

Partition: A Dehumanizing Episode in the Lives of Refugees

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Abstract

This paper tries to explore the events of life the refugees had gone through during partition. For the study some great short stories regarding partition have been analyzed to support the argument how refugees suffered and how miserable and inhuman behaviour they have faced during partition. The partition was a restless and chaotic event in the history of the sub-continent. The partition wrenched people away from the land of their birth, the death of their ancestors, and their present life. Only for survival, people moved to safer places where they could be surrounded by people of their own religion and nation. In moving towards the people of their own kind, safety and survival were of primary significance. Nation and Religion were expected to give support, security, and safety to the refugees, who crossed the borders. The Refugees found themselves in severe economic difficulties. They lost everything, which was theirs. They reached safer places with only clothes on them with empty pockets. Their displacement and dispossession were the causes of their economic difficulties and destitution.

Keywords: Partition, Refugees, Survive, inhuman, Sufferings, Politics, Community.

Partition Time -- Violence

The partition time was somehow more difficult and terrible than all the previous and later times. It was a time of hatred, vengeance, violence, bestiality, brutality, death, destruction, dislocation, and defilement. Stability and peace could not be seen anywhere in the country. One of the striking characteristics of the time was that it was overpowered by inhumanity. Despair, sense of shattered existence, nothingness, and meaninglessness spread everywhere. The noble qualities of compassion and concern disappeared.

The partition violence has some special characteristics. First of all, despite the fact that it was the result of the game of high-politics played by the leaders and men belonging to classes of higher social and economic status, most of its victims were the common people belonging to the lower strata of the society. The innocent people had to pay with their lives and their belongings. Becoming puppets in the hands of the selfish political interests of a few whom they had not understood, lakhs of common people belonging to all the communities inflicted violence on each other and suffered indescribable agonies. They behaved like wild beasts and killed and looted each other in the name of religion and nation. They were not villains. They were not criminals. Yet they became the perpetrators and victims of violence. "Communal hatred could be relegated

mainly to the lower classes, which, it was believed, could be goaded by unscrupulous politicians and criminal elements of either religious hue into a mad fury against each other because of an unenlightened approach to religion.” (23) Generally illiteracy and poverty of the masses were considered to be responsible for this.

On Both Sides of the Border

The partition violence happened on both sides of the border and the people belonging to all the communities became the victims of it. Acts of violence, killings, abduction, rape, mutilation, and migration were invariably seen on both the sides. It was not restricted to any place or community. If the Hindus and the Sikhs were targeted on one side, the Muslims were equally targeted on the other. No violent incident was isolated. Every incident resulted in its correspondent incident. Violence spread to all the communities and all the places, (especially Punjab and Bengal) in the North, the West, and the East. The Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs inflicted violence on each other. No community could plead its innocence. All were equally guilty.

Women -Worst Victims

The women did not participate in the partition violence; but they were the worst victims of it. “Violence is almost always instigated by men, but its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed, women whose children and husbands are sacrificed in the name of national integrity and unity.”(24) “... Violence was horrifying in its intensity and one which knew no boundaries; for many women, it was not only “miscreants”, “outsiders” or “marauding mobs” that they needed to fear - husbands, fathers, brothers and even sons could turn killers.”(25) Many women were killed by their own men in the name of family honour.

Unjustified and Futile Violence

Finally, the most important of all is that the partition violence was unjustified and futile. No point and no amount of argument could justify the partition violence. Though for some statist and nationalists, “the escalating communal and ethnic violence in South Asia is only an unavoidable by-product of state-building and nation-formation,” (26) the partition violence was not for nation formation, but nation-division. The struggle for independence and state-building was non-violent, as the whole world knows it. All the partition violence that occurred was for the division of the nation only. It is true that the partition was an event of the creation of a new nation, Pakistan, but it was only by separating from and carving out of India. If at all the people wanted separation, they would have parted peacefully like the sons of a family and not violently like enemies. Despite the fact that the partition was celebrated as the formation of a new nation in Pakistan, it was mourned as the partition of the nation in India. Whether it is formation or partition, the cruel violence and suffering cannot be justified on the grounds of humanity.

Survival and Existence

In the terrible floods of hatred, vengeance, and violence during the partition of the nation, nothing had any importance except survival and existence. It is quite natural for any living being to try to survive in times of danger and destruction. Saving life or survival became the most

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urgent need of the day. All the other superfluities of community, culture, and tradition (and even nation and religion) lost their significance in the face of the overpowering fact of the need to survive on an individual and family/group basis. That is why; the history of the partition of India has witnessed such a stupendous exchange of population across the newly created borders. In the space of a few months, about twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan.

Only for survival, people moved to safer places where they could be surrounded by people of their own religion and nation. In moving towards the people of their own kind, safety and survival were of primary significance. Nation and Religion were expected to give support, security, and safety to the refugees, who crossed the borders. It is for safety and survival only that many people became perpetrators of violence and made others victims. Killing others to save themselves is the shocking irony of the partition tragedy. Both the perpetrators and victims of the tragedy traveled in carts, cars, buses, trucks, and trains, but mostly on foot in great columns called Kafilas, which could stretch for dozens of miles. A number of people lost their lives during the travel/ migration and those who reached the safer places were able to survive.

Humiliated and Harassed They Left

But to survive was to suffer. Survival meant suffering in the aftermath of the partition. Even before and during the partition, suffering was intense and widespread because of the unbound and unprecedented violence. The whole of the partition is a gigantic incident of suffering in India, which was truncated for the formation of Pakistan. The partition is the division of the nation to India and so the division resulted in distress for its people, who suffered much after it. But the partition is the creation of a nation to Pakistan and so the creation should have been a matter of great delight for its people. Yet, the refugees who fled India to Pakistan suffered a great deal. Shorish Kashmiri observes in “*Humiliated and Harassed They Left*”:

If the masses thought that the journey to Pakistan would be like a stroll in a garden, this was an illusion, something which people begin to nurse because of emotionally surcharged slogans raised in communal politics. . . But the truth is that the promises made by the leaders were like the promises of a girl who makes and breaks them day after day. (4)

The delightful promises made by the leaders were not materialized and the refugees had to suffer after their survival in Pakistan also. Survival meant suffering in both the countries.

The survivors had to suffer as they reached their places of safety as refugees with bare hands. They had to leave their homes, lands, business, and other movable and immovable property to save their lives. Millions of houses were looted and set on fire. They were forced to abandon their villages, home, and hearth. Even small pockets of money and jewels and small bundles of clothes and beddings were looted on their way to safer places. They became destitute overnight and reached their destination as refugees. The material loss reduced them to the position of orphans and most of them joined the refugee camps started by the governments to help them. The sudden loss of dignity and social status added to their suffering.

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Material and Emotional Loss

The material loss was compounded by the emotional loss of birthplace, homeland, heritage, tradition, and culture. The attachment with one's homeland has always been deep, strong, and great. The birthplace or homeland has been reverentially called motherland. The loss of such motherland— along with the centuries-old, ingrained heritage, tradition, and culture— added to the suffering of the survivors. The very roots of their lives grown deep into the motherland, heritage, tradition, and culture were snapped at once. They had been living in their homes on their dear motherland with their own honoured heritage, age-old tradition, and revered culture. Such a secured and happy life was ruptured by the partition and it left the survivors in deep distress to suffer.

Carnage

The brutal killing of nearest and dearest persons in the partition carnage was a matter of great suffering for the survivors. The untimely, unnatural, and cruel death of close relatives and friends filled the lives of the survivors with tormenting grief forever. They had to live with only memories of the departed. Parents lost their children, children lost parents, husbands lost their wives, and wives lost their husbands, brothers lost their sisters, etc. Bruised and battered, they reached the land of safety. Each new arrival had a new tale to tell each ghastlier than the one we had heard earlier. Children would come minus parents and parents minus children. Survivors who were not physically maimed were so gravely wounded emotionally that survival seemed a torture. The emotional pain of severance from home, family and friendships is by its nature immeasurable. Losing everything that was near and dear, the survivors became so dispirited and downhearted that there appeared to be nothing in their lives. Life seemed to be purposeless. A sense of nothingness enveloped their minds and hearts. There was no interest in living. Still, they lived because they could not deliberately put an end to their lives.

Insulting Language

Millions of survived refugees suffered from severe mental trauma, which was a result of the permanent separation from all that was dear and near, and the deep sense of loss after they were forcibly uprooted from their birthplaces and homelands. To add to this, they suffered from a sense of alienation in the new homeland. Because of the loss of dignity and social status, the refugees were looked down on by the natives. They were ridiculed by their native neighbours. A common charge was that towns and cities became dirty due to the flooding of the refugees. The condition of the poorer refugees like petty traders, masons, carpenters, labourers, and others was beyond description. In Pakistan also, the refugees were derisively called by the term “Mohajirin”. They were humiliated and often ridiculed by the natives. Thus, whether it is in Pakistan or India, the refugees could not develop a sense of belonging and a sense of rootedness. They were marginalized. They had to suffer all the difficulties of their own destitution and the native derision for sheer survival.

As a tolerable atmosphere was not there in the new places and as the refugees could not develop a sense of being rooted, they were tormented by the piercing memories of home and homeland, the acute agony of having lost them forever and a piercing desire to see them once

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again. The most pervading emotion that tortured the survivors was nostalgia, the memory of the happy past. It was memory that prolonged and intensified the suffering of the refugees. They were torn by nostalgia, an intense desire to build up new life, and a necessity of getting a new identity in changed circumstances. The English word “refugee” and other words/phrases in regional languages like “Mohajir” in Urdu, “Nirashith” and “Anath” in Hindi, “Udbastu” in Bengali, “Mool Suta Ukhde” (Tom from the roots) in Gujarati, etc., signify the whole Partition history of the horrors of uprooting from the ancestral homes and property and the agonies of insecurity, humiliation, and suffering.

Even in refugee camps, the refugees suffered a lot. They lived in these camps in adversity and hoped for allotment of houses. Eight to ten families lived in each tent pitched for the purpose—all huddled together. The food that was served was not of good quality. They had no proper clothes and beddings. Their tents were exposed to the sun and rain. Life, in such unhygienic conditions, gave way to epidemic diseases like cholera. Thus, malnutrition and contagious diseases added their own contribution to the sufferings of the survivors in refugee camps.

Rehabilitation

The governments set up departments of rehabilitation to rehabilitate and resettle the refugees. They waited for a number of days, day and night, to get an allotment of a house and/or a piece of land. They had no money or capital to resettle them in life. There were no jobs and work for them. So, they had to wait for the government allotment of houses for residence, lands for agriculture, and loans for business. Some powerful, rich, and influential refugees got an allotment of spacious houses, big plots of land, and huge loans, while the vast majority of them got only tiny inconvenient houses, small pieces of land, and little loans of money. The allotment could not be impartial, and the seeds of corruption and bribery were sown then in this nation.

The Dog of Tithwal

Saadat Hasan Manto's “*The Dog of Tithwal*” is a sad story of a dog caught between the Hindustani and the Pakistani troops at the Indo-Pak borders in a place called Tithwal, which is now in Pakistan. The two troops are entrusted with the task of border security. The beautiful nature appears to be disturbed by the occasional gunshots during daytime. The soldiers, being lonely and bored, long for a little fun and frolic. At such a time, a free and innocent dog, in search of a stray morsel appears on the Hindustani side, and the soldiers befriend it. They treat it with biscuits and consider it a poor refugee. On a piece of cardboard, the Hindustani soldiers write, “This is a Hindustani dog” and tie it to the dog's neck. The rules of national boundaries of human world extend to the world of animals.

The scene shifts to the Pakistani side, where the dog reappears after a few days with the identity tag hanging from its neck. The Pakistani soldiers remove the tag and hang another tag saying, “This is a Pakistani dog” and send it back to the enemy. The dog gets a new identity now. The problem of shifting identities of the victims of the partition is ironically hinted at here.

Looking through the binoculars at the dog, which is coming from the enemy side, Jan Hamam Singh of the Hindustani troops fire at the dog. The Pakistani troops retaliate by firing. Thus, both the sides begin a game of firing at the poor dog that starts running helter-skelter in a panic. Both the sides enjoy the confused and terrified state of the dog and laugh uproariously. It Shows the complete dehumanization of people and the reign of cruelty. Finally, the dog is killed by a shot from the Hindustani side. It becomes a martyr to the Pakistani soldiers and it is just an enemies' death according to the Hindustani side. The unfortunate dog represents all the unfortunate victims of the partition and their merciless slaughter and suffering. The sardonic remark, "Now even the dogs will have to be either Hindustani or Pakistani", testifies to the absolutization of difference; the logic of national boundaries seems to be even to the creatures of the animal kingdom. The dog is explicitly described as a refugee, a vagabond status reminiscent of many refugees wandering about looking for shelter. The reader can make the inferences on the reality of widespread suffering on accounts displacement as personified in the figure of dog.

Manto has used the technique of balance in a very effective manner in this story. Even names and designations appear to be balanced: Hamam Singh- Himmat Khan, Banta Singh-Bashir, jamadar-Subedar, Hindustani dog-Pakistani dog, and Chapad Jhunjhun -Sapad Sunsun. In the middle is the innocent and unfortunate dog. To complete the balance, both the sides fire and laugh at a terrified dog. Even the pathos of the dog and frivolity of the soldiers are balanced. The technique balance has rendered the story interesting, in which, says Arjun Mahey:

a stray dog on the Indo-Pakistan border adopted by the peace-keeping border forces of both countries, is killed by soldiers from either side who, out of boredom, and for making of fun, take stray shots at it and accuse it of treachery. The irony is that, the time when the enemies agree about something, is when they want to kill a creature which has been an unselfish friend to both; the indictment of treachery is one which can only recoil back onto them. The tones of pathos and savage frivolity are balanced and captured by the simple tactic of overlapping images of the dog's wounds bewilderment with the soldiers' indifferent brutality, counterbalancing simultaneously the ideas of death and diversion. (18)

The Story of the Tulsi Plant

Syed Waliullah's "*The Story of the Tulsi Plant*" pictures the plight, as the title signifies, compares the Tulsi plant in the courtyard of a deserted house in East Bengal, which is now occupied by a growing number of Muslim refugees from West Bengal. The garden of fruit trees is sharply contrasted with the deployed condition of the refugees and the deserted house as well. The Muslim refugees live comfortably in a big house till they discover a small Tulsi plant, brown and dying, in a brick platform in the courtyard is to be uprooted immediately, some of the refugees maintain, because they can tolerate no Hindu symbols. Some others think of the woman who must have tended that plant with reverence and lighting a lamp every evening at the base of the plant in devotion. They speculate where she is living now. The image of train that occurs in the story symbolizes the departure of the Hindu family. One of the Muslim refugees insists on not removing the plant, as the juice of its leaves is effective in curing colds and coughs. And the other refugees are not hard-hearted. So, the plant remains. Despite their heated discussions about which community is responsible for the partition, the plant remains there untouched.

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The surprising thing is that the plant has been secretly cared, watered, and the weeds have been cleared by one of them, who has understood, with human compassion, the pain of the mistress of the house who tended the plant and of the forcible displacement of her family. In this connection, Bidyut Chakrabarty observes in his article:

What it is relevant to note is the underlying theme, articulated in the pain and agony of the Hindu family that had vacated the house and that of those who had occupied it. Their plight was the same. Both the families are victims of circumstances beyond their control and became homeless refugees with an uncertain future in an unknown place. (20)

The Muslim refugees are again displaced by the government order to requisition the house, illegally occupied by them. The government does not consider their pleas and protests. The refugees, now, do not remember either the tulsi plant or the tearful eyes of the “grihakarti” who tended it. The plant, again, is neglected and its leaves turn brown. The Muslim refugees are really worried about where to go after vacating this house.

This is where Waliullah is at his best in focusing on the trauma of human beings who became the first victims of partition. Just like the tulsi plant, which had a fresh lease of life due to the support of those who had occupied the house despite initial reluctance, the refugees, whether in Pakistan or India, were equally helpless in the radically altered circumstances. They were as “vulnerable as the Tulsi plant...” (2) Thus the tulsi plant symbolizes all the refugee victims of the partition who suffered unaccountable loss and indescribable anguish. The refugees are as helpless and vulnerable as the plant. “The life and well-being of the tulsi plant could not be insured by its own powers of self-protection” (p. 198) and the refugees had no powers of self-protection. They were at the mercy of the situations beyond their control and suffered a great deal.

You Know Me?

Kulwant Singh Virk's story *You Know Me?* brings out the tragic life of a dislocated refugee who lives his death-like life as an alien who does not have any relatives, friends, or even acquaintances. The narrator's casual question about the hill in his native in West Pakistan injects life into the worn-out, battered, and featureless refugee, who immediately asks, “You know me”? The very cheer of having found someone who knows him speaks volumes of his sufferings as a lonely alien in an alien land. This acquaintance makes him a normal human being and revives the zeal of life in him. He starts plying a rickshaw, earning more money and takes a room on rent. He develops the acquaintance into a kind of friendly attachment. After the suggestion of the narrator, he starts saving money to marry. He feels conscious for the first time after he has crossed over to this country. He has been in a kind of coma so far. Like *Weeds*, this story also ends with the hope of renewal of human life despite the rupture and loss.

The Book of Knowledge

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Fikr Taunsvi's *The Book of Knowledge* is an imaginative story that brings out the tragedy of the partition and its meaninglessness. The third part of this story, *The Refugee Camps*, brings out the sufferings of the refugees in camps, where they live in adversity. Their tents made of cloth are exposed to sun, rain, and winter. In each tent live more than ten families. Wheat flour, grain, and clothes are supplied. But the wheat flour is full of stones and the cloth is not sufficient to cover their bodies. Their faces are pale, and their eyes are full of bewilderment. An expectation of burnt "rotis", "dal", and rice always peeped in their half-open lips. "And the women with silken bodies, who had never stepped out of their homes, were clad with rags" (p. 107). They learn to be patient, hungry, and clotheless. Diseases like cholera and malaria break out and many of them die of the diseases. Yet they are silent. Silence is imposed on them, for, the narrator ironically says, "it is written in the holy book that silence is the sign of profound wisdom and insight" (p. 108). They are ordered not to create trouble for their country.

Even after six months, they live like savages. They are accused of being a nuisance for the whole country. They are considered to have become lazy, being fed on the rations supplied freely. They want to work, but finding no work, they grope in dark. Their efforts, put in according to the advice of the leaders, are in vain. They are humiliated and disgraced. The new land has not become their motherland. Their souls still dwell in their former homes; only their bodies are in the tents. Finally, the tents are removed, and the refugees are dispersed.

To Conclude

To conclude, the above statements regarding the situation of refugees, it is clear and open that The Refugees found themselves in severe economic difficulties. They lost everything, which was theirs. They reached safer places with only clothes on them with empty pockets. Their displacement and dispossession were the causes of their economic difficulties and destitution. For the time being they found shelter in refugee camps. They were able to get free meals to fill their bellies. With the passage of a few weeks, even there was no room in the camps for the newly arriving refugees. Many of them started living on railway platforms, bus-stations, and footpaths. They could not get work/jobs to earn their livelihood. Filling bellies became a great problem. Malnutrition and contagious diseases gave their own contribution to their grief and suffering. Rehabilitation and resettlement of the refugees became a huge problem for the new governments. The pathetic sights of millions of refugees, the heart-rending condition of children whose fathers were killed, and mothers abducted and raped and the miserable people handicapped both physically and mentally were common on both the sides of the new borders.

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