

Partition Amidst Politics, Life, And Literature

¹Sweta Singh & ²Dr. Purabi Panwar

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Mewar University, Chittorgarh (India)

²Associate Professor, Visiting Faculty, Mewar University, Chittorgarh (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 February 2019

Keywords

British, Communalism, India, Literature, Pakistan, Partition, Politics

Corresponding Author

Email: swetasinghdagar[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

History and Literature together constitute the past of a particular place or a thing. They both complement and supplement each other to generate a wholesome experience for the readers. The record and writings of the Indian subcontinent have always been full of events and actions. Partition of 1947 was one such transformative event that changed the state of world politics forever. The curiosity to understand the constituents of partition politics and independence struggle still continues. How did the struggle for independence take the form of demand for separate religious state confuses many. The present paper aims at the understanding of making of India in 1947. It will also comprise brief events related to the birth of East and West Pakistan. The study of the Partition in the paper will also take account of the study of the life of people, events, and overview of partition literature from three newly born region of that time i.e. India, Pakistan, and East Pakistan now Bangladesh, critically.

'Decolonization', 'Transfer of Power', 'Partition', 'Independence', 'Democracy', 'Partition-like violence's, along with continuous evolution made India of today. Independence for India was like a rebirth from its own ashes. The story of struggle and survival send a chill down one's spine. Once an independent nation, the country achieved new record and heights. National leaders wanted to prove that democracy was necessary for the overall development of the nation. But the snapped social ties and charred communal harmony at the time of partition failed to revive the warmth and passion among the natives. People tried to avoid talking about the loss and pain they had to go through to achieve freedom.

The study of partition, partition politics and its literature has become a necessity today. One must not brush it off for being violent or pertaining to past. The riots that India kept on experiencing from time to time after independence are the results nation have incurred by ignoring its past. The simple principle of, 'To embrace is to heal' was ignored which resulted in inconsolable differences between different religious groups and led to violence. By re-visiting the past one can try to understand the problem and its causes so as not to repeat the mistakes any further.

At the time of independence, the handful representative of Congress made a choice and accepted Partition as a price in exchange for free independent India. Nobody other than the decision makers was able to understand and justify the need of Partition and division of states in such a hasty manner. Today also the idea of Partition to achieve independence in exchange sounds bizarre to more than half of countries population. In other words, the dream of Union India shattered with the acceptance of Partition done over communal lines. It also poisoned the sovereignty and socialist secular taste of the country that directly or indirectly affected the hope and future of millions of people. After so many years of independence what one feels is that a misjudgment and lost opportunity at the time

of transfer of power resulted in the loss of countries peace, forever.

For around three hundred and fifty years India remained colonized. It was not that people were happy under the regime of the British Empire and did not crave for freedom. But their revolt often proved a futile attempt. The root cause of this was the acceptance people gave to the Britishers in their life. The feeling of helplessness and living life on master's mercy destroyed their courage to fight for self. On top of it were the lack of unity, social evils and economic disparities that provided an extra edge to the British rule in the Indian subcontinent and helped transform India into British province.

The journey of the British Empire in India is worth study. It was well thought and carefully planned. They surveyed the country by living here for trade purpose, and cautiously examined the loose hold of Nawabs and Rajas over their kingdom. They expended their regime step by step and caught stronghold in no time. Military buildup, market capture, and money power helped them buy loyalties of the weaker section in the society. Britishers never let the Indian mind liberate from the prison of poverty, illiteracy, and communalism. It was a major jolt to the spirit of the nation and the reason behind colonial India. Examining the crucial socio-political aspects of colonial India and its emergence as an independent nation tells a complex story.

The British rule in India was always full of challenges and complexities. Besides being the home of various religions, India was a big country with an area of 4,226,734 km² (in 1947), a challenge to rule in itself. The safe policy of Britishers was the avoidance of any interference with religion. It was necessary for them to keep Indians in their favor so as to run their empire in the country without any complexities. Their expansion policy was based on the economic development for which their military conquered trade routes all over the country.

When one talk about British India it includes their time that started with the East India Company in 1612 till the partition of the country in 1947. The Age of East India Company started in 1612 with the purpose of trade and shaped into company rule in 1757; till 1858. After that British Raj acquired the company rule in India. British rule and its end in 1947 in India is not a complete picture of the Indian subcontinent, as British rule in Burma continued till 1948 and in the Princely States till 1949. This clearly portrays the picture of the extended struggle for freedom and India's contribution and support to freedom seeker states.

Under British rule, India also embraced some historical and life-changing decisions for the upliftment of backward and socially neglected sects in the society. Abolition of Child Marriage, Dowry System and *Sati Pratha* helped empower the society. At that time major reforms and development were in the field of education, language, transport, communication, and postal services. But the revolt of 1857 came as a major shock to the British. It led to the transfer of authority from the hands of East India Company to the British Crown in 1858. Queen was declared the Empress of India in the year 1876. Later in 1911 her grandson George V was received as a king emperor, at *Delhi Durbar* and the capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi. The birth of *Babu Class*, growing Indian Civil Service culture, exploitation of natives, the foundation of Indian National Congress, surge of nationalism, regular protests and demand for equal rights made India a headache to deal with. The demand for a free independent nation-state started to rise. It was the starting of a highly volatile period in the history of the nation.

Partition of Bengal in 1905 was much more than the mere Partition. It was the colossal event of socio-historical importance that compelled the community to reconstruct life all over again. Partitioning Bengal as a part of the strategy was considered in 1903. Due to the continuous political protests, the two earlier divided parts of Bengal were later reunited in 1912. But a new Partition came into force that divided Bengal this time on linguistic grounds so as to form separate administrative units. The administrative capital of British India was moved from Kolkata to New Delhi. However, it did not prove a worthwhile step for promoting peace between the communities that were in conflict over their religious matters and communal interests. The Muslim and Hindu divergence resulted in the discovery of new ideologies and sets of law to govern both religious groups with equality and impartiality. But it was not enough to fill the chasm that was taking the form of 'Pakistan Movement'.

It would be wrong to attach the concept of Partition with the conflict between Hindu and Muslim communities alone. One must agree that two mainstream religious groups involved in this unendurable socio-political misjudgment were Hindus and Muslims, but its effects were visible on Bengali's, Punjabi's, Sindhi's, Buddhist, Christians, and Pashtu and Baluch nationalities too. The peoples who presumed partition to be a mere transfer that will end soon proved wrong. It took the shape of vindictiveness larger than life. Numerous deaths, inhumane atrocities, single largest mass migration, and the long rehabilitation process transformed it into a never ending

course. It was neither the demand of time nor the solution of communalism; instead, it was thrust upon the people in the wake of freedom and leaders shortsightedness. Today Partition can be termed as a result of 'unresolved ethnic-communal mistrust'. But at that time it proved colossal. After Partition everybody irrespective of cast and creed began to realize that it was the saga full of missed opportunities, fake promises, and tattered future.

Historian and philosopher strongly feel that the mixing of religion with politics for personal gain was a huge mistake. It gave rise to demand along religious lines by the representatives of earlier harmoniously residing communities. Mahonar Malgonkar, an Indian author, strongly felt 'that it was a saintly miscalculation of Gandhi to have brought religion into politics'. It is true to some extent, as for Gandhi religion was second beside saintly talks and a medium to reach out to the larger audience. Later this tool was misused by the leaders of Muslim League for the realization of their long cherished dream for a separate Muslim state, 'Pakistan'. Though the government of both nations was incompetent to control the loss of lives surely their swift action would have minimized it to some extent. The over-confidence of a few political leaders proved disastrous for the natives and could be termed as the biggest political failure in the history of India and Pakistan.

Even after seventy-one years of independence, India is still struggling to curb corruption and illegal use of power and politics. It was the same fruit of Partition politics which has ripen now. History and literature have always proven to be a valuable source to help understand the past period and ideologies of the time. To understand all the intricacies related to Partition and infancy of India and Pakistan with its socio-political conditions the past must be revisited. It is impossible to pinpoint exact tragic time from where it all originated, but after critically examining the details available in the history of India; one gets to know that British discovery for prospective markets converted into British dominance and British *Raj* step by step. It roughly falls under the five phases, in accordance with the series of development and changes that took place in the time period:

- 1600-1740,
- 1740-1792,
- 1792-1820,
- 1820-1848, and
- 1848-1914.

It was the fifth phase (1848-1914) that proved India to be the most glittering gem in the British crown. They extended from the core regions of economic development and gained the monopoly. Their sole motives were to strengthen the British economy. Raw and unfinished products, spices, indigo, opium, and cheap labor were the area of their focus. This helped them in cutting down the cost of items at the British market and unswervingly financed their maximum requirements. In simple terms, one can say that the taxes paid by natives of India were used by the Britishers to satisfy their interest and needs.

Under British rule, Indian society went through a dramatic change. The closely-knit-society created on traditional and moral values went for the modern lifestyle. Bureaucratic culture

took the place of agrarian society. Natives started dreaming for the luxurious life of Britishers. Their loyalty changed with the change of master and time. Selfishness, personal interest, earning rewards and favor were the only intention behind their service to the master. Amid all these changes a new political class emerged that was active, aware and concerned for the equality and human rights.

"In everyday social settings, therefore, a new kind of civil society developed, unarmed but not un-political, where people participated in politics with the venerable skills of literacy and cultural activism. In this civil realm, literate urban cultural activists produced national identities that by the end of the nineteenth century mobilized public support to challenge British supremacy in the name of nationalism. Political conflict between imperialism and nationalism first exploded in 1905 and reached a turning point in 1920, when nationalist mobilized the first massive public campaign for national autonomy."¹

In 1920, the British Empire reached the end of expanding their territory any further. This step brought modest positive change in the colonial policies and their attitude of dealing with colonies began to sober. But their attempts to fulfill the emotional, social and financial needs of natives failed to erase the memory of exploitation that had been there for around three centuries.

World War Two (1939-1945) brought the major changes in world politics. Many British colonies started demanding complete independence (*Purna Swaraj*). The countrymen were determined to settle for nothing less than nationwide independence. The states of Africa and Asia because of their invariable, continuous freedom struggles and determination began to acquire independence.

India secured freedom in 1947 and in the most turbulent way. The chaos amid which transfer of power was accelerated endangered the sovereignty of the country. There were rumors whether the country would be able to fulfill the promise of Union Independent India or Partition is evident. These speculation generated controversies and state of panic in minorities.

"Uncertainty intensified the communal conflict, principally in undivided Punjab. The Congress and Muslim League were at loggerheads. British officers lost interest in preserving the peace. But the joint Congress-League interim Government set up under the Cabinet Mission Plan was still in office in New Delhi. The Constituent Assembly, established on December 9, 1946, was in session. The Muslim League kept out. Even so, alternative ways to keep the country united were mooted. There was much wishful thinking; pitifully little contingency planning by the Indian leaders."²

Britishers knew that it was tough to maintain peace. The only thing they wanted was to withdraw with dignity and in the best possible manner. They knew situations were bound to deteriorate and could also get out of control at the time of Partition. Like Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many other political leaders were against the decision of partitioning the country to achieve freedom. They warned other Congress

minister that the decision of transfer of power in such a hasty manner will prove lethal. But Jawaharlal Nehru with the support of other minister wanted to achieve freedom as early as possible. They bowed down in front of the demands of the Muslim League and the British Government's plan for the transfer of power. The disagreement between Gandhi and Nehru and other Congress workers is clearly visible from the following quoted text:

"On May 27, Gandhi targeted the Congress leadership. He told his prayer meeting that the Viceroy should not talk only to Nehru or Patel or Rajendra Prasad. I wish to tell you that these are not the only persons in the Congress, he said. All those who have stood by the Congress and worked for it belong to it. Those who do not go on deputations and are not vocal are as many members of all Congress as anyone else."²

At the crucial time when the long chased dream was about to take the shape of reality, the leaders were divided over the way independence was arriving. It was the call of government after independence whether they wanted to have two independent nations: India and Pakistan, or Union India. The doubt of achieving the freedom without Partition as an impossible task could further be discovered from the following lines.

"Gandhi reiterated his case as the Viceroy's return approached: I am not at all worried about what June 2 will bring or what Lord Mountbatten will say on his return....The Constituent Assembly is sitting in terms of May 16 paper. It is for the British to hand over the power and quit. The government of free Indians formed under the constitution worked out by the Constituent Assembly can do anything afterward-keep India one or divide it into two or more parts...when we stood firm against such a mighty empire and were not afraid of all their arms when we did not bow down to their flag, why should we falter now?"²

Gandhi wanted to revolt and fight back against the decision of Partition. But he accepted that his age and health would not allow him to fight back alone and the kind of support needed to fight on this issue was impossible to generate. At public ceremonies, Gandhi restrained himself from speaking against Congress decisions as he did not want to weaken the spirit of the nation and also did not want peoples to lose trust in their future Prime Minister Sh. Jawaharlal Nehru. The situation was demoralizing in its own way. As uncertainty and chaos intensified the communal conflict, Britishers ruled the discussions and decision making power and also lost interest in restoring peace. The agreement of transfer of power gave the impression that the choice was given to the officials whether they want a Union India or Partitioned India, but in reality, there was no such scene. The nation was confused whether to celebrate on the day of independence or to be sad for the Partition of the country. Citizens of the country felt cheated when freedom arrived with the baggage full of conditions and blamed leaders for betrayal. Worst affected cities like Lahore and Amritsar were burned down to ashes. The conflagration lit by ignorance and sheer madness took little time in traveling to other parts of the country. Soon Sialkot, Sheikhupura, Gujranwala, Lyallpur, Gurudaspur,

Hoshiyarpur, Ferozepore and Jullundur had nothing more than debris. The loss of life and property was beyond recognition. Humanity was ashamed and the migrated masses with the communally inflicted wound from other religious groups were making the air heavy to breathe. Black days of Partition history never left the country in peace again.

With the division of Indian subcontinent, a new beginning for everyone and in every sphere of life started. Each family had the endless sufferings to count on. The extremities in life worked as a catalyst and gave people the strength to build life once more. The relations they developed with each other now were born out of shared traumas and common communally inflicted wounds. The whole incident and its saga still continue to generate massive literary interest from all corners of the world. As a result, the rich collection of Partition literature is available to readers. One can get a fairly good deal of ideas and beliefs that went into the making of today's India.

"Scores of writers of the subcontinent recorded their emotional experiences, but the authors belonging to the linguistic areas which have been directly affected by Partition, have delved deep into the event. A large body of Partition literature has been written in Hindi, English, Urdu, Panjabi, Sindhi, and Bengali. There are also some works in Pashtu, Dogri, Gujarati, and Marathi. Partition literature has not only added a new chapter to the world of Indian literature but has also provided enough source material for the reconstruction of the history of Partition."³

The Indian subcontinent was partitioned into three independent nation-states i.e. India, Pakistan, and East Pakistan now Bangladesh. They shared the same heritage, culture, and literature at one point in time, which increased their joint appeal towards each other. Still, the differences out of which they were born surpassed the love they shared. Partition transformed the lives of people and states it met with. It affected Punjab, Sindh, West Bengal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and turned the lives of people upside down. The noteworthy point here is that the writers had tried their best to record every possible facet of Partition. They responded to the pain, trauma, massacre, atrocities in the same manner as to the humanity amid beastly acts. The way people helped their neighbors and rescued the life of friends and families found a place in various short stories. Some writers even included the incident of boys getting married to the girls of other religion to save them from the torture on the name of communal differences. The peace marches and many more incidents like that became the common part of various writings.

Writers responded actively to the event of Partition but there were some characteristics attached to every particular language which helped register the event of Partition differently. S.R. Chakravarty and Mazhar Hussain's "Partition of India: Literary Responses" concentrates on the works of Partition in different languages, and the impact of language and the ideology of its writer that affected the way event of Partition was registered in that language. It also equips the readers with a fair amount of knowledge about the works published on the event of Partition, and also their significance and limitation. All the writers who have reacted on the colossal

event of Partition have faithfully recorded the growing communal tensions during Partition years i.e. 1946-1950. But it was Krishna Sobti who claimed that the economic disparity and daily differences of peasants began to be expressed in communal terms past 1940s.⁴ It clearly shows that before that social mechanism and interpersonal communication were working well to preserve society. By examining all the aspects one gets to know that the topic of partition generated vast response and writers have impartially documented the exploitations of minorities, refugee camp stories, caravan attacked and looted, the plight of women, and communalism and polarization creating havoc in a northern part of India. Southern India was relatively peaceful in comparisons to the scale of violence and atrocities that were recorded in northern India.

However, the literature in Pakistan of that time differed substantially from India. Pakistani writers in the wake of the spirit of nationalism tried to build the nationalist literature for the pure and sacred land of Muslims. They by means of literature wanted to communicate and justify the birth of their country. Resultant of it a huge form of creative literature came upon the theme of Partition, independence, and Islamic principles. It had nostalgia, celebration, fight for a separate Muslim state, victory feeling, and justification for the sacrifice to achieve Pak land. But as soon as the Pakistani movement became reality peoples began to understand fallacious promises. The refugees realized the incapability of Muslim League on being called *Muhajirs*. They faced discrimination and were treated as an outcast in pure-pak-land.

Particular attention should also be paid to the changes in the literature of Muslim dominant Bengal region that later became East Pakistan and was declared Bangladesh on 26 March 1971. Lahore resolution of 1940 also known as Pakistan resolution allured the major Bengali Muslims and gave them a sense of nationhood. They thought of it as a way to achieve exploitation free independent Muslim dominated separate Bengal. Their demand for equality suddenly took the form of demand for independent Muslim nation-state.

Bengali Muslim litterateurs together formed a literary association to create Pakistani Bengali literature. The literature that can define the cause of 'Pakistani Movement', the struggle and sacrifices made by Muslim brothers in realizing the dream of a sovereign Islamic state. Efforts were made to create the literature different from existing Bengali literature. As stated below:

"Islam will be the basis of these writings and Perso-Urdu words would be used in place of original Sanskritised words and expression. A new Bengali language with the induction of Urdu-Persian expressions and Islamic content would be created. A counterpart of the Renaissance society called Purbo Pakistan Sahitya Sansad was founded in Dhaka. Its first annual session was held in 1943. It also declared that the new Bengali language would help distinguish between Pakistan and Indian culture. The later was termed as Hindu culture."³

It clearly shows the attempt made to bring up new literature for the country that was still nowhere around. Peoples

of both the countries till date are unable to get an idea of what a purely Islamic culture stands for. To them the two dominating religion of undivided India: Hinduism and Islam extract their identity from the differences of each other and to sustain for long they must learn to co-exist with each other. Muslims welcomed Partition of the country as for them it was a dream come true. But their sense of accomplishment could not last long especially for Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan. Things took a worse turn and the common man found Pakistan a new kind of prison state in which they ended up getting trapped. The decision of imposing Urdu as a nation's language and promotion of its culture, made Bengali Muslim felt insulted. Undermining their language and ethnicity was a direct blow to their emotion and self-respect. And a new sort of socio-economic abuse started in East Pakistan via the hands of West Pakistanis.

For the people of East Pakistan independence came after the further extended struggle of about twenty-four years. On 16 December 1971, East Pakistan achieved the status of independent state Bangladesh. But in these twenty-four years, the revolt of Bengali people helped them in evolving as a force with new cultural unity irrespective of differences in the past. The literature produced in this time span was patriotic and biographical in nature. It expressed the bliss, pain, their nostalgic state for the lost integrity, admiration for Bengali culture, their love, passion and composite efforts to claim lost honor, and right to freedom. These writings also registered the dilemma of whether to migrate or not, the pain of being labeled as refugees, ache for not being the part of the mainstream population in dreamed paradise.

Focusing on the literary development in India gives one a more vivid picture of the turbulent socio-political time period. Here everyday life became a struggle for survival. Indian partition literature had much more variety in comparison to any other regions literature of that time period and still manages to interests many.

'Partition of India' is one of the most active themes in today's time period. The vision of achieving independence suddenly became the biggest tragedy in the history of the nation. Innumerable short stories, essays, plays, poems, novels, and research work had been published till date. Literature describing the holocaust of Partition and

compromises made by the nation for its independence comprises of some very outstanding works. To mention some of the most famous of them are "*Hoshiarpur to Lahore*" a novel written by a police officer who traveled in the train, "*Ali Pur Ka Aeel*" by Mumtaz Mufti, "*Khaak aur Khoon*" by Nasim Hijazi, "*Half a Village (Aadha Gaon)*" by Rahi Masoom Reza, "*The Weary Generations*" by Abdullah Hussein, "*Bast*" by Intizar Hussain, "*The Dark Dancer*" by Balachandra Rajan, "*A Bend in the Ganges*" by Manohar Malgonkar, "*Sunlight on a Broken Column*" by Attia Hosain, "*Pinjar*" by Amrita Pritam, "*Kingdom's End and Other Stories*" by Saadat Hasan Manto, "*What the Body Remembers*" by Shauna Singh Baldwin, "*Raavi Paar and Other Stories*" By Sampooran Singh Gulzar, "*Kitne Pakistan*" by Kamleshwar, "*Train to Pakistan*" by Khushwant Singh, "*Tamas*" by Bhisham Sahni, "*Midnight's Children*" by Salman Rushdie, "*Purbo-Paschim*" by Sunil Gangopadhyay, "*A Fine Balance*" by Rohinton Mistry, "*Ice-Candy Man*" re-published as "*Cracking India*" by Bapsi Sidhwa, "*Interpreter of Maladies*" by Jhumpa Lahiri, "*Azad*" by Chaman Nahal, "*The Shadow Lines*" by Amitav Ghosh etc.

The list seems unending. Some of the works mentioned above have also been adopted and made into a feature film. All of them are on the theme of Partition of Indian Subcontinent and their struggle to achieve independence. In Understanding the trauma of Partition of Indian subcontinent literary works of writers especially, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa, Saadat Hasan Manto, Manohar Malgonkar, and Amitav Ghosh proves wholesome and enriching. They all had light up the issue of partition and its impact in a unique way. Some of them had personally experienced the partition while others have gained the insight of it through literature and other mediums available.

Their work is close to reality and finely portrays the picture of the changing times and how communalism became a threat to the composite culture of the country. It also depicts how political ambiguity worsened the situation. At first, the fictional writing written on the theme of Partition of the Indian subcontinent was either of redemptive nature or ended on a note of helplessness. But later it began to portray humanity, positivity, hope, and prosperity amidst all the darkness. One can end it on a note that after Partition, 'Politics, Life, and Literature' got a verve that tasted sometimes like a failure and sometimes like a success bash.

References

1. Ludden, David, (2002): INDIA AND SOUTH ASIA: A SHORT HISTORY. Oneworld Publications Oxford. England. Pg.140-141.
2. Bhattacharjea, Ajit, (1997): COUNTDOWN TO PARTITION: THE FINAL DAYS. HarperCollins. New Delhi. India. Pg. xxii, 13-14.
3. Chakravarty. S.R, Hussain. Mazhar, (1998): PARTITION OF INDIA: LITERARY RESPONSES. HAR-ANAND PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD. New Delhi. India. Pg. 16, 23-24.
4. Sen, Geeti, (1998): Crossing Boundaries, 'Memory and History: Krishna Sobti Interview'. Orient Black Swan.
5. Butalia, Urvashi, (2017): The other side of the Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. Penguin Random House India.
6. Gundur, S.N., (2008): Partition and Indian English Fiction. Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
7. Bhalla, Alok, (2007): Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home. Oxford University Press.
8. Rashid, Salman, (2017): A Time of Madness: A Memoir of Partition. Aleph Book Company.