

# The Partition of India



# The Partition of India:

## *Beyond Improbable Lines*

Edited by

Daniela Rogobete and Elisabetta Marino

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



The Partition of India: Beyond Improbable Lines

Edited by Daniela Rogobete and Elisabetta Marino

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Daniela Rogobete, Elisabetta Marino  
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0846-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0846-0

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
--------------------	---

## **Part 1: Memory and History Writing**

Chapter One.....	9
------------------	---

Coping with the Aftermath of Partition: Some Personal and Impersonal  
Narratives

Jagdish Batra

Chapter Two .....	23
-------------------	----

From Metonymy to Metaphor: Toward a Tropology of the Indian  
Partition in Salman Rushdie's Fiction

Anca Băicoianu

Chapter Three .....	37
---------------------	----

Sublimation of Trauma, Memory and Relationships through Writing:  
Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Khushwant Singh's  
*Train to Pakistan*

Ketaki Datta

## **Part 2: Gendered Memory**

Chapter Four.....	53
-------------------	----

Moulding Identities in *Difficult Daughters* (1998) by Manju Kapur  
and *What the Body Remembers* (2000) by Shauna Singh Baldwin  
Elisabetta Marino

Chapter Five .....	65
--------------------	----

Twin Wounds, Twin Stories: Trauma and Gendered Memory  
in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's  
*What the Body Remembers*

Daniela Rogobete

Chapter Six .....	83
The Afterlife of a Victim of Partition Gendered Violence: The Plight of the Rape Survivor in a Post-Partition World Codified by Religion and Patriarchy	
Arunima Dey	

### **Part 3: Spatial Memory and Places of Remembrance**

Chapter Seven .....	101
The Mad, the Prostitute, the Child and the Dog: Whose “Partition” is it Anyway?	
Sharmistha Chatterjee (Sriwastav)	

Chapter Eight .....	113
Modern Delhi in the Light of Partition in William Dalrymple’s <i>City of Djinn</i> s	
Olivia Bălănescu	

Chapter Nine .....	129
Reading the Politics of Refugeehood: The Elusive “Nutan Badi”	
Kamayani Kumar	

### **Part 4: Politics of Representation and Memory in Film**

Chapter Ten .....	145
Love in Traumatic Times: Indian Partition in <i>Gadar</i> and <i>Qissa</i>	
Ritika Singh	

Chapter Eleven .....	159
A Partitioned Earth	
Viorel Stănescu	

Chapter Twelve .....	171
Salman Rushdie’s <i>Midnight’s Children</i> , between Book, Film and Screenplay: or What Went Wrong?	
Alan Munton	

Contributors .....	189
--------------------	-----

Index .....	193
-------------	-----

## INTRODUCTION

There is no way we can begin to understand what Partition was about, unless we look at how people remember it. (Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*)

The impressive amount of historical, fictional and analytical texts inspired by Indian Partition makes it rather difficult for anybody to find a new angle of research that might reveal unexpected nuances hidden under the layers of textuality the event has already gathered. The plethora of scholarly studies and anthologies focused on Partition have tried to analyse the innumerable aspects of this historic moment from various perspectives in the attempt to either evoke the event, memorise and better understand it, or to assess its social, political, historical, national and emotional implications. However, the ethical issues Partition continues to generate, the intricate problems and disturbing questions raised by its multifaceted violence, and the myriad untold stories still waiting to be revealed are reason enough to keep looking into the matter for further answers. “There will never be enough novels”—Shauna Singh Baldwin emphasises—“either by Indians and Pakistanis or by diasporic Indians and Pakistanis to tell the tales of each of 17 million people who became refugees as the two countries celebrated their independence from the British. There will never be enough novels to tell the tales of those who died—5 million people.”

From Kushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) to Deepa Mehta’s cinematographic *Elements Trilogy* (1996/1998/2005), from Saadat Hasan Manto’s Urdu Partition poetry to Butalia’s memorable interviews collected in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), from Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) to Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), a large number of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Parsee writers and artists have sought the proper means to reveal Partition in its complexity. Stark realism, naturalism, lyricism, magic realism and symbolism have by turns been used to describe a phenomenon that engendered communal riots, massive displacement, family disruption, extreme violence and disorientation, and that still traumatically haunts the memories of second-generation Indians and Pakistanis.

Starting from evocations of the events of Partition in literary texts and artistic representations, this volume does not focus on an objective assessment of the socio-political circumstances and the implications that led to it, but on a subjective perception of the events, which goes along with the editors' and contributors' intention to stay away from political stands and ideological biases. The stress is therefore on the way in which lived history is remembered and recorded; not in official statistics and grand meta-narratives but in subtler and more nuanced personal stories and reminiscent images that offer alternative ways of seeing Partition and its violent outcome.

Playing with the idea of "improbable lines" of demarcation—not only in spatial terms, as a comment on the arbitrariness of borders and territorial delimitation, but also in ethical terms, since most of the times, the conflicting motivations of Partition violence, that oscillate between honour and revenge, also become "improbable" as well as the thin border between remembrance and forgetfulness.

This collection of essays tries to explore Partition from the perspective of *liminal people* (women, children, religious communities other than Hindu and Muslim) placed on the thin edge between visibility and invisibility, between existence and non-existence, between self-imposed silence and erasure. All these studies are mainly interested in the way in which these people envisage Partition from the perspective of their status as not only geographically displaced individuals and refugees, but also as marginalised and strangers in their own families and lives. Caught in the intricate process of reconfiguring physical boundaries and remapping geographical, cultural, political and identitarian spaces, they try to retrace the story of Partition by activating their various types of memories (personal, collective, sensorial, material, cultural, communicative etc).

The volume dwells on the process of *remembering/re-membering* Partition and the intricacies of its unavoidable narrativisation as part of an attempt to demonstrate that the multiple "truths" engendered by this crucial event in India's history lie along improbable lines randomly generated between history, amnesia and memory, between personal drama and collective trauma, loss and rupture, religion and nationalism, longing and belonging. A special emphasis is placed on the stories of generally ignored Partition victims—women and children—and on the disastrous impact such silencing had upon households and domestic lives, irrespective of ethnicity and class. In the end a couple of questions arise: whether the present has found more definite "lines" and metaphorical boundaries that might situate all unhealed psychological wounds and unexorcised demons in an unrepeatable past; whether the present has also

discovered the best means to put together the once partitioned selves of the Indian nation and, finally, whether it has managed to separate willful amnesia from conscious remembering. The studies that make up this volume set out to offer possible answers to these questions and draw readers' attention to the silenced stories of Partition.

\*\*\*

The volume is divided into four sections that attempt to reopen discussion of the tremendous impact the Partition of India had and still continues to have on generations of people, on their identity and their sense of belonging, and on the way they choose to negotiate the meaning of their pasts and the effort to heal its wounds.

The first section, entitled "Memory and History Writing", attempts an analysis of the sometimes "improbable" images of the past created by the superposition of official historic records and unofficial personal remembrances. Partition, with all its political, historical, social and emotional consequences, is one of those events difficult to assess in their complexity, to represent and to reconstruct/remember. When cold statistics and historic records are set against the survivors' accounts what we actually get is a disturbing gap that may accommodate all the untold, forgotten or erased stories that belong to firsthand witnesses, usually placed at the margins of the mainstream Partition records. It is precisely the multitude of these untold or erased stories that this first section focuses on. One such personal account of Partition is offered by Professor Jagdish Batra in his article "Coping with the Aftermath of Partition: Some Personal and Impersonal Narratives". Professor Batra focuses on the survival strategies embraced by Partition refugees and their techniques of distancing themselves from traumatic experiences, in an attempt to demonstrate that the truth in this case lies somewhere between history, memory and amnesia. The author expounds on them from an objective perspective—as a scholar familiar with the politics, theory and literature of Partition—and from a subjective perspective, since he belongs to a displaced Indian family, itself the repository of firsthand Partition stories.

The personal and "impersonal" memories and narratives in Batra's article make the passage to Anca Băicoianu's study entitled "From Metaphor to Metonymy: Toward a Tropology of the Indian Partition in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" that introduces us to other types of memory and strategies of remembering Partition. The author's aim is to look into Rushdie's choice of tropes in his portrayal of Partition and post-Independence India, and into his switch from a metaphorical perspective

on identity and (history) writing to a metonymic construction of the self and of the Past. The author remarkably achieves this by applying Hayden White's "topological view on history" to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in order to establish whether Rushdie's use of tropes makes this a novel of Partition not only at the narrative level of History but also at the more profound level of discourse. The same metaphoric memory is analysed by Dr. Ketaki Datta in her article entitled "Sublimating Trauma, Memory and Relationships through Writing: Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*" which focuses upon the metaphoric transfer between trauma and memory, between forgetting and remembering, and on the active part emotional memory plays in discussing Partition; beyond this lie the changes it engenders in the essence of human (national, ethnic or personal) relationships.

The second section of this collection dwells on the gendered memory at work when Partition is evoked, and on a renewed attempt to focus on the unheard stories of victimisation and atrocious violence directed against the overwhelmingly invisible victims of 1947 post-Independence events: women. Elisabetta Marino proposes a comparative analysis of two well-known novels from the perspective of a gendered remembering of Partition. The article entitled "Moulding Identities in *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur and *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin" offers not only a renegotiation of identity and femininity but also a possible reconstruction of the past and its "improbable wounds" through the women's silenced stories. In her article "Twin Wounds, Twin Stories: Trauma and Gendered Memory in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*", Daniela Rogobete continues the analysis of literary representations of Partition as shaped by gendered memory. This article focuses on the intricate relationship between trauma and memory in order to create a more or less allegorical vision of events where different types of gendered memory work together in the attempt to recuperate the untold stories of women's plight during the Partition. Arunima Dey's article, "The Afterlife of a Victim of Partition Gendered Violence: The Plight of a Rape Survivor in a Post-Partition World Codified by Religion and Patriarchy" focuses on women's predicament in the wake of the events of 1947 as they are represented so clearly in Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning*. The author explores the damaging effects of the prolonged violence of Partition inflicted on female survivors in the name of honour and religion.

The third section of the volume, "Spatial Memory and Places of Remembrance", tackles the relationships between (in this case) constructive memory and (liminal) space as instrumental in the evocation

of the traumatic events of Partition. Sharmistha Chatterjee's article, "The Mad, the Prostitute, the Child and the Dog: Whose 'Partition' is It Anyway?" speaks of metaphorical spaces of exclusion, liminality and erasure that engender new types of spatial memory at work in demolishing the "meta-narratives" of post-Independence events. Olivia Bălănescu gets even closer to a type of spatial memory able to offer another representation of Partition in her article entitled "Modern Delhi in the Light of Partition", starting from William Dalrymple's novel *City of Djinns*. The author sets out to explore the palimpsestic essence of modern Delhi taking into account its long history of interruption, destruction and rebirth, and the successive waves of Partition refugees that shaped its destiny. The last article in this section, authored by Kamayani Kumar and entitled "Reading the Politics of Refugeehood: the Elusive 'Nutan Badi'", reconnects (visual) memory to various spaces of liminality (minorities, femininity and childhood) in a meritorious effort to re-represent Partition and its complete redefinition of the notion of "home" (*nutan badi* > new home) in the light of "post-memories" and their emotional impact.

The last section of the volume, "Politics of Representation and Memory in Film", focuses on some of the most famous cinematographic representations of Indian Partition and the visual metaphors they are built on. The traumatic images that have forever haunted survivors' and by extension the nation's remembering of Partition, find their cinematic counterparts in works that offer new interpretations and new strategies for dealing with the past. Ritika Singh proposes a revaluation of human relationships in her article, "Love in Traumatic Times: *Gadar* and *Qissa*". She dwells on love as a means of "facilitating recovery" after trauma, an exploration of the complicated struggle to achieve a successful integration of "the traumatised self" that mirrors the integration of a "traumatised nation still haunted by its past" (162). Viorel Stănescu's article, "A Partitioned Earth" offers a synthesis of the visual representations of Partition in Deepa Mehta's representative cinematographic production *Earth 1947*, projected against a more general background of the symbolic imagery consecrated by Indian films inspired by Partition. The author analyses the images of dislocation and severance present in *Earth*, the illustration of the process of partitioning that affects earth, lives, communities and nations, at the same time demonstrating the power of cinematography to offer suggestive survival testimonies and show how to bring erased stories back to life. Dr. Alan Munton, in the chapter entitled "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: Between Book, Film and Screenplay: or, What Went Wrong?", analyses one of the most famous novels of Partition alongside Deepa Mehta's film adaptation which,

apparently, fails to rise to the complexity of the former, and certainly achieves less than the script of the television series inspired by the same novel. The author dwells on this incapacity to fully transpose into images a “world-swallowing” narration that revolves around post-Independence events, and around metaphorical images of division and Partition, together suggesting the impossibility of ever fully capturing the historical, political and emotional complexity of Partition.

Alan Munton’s article closes this volume and the discussion about the processes of remembering and re-membering Partition with this tricky question: what went wrong? Obviously, many things have gone wrong since 1947 in evoking the events of Partition and in healing its wounds; many stories have been left out. This volume joins the many others that try to recuperate those untold stories.

### Works Cited

- Baldwin, Shauna Singh. 2016. “Q & A” Interview. Available at: <https://www.shaunasinghbaldwin.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/wtbressayo99.pdf> [Accessed 17 April 2016]. Web.
- Butalia, Urvashi. 1998. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Penguin. Print.

## **PART 1:**

### **MEMORY AND HISTORY WRITING**



## CHAPTER ONE

# COPING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF PARTITION: SOME PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL NARRATIVES

JAGDISH BATRA

When I was invited to write on the partition of the Indian subcontinent (hereafter referred to as “Partition”), I faced a dilemma. I had studied Partition literature to some extent but never dared to go deep into it. Now that I had to deal with the issue, I also feared unearthing what might have happened to my forebears as well. To speak frankly, I happen to be the child of parents who along with their kith and kin had to migrate from that part of India which came to be known as Pakistan after August 15, 1947. Surprisingly, I hardly heard from them the tales of horror which normally form the staple of Partition literature. What I heard occasionally was that my mother’s elder sister died young and that my brother died at the age of only two. The only issue of my parents as I was, born post-Partition in the new truncated India, they probably did not want me to undergo any trauma. I did receive intimations of their nostalgia for the lost land and in the 1960s met a few guests, former neighbours of my father, who had come on a visit to India. But nothing beyond that.

The Partition meant a lot to those who got displaced from either side of the dividing line between the new entities known as India and Pakistan. It meant forsaking forever their hearths and homes, their relationships, their cultural moorings, and that was no small loss; all this in an environment of communal frenzy and violence of unmatched proportions which the literary historian William Dalrymple, writing in the *New Yorker*, quantifies as more than one million dead and fifteen million displaced.

In Europe, the two world wars had led to the end of the modern age, and of faith in man’s rationality. What happened on the Indian subcontinent was too cataclysmic to sustain faith in humanity itself. The imprints of the shock are yet to be effaced from the public psyche. Myriad questions surround someone placed in my situation: How could one

become the enemy of one's neighbours, and acquaintances of lifetime? How could political bungling at the top whip up communal frenzy of such a horrendous magnitude? Is it the British policy of "divide and rule" that succeeded in leaving behind a never-ending legacy of tension between India and Pakistan? What use is it to read Partition literature now? Is it to lay blame at the door of the colonisers or the people of the subcontinent at large? And most important of all: is Partition now relegated to oblivion or is it still there lurking in the corner within the societies of India and Pakistan?

### **Partition literature and history**

Reading Partition literature is like taking a plunge into a river of blood and gore, and being an unwilling witness to nauseating incidents of looting, rape and arson of unimaginable magnitude; in short, visiting the nadir of bestiality to which humankind can descend. It is an experience that shatters your very soul and the scars just refuse to heal. The impact of Partition has been "too deep-seated to be wished away", says Mushirul Hasan, in his introduction to *The Partition Omnibus* (2002); and he feels that "both as an event and memory, it has to be interpreted and explained afresh in order to remove widely held misconceptions. This is both a challenge and a necessity and it is indeed a theme where the historian's craft must be used deftly" (xliii).

The Hindi writer Krishna Sobti rightly comments that Partition is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember (Butalia 2014). A number of narratives in various formats—print, visual, performance, etc. have sprung up of late showing renewed interest in this "dangerous" enquiry. The various narratives—historical, literary and oral—dealing with Partition work their way by differing routes. Historians like Bipin Chandra, Mushirul Hasan and Ian Talbot, social scientists like Gyanendra Pandey, Ashis Nandy and literary writers like Chaman Nahal, Saadat Hassan Manto, Amitav Ghosh, Intizar Hussain and Bhisham Sahni have presented narratives guided by the norms of their respective disciplines (Bhalla 2006: 4-53; Saint 2010: 1-38; Malik 2007: 11-22; Arora & Dhawan 2010: 14-22). So far as literature is concerned, several issues have been touched upon; the foremost of these is the problem of identity as between Indian or Pakistani which became a hot potato in great many cases. The formation of the new states—India and Pakistan—precluded divided loyalties and insisted on either Indian or Pakistani identity regardless of one's past or present belongingness. It was an acid test for the task of nation building. Most Muslims, who had willy-nilly to kowtow to the obsessions of self-

serving politicians, were least bothered about leading their lives in a sanitised land where the *qafirs* (non-Muslims) would not rule. And even if some had thought so, there was no land of pure grace awaiting them on the other side of the border. To forsake their moorings in India was akin to death for some, and indeed some stayed put at great risk to their lives, even as some played into the hands of wily politicians and turned into fanatics. In Saadat Hasan Manto's stories, we find that those celebrating Partition do not hesitate to rob the helpless refugees of their own faith: "... those who celebrate the Partition, jeer at the refugees, rob them of their few possessions, and then cynically exploit them instead of helping them, become citizens of the new societies" (Bhalla 7).

Indeed, there are thematic narratives that condemn the self-righteous politicians and their cronies who showed people visions of utopia, once they had left their hearths and homes for an unknown destination. Some narratives celebrate the spirit of nationalism on both sides, some of religion on the Pakistan side (India having declared herself to be secular). Some narratives are "melodramas of patriarchal follies where women could easily be sacrificed to preserve the purity of the tribe" (Bhalla xii). No doubt, the novels written by women writers like Attia Hosain, Bapsi Sidhwa, Anita Kumar, Krishna Sobti, and Shauna Singh Baldwin articulate the pent-up agony and misery of female victims with great sympathy and understanding. According to Seema Malik, who has researched the works of six leading women writers, these are gendered narratives which foreground the marginal in a mode which she calls "honest fictionality" (2007: 172). Authors like Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) and Anis Kidwai in *In Freedom's Shade* (2011) have documented the oral histories of women wronged by men. At the same time, women writers bring forth cases of exceptional women who transcended the religious barrier and helped women belonging to the other faith.

The significance of literature cannot be underestimated in these postmodern times when history has been found to be wanting in revealing the truth. Even otherwise, compartmentalisation of disciplines is something that may be helpful in studying the world around us but it presents half-truths only. For that matter, sociology and literature do have a lot in common, as Zygmunt Bauman and Riccardo Mazzeo aver in their renowned work *In Praise of Literature* (2016). History, though tied inexorably to politics and sociology, is supposed to rely on authentic facts and figures. The historians agree more or less on the number of people killed and displaced, but while the historians try to create coherent narratives based on "official" facts and their own explanations, the lived

experiences of the people can only be felt in the literary texts and oral memoirs of survivors and witnesses. The Hindi writer Kamleshwar says in an interview: “. . . the historians and the political scientists can’t have a sense of the lived reality of a particular period. They work with a set of events and try to make sense out of them. They know that since the Muslim League was formed in 1906, the seeds of separatism were sown at that time. The historians forget that there are other events and other stories which suggest different possibilities for the ways in which a society evolves. For the historian, there is only a linear process towards a given end” (Bhalla 196). So, the historians are not competent, by virtue of the limits of their discipline, to deliberate on the plight of divided families, physical and mental hardship, the trauma of loss and exile, quite apart from the forced witnessing of the torture, rape and amputation of children, women and helpless people. Indeed,

Some realities need to be fictionalised before human imagination can come to terms with their horrors and unbearable pain. Fiction also spawns competing versions of truth and multiple points of view and thus facilitates a richer, and a more nuanced, understanding of events and people. (Asauddin 2010: 96)

But after all is said and done, the bulk of Partition literature forces one to see the futility of the exercise of Partition: “If one looks deeply at the whole gamut of Partition literature, it appears that apart from portraying the ordeal of Partition, or expressing their sense of rage, anguish, hatred, anger or loss, the writers seem to be questioning the ultimate benefit or validity of such events to mankind” (Arora & Dhawan 2010: 17). Indeed, the justification for Partition literature lies in asking the question: what lessons do we learn so that we do not have a repeat of such horrendous calamities? In this, the later literature produced by the post-Partition generation has been more focused on this aspect, as Saint argues:

Several critics have highlighted the differences between early responses to the partition during the first decade after 1947 and later representations of the event. Aijaz Ahmad suggests that later writing in Urdu tends to be more reflective, seeking to negotiate larger civilisational, social or political questions after the initial raw narratives of suffering. (2010: 116)

In English literature too, as for example in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), we find the unnamed narrator recalling, after a good bit of prodding, the killing of Tridib as a traumatic event which is pitted against the grandmother’s failure to find signs of division on the land

between East Pakistan and India, when she crosses by plane *en route* from Dacca to Calcutta. Naively, she had imagined that there would be some concrete sign of division, such as trenches. Of the “No man’s land”, her notion was that there would be some barren strip of land or there would be soldiers pointing guns across the border. But there are only green fields to be seen and that surprises her no end. Her naivety is reflected in her remark: “I mean, where is the difference then? And if there’s no difference . . . What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn’t something in between?” (151).

### Oral narratives

And yet written literature proves inadequate in conveying the fond memories of cherished relationships with neighbours and friends, and the trauma of violence. It is here that the oral histories and narratives find their relevance. Keeping this in view, several digital repositories of oral narratives have been launched. These include [www.1947Partitionarchive.org](http://www.1947Partitionarchive.org). This is being done with the avowed objective of “collecting, preserving and sharing personal items and artifacts associated with the people’s memory of the 1947 Partition” to bring it into the public domain. Sachi G. Dastidar’s Indian Subcontinent Partition Documentation ([www.ispad1947.com](http://www.ispad1947.com)) project is clear about its benign mission, which is to trace missing Hindus in Bangladesh post-1947 and 1971. Similarly, the Panjab Digital Library at [www.panjabdigilib.org](http://www.panjabdigilib.org) has done a yeoman’s job in digitising some one billion pages of ancient texts on Partition (Sandhu 2014: 3). There are other such sites both in India and Pakistan that are working with this noble objective.

Partition as a catastrophic event is also retained in public performance. A case in point is the addition to the annual *Ramlila* festival (a festival of plays based upon Ramayana), a play about Haqeeqat Rai who, as a school student in the 1730s, was accused of blasphemy. Haqeeqat was sentenced to be beheaded by the Qazi or the religious judge for not reciting the *kalma*. The play was regularly staged by a dramatic club run by displaced Hindus settled in Sonapat and nearby places. The legend was meant to remind posterity of the sacrifices made by their ancestors for the sake of religion. Stories of countless women drowning themselves in wells rather than being dishonoured by Muslim attackers have come down as another saga from these times (Butalia 2010: 77). A temple called “Satanwala Mandir” in Karnal memorialises the voluntary suicide of several women to escape being abused by Muslim hordes. Elsewhere, small memorials might be found, in Sonapat for example, where a square is still known as

“Shaheed Chowk” because a family residing there had lost a number of people in the Partition holocaust.

Oral narratives have found takers among the followers of the New Historicism. The sufferings of ordinary people have been noted in this mode by Vazira Zamindar in her book *The Long Partition* (2007), which begins and ends with reference to a certain Ghulam Ali who was a subaltern in the British Indian army and was sent to the UK to get training in the art of artificial limb making. At the time of Partition, he was caught unawares in Pakistan, while his family lived in Lucknow in India. He valued his job very much and tried hard to get it back but his numerous representations, along with border-crossings, imprisonment, culminating in confinement to a Hindu camp in Lahore, show how he became a ball in the ping-pong game of the bureaucrats, judiciary and armies of both countries; because while the displaced persons from both sides of the Punjab were accounted for, there was no provision for, say, Muslims from UP (Uttar Pradesh) or other states. “[H]e remained a stateless person, ‘undefined’ and a ‘foreigner’ in his home—disowned by the Pakistani state on the one hand, and a subject of continuous surveillance by the Indian state on the other” (Zamindar 2007: 234).

## Aftermath

The aftermath of Partition was not, and of course, could not have been a smooth one for the migrants. Urvashi Butalia has commented in an article that “as an historical event, Partition, for example, has ramifications that reach far beyond 1947, yet historical records make little mention of the dislocation of people’s lives, the strategies they used to cope with loss, trauma, pain and violence” (Arora & Dhawan 61). Crammed in trains like sardines in cans, cowering in silence for fear of attacks from marauding mobs, clutching the valuables that they could bring along, the migrants chanted the name of their guru or god until they crossed the newly formed border with India.

. . . when refugees arrive at camps set up for them or find shelter in schools, evacuee properties, temples, mosques, old forts, gardens, railway stations, footpaths, they understand that far from being participants in ‘pilgrim time’ who had at last realised their ‘telos of burgeoning historical expectation’, they are merely poor players trapped in civil, political and religious nightmares enacted to satisfy the egotism of some and the powerful ambitions of others. (Bhalla 6)

My mother told me that my father sewed gold jewelry into his underpants to bring it safely to India. My enquiries much later in life revealed some sordid truths kept hidden from me by my parents. One of these was that my aunt had actually been abducted and forced to change her religion at the time of Partition. The family wrote her off and counted her among the dead. My mother, however, had a copy of the *Sakhi* (the biography of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith), which the aunt had gifted her and from which my mother recited with reverence every morning at the time of daily worship. This was in Gurumukhi script, which the aunt had taught my mother. Apart from this, the other harrowing truth was that my two-year old brother died due to suffocation on the train to India! These scars remained forever with my parents. My father, who otherwise took risks in business, would grow extremely nervous whenever any threat of violence occurred. In contrast, an uncle of mine, Dr. Raghunath, was made of sterner stuff. He joined RSS—the staunch pro-Hindu socio-political organisation and remained attached to it throughout his life; he died a much revered RSS leader only five years ago. In fact, at the time of Partition, many migrants attached themselves to RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and its ideology permeated their families. To this day, sympathy for this organisation—and for its political version, BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)—remains strong among descendants of the migrants.

At the time of Partition, the Indian government did what it could to settle the migrants here even as instances of bribery and corruption were often reported. The best thing it did was to earmark areas for settling *en masse* migrants belonging to the location they had left behind. Thus, after settling the refugees in transit camps, the residents of West Punjab in Pakistan got shifted to various cities/towns in East Punjab in India: from Alipur to Sonapat; Multan to Karnal, Jhang to Rohtak; Frontier area to Faridabad and so on. This was done to provide these unfortunate people with some solace in the company of those whom they knew or whose culture they shared.

Unfortunately, the “refugee” tag has come to stick to the people who migrated from the other side of the border. They were neither immigrants, as that term is applied to people crossing over to a foreign land, nor were they “refugees” in the true sense of the word because that term is also applied to those who move out of their country from fear of religious or political persecution. Even though India gave Muslims the choice whether to stay in India or move over to Pakistan, the creation of Pakistan itself was based on religion; this made it clear to the Hindus that that territory was no longer their homeland. In that sense, the Hindus coming to India

were refugees, but strictly speaking, in the legal sense, they were not crossing the boundary of any settled nation and were only moving from one part of India to another. At best or worst, their identity fell between “refugees” and “migrants”.

## Enterprising people

The Hindi word for “refugee” is *sharnarathi*. Indeed, the term gained currency at the time of Partition, but Mahatma Gandhi took exception to it and proclaimed that these people were not *sharnarathi* but *purusharathi*: those living by the sweat of their brow. Truly did the migrants prove themselves worthy of this epithet. They laboured day and night, undertaking whatever honest work they could find. They set up small businesses, not minding whether a big landlord from erstwhile Multan had to set up a pavement shop or a rich businessman from Lahore had to sell wares on a cart. The women, realising the hard times they were faced with, stood shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk and did not mind helping them by taking up petty jobs. The enterprising spirit was a hallmark of the Punjabi population.

These were hard working people; even children contributed their mite to put the wheels of life together again. I remember that as a child I helped my mother shell chick-peas, make paper envelopes, slice bamboos to make ice cream sticks, etc. Raw materials were procured from shopkeepers and then work was done at home. Later, the finished products were taken back to them. The government-run Khadi Bhandars (stores) gave cotton to us and my mother would then spin it into yarn on the spinning wheel. The Khadi Bhandars were stores which dealt in *khadi* or handloom fabric. This cottage industry had been given a boost by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom movement, in a bid to firm up village economies as against cloth imported from England; the *charkha* or the spinning wheel actually became an icon of economic freedom.

In pre-Partition India, my ancestors lived in the town of Alipur, in the Muzaffargarh District. The family was well off and the extended family lived in a *haveli*—a big house with an ample courtyard and several quarters. My grandfather was an Ayurvedic doctor. Unluckily, he died when my father was quite young. My grandmother too, passed away around that time. My father had to fend for himself quite early in life. As a student, he was helped with meagre allowances from one relative or another. When he joined Multan University for his matriculation, he had to go without food many a time even though he undertook menial jobs to

make ends meet. But he had learnt to cope with want. After graduation, he became apprentice to a mechanic.

In time, he settled himself in Alipur as an expert mechanic and in due course built himself a small fortune. People started referring to him as *Lala*, which is an honorific for a moneyed man. His brother's father-in-law from the village of Marian was so impressed with this industrious young man that he chose him for his unmarried daughter. At the age of 34, Partition brought my father to India. Here, he had to begin afresh by starting a small machine repair shop and slowly but steadily established himself as a fabricator of machines. Later, he changed tack and thrived as a trading businessman supplying goods across a substantial part of North-West India. He was one of the richest men in the town before he left for the next world in 1981. He was much admired as a self-made man, like so many other migrants. He would train himself by reading books. I often stumbled upon old books in Hindi or Urdu on subjects like running a workshop or maintaining account books.

### Migrant-local relations

The Hindu migrants to East Punjab (India) laboured and prospered. That speaks volumes about the hospitality of the local populace, who welcomed them as ones who had sacrificed much for the sake of religion. If I focus on the conditions in the present Haryana (carved out of East Punjab in 1966), I can say that the native people, mostly of Jat ethnicity, were given mainly to farming. The Punjabi migrants became in due course models to be followed. Their food and dress habits gradually influenced the Jat community. The staple diet of the rural people consisted of chapatti made from wheat flour, and milk preparations. The use of vegetables as a dish in the *thali* (plate for food) was rare. Similarly, in matters of dress, men wore white cotton shirts and dhotis, and the women white shirts with elaborate and colourful *lenhgas* (plaited skirts). The migrants first brought the *salwar* into fashion, both for men and women. However, they took to western dress quickly and were emulated by the native people. It was a kind of “sanskritisation”<sup>1</sup>. The *salwar-kamiz* was to become, in due

---

<sup>1</sup> The term *sanskritisation* was coined by the Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas, who in his study *Religion and Society Amongst the Coorgs of South India* (1952) found that the lower castes tended to adopt the customs and practices of such higher castes as Brahmins, Kahatriyas and Vaishas. They did this under the impression that the change would raise their status in society and put them on a level with higher castes. Some of these practices include dressing and worshipping like them.

course, a kind of national dress for Indian women. To be precise, it was the traditional dress of women in Punjab on both sides of the dividing line. The cultural interaction was also mostly one-sided with the native women taking to celebrating *Rakhi* and *Karva Chauth* festivals<sup>2</sup>.

Various political developments have moulded the relationship between the migrants and the local population. The bifurcation of the state of East Punjab in 1966 into “Punjab” and “Haryana”, along with the erstwhile PEPSU state (The Patiala and East Punjab States Union) renamed Himachal with some territorial adjustment here and there was a watershed in the lives of the native people of this region. The bifurcation followed intense agitation by the Akali Dal party of East Punjab for a separate Punjabi Suba (the province formed on the basis of the Punjabi language) had undercurrents of being a separate area for the Sikh community. This came to be true, as Sikhs have ever since dominated politics in the Punjab, even though the non-Sikh Punjabi-speaking population is sizeable there.

The demand for Punjabi Suba had been opposed by the non-Sikh Punjabi-speaking Hindus of East Punjab. A linguistic survey was done in which most Hindus gave Hindi as their mother tongue, to thwart the creation of Punjabi Suba for objective reasons. The impact of Arya Samaj, a religio-nationalist movement, was notable and it favoured Hindi as the national language. Thus, the Hindus earned the ire of the Sikh community for the first time. In this, the fellow feeling born of the common experience of Partition was forgotten.

The division of East Punjab also threw up the question of what should be the state capital of Haryana and Punjab; both wanted the newly-created designer city of Chandigarh. The fate of Chandigarh was decided by a commission whose mandate also included settling the state boundaries by exchanging areas occupied by people speaking the language of the other state. But the award stipulated handing over 113 Hindi-speaking Punjab villages to Haryana, while retaining Chandigarh as the joint capital of both states. This led to violent reactions in Haryana. Government and private properties were torched and Punjabi speaking people assaulted. Thus the Punjabis came to be at the receiving end here, too.

---

<sup>2</sup> “Rakhi”, or “Raksha Bandhan”, is a traditional festival in which women tie a band on their brothers’ wrist. The brother presents a gift to her. This is symbolic of the brother’s commitment to safeguard the honour of his sister. “Karva Chauth” is another festival in which women fast from dusk until the moon rises in the sky, whereupon they see their husband’s face and break their fast. This fast ensures a long life for the husband. Both festival days are calculated according to the Indian lunar calendar, the Vikrami.

Another harrowing event that cast its dark shadow on Hindu-Sikh relations (and the bond between the migrant Hindus and Sikhs broke down) was the outbreak of violence in the wake of the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Around 2500 Sikhs were butchered in the capital Delhi alone by non-Sikh Hindu goons incited by members of Gandhi's political party, that is, Congress. This horrendous event created a chasm between the Hindu and Sikh communities which the Khalistan insurgents would have liked to have capitalised on except that their backbone had already been broken by the Indira Gandhi government. The common people chose to forgive and forget and have since lived in peace in Punjab and elsewhere.

The state of Haryana was the unintentional outcome of the division of East Punjab, in the sense that there was no demand for such a state. But the new state came as a bounty for the native Jat community which was in a majority. The third chief minister of the state, Bansi Lal, who took office in 1968, saw to it that government posts went to the Jat community only. This started with the transport department, followed quickly by the departments of electricity, education and so on. This small state has had good governance since, and the fruits of development have been shared widely by the Jat community. The representation of other communities, including the Punjabis, gradually declined, but the Punjabis never complained. They had built a reputation as enterprising people, and were confident of success without state largesse.

There are many stories of migrant achievement, though these also aroused the jealousy of local people. A factor that helped the native Jat community was the rise in land prices after 1970. The state planning board built new colonies and encouraged the setting up of industries requiring land on a large scale. The result was that many farmers, an overwhelming majority of whom were and are Jats, sold their land and invested in profitable enterprises—though there were some who squandered money in wasteful activities and became paupers. In time, a large section of the Jat community rose high in the social order and even surpassed the Punjabis. The losers in these circumstances have been the non-Sikh Punjabis of Haryana, whose culture has also been sidelined. The Punjabis, like the writer of these lines, whose mother tongue is actually not Punjabi but a dialect such as Saraiki, have had a hard time retaining their culture<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> In the undivided Punjab, the Saraiki-speaking people lived mostly in the districts of Multan, Muzaffargarh, Dera Gazi Khan and Sargodha. In Indian East Punjab, Saraiki was not spoken. This language is a cross between Punjabi and Sindhi. In the Haryana region of East Punjab, they were swamped politically and

The elections to the state legislature in Haryana held in 2014 showed the consolidation of non-Jat votes which was instrumental in a landslide victory for the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which had always been a favourite with the Punjabi community. It was the first time that the BJP had come to power on its own in the state. The selection of the present Chief Minister of Haryana, Manoharlal Khattar, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not go down well with some Jat leaders, one of whom called him “Pakistani” and “refugee” (“Mining”). This raised eyebrows in political circles, but the concerned Jat leader had no regrets. A non-Jat leader of the Saini community crossed swords with the Jat leaders over demands for reserved employment for Jats.

Then followed the unpleasant violence let loose during the agitation for reserved jobs by a Jats organisation. The demand had been raised during the previous Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda’s regime too but it had largely been localised around Mayyar village in the Hissar District where for a considerable period of time rail traffic had been blocked by villagers. The agitation took a violent turn in February 2016 when property was looted or set on fire (“Jat”) and thirty people lost their lives (Narwal). While most of the people whose property was damaged (mostly in Rohtak) were Punjabis, those killed also included Jats. A large number of vehicles of people crossing Haryana from Punjab were held up at Murthal, Sonapat, where around a dozen young women were reportedly forcibly taken out of vehicles and raped in the adjoining fields. The law and order machinery, mostly manned by the Jats, was found inept in controlling the violence, inviting allegations of partisan behaviour. There were allegations of a conspiracy to destabilise the newly elected government. Mercifully, the situation has been brought under control even as the perpetrators of violence and arson are yet to be punished. Incidents like these bring back memories of Partition to the Punjabi community settled here and tend to create anxiety about their future.

---

economically by the Jat community speaking Haryanvi, so that they have not been able to retain their cultural uniqueness. With the passing into oblivion of the first generation, the following generations are hardly able to speak Saraiki. An organization known as the Saraiki International Congress has been formed by some Saraiki speaking people which aims at providing a platform for promoting Saraiki language and culture.

## Works Cited

- Arora, Neena & R.K. Dhawan. 2010. *Partition and Indian Literature: Voices of the Wounded Psyche*. New Delhi: Prestige. Print.
- Asaaddin, M. 2010. "India's Partition: Literary Narratives and Retrieval of History" in *Partition and Indian Literature: Voices of the Wounded Psyche*. Neena Arora & R.K. Dhawan (eds.). Vol. 1. New Delhi: Prestige, 95-111. Print.
- Bauman, Zygmunt & Riccardo Mazzeo. 2016. *In Praise of Literature*. Oxford, UK: Polity. Print.
- Bhalla, Alok. 2011 (2006). *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Print.
- Butalia, Urvashi. 2014. "A Tumultuous History." *Literary Review, The Hindu*. 3 August, 2014: 3. Print.
- . 2010. "Listening for a Change: Narratives of Partition" in *Partition and Indian Literature: Voices of the Wounded Psyche*. Neena Arora & R. K. Dhawan (eds.). Vol. I. New Delhi: Prestige. 60-81. Print.
- . 1998. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Penguin. Print.
- Dalrymple, William. 2016. "The Great Divide Books". *New Yorker*. 29 June, 2015. Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple> [Accessed 10 November 2016]. Web.
- Ghosh, Amitav. 1998. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. Print.
- "Jat Agitation: Arson, violence continue unchecked; hope from meeting with Home Minister". *Times of India*. 21 Feb., 2016. Available at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/jat-agitation-arson-spreads-despite-army-6-more-dead/199157.html> [Accessed 12 November 2016]. Web.
- Kidwai, Anis. 2011. *In Freedom's Shade*. (Trans.) Ayesha Kidwai. New Delhi: Penguin. Print.
- Malik, Seema. 2007. *Partition and Indian English Women Novelists*. New Delhi: Prestige. Print.
- "Mining minister seeks apology from Jat leader" *The Tribune*. 24 Sept., 2015. Available at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/mining-minister-seeks-apology-from-jat-leader/136920.html> [Accessed 12 November 2016]. Web.
- Page, David, Anita Inder Singh, Penderel Moon & G.D. Khosla. 2010 (2002). *The Partition Omnibus*. New Delhi: Oxford. Print.
- Saint, Tarun K. 2010. *Witnessing Partition*. London: Routledge. Print.

- Sandhu, Amandeep. 2014. "Digitising memories". Literary Review, *The Hindu*, 3 August, 2014: 3. Print.
- Narwal, Natasha. "Two Commissions and Various Omissions: The Aftermath of the Jat Agitations" in *The Wire*. 3 June, 2016. Available at: <http://thewire.in/40434/two-commissions-and-various-omissions-the-aftermath-of-the-jat-agitations/> [Accessed 18 Nov. 2016]. Web.
- Zamindar, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali. 2007. *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*. New Delhi: Penguin Viking. Print.

## CHAPTER TWO

# FROM METONYMY TO METAPHOR: TOWARD A TROPOLOGY OF THE INDIAN PARTITION IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S FICTION\*

ANCA BĂICOIANU

### **Memory, history, fiction**

In 1974, Salman Rushdie travelled around India with his future wife Clarissa Luard. This extended visit brought him to Bombay (today's Mumbai), his native city, for the first time after an absence of "something like half [his] life" (1992: 9). In the opening essay to *Imaginary Homelands*, the writer describes this experience as a sudden immersion "in the mists of lost time." Despite his close family having emigrated to Pakistan ten years earlier, the city's phone directory still registered "his [father's] name, [their] old address, the unchanged telephone number"; everything was still there, still the same, as if they "had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border" (9). The unexpected confrontation with something that has been thought of for years as distant and lost, and yet suddenly reappears in all its eerie vividness, results in a strange perceptual reversal: "I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality" (9). In the essay's following paragraphs, this experience is dramatically staged as a clash between a real object (the writer's childhood home) and its representation (a black and white photograph of the very same house hanging on a wall in his London study):

---

\* This work was supported by a grant from the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS—UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE- 2014-4- 0787.

The photograph had naturally been taken in black and white; and my memory, feeding on such images as this, had begun to see my childhood in the same way, monochromatically. The colours of my history had seeped out of my mind's eye; now my other two eyes were assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus-leaves, the brilliance of the bougainvillea creeper. (9)

The contrast between these two different versions of reality will prove to be, in retrospect, one of the major incentives for writing *Midnight's Children*. The displaced writer's "sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back" (1992: 10) fuels Rushdie's wish "to restore the past to [himself], not in the faded greys of family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor" (10). But, during the early stages of the novel's elaboration, the awareness of the partial and fragmented nature of his recollections will progressively lead to a shift in emphasis, from the "somewhat Proustian" ambition of seeing beyond the "double filter" that temporal and physical distance has placed between himself and his subject to an increasing interest in "the process of filtration itself" (23-4).

From this perspective, of particular relevance to the fragment cited above is the relation between the world and its image, as produced by the imagination of the novelist: the evanescent character of the past, "a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9), is contrasted with the permanence—or, more accurately, with the solidity—of the photograph, whose immutability turns it into a site of memory. The black and white photograph is a simplified, essentialised image of the house Rushdie grew up in, and its metonymic force transforms the writer's entire childhood into a monochromatic film. The photograph thereby illustrates the functioning of memory itself: in order to be preserved, the past must be reduced, compressed, purged. But this site of *memory* is also the impetus behind the process of *rememoration*: in contrast with the "abridged version" of the past as encapsulated in the black and white photograph, the actual experience of Rushdie's childhood Bombay is rich in the colours, sounds, and smells that a monochromatic picture would be unable to capture. And the rediscovery of the *real* complexity of the Bombay scene pushes the writer to create a more accurate representation of his childhood: not a photograph (an image), but a novel (an imagined world).

While other means of representation may suffer from the same reductionism noted in the case of the black and white photograph, the complexity of fictional narrative appears as an apt rendition of the richness that reality itself possesses. But the "world" thus produced is not a mere reproduction; it is a re-production, a different, alternative version of the