: *Memories of a Lost Home*, giving glimpses of those former days through conversations of eminent men-of-letters with Alok Bhalla, a leading exponent on the subject. The claim of memory along with a share of trauma arising out of the displacement suffered by millions, which sometimes becomes ineluctable, informs other scholarly endeavors as well such as *Home, Uprooted*: *Oral Histories of India's Partition* by Devika Chawla, and *Partition and the Practice of Memory* edited by Churnjeet Mahn and Anne Murphy. Yet, there are sections of the populace who retain memories of their previous abodes but balk at the prospect of visiting them. In such instances, the specter of violence, usually experienced firsthand, and the ensuing hatred overshadow the tenuous hold that nostalgia might have had over them.[13] There also exists a counter-discourse in this arena which invalidates this nostalgia by counting the 'benefits' of this divide. Such views have been espoused by not just religious fundamentalists in the subcontinent, but also historians like Ramchandra Guha who has dispassionately scrutinized the issue to come to a similar stand ("Why there's no need").

In conclusion, it might be said that the leitmotif of nostalgia occupies a distinctive terrain in South Asian literary oeuvre, intersecting the spheres of the fictional, the anthropological and the political. Laurence Lerner postulates that "[L]onging is what makes art possible" (52), and the precept finds bearing in the protagonists of "Home, Sweet Home" and "Do You Suppose It's The East Wind?", both of whom belong to creative fields. Quite a few of the authors discussed in this paper, viz. Intizar Hussain,

Samaresh Dasgupta, Altaf Fatima and Prafulla Roy, have been Partition migrants themselves, and it would not be far-fetched to presume that their experiences did find some reflection in their literary output. The importance conferred to nostalgia in both high art and mass culture can be seen in the museological turn that remembrance has taken in recent times. Venerating the past through memorials–be it physical or textual–has become increasingly popular, so much so that nowadays one even gets to hear about the 'nostalgia industry'. The emotional outpourings of migrants cannot be summarily negated as unsubstantial or inconsequential, since they do have a certain locus and import in the scheme of the crisis that was the Partition, and its far-ranging reverberations. Notwithstanding the concomitant pitfalls, such nostalgic accounts convey the idea that the gains from achieving independence were not unqualified. This is not to suggest that those tripping on nostalgia are yet to be 'mentally' decolonized, or that they endorse a re-imposition of foreign rule. Instead of interpreting their pining as a value judgment on the comparative merits of the pre-1947 era, they may be considered as voices simultaneously inhabiting the interstices of past and present, and contributing to a nuanced consideration of the postcolonial experience in all its plurality.

Notes

1. Among Indian political figures, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's 1959 autobiography *India Wins Freedom* provided a nationalist narrative of the events leading to the country's liberty. There were also colonial representations of this phase, viz. *At Freedom's Door* published in 1949 by Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling–posted in Punjab as a civil servant–containing his impression of the period. The Indian Council of Historical Research commenced its "Towards Freedom" project in 1972, in an effort to proffer 'Indian perspectives' on the subject by issuing original archival materials. The 1975 book *Freedom at Midnight* by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins could be read as a take on the subject from the western perspective since it was largely based on the account provided by Lord Louis Mountbatten–the last Viceroy of British India. As is evident from the titles of these works, they generally focus on the triumphant aspect of the 1947 independence.
2. The popularity in the 1980s of the cinematic version of E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* and the television adaptation of Paul Scott's novel-sequence *The Raj Quartet* (titled as *The Jewel in the Crown*, the sobriquet by which India was known in the colonial period, emphasizing its worth both in terms of natural and human resources) attested to the presence of a form of this sentiment in the land of her one-time ruler.
3. Apart from economic exploitation of India through draining of natural resources to Europe, the foreigners were also responsible for repression of

civil rights as well as indiscriminate killings, viz. coercing farmers in eastern part of the subcontinent to plant indigo, or the Kuka and Jallianwala Bagh massacres in northern India. Such instances were not uncommon in the region's more than two centuries-old checkered colonial history.

4. From here onwards, "Partition" is spelled with a capital 'P' and specifically denotes the Indian Partition, to distinguish it from other similar instances in the international arena.
5. Sindh has an alternate spelling, "Sind"; however, I have used the former which corresponds to the land of the "Sindhu" or Indus river.
6. The port-city of Karachi which was the capital of Sindh province and a commercial hub, became the capital of newly-founded Pakistan in August 1947; Islamabad was declared the capital later in 1960.
7. *Mohajir* implies "migrant" in Urdu, and has its origin in the Arabic *muhajir*; early Islamic history associated this term with the Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina [in modern-day Saudi Arabia]. In the South Asian context, the term has been applied to those Muslims who left India at the time of Partition to settle in Pakistan.
8. A popular Bengali folk-song deplores this lack of access to one's original home: *'Sealdah Goalondo/ Aajo ache bhai/ Ami jabo amar deshe/ Soja rasta nai'* [Sealdah and Goalondo–two major hubs in West and East Bengal–still exist, but a straight path to my native place does not].
9. *Rakhi* or *raksha bandhan* is the Hindu tradition of tying a piece of decorative thread by a sister on the wrist of her brother as a symbol of their sacred bond; Rabindranath Tagore promoted it to foster Hindu-Muslim solidarity after the 1905 partition of Bengal–a decision that the colonial government had to rescind in 1911.
10. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 in Partha S. Ghosh's book *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia* provide a ready reckoner of their respective numbers for the period from 1947 to 1957.
11. According to Gopal Krishna, incidents of communal disturbances in British India had been documented at least since the eighteenth century, with the first recorded riot taking place in Ahmedabad in 1714, involving issues of Holi celebration and cow slaughter (149).
12. Millions crossed the border to arrive in India over the years, not just around the time of the Partition but also during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 and even later, owing to persecution of religious and ethnic minorities in the region.
13. Such conflicting emotions crop up in the testimony of Hironprova Devi, a woman in her mid-seventies, who has lived as a refugee for more than half a century at Cooper's 'Permanent Liability' Camp in West Bengal. Her ancestral village of Jolisha in Barisal district of eastern Bengal remains in her memory as "the land of abundance, but a land of no return" (Raychaudhuri 5655).

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CONTENTS

Section 1: CBCS SYLLABI

‘Look East, Act East’: Locating Bengal Partition Literature in the Public Imaginary

Debasri Basu

Abstract ■ The 1947 Partition of British India is reckoned as a momentous event in the annals of this subcontinent and, along with historico-political accounts, has generated an imposing volume of reflections in the socio-cultural realm. Creative writers and artists have variously dealt with the subject in their distinctive ways, contributing to the corpus that has come to be known as Partition Literature in common parlance. Within its ambit, however, there arose over the years a discrepancy in terms of geo-cultural origins, its fallout being that the territorial division on the east received meagre attention vis-à-vis the northern and north-western sectors. It had the regrettable upshot of a fallacious notion forming in the general psyche about the lack and/or inconsequentiality of writings emanating from the eastern region. The impression resulted in the Bengal chapter becoming a marginalised episode–bordering on the postscript–in most Partition discussions, and by corollary literary compositions on this topic too remained relegated to a subordinate status–be it in the pan-Indian or international circles. The present study aims to analyse the probable reasons for such a scenario which have led to a limited circulation of literature emanating from and/or revolving around the rupture of Bengal in 1947. In course of this investigation, issues of provincialism and power-imbalance come to the fore. Politics of representation and the mindscape of the intelligentsia are also exposed, prompting one to view the prevailing situation through a multi-focal lens. The paper proposes translation as an effective method for filling, to a comprehensive extent, the said lacuna, and also touches upon the practices of the academia and the publishing industry in this respect.

Keywords: Partition, Vernacular, Marginalisation, Translation, Publishing.

The Partition of British India in 1947 was a cataclysmic occurrence in the history of South Asia, with far-reaching politico-social consequences. In the last seven decades these ramifications have been recorded through an array of official and cultural forms, ranging from contemporary government reports, journalistic writings and treatises to various modes of literary and artistic depiction–be it stories, novels, poems, memoirs or audio-visual productions. Creative writers from diverse parts of the subcontinent, and not merely from the affected zones, took up the complex strands of this event and its far-reaching repercussions in a host of languages and genres, in the process

engendering an extensive array of Partition Literature. However, these writings have largely remained confined to their originating regions, with little currency beyond their respective linguistic territories. Even a cursory glance at the body of existing works exposes this differential status, and the reasons for such limited influence lie in plain sight. The usual discourse on Partition has been predominantly centred on the north, especially Punjab, and it has occurred at the expense of Bengal– the other province which was also partitioned in August 1947. The east has received visibly less weightage in most form, a practice that is evident in both literature and the social sciences.[1]Urvashi Butalia, a leading chronicler of personal memories around the Punjab Partition, had brought this bias to notice long ago when she, in August 1994, stated in the journal *Seminar*: "A serious gap is the omission of experiences in Bengal and East Pakistan" (qtd. in Bagchi and Dasgupta 1:1). Her voicing this concern ought to have stimulated scholars to mend the gaping hole, but it is indeed unfortunate that there is still a palpable neglect regarding this in many quarters.

Turning to the pages of history, one sees that although Bengal had enjoyed a considerable clout from the beginning of the European colonial period till the first decade of the twentieth century, its standing began to diminish once the capital of British India was moved from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. Along with administration, the concomitant power-centre too shifted to northern India, and continued to be so even in the post-Independence era. The Partition of 1947 dealt another body blow, as this largest Indian province was bifurcated to form the eastern wing of Pakistan and West Bengal. Moreover, violence triggered by the breakdown in inter-religious relations was much more brutal on the north-western sector, with instances of carnage, arson and sexual aggression growing terribly frequent. Not surprisingly, images of bloodshed on this front–trainload of corpses and mutilated bodies–began to be closely associated with the subcontinent's vivisection, for such motifs usually possess an abiding quality and stay entrenched in one's psyche. In the general mindscape, it led to the subject of Partition becoming almost synonymous with the savagery and horror occurring in these regions. This impression deepened in subsequent years, and any discussion on the topic inevitably gravitated towards the massacres in Punjab, North West Frontier Province and, to an extent, Delhi. It was manifested not just within the geographical boundaries of the country, but also on foreign platforms with the outcome that this perception–although qualified–percolated through both intellectual circles and popular culture. The extent and depth of this notion is, perhaps, best reflected in the comic strip *Ms. Marvel* [Kamala Khan] which summarises the events of 1947 in these words: "After decades of struggle, India has won independence from Britain. A new state, PAKISTAN, has been partitioned from the *north western* provinces of the former colony" (Pillai, n.pag.,emphasis added). That a world-famous American company like Marvel Comics could conveniently gloss over the fact that the eastern

part of the subcontinent was simultaneously partitioned to form East Pakistan is a testament to the obscurity that has characterised the Bengal Partition in public consciousness as late as 2016 when the above issue of the comic strip was unveiled– even though it had been more than two decades since Butalia had referred to this oversight.

Commensurate with this historical slight was the degree of attention received by Bengali Partition Literature over the decades in comparison to writings on the subject emanating from the northern and western sectors.[2] Admittedly, writers from the east did not respond to the division and its aftermath with as much alacrity as was the case with these other regions where authors like Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Intizar Hussain, Mohan Rakesh, Yashpal, Kartar Singh Duggal and Mohinder Singh Sarna took up the innumerable strands of this rupture and its manifold human reverberations in their several works. Those like Manto, Duggal and Sarna wrote copiously on the theme to shoulder this onerous ethico-literary responsibility; according to one estimate, there have been more than five hundred texts on this topic in the Punjabi language alone, composed by writers numbering over a hundred (Kudaisya and Tan 18). Such writings in the north-Indian registers of Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi emerged as significant signposts in the domain and, with time, also benefitted from the act of translation. It is but natural that they came to bear a pervasive influence on the then literary scene. Being rendered into English and other languages in greater numbers, their fame spread to far corners of the land, later transcending even national boundaries. As such, they grew into evocative symbols of Indian Partition Literature and steadily gained repute at home and abroad.

Partition writings from Bengal did not manage to acquire a similar prominence, and probing the underlying causes throws up certain worrying issues. There was reluctance on the part of some Bengali writers to delve into the vortex of communal passions and the attendant violence; they, instead, seemed more inclined towards the portrayal of refugeehood and its related miseries. Columnist Semanti Ghosh critiques this aspect of Bengali Partition writings upfront in her article "Silence: A Deliberate Choice?":

> In the world of post-1947 Bengali literature we are faced with a curious indifference towards this watershed event…. Bengali culture, specially the field of literature, showed a stubborn immunity from the devastating realities around….thus rendering 'Partition literature' a rather lopsided character. (Ghosh, n.pag.)

A somewhat analogous query is also raised by the eminent social theorist Ashis Nandy, himself a Bengali: "Why have even the garrulous Bengalis been, for once, silenced?" (xvi). It is, of course, a matter to be pondered upon, and taking into account

the quagmire of polemics prevalent around the time immediately following the Partition might possibly yield some answers. Ghosh attributes it to ideological moorings, pointing to leftist philosophies in West Bengal from the middle of the twentieth century. She underscores the workings of a societal compunction linked with explicit references to anything volatile, resulting in a virtual moratorium by many writers in that phase. The intellectual atmosphere in the years after the catastrophe discouraged any unfettered discourse on the subject, for apprehension of ruffling feathers in certain sections of the society. This is further confirmed by Tapati Chakravarty who, in her essay "The Paradox of a Fleeting Presence", alludes to the existence of a barely veiled 'literary policy' deterring the spread of communally-charged themes in literature of that period (268).

It may be mentioned at this juncture that a similarly syncopated approach to the raw, visceral aspects of life has been typical of Bengali Literature in general, and not just Partition writings from the region. What complicated matters, though, is that even those works that did negotiate with the complexities of this vicious divide remained inaccessible to the rest of the country, and world. Very few of these got translated into English or the other vernaculars; as a result, bulk of the Partition Literature from Bengal has had negligible circulation outside its linguistic community, and the little that has managed to get transmitted elsewhere was through word-of-mouth. Partition writings from Bengal could not attain the extent of fame which they merited, with the predictable fallout of a marginal existence. Till a long time, the only such Bengali piece to have been translated into English was Sunil Gangopadhyay's 1971 novel *Arjun*, translated by Chitrita Banerji-Abdullah in 1987. This was quite a few years after Bhisham Sahni's iconic Hindi novel *Tamas*, originally published in the early 1970s, had been rendered into English as *Kites Will Fly* by the veteran translator of Hindi and Urdu, Jai Ratan. The temporal lag in these analogous endeavours could be construed as emblematic of the relegation that most Bengali works faced initially.

Partition Studies in India, incidentally, began to show signs of rapid progress in the last decade of the past century, and the fiftieth anniversary celebrations associated with Independence gave it an appreciable fillip. The phase also witnessed a renewed interest in writings on this motif pertaining to miscellaneous genres, duly buoyed by the release of new books and re-translation of existing ones. The primary emphasis was on fictional works, many of which were translated into English; as far as Bengal was concerned, it was around this time that the English version of Jyotirmoyee Devi's 1968 novel *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* was brought out, titled as *The River Churning*, by the seasoned translator Enakshi Chatterjee. *Purbo-Paschim*, Gangopadhyay's other magnum opus on the same theme that was first published in 1989, was again taken up by Chatterjee and saw the light of day in 2000 as *East-West*. The Bangladeshi writer-activist Taslima Nasrin's novel *Phera* was translated into English as *Homecoming* in

2005; it was one of the handful Bengali Partition titles to get a Hindi version when Vani Prakashan published it four years later–a phenomenon that could be linked to the author's global repute. Interestingly, Mihir Sengupta's *Bishadbriksha*– a work narrating his experience of the Bengal Partition that won the prestigious Ananda Puraskar in 2006–has been translated into Hindi by Hem Jhunjhunwala in 2012, but still awaits its English version.The latest such venture in the field is Sunanda Sikdar's novel *Dayamoyeer Katha*, which after having won the Lila Puraskar awarded by the University of Calcutta in 2008 and the Ananda Puraskar in 2010, was released in its English avatar as *A Life Long Ago* in 2014. Even so, this brief survey makes it amply clear that these translations have been exceedingly few and far between, compared to the entire gamut of Partition Literature in the eastern sector.

The realm of short fiction has cut a sorrier picture, since the English anthologies that got printed during the era of heightened publishing activity post-1990s contained stories from Bengal in pitifully small numbers. Majority of these productions suffered from this lack, made starkly obvious in the skewed ratio of regional representation. Although the titles of these collections projected them as pan-Indian, they were chiefly centred on the Partition experience in the northern and western parts of the subcontinent, and originally written in languages like Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. Of these, *Stories about the Partition of India* edited by the distinguished literary scholar Alok Bhalla, in four volumes, was the most extensive and had the greatest impact. The duo of Saros Cowasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal, the latter himself a leading figure of Punjabi literature, collaborated twice on this topic, bringing out *When the British Left India: Stories on the Partitioning of India, 1947* and *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India* within a span of eight years. The renowned historian Mushirul Hasan edited a unique collection titled *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* in two volumes containing translated pieces from multiple genres, viz. novel excerpt, short fiction, poetry, diary-entry, memoir and essay. Another noteworthy endeavour was the Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint-edited *Translating Partition* and as the title indicated, it compiled English translations of miscellaneous literary pieces on the Partition. However, a review of their contents revealed one common feature–all the above-mentioned works had prioritised northern and western India at the expense of other regions which too had borne the brunt of the Partition mayhem. Bhalla's book, originally in three volumes, was a mammoth compendium of sixty three pieces, out of which only eight were from Bengal. Cowasjee and Duggal incorporated a story from Bengal in their latter compilation, in what appeared to be more of tokenism. The rest of the collections were wholly focussed on north India, accentuating a void that had come to characterise many other works which strove to highlight the Indian Partition. What is striking is the fact that these works had 'India' in their titles, although they were in effect limited to mostly one region.[3] That the eastern sector was so brazenly overlooked

was reason enough to provoke academician Somdatta Mandal to soon pen the article "'Is She A Step-Daughter?': Representations of the Partition of Bengal in English Anthologies and Novels" where she called into question this grossly selective approach. It was almost reminiscent of the uncharitable manner in which rehabilitation-package had been meted out to West Bengal in the years after 1947.[4]

The flagrant absence of writings from Bengal in most of these compendia could not be explained away by simply putting the onus on editorial prerogative or the policies of publishing firms. In reality, it can be deemed as a marker of the cultural capital that a literary work generates, and Bengal seemed to be sadly lagging behind in this regard. The dearth of translated writings on the Partition from Bengal has, in effect, led to certain erroneous ideas crystallising in some quarters, articulated by not just laymen but also members of the intelligentsia. A glaring illustration of this came up as late as the initial years of the twenty-first century when the joint-editors of *Pangs of Partition*, a two-volume collection of critical essays on the subject, posited: "An interesting aspect of Bengali literature is its total indifference to Partition, as virtually no short stories or novels of significance dealt with it" (Settar and Gupta 11). The statement should not be dismissed as merely smacking of ignorance about Bengali novels and short stories on Partition; it actually indicates a deeper problem–the fact that even those like Shadakshari Settar and Indira Baptista Gupta, hailing from the intellectual stratum of society, could not procure the requisite information about the existence of such works. Along with inadequate research, it is also an index of the plausible hindrances to Bengali Partition fiction being placed on the radar of those who might exhibit an interest in the subject. Chief amongst these causes would be the acute shortage of translated versions, and it therefore becomes imperative to devote specific focus to this aspect, and engage in translation acts with the express aim of augmenting the corpus.

The process started in right earnest in the new millennium, though it was Bangladesh which took the lead when Niaz Zaman, a professor at the University of Dhaka, edited what proved to be the first anthology of Bengali Partition stories translated into English. Titled as *The Escape and Other Stories of 1947*, the book included renowned writers like Syed Waliullah and Abu Rushd. Zaman declared in its Introduction: "Taken together, the stories reflect the lives of ordinary men and women in the changing political climate of East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh from the partition of 1947 through the Language Movement of 1952 to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971" (6). When viewed in the backdrop of the intermittently fraught inter-communal conditions in her native land, this book was surely a commendable feat. Two years later, a comparable initiative was taken up in India through *Set at Odds: Stories of the Partition and Beyond*, which was essentially a compilation of a dozen short stories written by the popular Bengali author Prafulla Roy, and translated into English by its editor John W. Hood. In the Translator's Introduction, Hood–an Australian

academic of Bengali language and literature–attested to the comprehensive nature of Roy's tales spanning over a wide spectrum of fifty years: "Indeed, much of the relevance of all these stories lies in their reflection of the persistence of a partition mentality in contemporary society where such notions as homeland, mother tongue and identity are so often given an exaggerated significance" (xxi). In what turned out to be an instance of supreme irony, this book was published the same year in which Settar and Gupta had made their highly flawed remark about the supposed non-existence of Bengali Partition fiction. Roy's pieces were not just stories of '1947' but also dealt with its far-reaching aftermath as also the multi-layered echoes of sectarianism in latter-day electoral politics. Next year, there came *The Trauma and the Triumph*: *Gender and Partition in Eastern India*–a work almost parallel in range to Hasan's *India Partitioned* but concentrating on the aspect of gender; it was compiled by academicians JasodharaBagchi and SubhoranjanDasgupta, with Subhasri Ghosh joining the editorial team in the second volume published six years later. In the Introduction to the latter volume, the editors refuted the oft-bandied charge that "the traumatic division of Bengal in 1947 has not been adequately reflected in contemporary Bengali literature", while asserting that it "has emerged from both East and West Bengal" (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2: x). They contended that "Bengali writers on both sides of the border did not ignore Partition", albeit admitting later on that "a complete analytical account of this creativity has not taken place as yet" (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2: xi). *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals*, collected by DebjaniSengupta, too emerged during this welcome stage when writings on the topic had begun to steadily make their mark felt on a wider forum. It came out in 2003, and proffered a balanced sampling of Partition stories from both sides of the Bengal border. It is relevant to bear in mind, however, that the portrayal of the socio-political split in some of the stories in these collections is tinged with nationalistic hues–establishing the heterogeneous experiences of the subcontinental populace and their conflicting outlook towards this separation.

The year 2007, also the sixtieth anniversary of the momentous event, saw a foreign collaboration on this theme when Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar edited *Crossing Over: Stories of Partition from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*– though only five of the eighteen stories in this collection were from Bengal. However, such deficits were taken care of to a considerable extent by Bashabi Fraser the very next year through *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*– the most voluminous anthology on the subject devoted to the eastern sector till date, rivalled in breadth and scope only by Bhalla's influential compendium. In its Introduction, Fraser accepted that "a gap remains, as the Bengal story is still untold in its entirety in a major collection of stories about the Bengal Partition, in English" (2), thereby justifying her grand endeavour. The second volume of Sengupta's anthology, published in 2011, is noteworthy for having a story from Tripura– an inclusion that gains added importance

when one takes cognizance of the fact that Tripura too had absorbed a sizable number of refugees from East Pakistan once Bengal was cleft into two, but had been consigned to oblivion in most Partition discourses. The fourth volume of Bhalla's anthology appearing the next year attempted to make some amends in this direction, and out of the forty eight stories, nine focussed on the east–encompassing the murky events of 1947 as well as the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. These years had seen continual migrations across the eastern border to not just West Bengal but also Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya and other north-eastern states of India. The Indian English poet Keki N. Daruwalla had tried to raise awareness about these lesser known regions when he once said: "…we need to be better informed on partition literature from Bengal and Sylhet" (200). In the light of such a statement, the Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee and Dipendu Das-edited *Barbed Wire Fence: Stories of Displacement from the Barak Valley of Assam*, which too came out in 2012, established itself as another crucial attempt at incorporating the strife-ridden experiences of those who left East Pakistan and latter-day Bangladesh to come to the Barak Valley located in southern Assam. These areas had been largely inhabited by refugees who had fled from Sylhet, since their province was merged with East Pakistan following the Sylhet Referendum of July 1947. From the 1980s onwards, there arose violent tension between the local Assamese and the migrant Bengali/Sylheti population, with Bhattacharjee and Das openly alluding to this predicament in the book's Introduction: "…Bengali writers of Assam began to address the issues pertinent to their marginal existence, their disturbed sense of belonging and their peculiar crises, and thus succeeded in evolving a distinctive identity" (xi-xii).

Thus one can well acknowledge the valuable service rendered by translation to the cause of facilitating the spread of Bengali Partition Literature, while simultaneously recognising its further potential which needs to be fully tapped into. Having delineated its trajectory over the last three decades, it might be instructive to take a stock of these pieces that have been rendered into English and, in some instances, various other languages of the subcontinent.[5]That the process of translation is a complex one necessitating sedulousness cannot be gainsaid, and this is applicable for both content and form. Most practitioners of this act exercise fidelity in sense, if not letter; however it has been observed that at times a few choose to be adventurous and take ample liberties with the text. This is fairly noticeable in their sentence-structure, phraseology, and paragraph-division, thereby engaging with a method that could almost border on 'transcreation'. The argument in support of such imaginative reconstructions is that these are carried out in an effort to preserve the spirit of the original, taking into account the idiomatic and linguistic differences that exist in the source and target languages. When subtle or minor, these divergences are more often than not accepted into the fold of authoritative translations, but stand the risk of complications when

anomalies grow too prominent. It must be remembered that merely producing translated versions in prolific numbers is not enough; it has to be also ensured that the literature does not get 'lost in translation'. An instance in point is Hasan Hafizur Rahman's Bengali story "Aro Duti Mrityu", and the case-study that follows would demonstrate the same by looking into the variances which have crept into its two translations. Rahman's heart rending account brings to light the misery of religious minorities in the eastern part of Bengal, witnessed and narrated by a member of the majority community. While returning from Dhaka to his native place, this unnamed Muslim narrator had boarded a night train from Narayanganj to Bahadurabad. En route, he happened to meet a Hindu family of three desperately trying to enter his compartment. The import of Rahman's poignant tale can be gauged from the fact that it was translated twice into English: initially by Niaz Zaman and then by Debjani Sengupta in their respective anthologies. On first look, the former's title ["Deaths on the Night Train"] appears as overly simplified, being devoid of its violent context and thereby robbing these deaths of their rightful place in the larger scheme of communal terror. The latter through her title of "Two More Deaths", though, sticks to Rahman's implication of these two additional deaths forming a part of the protracted series of tragic events attendant to the Partition upheaval.

Apart from the title, there are also several counts on which the two versions diverge from each other, conspicuous among them being their narrative modes. The original Bengali text had made use of simple past tense, but Zaman combines it with past perfect tense, and Sengupta changes it to simple present tense. Moreover, there occur a few factual inconsistencies that are quite inexplicable: for example, the narrator's age is forty in Rahman (356) and Zaman (32), but gets mysteriously increased to forty-four in Sengupta (118). The latter also deviates from the original paragraph divisions and truncates longer sections, although the 'invariant core' of the story is left untouched and successfully evokes the insecurity of the evacuees in the wake of expressed threat to their lives and honour. The difference in the age might seem trivial, but such errors are unwarranted and best avoided. The most blatant discrepancy, though, comes towards the conclusion in Sengupta's version where she winds up the tale at a critical moment by omitting almost one and a half pages from the Bengali original. The narrator, and by corollary the readers, are left in a cloud of suspense regarding the fate of the Hindu woman who was pregnant and had been suffering from labour-pain in the train's toilet for more than an hour. This open-ending might have been executed on the part of Sengupta with the intention of stumping the readers and driving home the dreaded effect of Partition violence on these people who had to flee their homes in search of safer lands despite being in such delicate physical condition. Even so, it cannot be denied that arbitrary modifications as these change the original to some extent, and in the overall analysis it is seen that the two English translations

are marked by a curious mix of exclusions and intrusions, thereby giving rise to a considerably altered text. The above sample demonstrates that translating these Partition narratives should be a responsible act, or else their credibility might get compromised. This is of vital importance for a multi-lingual country like India where translation alone can enable the flow of literature and knowledge from one region to the other, as well as rest of the world. Furthermore, along with its broader implications, the subject of Partition is also one of sentiment, and even after the passage of seven decades it is still potent enough to touch a chord in the hearts and minds of the populace. As such, due diligence must be observed to ensure that this emotive factor is not exploited for mere commercial interests. Because of problematic previous translations, it is not uncommon to find novels and stories being re-translated with the objective of presenting newer versions which would ostensibly be 'more authentic'.[6] In recent times, writings from some of the non-fictional genres, namely personal recollection and correspondence, have also started receiving prominence– in light of the 'history from below' movement that the field has witnessed– with translators increasingly focussing on the mnemological. Taking a cue from this approach, the University of Burdwan in West Bengal has recently started a project to translate Bengali Partition memoirs into English in order to share memories of those affected by the Partition with a wider section.[7]

It is, particularly, in this context that the role of educational institutions becomes all the more vital, for they are vested with the power and authority to usher in winds of change in the cultural sphere. Having the facility to introduce fresh thoughts and ideas amongst the learners, they are in a position to encourage the formation of new discourses and alter the canon. This process involves, inter alia, "a broad concurrence of critics, scholars and authors with diverse viewpoints and sensibilities…and the widespread assignment of an author or text in school and college curricula" (Abrams 42). Taking into account the composition of scholastic courses on the subject of Partition, it is seen that Bengal still lags behind in terms of fair proportion. Many teaching modules, even in highly-ranked western universities reputed for their education in liberal arts and humanities, do not have sufficient representative Partition texts from the east–be it West Bengal and the north-eastern states of India or East Pakistan [modern-day Bangladesh].[8] Such a disconcerting scenario may be attributed to the relatively lesser politico-economic traction associated with Bengal, and therefore seeks the urgent attention of all stake-holders. A viable way to emerge out of this bleak situation would be the inclusion of texts from not only Punjab but also other regions like Bengal [as also Sindh and Sylhet] so that pupils are imparted a comprehensive education. Under such circumstances, it is heartening to see the University Grants Commission of India formulating a Discipline Centric Elective [DCE] on 'Partition Literature' (Paper 10) at the undergraduate level for English Language and Literature, with satisfactory

weightage given to Bengal.[9] Since universities around the country are expected to frame their syllabi in accordance with the above general guideline under the Choice Based Credit System [CBCS], this step can go a long way in delivering the requisite impetus to the exploration of hitherto neglected areas in Partition Studies. It is also hoped that these modifications would soon reach overseas and play a pivotal role in raising awareness worldwide about the impact of the Partition in the east. They can serve as important pedagogical tools and become instrumental in providing a recalibrated assessment of the Indian Partition in all its multifarious dimensions.

Such newer strides, by means of translating vernacular titles, introducing them into the sanctified corridors of academia and thereby facilitating much-needed cultural exchange, have the potential to enrich Bengal Partition Studies in immense ways, and there is ample scope to extend it beyond its present contours.[10] These sporadic attempts at collating the narratives of Partition have yielded tangible results, but there are still many more unexplored areas to map. In recent years, while the genres of shorter fiction, poetry, and essay have had a higher incidence of translation, longer pieces like the novel or drama did not fare equally well. Noteworthy Partition novels from West Bengal, viz. Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkantha Pakhir Khonje*, Narayan Sanyal's *Bakultala P.L. Camp*, Prafulla Roy's *Keya Patar Nouko* and Sankha Ghosh's *Supurib oner Sari*[11] await their turn at being translated and reach a wider readership, as do those from East Pakistan/Bangladesh.[12] Since institutional backing or governmental sponsorship may not be always available, individual initiatives and private funding can show the way forward. It is promising to find both authors' collectives as well as publishing houses– be it multinational firms like Penguin and Harper Collins or home-grown names like Sahitya Akademi and Manohar–taking them up, owing to the increased accent given to these issues. It is important that the various genres of writing on Partition are propagated to as many sections of the populace as is feasible, and translation is a powerful medium of accomplishing this herculean task. Bengal, being a significant territory of both undivided and independent India, ought to figure in a substantial way in these tomes, necessitating a 'look east, act east' policy. A concerted effort towards this end in the domain of translationis the need of the hour, for that alone can pave the path to achieving greater familiarity of these works amongst non-culture readers both in India and other countries. In any case, the subject is exceedingly vast, and in his essay "The Days of The Hyaena" Nandy has reminded us about its inadequate expanse compared to that of the early 20th century Armenian massacre, the European Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s, and the Balkan or Rwandan genocide of the last decade of the past century (xiv). The innumerable elements of this epoch-making event that was the Partition and its multivalent reverberations inscribed in literature thus look forward to our thorough intellectual deliberation and engagement, and this is all the more essential with regard to those sectors which have been relatively ignored–including Bengal.

Notes

1. A measure of this can be grasped from the Introduction to Chaman Nahal's Partition novel *Azadi* where the author concedes: "Even though there was distress of the same magnitude and horror in Bengal at the time of Partition, I refrain from covering that region; I was afraid of making a factual error somewhere. I stay firmly close to the Punjabi character and scene" (xiii).
2. On the occasion of the golden jubilee of the subcontinent's gaining freedom, Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West co-edited *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947 to 1997*, claiming to select "from the best Indian writing of the half-century since the country's independence" (ix). The book included three Partition texts: excerpts from *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie himself, *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa and "Toba Tek Singh" by Manto–none of which were illuminating about this tragedy of decolonisation on the east.
3. Ravikant and Saint had, of course, made a disclaimer in their Introduction: "In the present anthology we include writings in Urdu and Hindi, thus restricting our focus to the North and North-Western part of India, the region which witnessed the worst of the carnage unleashed during this time" (xi).
4. Well-known social worker Phulrenu Guha had raised her voice against this lop-sidedness, labelling the Bengal package a 'blatant discrimination' (201). A comparison of the refugee-conditions in the western and eastern border, undertaken by leading figures of the rehabilitation process in West Bengal, revealed this imbalance in statistical detail (Bagchi 1: 244-49). In recent times, historian Joya Chatterji has also interrogated the issue in her article "Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947–50".
5. The latter enterprise has been mostly undertaken by India's National Academy of Letters–the Sahitya Akademi– for private players seldom venture into the vernacular translation industry.
6. The first English translation of *Tamas* was plagued by such flaws, as a result of which two decades later Sahni had to take up the cudgels and translate it himself in 2001; in 2016 it was translated a third time into English by the American translator Daisy Rockwell who claimed a greater accuracy compared to the earlier two versions (Rockwell,n.pag.).
7. The original reminiscences in Bengali had been gathered in the anthology *Border: Bangla Bhager Dewal* by Adhir Biswas–a key figure in Bengali Partition and Dalit Literature.
8. A sign of this tendency is, perhaps, most tellingly evident in Course EN251 entitled "New Literatures in English" at the University of Warwick in United Kingdom. The module on 'Partition Narratives', to be taught to undergraduate students in Week 2, includes six works–both books and movies–in the reading list, all concerning the north and north-western sectors of the Indian subcontinent. For the complete list of texts, check <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/newlits/>
9. This DCE Paper on Partition incorporates works by both internationally-reputed authors

like Amitav Ghosh as well as regional luminaries like Manik Bandyopadhyay, Jibanananda Das and Dibyendu Palit.

10. Adapting Bengali Partition movies into Hindi, as had been done in the case of the 2015 Srijit Mukherji-directed *Rajkahini* which was re-made as *Begum Jaan* in 2017, could also disseminate the pathos of the topic to a greater chunk of audiences, being a sort of filmic translation.

11. Mosarrap H. Khan has translated Ghosh's novel into English as *The Row of Areca Nut Trees*, although the manuscript is yet to be published.

12. Prominent among these novels which await translation are Abul Fazl's *Ranga Prabhat*, Shaheedullah Kaiser's *Sangshaptak*, Abu Rushd's *Nongor*, Sardar Jainuddin's *Anek Suryer Asha*, Alauddin Al Azad's *Kshuda O Asha*, Selina Hossain's *Gayatri Shondhya*, Hasan Azizul Huq's *Agunpakhi* and Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Khowabnama*.

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EDITORIAL

The Journal of the Department of English, Vidyasagar University, included in the UGC-CARE list of journals, has succeeded in overcoming the unprecedented hurdles erected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with all work for it being done online during the lockdown and new-normal situations. The enthusiasm of the present Editorial Board in shouldering this difficult task has been generated by the strong foundational enterprises of the Editorial Boards and Advisory Boards of former issues of the Journal. In keeping with this tradition, the Journal shall continue with its role of accommodating quality articles on relevant issues related to the purpose and focus of the academic enterprises of the Department, honouring the status accorded to it by UGC-CARE.

Volume No. 14 has spread its wings, gliding over a literary topography comprising diverse theoretical and critical insights which unravel sites ranging from classical literature to movies, from humanism to antihumanism, posthumanism and transhumanism, besides issues related to Gender Studies, Partition narratives, relevant contemporary issues, and more. The journal retains its inclusive character with quality contributions from different parts of India and abroad. It has been a steep ascent for the Editorial Board and the esteemed reviewers of the submitted articles, to deliberate upon the process of selection of articles for publication. The quality of the forty-three selected articles has compelled their inclusion in this volume, along with the pair of invited articles from erudite academicians.

We hope such variety in themes and depth in critical analysis would generate finer sensibility in students and scholars alike.

The flight of this volume has been facilitated by the uphill perseverance of the members of the Editorial Board whose remarkably meticulous coordinated efforts have perched it there. The advisors and peers, the administrative officers and staff of Vidyasagar University have also put in their best efforts towards publishing the present volume, for which a humble gratitude is offered to them.

Jolly Das

Midnapore
04 February 2021

Jolly Das
Chief Editor

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‘In Search of the Silver Lining’: Vestiges of the Humane in Narratives of Indian Partition Violence

Debasri Basu

Abstract

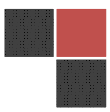
Treatises on the 1947 Indian Partition have been mostly centred on the vehemence of riots and the travails of refugees, but the present article chooses to take a revisionist line and focus on the humane amidst this overwhelming violence and misery. It explores episodes of compassion when ordinary men and women admirably extended help to members of the ‘Other’ community during their moments of dire need. Though not numerous, these instances where they showed exemplary courage in rising beyond the boundaries of their religious affiliation constitute a significant feature in Partition Studies and deserve to be suitably highlighted. Such incidents also gain immense significance in the light of sectarian hostility repeatedly rearing its ugly head across the Indian subcontinent, even in the post-independence period, making minority groups feel vulnerable. Literary and historical accounts based on the theme of inter-religious amity amidst those vicious times of the Partition have the potential to play an ameliorative role in the current scenario by bridging the gulf between different communal factions and foregrounding essential human principles of peace and harmony.

Keywords: compassion, humanity, sacrifice, saviour, violence.

Partition of British India in 1947 on the basis of 'Two Nation Theory' is considered as a watershed in South Asian history, for apart from creating the new states of West and East Pakistan along with independent India it also left inter-communal relations deeply strained. The attendant violence spread like wildfire to several parts of the subcontinent and held sections of the populace in its monstrous grip for months on end. Conflicts fuelled by religious differences in myriad pockets of the region had already been recorded from the early seventeenth century, usually over issues like celebration of Hindu festivals, cow slaughter and playing music in front of mosques (Krishna 149-51). But the carnages which took place around the time of the Indian Partition were brutal in the extreme, resulting in massive casualties.[1]They entangled not just Hindus and Muslims but also Sikhs, and were characterised by inter-religious relations hitting a nadir which was both the immediate cause and consequence. The resultant butchery was strategically directed against numerically minor members in a particular area–be it Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs, and created a major rupture in the social fabric of South Asia.

The vicious sequence of events which got triggered with the Great Calcutta Killings in August 1946 soon spiralled into a civil war along religious lines in the northern, western and eastern parts of the subcontinent. It also affected the contemporary men-of-letters who soon took to rendering their pained sensibilities in literature. Apart from the horror that had come to hold a sizable population in its vice-like grip, the narratives of these writers included occasional acts of kindness between members of supposedly 'rival' groups, thereby offering a supplementary view of the subject and contributing to the de-escalation of the prevalent atmosphere of mistrust. These were not imaginary tales, and the presence of such instances, even if rare, is the sole saving grace in the bleak and sordid chapter of history that was the Partition violence. Since then, there have been sporadic efforts to normalise communal equations–both at the official level as well as through initiatives of citizens and non-governmental collectives in their private capacity. Lately, such initiatives with an eye to fostering harmony amongst the various communities have been lauded at national and international fora too, and the book *Humanity amidst Insanity (Hope during and after the Indo-Pak Partition)* embodies the same tenet. Incorporating a slew of accounts featuring acts of benevolence on both sides of the western border, the editorial team of Tridivesh Singh Maini, Tahir Javed Malik and Ali Farooq Malik view these occurrences as the "silver-lining" whereby religious nationalism was dwarfed by bonds of humanity. Referring to the celebrated socio-political theorist Ashis Nandy, the editors reiterate the enormous impact of these cases, even if they transpired only occasionally. They also contend that choosing to forget these incidents would tantamount to "intellectual dishonesty", and rue the fact that this "positive side" has not yet received its due analysis (Maini et al 2-4). The subject, therefore, calls for a thorough survey to bring to limelight the Oskar Schindlers of the Indian subcontinent and confer upon them their due glory.[2]

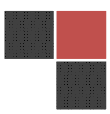
It is worth noting at this juncture that Maini and his co-editors do not confine themselves to only recording such real-life episodes, but also stress the function of literature in regarding the topic from a "non-political" and "non-historical" perspective (4). In this context, it would certainly be instructive to review the corpus of Partition fiction [written in both English as well as the Indian vernaculars which were later translated into English], and substantiate their observations. Turning to the genre of short stories–which is the purview of this article–one readily comes across multiple cases of people going out of their way to extend a helping hand to those in crisis, in the process



even coming to personal harm. In the short story "The Refuge" by the noted writer S. H. Vatsyayan 'Ajneya', an unnamed railway employee–most likely a Muslim–gives shelter to Hindus during the infamous Lahore massacre in 1947, and thereafter seeks police protection for the safety of their lives and property. But the socio-political conditions were so vitiated that the local law-enforcing agency arrests not just the wretched refugees but also their protector; the police do not spare even the womenfolk of this Samaritan's family. When these family members are released from custody three days later, the armed guards entrusted with the responsibility of escorting them to home instead open fire. The man and three of his relatives die on the spot, while his "mother and wife lay wounded on the street…" (Bhalla366). It is a sad reminder of the Partition days when people had grown so debased that they could kill even their co-religionists for real and imagined transgressions against their 'community'.

Offering an almost parallel across the border, this time in Delhi, is Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's story "The Death of Sheikh Burhanuddin" where an aged Sikh man valiantly sacrifices his life to save his Muslim neighbour–the eponymous Sheikh Burhanuddin. A ferocious crowd had assembled before their apartment with vendetta on its mind following the violence faced by Hindus and Sikhs in what had now come to be called West Pakistan. The events turn out to be supremely ironical, for the narrator Burhanuddin used to harbour a prejudice against Sikhs, calling it "Sikh-phobia" (Bhalla542). He held deep contempt for this community–a bias which had been seemingly justified by the strife in the city of Delhi immediately after the Partition. That his next-door neighbour was another Sikh made him feel all the more chary, particularly since this man was also a victim of forced migration, having had to escape from his native place in Rawalpindi after Sikhs came under attack there. Burhanuddin had presumed that the Sardarji too must be bearing ill-will towards Muslims, including him, and was therefore astonished when the man volunteered to hide him in his own quarters in the face of imminent attack. As fate would have it, a slip-of-tongue by the Sikh's young daughter Mohini reveals the secret to the murderous mob and turns its attention to the quarry. The Sardarji locks Burhanuddin in one of the rooms of his flat, gives his "kirpan to his son" and courageously goes out to "face the mob" (Bhalla552). In the turmoil that follows, the man is gunned down for his attempt to save a Muslim, but even on his death-bed, he admits to having no qualms about it. He also discloses the fact that it was actually his way of repaying a debt which he had run into when a Muslim named Ghulam Rasul had laid down his own life in a bid to save the Sardar and his family back in Rawalpindi. The irony comes a full circle when the narrator recollects that this Rasul was a prior acquaintance of his who had originally injected the bias against Sikhs in Burhanuddin's mind, and this final twist serves to accentuate the intricate plot-line. The author, who was a distinguished Urdu writer and had worked in Bombay [modern-day Mumbai] for the Hindi film industry, skilfully delineates the evolving trajectory of the relationship between his two protagonists, which also symbolises the volatile dynamics of their respective communities. Incidentally, Abbas had later acknowledged the source of this story to be one that involved his close relative in Delhi–a fact vouching for the existence of such gallant saviours in acutality.[3]

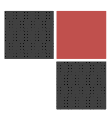
The courageous effort of the aged Sikh to protect his neighbour has a striking semblance to an episode in Mumtaz Mufti's short story "An Impenetrable Darkness". Here too, the brave-heart remains unnamed like the Sardarji, although the reader can deduce that he is a non-Muslim. He boldly asserts in front of his *haveli* [mansion] that



"[T]here aren't any Muslims in my house. I never gave refuge to them. Do you hear me? Buzz off, you scoundrel!" (Hasan 220-21)–his voice heightened, no doubt, to appear sufficiently bigoted. Once again, fate intervenes when a child from his house, when queried about presence of Muslims inside, declares that there were "no Muslims" and then naively adds that "[I]t is only Chaida's *Abba*, and not a Muslim. He is very nice. Chaida is my friend. It is her father" (Hasan 221, italics in original). The revelation promptly leads the mob to attack the inhabitants inside, and the ending is inevitably grim. It is noteworthy that the unsullied mind of this child, in all its innocence, could view Chaida's Abba as simply her friend's father. Her slip-up, or that of the young Mohini in Abbas' story referred to earlier, are eerily similar to the manner in which little Lenny unwittingly bares the location of her Hindu ayah Shanta's hide-out in Baspsi Sidhwa's renowned Partition novel *Ice-Candy Man*.[4]It is indeed tragic that religious animosity had severely corrupted most adults, turning them into hard-core zealots who could not and did not care to rise beyond the barriers of communal divide.

Although Punjab and the neighbouring North-West-Frontier-Province were the epicentre of Partition killings, other regions like Bengal too did not go unscathed. As such, narratives from the eastern part of the subcontinent also touch upon instances of compassion amidst the violence, and prominent amongst these is the short story "The Knife" by the eminent Bangladeshi writer Alauddin Al-Azad. It is the poignant tale of a Muslim youth named Mansur whose family were originally inhabitants of Calcutta [modern-day Kolkata], and had decided to shift to eastern Bengal on account of the deteriorating communal relations. Mansur had reached Dhaka prior to others so that he could renovate their house. However, misfortune strikes when he receives the news of murder of his younger brother Munnu and cousin Hosne Ara in West Bengal (Zaman 46). Mansur is left distraught, for he was betrothed to Hosne and affectionately called her Hasi, meaning 'smile' in Bengali. A secular man by temperament, he was contemplating the idea of organising a "peace procession" (Zaman 42) in his Dhaka neighbourhood when the twin deaths of Munnu and Hasi disrupt his mental calm. He finds it difficult to hold on to his erstwhile "analytical", "objective" self: "a primitive onslaught of raw emotions swept over his rationale. He was consumed with the primeval lust for hate and revenge" (Zaman 47). To complicate matters, Mansur's father incites him to seek vengeance and kill the Hindus living in the adjacent house in Dhaka. Despite his momentary antagonism towards members of this 'rival' religion, Mansur does not succumb to the provocation and manages to retain his innate goodness. Sensing his father's deep hatred for the neighbour Hiramoni and her three daughters, he keeps guard at their front door and tries to save them from the impending threat. In the process, Mansur is stabbed in the shoulder by his own father and cursed for being a traitor to his community. In spite of his grave injury, he courageously escorts these neighbours to a local colony where members of the Hindu minority had sought refuge. When enquired about his bleeding, he remarks: "It's pointless to ask when everywhere people are being killed. It's no use to anyone to know who attacked me. Just know that it was a man who stabbed me. Men are murdering men" (Zaman 54).

Amidst this prevailing turbulence, these words of Mansur point to the essential tragedy associated with the Partition since humans had sharpened their knives against their fellow-humans, subverting the very basis of a civilised existence. Towards the conclusion of the story, he also admits to Hiramoni about his initial impulse to hurt her family, and this very confession shows his integrity as a human. It is possible that he was

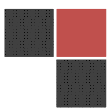


led to eventually save his neighbours following the comparable act by Mansur's acquaintance Fani Babu who had lent a *dhoti* [cotton loincloth typically worn by Hindu males] to Mansur's uncle Anwar at the time of his attempt to leave West Bengal undetected. The sequence of events is reminiscent of the Sardarji's indebtedness to Ghulam Rasul in Abbas' story discussed above, and attests to the vestiges of humanity still retained in some individuals despite the communal acrimony which had consumed most people. Incidentally, taking the garb of the majority community was a common method to avoid detection and harassment, and one finds a similar reference in the English story "The Parrot in the Cage" by the famous writer Mulk Raj Anand. In this story, Rukmani, an old woman from Kucha Chabuk Swaran in West Punjab, falls destitute during the infamous Lahore bloodbath and is compelled to flee home after being lent a '*burqa*' by a Muslim acquaintance of hers named Fato (Bhalla 54). Such instances of assistance meted out to people like Anwar and Rukmani reaffirm the validity of core human ethics despite the prevailing savagery in those times of turmoil.

Al-Azad's story is notable, for it does not present Mansur in a unidimensional light; instead of a cardboard figure, the author attempts to realistically portray the instinctive reactions of his protagonist as he traverses the trajectory of a man being intent on revenge to ultimately becoming a protector. This growth and evolution is also to be seen in "The Neighbour", a short story by Sheikh Ayaz originally written in Sindhi, which relates the tale of Khanu, a barber in Sind/h. He was a devoted supporter of the Muslim League and used to don a Jinnah cap to showcase his solidarity with this political party's agenda. Once when he was shaving *Sheth* Shyamdas, a Hindu, in his shop, the marching of National Muslim Guard members fill him with religious passions. The horrid description of violence faced by Muslims in Bihar, as recounted in Sindhi newspapers like *Sansar Samachar* and *Al Wahid*, add to his feelings of loathing for the Hindu community, for he infers that they "had wreaked havoc upon the lives of Muslims in Bihar", harmed his "Muslim brothers" and "humiliated the purdah" (Kothari 118). These reports almost provoke him into contemplating slitting the *Sheth's* (Kothari 118, italics in original) throat with his shaving blade as his way of seeking retribution. Khanu's momentary urge in this section of the story is almost reminiscent of 'Sweeney Todd'–the legendary Demon Barber of Fleet Street.[5]

Unlike Bengal and Punjab, Sind/h was not divided by Sir Cyril Radcliffe; the province had been completely assigned to West Pakistan despite having a sizable Hindu and Sikh population. As a result, these minorities were left at the absolute mercy of the dominant Muslims in what was essentially a theocratic state. After the Partition Award, the law-and-order in this region worsened steadily, more so with the advent of Muslims from United Province [modern-day Uttar Pradesh] and Bihar in India. It is during this period of demographic transition that Pesu's mother, a Hindu neighbour of Khanu alarmed by the winds of change, requests for shelter at his place in the event there was any danger in future. She also remarks in passing that for her it would perhaps be preferable to be put to death by Khanu himself, a fellow-Sindhi and her neighbour for several years, than to be killed by a random stranger (Kothari 123). Her fear of the migrants is not a one-off case, but is to be found in other regions like Bengal where outsiders were mostly blamed for disturbing the communal relations and intimidating religious minorities.

Coming back to Ayaz's story, it is this allusion to the migrant by Pesu's mother and her prioritising Khanu because of their common linguistic identity that lifts the veil



of bitterness which had shrouded him till then. Her implicit trust in a fellow-Sindhi takes Khanu down the memory lane back to the happier times they had spent together:

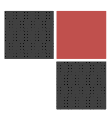
> It was a staggering eye-opener for Khanu. Was he going to be able to kill this woman, who looked up to him for protection? Certainly not. How could he be so heartless? If the Hindus in Bihar had slaughtered Muslims, how was Pesu's mother responsible?
> . . .
> It is true that his Muslim brothers were being killed in Bihar, but how was Pesu's mother to be blamed for it? Why should she be killed? In this land of the sufis, there will not be any riots, absolutely not. Who was so cruel and heartless that he would not protect his neighbourhood, and slit the throats of the helpless? Someone whispered in his ears, 'Jai Sindh!'(Kothari 123)

His mind now cleared of all initial misgivings, Khanu realises his duty to save Pesu's mother not only as a human being but also as a member of the Sindhi community. The latter factor is of vital importance, since the harmonious heritage of the province, enriched by the centuries-old Sufi tradition, had substantially contributed to minimising tensions between the various religious groups–an aspect that finds corroboration in the significantly lesser degree of violence here in comparison to the adjoining region of Punjab.

Thus one finds many Partition narratives emerging from Sindh to be characterised by this syncretism, and Lachhman Kukreja's short story "Who was Responsible?" belongs to the same category. An elderly Pathan reprimands a Muslim boy named Gaffur for pilfering items from a shop owned by a Hindu in Gadiyasun, and slaps him hard:

> '*Lakhalaanatathaichhora*, shame on you,' said the Pathan to Gaffur and slapped him once again.…'You are harassing these poor people. These *vaanyas* [traders] are having a hard time. They are leaving their homes and everything else. Here you are, stealing from them? Shameless fellow, return whatever it is you took from him.'
> . . .
> Poor banias [traders], what do they know of fighting? We are harassing them, looting them and creating problems instead of helping them. They are leaving everything behind them. We should be ashamed of ourselves, we are not helping them, rather we are multiplying their miseries.' (Kothari 139-40)

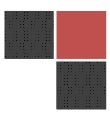
This Pathan is representative of those Muslims who, despite being citizens of a country founded on theocracy, were daring enough to not only help the besieged minorities but also protest the lumpen acts of their co-religionists. Although few and far between, records prove that such morally upright men–for example, one Sheikh Akbar Husain of Ravi Road in Lahore–raised their voices whenever they came across acts of atrocity. Ganda Singh, the chronicler of Punjab's turbulent history during this time, has referred to Hussain's letter which, dated 10 October 1947, was addressed to the *Civil and Military Gazette* (Lahore) and unequivocally reproved the surging religious violence in West Pakistan: "Are these murders sanctioned by Islam? Is this butchery allowed by Islamic laws? Is this killing of women and children in accordance with the rules of *Shariat*? Well, I dare say, these acts are against Islam and *Shariat*" (qtd. in Singh 59).



Analogous to these men in generosity of spirit is Fazal, the protagonist of the short story "The Boatman" written by the famed Bengali writer Prafulla Roy whose thematic anthology *Set At Odds: Stories of the Partition and Beyond* clearly emphasises the importance of humanity irrespective of religious identity.[6] Fazal was enamoured with the young Salima, but her father had set the 'mehr' [groom's dowry as per Islamic tradition] at "seven score rupees" (Roy 3) for her marriage. Salima had asked him to accumulate the sum as soon as possible, for there were other prosperous suitors approaching her father and it would not be easy for her to avert their proposals. The poor boatman steadfastly saves pennies to arrange for the requisite amount and is confident of raising it before long–for the Hindus were "fleeing their homes and the country" and the trend would certainly allow him "quite a few fares" (Roy 3). The observant reader cannot ignore the fact that Fazal's feeling assured about the money inflow is actually a grim indicator of the condition of religious minorities in the newly-created East Pakistan who were forced to take flight in large numbers.

When Fazal had almost succeeded in arranging the entire dowry, the plot takes a twist in the form of his chance encounter with a local Muslim named Yachhin Shikdar who had killed a Hindu man and abducted his wife. The hapless woman was then hid in a "burka" (Roy 7) to pass off as Shikdar's wife and made to board Fazal's boat in order to cross the river Dhaleshwari. She begs for her freedom, but en route the lustful Yachhin attempts to rape her. Roused from his reverie of Salima by the woman's desperate cries, Fazal quickly grasps the situation and aims his fishing spear at the perpetrator, killing him instantaneously. After throwing his corpse into the water, the boatman enquires the widow about her surviving relatives and learns of a brother-in-law in far-away Calcutta. He accompanies her to the nearest steamer ghat [harbour] at Tarpasha, and upon realising her indigent condition, "…thought of the secret pouch tucked away at his waist containing the price for that wondrous dream of his youth. He hesitated for a moment as he wavered inside. Then he resolutely turned his back on his own dream as he pushed into the vast sea of people and purchased a ticket to Calcutta" (Roy 16).The vast sea of people mentioned in the above passage refers to the large number of panic-stricken Hindu Bengalis seeking refuge in various parts of West Bengal and other states of India in the face of escalating persecution in East Pakistan. Towards the conclusion of Roy's story, the poor Muslim boatman displays utmost magnanimity in donating the entire amount he had amassed painstakingly all these days to this unknown Hindu woman so that she may start her life afresh in a new land. What is all the more commendable is that Fazal's instinctive act did not cause him any belated pangs of regret, for it was now well-nigh impossible to wed his beloved Salima. Instead of being bothered about his bleak marital prospect, the only thought plaguing Fazal while returning home was the stark human degradation witnessed by him: "How many times in the cruel dead of night would so many other Yachhins come to his boat? How many times?' (Roy 17).

These narratives discussed herein, both fictional and historical, are hugely significant in any study of the Indian Partition, for despite the risk of being subsumed by more arresting accounts of murder and mayhem, they stand their ground on the strength of idealism and historical merit. One could perhaps charge some of the authors with overt sentimentality, but the crucial role played by such tales of sympathy surely cannot be gainsaid. They reinforce our trust in cardinal human values and encourage us to strive for their sustenance in the midst of all adversities. With the 'History From Below' drift that has gained prominence in the past three decades, there has been a special drive to



retrieve such experiences from the annals of time, and the efforts of scholars Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi who visited Lahore in 2005 readily come to our mind in this respect.[7] Their findings, published in the research article "Partition Memories: The Hidden Healer", echo numerous incidents of Muslims coming to the aid of Hindus and Sikhs during the 1947 ethnic cleansing in western Punjab. From a sociological perspective the matter assumes an added import, for most explorations of communal disturbances generally focus on the collective aspect involving large impersonal groups. Under these circumstances, it becomes all the more necessary to highlight the individual heroic acts and bestow upon them their due credit. These accounts have the potential to appeal to the moral conscience of not just contemporary men and women, but also the future generations, and their tender, humane touch leaves a benevolent impression, re-instilling faith in the cardinal life-affirming values.

Notes:

[1]The death toll on account of the Partition has been put at diverse figures by different sources, and varies from two hundred thousand to two million (Doshi and Mehdi n.p.).

[2]Oskar Schindler, despite being a German member of Adolf Hitler's notorious Nazi Party, had saved more than a thousand Jews from being condemned to concentration camps during the European Holocaust in mid-twentieth century.

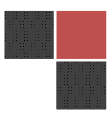
[3]In his essay "Who Killed India", Abbas offers an elaborate description of the manner in which his cousin's family was saved from a mob-attack by their ingenious Sikh neighbour:

> One day the RSS boys came to the Babar Road locality in trucks to carry away the Muslim property. A minute earlier a kindly Sikh gentleman hid my cousin and his family in the interior of his house, and when the looting began, the Sardar's children joined in the process, and brought home much of the household articles which, they claimed as their
>
> neighbourly right! Asked as to where the 'Musallas' had gone, they had no compunction about the virtuous lie they told–that they had run away to a refugee camp. If somehow the looters had come to know that they were there, not only their lives were in danger, but also the life of the old Sardarji who was standing guard over them holding a drawn sword in hishand. [It was this incident which inspired the story of Sardarji many months later!]. (Abbas238)

[4]The novel was renamed as *Cracking India* before its publication in the United States of America in 1991, probably in an attempt to enable a better understanding of its historical subject to a non-culture readership.

[5]It is based on the legend of one Benjamin Baker, alias Sweeney Todd, who–in a diabolical plan to take revenge against the entire world for the death of his wife–had set up a barbershop and slit the throats of his unsuspecting customers to bake them into pies.

[6]"Destination" and "For a Little While" [*'Gantabya'* and '*Kichhukshan*' in the Bengali original versions] are two other similarly-themed stories by Roy included in the same volume. They depict men and women from different religious groups extending a helping hand to each other in Bihar villages ravaged by riots.



[7]Their being the grandson and grand daughter-in-law of Mahatma Gandhi, the great votary of non-violence and communal harmony, lends additional credence to this endeavour.

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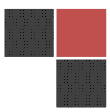

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