

REIGN OF TERROR IN THE GRAND GUIGNOL
DAYS OF PARTITION: A SELECT READING
OF ALOK BHALLA'S EDITION OF
STORIES ABOUT THE PARTITION OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to outline the trauma that the people of the Indian subcontinent underwent some fifty-seven years ago in the various provinces at the time of the Partition. A selection of the Partition narratives appeared in the 1990's and edited by Alok Bhalla are chosen to study one of the greatest historical events of the 20th century and the great magnitude of the communally inspired tragedy wherein some one million people died, about 75,000 women were abducted and raped, about ten million people were uprooted besides instances of other vandalism. Terrified people were fleeing from their houses leaving behind everything to save their lives. Cities and towns were silent as graveyards. The sky and the air were rent with the screams of the victims. The entire human race looked crooked and deformed. People seemed to have lost even the last drop of humanity.

KEY WORDS: Indo-English literature, Partition, historical traumas.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es explicar, a grandes rasgos, el trauma vivido por el pueblo del subcontinente indio hace unos cincuenta y siete años en diferentes provincias durante la partición. Una selección de los relatos de la partición publicada en los años noventa del pasado siglo y editada por Alok Bhalla ha sido elegida para estudiar uno de los mayores acontecimientos históricos del siglo XX y la gran magnitud de la tragedia de ámbito comunal en la que murieron casi un millón de personas, unas setenta y cinco mil mujeres fueron raptadas y violadas y unos diez millones de personas fueron desarraigadas, amén de otros casos vandálicos. La gente aterrorizada abandonaba sus casas dejando todo atrás para salvar sus vidas. Las ciudades y los pueblos, como tumbas, quedaban en silencio. El cielo y el aire se desgarraban con los gritos de las víctimas. Toda la raza humana se encorvaba y deformaba y la gente parecía haber perdido hasta la última gota de humanidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura angloindia, relatos de la partición, historia traumática



I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young spheres
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their blood;
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.iv.20-26)

Going by the ratings, Partition literature is not a gallery of well-wrought urns. It is a literature of anguish, agony, and bloodshed unmistakably reminding us of the terrifying Parisian drama of blood and gore known as the *Theatre du Grand Guignol*. Realistic representation of acts of unimaginable horror, murder, rape, mutilation, and torture were bread and butter to the Grand Guignol. A doctor was always in attendance to assist swooning spectators. On an average two members of the public fainted every night. One actress known as Maxa, who appeared as a character in Moran's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, kept a full journal of her performance with the Guignol. During her relatively brief career, Maxa was murdered more than 10,000 times in some sixty ways and raped over 3,000 times under a dozen circumstances. It had been calculated that while on the Guignol stage, Maxa cried, "Help!" 983 times, "Murder!" 1,263 times, and "Rape!" 1,804 times.

A couple of months before the Partition, Cyril Radcliffe's marking the instinctive arbitrary deep lines pushed the simple folks into an abyss for which they were least prepared, let alone tackle. Hell let loose. Friends and neighbours turned enemies overnight; there was sudden panic; unimaginable violence was let loose; people killed each other; women of all ages were cruelly raped; there were flames all around; hundreds and thousands took their own life to guard their honour and to save themselves from the humiliation of forcible conversion.

Generally, historical events of great magnitude like wars, genocide, holocausts, and natural calamities inspire the writers and artists to create great works of art in language and other forms of art. A conspicuous body of literature has been produced in Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, English, and Sindhi highlighting above other things the trauma of Partition of the country. There has been some activity in Dogri, Gujarati and Marathi languages also. In the Punjabi language alone since 1947, some 500 texts have been written on the issue of Partition. A little more than 100 authors have touched upon this theme in their writings. There have been more than 200 poems, nearly 200 short stories, and 40 novels and some plays too. This theme even now propels artists to launch new artistic enterprises. About 20 novelists have dealt with Partition, which include authors from the Pakistani side of Punjab as well.

Partition tales are "told and retold," Urvashi Butalia has very painfully observed as in her book *The Other Side of Silence*, "inside so many households in India and Pakistan" (3). They furnish the missing link, because it is through these pages we come to know how people survived the holocaust, how the survived coped with the trauma, how the affected rebuilt their lives, their experience of dislocation, their existence in the strange localities, amidst strange customs and manners. What



is more important now is not the facts or figures of those affected, but how they remember those facts, and how they represent them through bearing their baggage of bitterness and pain. The acts of brutality committed on men, women, and children fill every decent person with shame and humiliation. In the bitter harvest that ensued, the grim reaper, even according to conservative reports, claimed nine million lives, and some ten million people were uprooted from their ancestral homes. The Partition caused an unfolding human tragedy of enormous proportions. However “in this human event, human voices are strangely silent” (Talbot 39).

Soon after Jinnah's call for “Direct Action,” other leaders of the Muslim League started delivering inflammatory speeches and the reputed dailies even carried them. *The Tribune* on 11 April 1946 reported the speech of Malik Sir Feroze Khan Noon: “The havoc which the Muslims will play will put to shame what Halaku did” (Singh 27). The Halaku Khan gang was one of the most cruel and remorseless destroyers of life and property. Inspired by such heady speeches, the Muslim League initially targeted Haripur Hazara, a stronghold of the Muslim League in the Northwestern district. The Hindus and Muslims were negligible in number there. They were caught unawares when fire and sword played against them. There was literally a bloodbath. Having been very successful there, the League then began its fire and sword operation in the central Punjab and in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore in March 1947. Many parts of these cities were burnt down in a few days. The carnage and contagion very soon spread to other cities and towns. The Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab were left with no alternative. Many saw it as an unmistakable enactment of the gruesome slaughter witnessed some 2500 years before Christ at almost the same province (Kurushetra) when the earth trembled with a loud noise and the horizon became dim. Some people thought that such things were happening because *The Mahabharata* advocated retaliation. However sensible people thought that the victory of the sword was no victory at all. As Gandhi says, “Victory of the Pandavas was an empty nothing” (412).

Quite naturally, the joy of freedom was drowned low by the exceptionally savage massacres that gripped these cities in the north, west and Bengal in the east. However, according to Swarna Aiyar, “the province most affected by these dark side of independence was the Punjab which was caught in the maelstrom of unprecedented violence” (15).

The disturbances in March 1947 in West Punjab lasted about three weeks at its peak intensity. This was the first phase of violence. It was marked by large-scale arson and destruction of property. The villages were also affected. The second phase between April and July was characterised by organised raiding and stabbing in both cities and villages. The rural areas were very tense. The uneasy calm of the Boundary Commission over the fate of Punjab made the situation still more volatile. Revenge and retaliation were the principal passions expressed by all the communities as each faction swore to get “an eye for an eye.” Stinking bodies of the three communities (Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims) were seen strewn all over the railway tracks and stations. The evacuees were harassed at every stage of their journey. It was a journey downward to hell, for as Swarna Aiyar points out, “they were refused food and water and medical supplies” (20). In the report of a British army officer,



“There were dead and dying in every rail track, and their bodies were covered by bile and excreta. The smell was almost unbearable” (Aiyar 20).

I

Most of the narratives of the editor Alok Bhalla’s first volume of stories like his other two volumes are “an instance of violence in an unending stories; savagery is random and capricious; anyone can be destroyed” (Bhalla xix). The tales in his collection are sad witnesses to a period in which our people fell far low out of a human world of language, customs, rituals, and prayers “into a bestial world of hatred, rage, self-interest and frenzy” (Bhalla xxxiii). Syed Mohammed Ashraf gives just a hint of the genocidal Partition in his story “Separated from the Flock”: “Then came 1947 —growling, gnashing its teeth, holding the order of the Partition in one of its claws. And they heard voices calling for terrible sacrifices rumble down the mountains —screams of Ya Allahi rent the sky” (19).

Salil Choudhary tells his sad tale of riots and violence in his story “The Dressing Table” through a series of letters found in an old dressing table. The action of the story takes place in Calcutta on the eve of Partition. Nanda bought a second hand dressing table from the pavement. He bought it at a chief rate. His wife was excited for she had been longing to have one. She stood hours before the mirror and either adjusted her sari or put a bindi on her forehead. However her excitement was short-lived as she found a bundle of letters inside the drawer of the dressing table. The letters contained a very distressing tale of arson, loot and violence in the eastern sector. The letters were from Bagerhat written by Rahim to his wife, Amina. The second letter goes as follows:

I saw people fleeing from this place, deserting their homes. The whole town is as silent as a graveyard. People are even scared to talk loudly... Recently, there had been a terrible riot in a scheduled caste village a few miles from the town...

One day, a number of armed policemen, accompanied by a gang of hooligans, attacked the village. Brutality, in its most horrendous form, was unleashed upon the villages. The policemen didn’t differentiate between men and women. Village after village was burnt and looted. The inhabitants fled from their houses. The sky and the air were rent with the screams of the victims. In the meantime, some people began shouting that the Hindus were enemies of Pakistan. Slogans like “throw the Hindus out,” were raised. (32)

Taking advantage of the confusion created, the goondas in the town looted the shops and then torched them. Those who were neutral and poor felt utterly helpless. If they protested, the goondas would burn their houses or even kill them. The entire human race seemed to Rahim “crooked and deformed” (35). Rahim had no wink of sleep for many nights. He wandered about in the town like a mad man. People, he thought, seemed “to have lost even the last drop of humanity” (35). Bestiality had been unleashed upon the town. The entire town was filled with screams,



wails and fearful fiendish laughter. He was not sure whether his beloved wife Amina was alive or not.

On reading these letters, Nanda rushed to the spot where Rahimuddin lived. But there was no trace of him. Somebody who knew him said that he had gone to Pakistan; but the sad part of the tale was that Amina was scorched inside her house. At midnight, “the house was locked from outside and set on fire.” There was a lot of firing at that time, bullets were flying all around and it was impossible to come out. When Amina was burnt in the fire, her dressing table escaped because it was kept in the smaller room.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s “Cold Meat” is a horrible tale about a mad Sardarji’s butchering some six men with his dagger and abducting a lovely young woman and raping her after her death. Kulwant Kaur, the mistress of the Sardarji, Ishwar Singh, however in a fit of jealousy, slit his throat with her dagger and he died shortly, after making the gruesome confession.

Umm-e- Ummara’s tale “More Sinned Against Than Sinning” talks about the violence and the destruction of Munni Bitiya’s family, because of her father’s foolish decision of taking the family to Dhaka much against the wishes of the other family members. Though the action of the story took place a few years after the Partition, the enmity between the two communities still existed, and both tried to smother the other. The lone survivor of the violence Munni Bitiya sadly recalls what happened then:

Evil finally strangled good. The enemy attacked with all its force and fury, and man lost all traces of humanity. Phoolbari was set on fire. Poor Pakhi (her sister-in-law), with her hair dishevelled, ran from one singed flower to the next like a frightened bird. But before she regained her senses, her Phoolbari had been burnt to ashes. She tried to bury herself in the ash. (116)

Not only Pakhi’s lovely body was reduced to ash, even her flower-like children were burnt to death.

The great divide ultimately divided even the good neighbours of both the communities. When there was so much fighting and killing all around, even friends would turn enemies. Manik Bandyopadhyay’s story “Childishness” is all about that. People, on seeing the violence, which they had never seen in their life, “were bewildered and terrified; their hearts quavered” (129). They had heard the Japanese air raids a couple of months ago, and were struck with terror. But that was far away. But now, “here was a wider, more terrible calamity rising from the nation’s own heart —across the city, in their very quarters, at their own doors. The heart’s loud flutter found no pause; it rose and fell, fell and rose” (130). The air was full of such cries as —“Kill, cut them up, butcher them, finish them off” (130).

Bhisham Sahni’s “The Train Has Reached Amritsar” illuminates a moment of horror. In his story, a motley group of refugees were going in a train to Amritsar. On their way, as the train stopped in stations, some got in and some were refused admission and pushed out. On the route of the train, the refugees saw more than once fires and burning of buildings. They saw “flames leaping out of the clouds of



smoke, which rose above the city,” (151). The passengers were frozen in fear. Some rushed to the windows to catch a glimpse of the fire. They saw that “the city was in flames” (151). And they understood that many people had been killed. Terrified, they pulled their shutters down. The narrator of the story recalls later, “In the far distance, we saw flames leaping up into the sky. Cities were burning all around” (153).

The riots were a natural corollary to Partition. Yaspal’s “A Holy War” focuses on the riot in Lahore, a city of beautiful gardens and bustling crowds. The city was very much loved by its citizens, but now there was “no sign of life in any house” (193). In one part of the city called Gangu-ki-Gali, there was a fire, which had “destroyed all the electric wires and the street lamps” (193). That resulted in permanent darkness. Soon such dark places of the city became, to quote a phrase from *The Bible* “full of the habitations of cruelty” (“Psalms” 74:20). The streets were deserted and made “the desolation and the sadness more oppressive” (193). When the curfew was imposed, it naturally was felt to be “gloomy and suffocating” (193). On 13th of August, 1947 all the Hindu families living in Gangu-ki-Gali had run away. The nearby Bazaar had been attacked twice by hordes of Muslims. Incidents of burning, looting, and killing in the bazaar led the Hindu families to quietly slip away. Seeing the desolation, reasonable Muslims exclaimed, “Ya Allah! What a catastrophe!” (197). But the multitude of the wicked felt elated and said, “Let the kafir bastards go to hell! Pakistan doesn’t need kafirs!” (197). The lootings, which were going on unabated on a large scale, were justified by the violent and heartless among them. Boys like Nasru argued, “Why, everyone is looting. They say they are collecting the just rewards of a holy war” (198). Lahore was stunned and became a “ghost-haunted place” (197).

It was a very sad sight to see the enemies of the other roar in the midst of all around devastation, and life in every village and town had been turned upside down, as Kulwant Singh Virk’s story “Weeds” shows. As the author observes, this is a story about post-partition Pakistan. Strangers now occupied the old havelis there, and the rivers and canals, which flowed past their towns and villages, were polluted. For many days, the water flowing through them “had been reddened by blood and befouled by the bodies of men and women who had been mutilated and killed” (204).

II

In the pre- and post-Partition times, women had to undergo a horrifying experience. Thousands of women were destitute in one-way or another by that holocaust. Forced mass migrations led to an extreme disruption of life at all levels. As a corollary to this upheaval, a good number of women and children were dislocated and uprooted. They were, as has been observed by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “forced to reckon with the twin aspects of “azadi” —bewildering loss: of place and property... but more significantly, of community, of a network of more or less stable relationships, and of a coherent identity” (2). Invariably the marauders were not from outside the area, but from the same village and sometimes their own family members. To escape from abduction, and the accompanying humiliation



and mutilation of their bodies, many women took their own lives; the male members of their own family killed hundreds of them. Thousands of others carried packets of poison on their own persons in case they were captured. An innumerable number committed suicide the moment they were let off by their captors after being sexually used.

Neither the politicians nor the well-meaning citizens foresaw that there would be streams of people and blood flowing from one part of the country to the other. No one had thought that the poor and the innocent would be ambushed and killed in tens of thousands. Even convoys escorted by the army were ambushed. Families were uprooted, children were orphaned, and women were abducted; sometimes they were left as hostages or killed by their own family members. Those women, who were carried away, were forcibly converted. According to Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “The official estimate of lives lost during Partition is placed at half a million, but the number of those destituted would have been much higher” (3).

The issue of abduction and forcible mass conversions became a hot subject of debate in the Constituent Assembly, but the government found it helpless. The Indian National Congress in its sitting at Meerut on 23-25 November, 1946 viewed the situation very seriously and passed the following resolution:

The Congress views with pain, horror and anxiety the tragedies of Calcutta, East Bengal, Bihar and some parts of Meerut district... These new developments in communal strife are different from any previous disturbances and have involved murders on a mass scale, and also mass conversions... abduction and violation of women, and forcible marriage.

Women who have been abducted and forcibly married must be restored to their houses; mass conversions have no significance or validity and people must be given every opportunity to return to the life of their choice (Menon & Bhasin 3-4).

According to the official estimate, the number of Muslim women abducted in India was around 50,000 and in the Pakistan side, the non-Muslim women were about 33,000. However the figure was disputed by both the government agencies and service organisations. Urvashi Butalia says in her book, *The Other Side of Silence* that about 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own “and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion” (3). The following is the age wise break-up of the victims:

| AGE-WISE | PERCENTAGE | |
|--------------|-------------|----------|
| | IN PAKISTAN | IN INDIA |
| >12 years | 45 | 35 |
| 12>35 Years | 44 | 59 |
| 35.50 years | 06 | 04 |
| 50 and above | 05 | 02 |

(Menon & Bhasin 4)

It is quite painful to note that both India and Pakistan in their steps to trace abducted women displayed absolutely little concern for their sufferings. Their recovery became a point of honour for the proud young nation-states. As Partho Datta shows, “the surviving women, some of whom had found new homes with their abductors, had to face violence a second time around —this time from the state— as they were forcibly repatriated to countries they did not necessarily want to come back to” (68). It’s found to be rather impossible to present an accurate profile of the abducted women and children during that turbulent time. A peculiar kind of denial is also at work when one community on the other mindlessly unleashed cataclysmic violence and violence was not an undifferentiated phenomenon but “was deeply gendered” (68).

The circumstances of women’s abduction varied widely. Some were left behind as hostages for the safe journey of their other family members. Others were separated from their family or groups while escaping and were picked up. Still others were initially given protection and transported into the host family. In the Muzaffarabad district of Azad Kashmir not a single Sikh male was left alone alive, and most of their women and young girls were abducted away. Some changed hands several times or were sold to the highest bidder. Some became second or third wives. And very many were converted and married and lived with some dignity and respect.

The height of the holocaust was between August 1947 and September 1947 and at that time the mob fury was unleashed unchecked. The vast majority of rapes and abductions occurred then. The following is a heart-rending report of K.C. Kalsa, District Liaison Officer, Mianwali, of an attack on the non-Muslim residents of Harnoli, a town in Mianwali district in Rawalpindi:

More than half the population (being 6000 men and women and children) were massacred and burnt alive. Children were snatched away from their mother’s arms and thrown into the burning oil. Hundreds of women saved their honour by jumping into wells or throwing themselves into burning houses.... Girls of 8 to 10 years of age were raped in the presence of their parents and then put to death mercilessly. The breasts of women were cut and they were made to walk all naked in rows of line in the bazaars of Harnoli. About 800 girls and women were abducted and small kiddies were wandering without a cover in the jungles and were kidnapped by the passers-by. (Major 58)

The Partition not only partitioned the country, but also rent hearts. In Syed Mohammad Ashraf’s “Separated from the Flock,” Nawab a U.P. resident before migrating to Pakistan, fell deeply in love with Begum. But he couldn’t marry her. She stayed back and married a drunkard and consumptive. She became a widow shortly. Even the Superintendent of Police in the story before he had migrated to Pakistan had been in love with a “sublimely beautiful” young woman called Ghazala. Like Nawab’s Begam, Ghazala also was married off to another man. Her husband died many years ago, and Ghazala, “who was as gentle and frolicsome as a dove” (21) too died. The castles, the castles of sand built by the young men and women those days were swept away by the flow of the river because “the waters were hostile” (20).



Identifying himself with the bird that escaped the hunter's gun, the police officer felt that "the whole universe had been splattered with blood—who knows how many wings had been broken and how many birds were writhing in pain in the lake?" (23).

Recent studies have begun to uncover that women in those infernal days were treated as a commodity. As always they were the worst sufferers. Mothers and daughters were sexually abused in front of one another, and then their throats were casually cut afterwards. Many women who survived were heartlessly ostracized by their own kith and kin. The number who committed suicide out of shame could have populated a small town. Saadat Hasan Manto's "Cold Meat" deals with such a story. Ishwar Singh cruelly murdered six people in a house and took away a lovely young girl alive for his future enjoyment. He had already a ladylove by name Kulwant Kaur. His intention was to keep the abducted girl in some secret place and to "taste this delicacy also" (95). With this intention, he carried her over his shoulder and on the way he laid her down behind some bushes and raped her. When it was over, he found to his great shock and dismay that she had already been dead.

It is a heart-rending experience to read a poem of Saadat Hasan Manto's "Compassion." It shows a helpless father pleading on bended knees before a group of abductors and the callous answer of the latter:

Please don't kill
My young daughter
Before my eyes...
All right, let's do as he says...
Strip her
And drag her away... (97).

Past histories of the world show that rape has been a prominent and inevitable feature of wars. This horrific abuse of women has been in practice in order to intimidate a conquered people. In civil wars too, women are normally seen as a commodity, a "territory" to be "occupied." In such a context, as has been observed by Andrew J. Major, "revenge can become a powerful motive (or excuse) for abuse of women" (59). At this juncture, it would not be out of place to point out that physical harassment and defilement of women is embedded like a fossil in everyday relationships in our society. As Andrew J. Major shows "power rape—the raping of women in order to demoralize and defeat rival men in a patriarchal society—is particularly common in northern India" (59).

Lalithambika Antharjanam's story, "A Leaf in the Storm" narrates the experience of some abducted and sexually abused women. The story takes place in a refugee camp in Western Punjab. Fifty bonded women were handed over for fifty reclaimed "women." The exchange took place on the border. They were shuttlecocked "from one prison to another" (137). Many were crying loudly. Among them was an old woman—a mother of nine children too. She was alone, because all "her children were killed" (138), and the girls in her family were abducted and "her house was gutted" (138). In fact, she was watching helplessly "her house burn down to ashes" (138).



There was another woman, the wife of an officer in Sindh. Her “cheeks and breasts are swollen” (138). Tragedy overtook her, and “she was violated in front of her husband’s body which laid ripped open and scattered” (138). She could only see the bloodstained hands of children.

There was another young woman with distinguishing features. She was a Sikh and Jyoti was her name. She didn’t cry like the other women. But her eyes reflected hate and cynicism. She despised the whole world. She was good-looking and noble and from a well-to-do family and was a rape victim. She refused to eat or drink. The camp doctor was coaxing her to drink milk. She was shouting at the doctor, “Look at me! I am damned too.... You want me to live on still, and sow the seed of damnation?” (139). She was conceived in consequence of inhuman rape. Only a few people in the camp knew her secret that she was pregnant and unmarried, and had been “reclaimed” by the camp. She suppressed the terrible pain. Life’s traffic is certainly cruel, and “no woman,” as observed by Antharjanam, “can evade the tax levied on her life” (144).

Umm-e-Ummara’s “More Sinned Against Than Sinning” highlights the fate of an enthusiastic, honest young man who had “deliberately refused to look at the past and had dreamt only of a bright future.” Unfortunately very shortly he came to be a thoroughly disillusioned man, because “the gulf separating people had begun to widen and that evil had begun to circle and entrap good” (117), and as a result, his lovely young wife Pakhi and their “flower-like children were burnt to death” (117).

Yaspal’s “Holy War” presents how communal frenzy had spread devastation and destruction in the Hindu areas in Lahore when a violent young Muslim, Nazru wantonly stabbed Moolan Tai, an aged Hindu widow. When the city was under curfew, she ran to a safe place in the thick of war with a small bundle. Nazru’s religious passion was so inflamed that he thought the rioting and killing were nothing short of a holy war. So when he saw Moolan Tai running away, he called her a bitch and “stabbed her with his knife and snatched away her bundle” (203). The poor innocent woman had nothing but a small stone idol of her god in the bundle.

It should not be assumed that only the antisocial elements alone were abducting women. Men from all social classes were involved in abduction and rape; villagers, peasants, the rich and the poor were also involved in this gruesome act. They considered it as part and parcel of general looting.

Kulwant Singh Virk’s “Weeds” is about an abducted Sikh woman who has stoically started feeling that she has somehow to pull on her days as all the doors have been closed. It takes place within a village in Pakistan. The narrator, who is a reasonable Pakistani officer, finds this abducted wife of another man, in a house made of brick and mud, lay helplessly on a cot. The narrator says, “I couldn’t think of an uglier image of man’s inhumanity to man. Abducted, raped and humiliated, she lay quietly and still. There was no one from her caste, community, religion or village with her” (207). Obviously, she had no hope of going back to her own place and rejoining with her kith and kin. No one could rescue her “from such a big and strong country like Pakistan” (207). She was also seriously ill. She had just one request to make to the officer. It was to rescue her sister-in-law abducted and kept

in a near-by village. She added, “She was abducted by the scoundrels when they attacked our village. Their gang was the largest and the cruellest... Please help me... Bring her back to me” (208). This would perhaps dissipate her alienation.

III

Close to the heels of the Partition, millions of people (the exact figure is difficult to ascertain) migrated from the east to the west and from the west to the east. With that all that the people had cherished for long, their ancestral homes, the soil that they owned, the graveyards of their ancestors, the tradition and culture of their families and villages, their joys and sorrows had all been destroyed once for all. They were thus forced and faced with the challenge of rebuilding their lives and overcoming their terrible hardships.

In fact, much before the actual drawing of the Radcliffe line, there were communal disturbances all over Lahore, Rawalpindi, Bengal and Punjab. This was due to fanning of the communal disharmony by the notorious politicians for achieving their selfish motives. Seeing what was happening around them, the panic-stricken people ran for cover and a few thousands packed their belongings and started moving into refugee camps set up in “safer places.” Still, a good number of rural folks, mostly farmers and artisans did not bring themselves to the idea of quitting. They were in a terrible dilemma. But when death and destruction closed in from all sides, they too hurriedly packed all that they could lay their hands on and yoked their bullocks to the carts and started moving from one end to the other. This formed a very long caravan. They looked dazed because these unlettered people were not at all prepared to face this kind of earthquake-like calamitous displacement.

As the designers of the Pakistan state propagated that all the Muslims living in India could go to Pakistan without any sense of shame and live a decent life and practice Islam, “Muslims leaving India for Pakistan perceived themselves to be migrating to a place... which “belonged” to them as “Pakistanis” just as much as it did to the Muslims whom they found living there” (Ansari 92). The refugees went there as if it was their own place. It was quite true that they received some support initially. But very soon everything became topsy-turvy. The Pakistani authorities found themselves totally helpless to cope up with the situation because there was a terrible inflow of refugees from all over the northern India. Those who were already living there considered the refugees as “second hand.”

It was estimated that seven to eight million people were moving to opposite directions, and some sixteen million were approximately displaced. These truncated destitute people looked up from their respective governments not only material assistance but also psychological assistance and reassurance. Apart from the continuing communal tension arising out of issues like natives and outsiders, questions of transportation, issues concerning food, clothing and medical supplies and shelters became a big headache to the officials especially in Pakistan.

Syed Mohammad Ashraf’s story “Separated from the Flock” symbolically presents how a couple of men and women presently in Pakistan live as refugees in





spite of some of life's comforts. They are like the estranged birds separated from the flock may be due to fate or due to some immature and thoughtless decision. The story takes place in Pakistan a few kilometres away from Lahore. A police officer is going for duck hunting in a jeep. He is the narrator of the story. Gulam Ali drives the jeep. The officer wants to reach the lake where there are plenty of ducks before sunset. He will also rest for a while at Gulam Ali's house on the way. Gulam Ali's wife has a request to make to her husband's boss. She wants a permit to visit India her birthplace. Gulam Ali has been dodging her, for he has not gone to Pakistan as a refugee like his wife or the officer. Gulam Ali's wife migrated from Hardoi district of U.P. like the officer. At the time of the officer's migration, he was emotional, instinctive and not at all mature. He was not even eighteen at the time of his exit from there. Obviously he feels sad now for his decision. He says that those who came and settled there "were all cowards" (3). He adds that he too was a coward, "but a minor coward..." (3). He feels hopeless and despairing and frenzied like a convict who hears that he has been sentenced to death. He has been wrestled with the feelings of visiting India for many years.

On the way to the lake for duck shooting, the officer meets an old friend by chance. They exchange tales about their boyhood days in a village in U.P. and fondly recall their old friendships, courtships, dreams, fields, lanes and songs. Transformed by their emotions, they lower their guns in a gesture of renunciation of violence. However, another hunter shoots down some ducks. Salimullah who has done it, collects the birds and holds them up before the officer and his friend. Their wings are broken. Their innocent eyes reflect the dreams that they have. The officer says to them in enormous sadness, "Farewell, innocent ones, farewell —forget your friends and companions, forget all those whom you loved once— stop grieving for those you will leave behind —those eggs buried in snow— forget everything —your wings are broken, you'll never, never be able to fly again— never return —never..." (15). Jameela's plight is exactly like those of the birds whose wings are broken. In his heart of hearts, he wishes her farewell:

Good-bye, sister. You'll never again see that land where you grew into consciousness—hear its songs, swing from its trees on rainy days, play hide-and-seek in its chicken coops, dye your dupatta there in rainbow colours, collect flowers with your childhood friends —never again will you see the place where you gathered tenderness in your hands and pressed it against your heart— Forget that place, sister. Don't grieve for it anymore. Let the tears you just shed be the last. There are others who share your sorrow. Don't waste your tears anymore —Why thrash your wings about in vain, a hunter hidden in the shadows of the lake broke them a long time ago— there is nothing left now. (18)

Salil Choudhary's "The Dressing Table" besides highlighting the communal violence in Bengal, presents the issues of refugees too. Using the technique of a few letters, the author makes us aware of the sorrows and sufferings of the minority community in and around the Bengal province at the time of the Partition. The communal disturbances are a sequel to Jinnah's call to Direct Action. With this war cry everything went awry in Bengal. The little semblance of communal harmony

was torn asunder. Unable to pull on for long the minority community which felt insecure in a province began to shift to a safer place. Thus people became refugees overnight. A letter found in the second hand dressing table which the narrator of the story presented to his wife, reads as follows,

I reached Amal's house today. On my way I saw people fleeing from this place (Bagerhat), deserting their homes. The whole town is as silent as a graveyard. People are even scared to talk loudly. You can well imagine my condition. I find myself quite unexpectedly, in a place where things have taken a bad turn. Before I could even understand what was going on, Amal (his friend) told me that he had resigned his job. His wife and he are busy packing their belongings and will leave for Calcutta in a day or two. They plan to go to Pakistan from there. (31)

People then were forced to take a quick decision —either with Hindustan or with Pakistan. Amal's wife's sad words express this, "Things have changed. Now the Muslims belong to Pakistan and the Hindus to Hindustan" (32). Pessimistic people, to abet this sentiment still further spread rumours everywhere. Newspapers also publish news in an irresponsibly senseless manner. Ordinary folks "are becoming suspicious of each other, losing faith in each other's integrity" (34). In such an overcharged vicious situation, if anyone tries to infuse reason into anyone in a place like Dhaka where the Muslims are in the majority, he or she "is condemned as an enemy of Pakistan" (34). Another letter found in the dressing table also speaks volumes about the plight of the helpless people and how they become refugees. It goes as follows:

I am sure that I will lose my mind. I haven't slept a wink over the last seven days. I wander about in the town like a mad man. People seem to have lost even the last drop of humanity. Bestiality, in its most terrifying form, has been unleashed upon the town. The entire town is filled with screams, wails and fiendish laughter. (35)

The saddest part of the story is that the man (an artist by profession) who had written these letters to his beloved wife (she herself was killed in the communal clash) was arrested in Calcutta as "a Pakistani spy" (38).

Intizar Husain's "A Letter from India" brings out the plight of the refugees from a very popular Muslim family. The members had been scattered in different directions as refugees at the time of the Partition. Kurban Ali is the narrator of the story. He brings before our eyes how his family had been got lost in the form of a letter. He wrote the letter to his brother's son Kamaran in Pakistan. Kurban Ali lists out the members of his family and ruefully says that they have been lost now. In the garden of his family, "over the last twenty-seven years so many trees have fallen, and with them so many memories have been buried, that one should now consider the garden to be an extension of the graveyard. The few trees that still remain in it are like tombstones on the graves of days long dead" (81). He wants his brother's son to live in anonymity in Pakistan for he says, "your safety lies in your not being recognized" (81).

A sad thing happened to Imran Miyan, one of the sons of Kurban Ali. When his mother saw him she hugged him and wept. She asked him why did he





not bring his family with him. He suddenly turned pale. The question unnerved him. Quite obviously he had lost them in the holocaust. He had spent the night in the family graveyard and the next day, he begged Kurban Ali for permission to leave. The latter asked him where he would go. To this he replied, "Wherever my feet carry me" (81). Kurban Ali recited a prayer for his safety. He was also asked to inform the family as soon as he crossed the border. Kurban Ali says, "Since that day, however, I haven't heard from him" (81). Kurban Ali's family which had lived in one place and whose dead had been buried under the same soil had been now scattered across three different lands Hindustan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. His family had been afflicted by misfortunes. With enormous sadness he writes, "Now we have neither a place which is our own nor a history to remember. We are the victims of a time when everything has fallen apart" (83). Remembering the pioneers of his family he says that they originally came from Ispahan. They came to India "after wandering like haunted fugitives across dusty lands" (85). They found India a hospitable place and decided to build a home on its soil. The Indian soil nurtured the family at its bosom, and watched it grow and prosper like a jealous mother who hugs all her children in her embrace and does not let them out of her sight. All this went on well until the Partition. And then fate willed it differently. The members of his family have left a lot of blank spaces. Sadly he observes, "A family which has once broken apart can never be united again" (88). He wonders whether all the families in Pakistan have lost their families. He has no idea, for he has spent all his time in India, and he has heard that Pakistan is a strange and a peculiar country. He concludes: "Our family tree has been lost and our lineage has been sullied forever. How will our family be recognized as a distinctive one in the future? Indeed, I feel that our family members are like the falling leaves of a tree, which are scattered by the wind and crumbled, into dust (88).

Umm-e-Ummara's "More Sinned Against Than Sinning" is a tragic tale of a refugee Muslim family's pathetic end. The decision to move from the Indian side to Dakha was taken by the Baba in that family. When Amma smelt the Baba's decision she lost her nerve. She was in a flood of tears. Baba convinced her that India no longer belonged to her as they were Muslims and it was time that they moved to Dakha. Baba added, "This earth no longer belongs to us, we are aliens in this country. I can no longer live here" (102). Amma who used to worship her husband felt an enormous sadness and started packing her things. She couldn't understand why Baba thought, "his own home was a place of exile" (103). The narrator, Munni Bitiya one of the children in the family, wondered, "How a world which was so familiar had suddenly become a world of strangers" (103).

Their new house was a bungalow in the new country. The members of the household were learning to speak Bangla. They did their best to acclimatise to the new surroundings. They tried to be happy and started forgetting English and Urdu for they were "a memorial of our enslavement" (107). The narrator however felt suffocated in the new house though it was larger than the previous one. Before long Baba realised the foolishness of decision. He told his son that even if they lived for long and strengthen their roots in the new soil, they would always be considered aliens and "transplants" (111). Wisdom dawned on him late and he said, "A grafted

tree can never be regarded as anything else” (111). The younger brother of Munni Bitiya cornered his father and said, “But, Baba, you don’t have the right to talk like that... We pleaded with you not to bring us here. It was your decision. You betrayed your traditions... You uprooted a flourishing tree and tried to replant it here. Why do you now feel so alienated from this place?” (111). To make matters worse, Amma started hating the house. She heard voices arising from every nook and corner. Very shortly everything became topsy-turvy. Evil strangled good. Things fell apart. And uncontrolled anarchy was loosed upon their place. One by one all the members of the household had to meet with a very tragic end. They didn’t even get a decent burial. Baba watched with horror Amma’s grave “slowly fill with water and the body of the woman with whom he had spent a life-time, float on it. Horror-stricken, the father-refugee prayed to Allah that his body should not be buried under the earth in that place. God granted him his wish for the body of Abba was neither enclosed in a coffin nor buried beneath the earth there, for he was reduced to ash with a couple of other members of his family. Having seen all these, the narrator-refugee says, “I drank the poison of life” (117).

In those days of tension, unrest, uncertainty and all sorts of violence, there were also a few good Samaritans. S.H. Vatsayan Ajneya’s “Getting Even” presents such a welcome sight amidst widespread chaos. An old Sikh refugee from Punjab is the Good Samaritan who rescued and escorted helpless women belonging to different religions from Punjab to Aligarh. It meant even death to him but he wouldn’t mind it.

In Ajneya’s story a refugee woman by name Suraiya was travelling with her daughter Zubeida and her small boy Abid from Punjab to Aligarh. Both the Muslim women looked terrified. They wrapped themselves in blankets and sat in the far corner of the compartment. Most of the other passengers were either Hindus or Sikhs. To their horror the women noticed something inhuman in their pitiless eyes. The old Sikh refugee was beginning a conversation with Suraiya. With great trepidation she was answering the Sikh. She thought that “he might very well kill her and throw her out of the train after a couple of stops...” (119). In her heart of hearts she was sizing up the Sikh and felt that he was calculating how much time he would need to kill her. Quite contrary to her expectations, the Sikh was trying to dissipate her fear of other potential killers: “Stay where you are. You have nothing to fear here. You are like a sister to me, and these children are as my own. I will see you safely up to Aligarh. There is little danger beyond that point, and anyway some of your own people will also be entertaining there” (121).

From the Sikh’s conversation, the fellow travellers understood the traumatic experience of the Sikh and his family had before his exit from West Punjab. He had lost all his near and dear ones besides his entire property. Though the perpetrators of the crime in his case were the Muslims, he made it a point to escort the fellow refugees irrespective of their religions. A refugee alone knew the pangs of the fellow refugee and therefore his resolve to escort the helpless people. He had no place to call it his own. He made the moving railway compartment as his home. If any one stabbed him on the moving train, he would only go and join up with the other members of his family. For him it mattered little whether the killer was a



Muslim or a Hindu. With a terrible emotion, he says, “My only aim is that no one—Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim— no one should ever have to see what I have seen. And whatever befell my family members before they died, may it not be the fate of anyone’s wives and daughters ever to have to behold!” (124).

Lalithambika Antharjanam’s story “A Leaf in the Storm” takes place in a refugee camp on the Indian side. Jyotirmoyi Devpal was a Sikh woman from a rich family. She was a highly educated intelligent girl. Quite obviously she was a pet of her parents. She was a woman who refused to veil her face and spurned the proposal from a Zamindar. She was quite independent. But now she was in a pathetic condition. Her belly was swollen; only a few people in the camp knew her secret; she was pregnant and unmarried, and had been reclaimed by the camp. She had to bear her pain and her humiliation all by herself.

There were many like her in the camp. She was watching them. Some of them were weeping aloud. When a volunteer brought some bread for her, she exploded, “Damn your crumbs of bread; I want a gun. Or a dagger. Wouldn’t mind a little poison either. It’s that I want...first and last...” (137). The volunteer stood aghast. She thought that the young woman was gone mad. She had seen many such deranged cases in the refugee camp.

Day by day the crowd in the refugee camp was growing in leaps and bounds. Men, women and children of different regions and speaking different languages were huddling together with their little bundles and baggage. The number went on swelling. They brought in different tragic stories. In that unmanageable crowd, Jyoti was just a speck. No one bothered about her much. But she was watching everything. She “witnessed many births in the camp. More deaths than births” (140). When her child was born, she didn’t allow the scavenger to drag it away. Though this refugee was the most emaciated and the most outraged of all the reclaimed women from western Punjab, she felt at last like a flash that “One must carry one’s cross oneself” (145).

Bhisham Sahni’s “The Train Has Reached Amritsar” treats as its subject the tension, the pain and the agony of the fleeing helpless poor refugees at the time of the Partition. In the bogies people distrusted each other. The other person was always considered with suspicion. In the story a few people were travelling from the Pakistan side to Amritsar. Most of them “had abandoned their homes and run away...” (148). In one station, when the train stopped there was a large crowd. The commotion at the door increased. A poor man was among them and he was pulling in an enormous black trunk. A thin frayed woman and a young, dark girl of about sixteen followed him. The man continued to pull the trunk in, while his wife and daughter stood against the toilet door. The man was breathless and his clothes were soaked through his sweat. Nobody helped this fleeing refugee. A Pathan got angry with the refugee, tried to kick him. But the kick landed on his wife’s stomach. She screamed with pain and collapsed on the floor. With this an ominous silence descended on the compartment. The Pathan blind with rage threw the man’s trunk out of the door of the compartment. It fell at the feet of a coolie. No one interfered. The poor man screamed when the train moved for his luggage was thrown outside. The man’s wife and daughter were trembling with fear. Before the train picked up



speed, the man and his family got out. There was an uneasy silence in the compartment. No one had any guts to defy the Pathan.

Kulwant Singh Virk in his story “Weeds” tells us how the refugees started settling down once the dust storm subsided. He compares them sarcastically to weeds, which after being pulled out and thrown away, strangely starts sprouting again. The refugees on the Pakistan side did the same. The whole of Pakistan seemed desolate soon after the Partition. There were millions of refugees all over the place. They “had been uprooted from their own homes elsewhere” (203). They often sat at the doors of their new houses and looked out at the world with despair and sorrow in their eyes and when they walked, they placed their feet upon alien soil with fear and apprehension. Virk observes,

The refugees, who had been uprooted and thrown out of their native lands, were forced to move from one place to another. When they were pushed out of the big refugee camp at Vaghey, near the border, they had to drag themselves from zilla to zilla, crawl from village to village, till they could find a hovel somewhere, which would give them shelter. (203)

The displaced migrants began to settle down in the available land there. Though life in every village and town had been turned upside down, the refugees were trying hard to discover some old rhythm of life and were trying to rebuild their life once again.

Seeing everything before his very eyes Gandhi wept bitterly. He very often wished that he were not on earth. He was wondering how could the tragedy be stopped once for all. The only solution seemed to him was that people’s consciousness should be raised whereby they should be made to realise that, as he says in his *Communal Unity*, “We are all equal before our maker—Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsis, Christians, worshippers of one God” (291). If people began to realise this, then there wouldn’t be any fight among them. Reading and trying to understand the holy texts of the other, according to him, was another solution. Gandhi adds, “I am also a reader of the *Quran* like them, and I will tell them that the *Quran* makes no distinction between Hindus and Mussalmans” (291). The communal leaders of both the communities unfortunately, to gain some narrow political ends, put hatred and distrust into the minds of their sheepish followers. As the saying goes, sow the wind and you reap the whirlwind. Instead of moving towards a universal religion, the followers of Vivekananda and Prophet Mohammad have been moving towards a narrow and parochial hate zone, which facilitates a wholesale mass killing. They have conveniently forgotten what religious savants like Vivekananda have pointed out time and again. For instance, in discussing the ideal of universal religion, he says, “Nothing makes us so cruel as religion, and nothing makes us so tender as religion. This has been so in the past, and will also, in all probability, be so in the future” (Ghosh 1). The majority of the people think that they do all these to please their God. They conveniently forget that God is their Brother who stands among the helpless brothers that they annihilate. How can they profitably worship their God if they do not heed Him? If they do not pluck out their hatred and



prejudice embedded deeply in their mindset and allow love, equality and respect for the other to blossom, cleanse themselves of their sins accumulated over the past many years, there may not be any lasting and durable peace in this sacred land. A verse from Tagore's *Gitanjali* will be a fitting conclusion to this Paper:

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure,
knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.
I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my
thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has
kindled the light of reason in my mind.
I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart
and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast
thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.
And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my
actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act. (4)

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