

## Inventive Portrayals of India's Partition in Indian literature

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### Abstract

*The Partition of India and its consequences has inspired many writers and artists from India and Pakistan to depict it in their literary creations and cinematic depictions. However, while some creations depicted the massacres during the refugee migration, others concentrated on the aftermath of the Partition in terms of difficulties faced by the refugees on both sides of the border. Many novels written by Indian and Pakistani writers feature Partition as their theme or background, like- Ice-Candy Man, Train to Pakistan, Midnight Children, Sacred Games, Tamas, Pinjar, to name a few. These works have been adapted into feature films & serials like- 1947 Earth, Train to Pakistan, Midnight Children, Sacred Games, Tamas and Pinjar.*

**Keywords:** partition, riots, hatred, literature, adaptation, cinema

India is a spiritual place, a land where religion and philosophy have attained their culminating point. A nation that is famous for its unique exuberance quality of unity in diversity. It is so because it is considered a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Nevertheless, this spiritual country has also seen many bloodsheds, wars, and battles. Moreover, the Partition of India is one such fierce incident in India's history. This has resulted in killing thousands of innocent people, loot, robbery, rape, homelessness of thousands of people, and utter chaos leading to India and Pakistan's division into two nations.

Andrea Nightingale, in her essay, 'Mimesis: ancient Greek literary theory', says that:

According to Aristotle, tragic plots and characters are designed to arouse pity and fear in the audience. The audience does not experience the same feelings as the fictional characters; indeed, it experiences a very different set of emotions. When reading or seeing a tragedy, we feel pity for the characters who suffer, but we do not feel their pain. In fact, the emotion of pity depends on a certain distance between the viewer and the sufferer: we feel pity when we are not personally involved in another's suffering but, somewhat, watching from an external vantage point. (44)

Because of this, the topic 'partition' is still a hot and important topic for writers and directors to depict in their creations.

Ice-Candy Man (1988), by Bapsi Sidhwa's pioneer of Pakistani writing in English, is a masterpiece partition novel. It is written in the backdrop of the riots in Lahore and was re-released in 1991 as Cracking India. This has been written in the first person, from a child's point of view. The Partition of India accompanied by Hindu-Muslim tension was like splitting up a family and tearing apart one's country. In the centre of the novel is eight years old Parsi girl named Lenny. She has chosen a Parsi rather than a Hindu or a Muslim narrator to keep the account objective. According to Ralph Crane:

It may be that the atrocities of 1947 are best seen through the innocent, naive eyes of a child who has no Hindu, Muslim or Sikh axe to grind. (2)

The Ice-Candy Man is a story of a Parsi family living in Lahore during the time of Partition. We see the Horror and Holocaust of the incident from the perspective of a child living in Lahore. She witnesses what happened in Lahore: the looting of the Hindus and Sikhs communities and the killing, mainly of the Hindus and Sikhs, by the Muslims. However, she also illustrates the atrocities committed in East Punjab against Muslims in the minority. The Hindus and Sikhs drove them out brutally. Many women and girls, even very young girls, were raped on both sides or forced to become prostitutes. The kidnapping of Ayah, one of the significant incidents of this novel, had been witnessed by her during her childhood. Many scenes and incidents embedded in her memory made her decide to write a story on Partition. She says:

So, these emotions and images were in my mind, and I wanted to write a story of Partition. Nothing has been written on the Partition in English fiction from my part of the world, Pakistan. Very little has been written in English, besides Kushwant Singh's, The Train to Pakistan and Chaman Nahal's Azadi. (200)

Later Deepa Mehta adapted the story into a film called Earth, starring Amir Khan, Rahul Khanna and Nandita

Das. The movie, *Earth*, directed by Deepa Mehta, released in 1998 as an India/Canada co-production, depicts a thoughtful examination of a circle of friends and acquaintances affected by the Partition. It also has a romantic theme, and there is a scoundrel who uses communal violence as an excuse for retaliation against a romantic rival. Deepa Mehta took the help of Bapsi Sidhwa and co-wrote the screenplay with her. It contains many brutal scenes of communal carnage.

*Midnight's Children* (1980), the winner of the Booker prize, is written by one of the most controversial and diasporic Indian writers, Salman Rushdie. He wrote this famous masterpiece and surrealistic fiction full of satirical references to Partition and Independence.

It is historical fiction based on magic realism and is a fine example of post-colonial literature. The novel deals with the transition in Indian history from British colonialism to the independence of India and its Partition into two countries and its aftermath. Arun P. Mukherjee, in the essay 'Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?', states:

Without the knowledge of ... cultural apparatus, the readings generated by postmodernist critics are necessarily uninformed ... I have read few Euro-American critiques that understand the hurt and anger *The Satanic Verses* has caused on the part of the world I come from. In this part of the world, we tend not to notice the hurting capacity of discourses. (12)

In the year 2003, the Royal Shakespeare Company of Britain adapted the novel on the stage, and in the same year, Deepa Mehta, the Indian director in collaboration with Rushdie himself, adapted it into a film. Nevertheless, the film *Midnight Children* was based on the new version of the story by them. The film had many stars, including Indian American actor, Satya Bhabha who played the lead role of Saleem Sinai. Many great actors like Shabana Azmi, Anupam Kher, Seema Biswas, Soha Ali Khan, Shriya Saran, Siddhartha Narayan, Rahul Bose, Anita Majumdar and the wonder child, Darsheel Safary, were cast in the film, Though the movie was commercially not a big hit, it was premiered at Toronto International Film Festival and at the Vancouver International Film Festival in September 2012.

*Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a tragic saga by Khushwant Singh. It is an account of a horrifying description of the atmosphere of Punjab during Partition. Singh's depiction is that everyone is equally at fault and that placing blame was irrelevant. He has provided human accounts in a diverse, detailed character base description with unique

views. He has interwoven this point and has asked subtle questions of morality through his characters seeking the consequences and the effect of Partition. Seeing its appraisal, it was later adapted into a Hindi film by the same title by Pamela Rooks in 1998.

*Train to Pakistan* has its setting in village Mano Majra, which is on the border of India and Pakistan. The Sikhs and Muslims of the village were still living peacefully. However, one day, the peace gets disturbed as a local moneylender is murdered. Juggut Singh, a local gangster, is suspected to be behind this crime. Though being considered a vagabond, Juggut Singh is in love with a Muslim girl of the village.

The situation becomes worse when a train loaded with dead bodies of Sikhs arrives from across the border. This gives way to the wave of fundamentalism, making the village a battlefield. The situation becomes such that neither the magistrate nor the police were able to control it. The violence was increasing day by day, and it was left for Juggut Singh, who only could have ended all this. He restores peace by sacrificing himself for his love and village

In the fiction, the writer has shown cultural ties and social understanding among various groups in those days. He had not tried to blame any community in particular; As he says:

Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. (1)

Khushwant Singh had told the story of Partition by creating a fictional village, Mano Majra, which the Muslims and Sikhs occupy. He had shown the situation of that time that before Partition, how they were living together peacefully, sharing each other's happiness and sorrows. Nevertheless, because of the Partition of India, hatred and fundamentalism stems there, and both the communities start hating each other. However, some people were not affected by all these happenings and continued to live together.

The people of Mano Majra were simple villagers ignorant about the happenings and incidents in the world, and mainly they got information from the village outskirts and through rumour and word of mouth. They were not so easily get carried by the information. When the Muslims of the village heard that the government is planning to transport them to the newly found country, Pakistan, they could not accept it. Considering the place of their motherland, they were not ready to leave the village; as

one Muslim says,

"What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst [Sikhs] as brothers" (126).

Nevertheless, a time comes when they have to leave the village to the refugee camp provided by the government for their transportation to Pakistan. The Sikhs of the village were depressed about it, but a group of religious fundamentalist comes to Mano Majra accuse them of being so moderate and not responding against the killing of Sikhs in some places by the Muslims. They could convince a local gang to kill all the Muslims leaving on their train to Pakistan.

Singh has tried to throw light on the situation, which would have been avoided if the Government officials tried to do so. However, they were corrupt, manipulative, greedy, lazy and incompetent and could arrest anyone they chose for any reason, more often than not for their benefit. They did not try hard to settle the dispute; instead had their end. It was a time when there were utter chaos and tension in the country as after ruling for many centuries, the Britishers were about to leave because of the independence of the country, hence at that time, there was no law, and the law enforcement was entirely in the hand of the local government.

It was the time of transition and the new beginning as the new government comprising the people of India was going to be sworn in. It was a time when many educated Indian came out and recognised their responsibility to instil the village people about the ideas of democracy, communism or other western ideologies. However, the village people, being uneducated, orthodox and ignorant, could not understand their new ideas. When one such educated, man was speaking to a villager about freedom, the villager expresses:

Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians -or the Pakistanis (48).

The writer has closely examined the various religious groups' religious attachments and social structure in the novel. He has vividly described the culture and traditions of both Hindus and Muslims practised there at the time of Partition, giving us a better understanding of the situation. As he describes in the following lines: The mullah at the mosque knows that it is time for morning prayer. He has a quick wash, stands facing west towards Mecca and with his fingers in his ears, cries in long sonorous notes, Allah-o-Akbar (4).

In the same way, he describes the practices followed by the Sikhs in the village:

"The priest at the Sikh temple lies in bed till the mullah has called. Then he too gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple courtyard, pours it over himself, and intones his prayer in monotonous singsong to the sound of splashing water (5)".

Khushwant Singh has tried to give a moral and social message in the novel that humanity should be given preference rather than community. Any human civilisation can progress with the help of human integration and not only with nativity. He had tried to highlight that the Partition of India was wholly political. Singh has not discussed the politics of that time in detail because he wanted to show the individual involvement and moral and social duty of any individual belonging to any community.

Pinjar is considered a great work by the Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam. It is the story of a horse that goes for a walk with a girl called Zoe. Being an emotional and sensitive story, it deals with the emotions and individuality of a woman. It was later adapted into a film in 2003 by the same name and had Urmila Matondkar in Puro. About the film she says:

"The message of the film is that atrocity does not have any face or religion. It is faceless. We cannot have every decade filled with violence. We, as educated citizens of our countries, should see that these things do not repeat themselves."

Pinjar is the story of love lost and found, set in the backdrop of Partition. A middle-class Hindu Punjabi girl is caught in Partition's trauma and is affected by it throughout her life. Both novel and the film give a message to today's generation as Urmila Matondkar says:

"Today's generation does not know what Partition and Independence mean. It is time that they know about those times. They will know from books or films like Pinjar. "

Tamas (1975) by Bhisham Sahni is a Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel. It is a great novel and considered a monumental work by him. It depicts riots in a small Indian town at the time of Partition and its aftermath. As the word Tamas suggests, Sahni seems to denote the riots during the time of Partition as darkness in Indian history, though with a fictional touch to the incidences. The book reflects the intense feelings of hatred which had developed among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in those days and the success of the British's policy of 'divide and rule.'

It was adapted into a film by the same name by Govind Nihalani for Doordarshan in 1987, starring actors like Om Puri, Deepa Sahi, Amrish Puri, Bisham Sahni, A. K. Hangal, Manohar Singh, Dina Pathak, Saeed Jaffrey, Surekha Sikri and Ila Arun and was directed by Lalit Brijlani. The Gurbani in the film was sung by the famous Singh Bandhus (Tejpal Singh and Surinder Singh). Nevertheless, in 1988 it was shown in a mini-series on Doordarshan. It was also later adapted into a one-off four-hour feature film.

Bhisham Sahni, brother of legendary actor, Balraj Sahni is a big name in the modern progressive Hindi literature. He won many awards for Tamas, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975. Being himself a refugee from West Punjab, Sahni wrote his experience and pain in the form of the book after almost thirty years of Partition. Director Govind Nihalani found his approach in the book to be very contemplative, humane and non-judgemental. The novelist has developed a sensitive and straightforward style that touches the reader deeply.

The epic novel Sacred Games (2006) by Vikram Chandra's is not about Partition, but it contains a long and graphic chapter describing the main character's mother's flight as a young Sikh girl from what would become Pakistani Punjab. Moreover, during all this, her beloved older sister was abducted. It was adapted into a film in Hollywood. The story is about the crime world and its network, local politics and Indian espionage that lie below the surfaces of its economic renaissance. So, to sum up, literature and cinema are co-related with each other, and people belonging to any genre or field cannot deny this fact. In other words, we can say that literature and cinema both reflect the spirit of the age.

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