

## Amit Majmudar's *Partitions*: AVantage Point of the Partition of the Indian Subcontinent

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### Abstract:

*The Partition of the Indian subcontinent begot a stratocumulus in the peaceful streams of the lives of the Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims. The dark moments of the Partition witnessed the collapse of religious fraternity and the emergence of communal feud in the subcontinent. Screams of terror, nauseating sights of mutilated dead bodies, and irrevocable separations were some poignant features of the Partition. The silenced childhood and womanhood got victimised to coercive suicides and mass killings while the untouchables became non responding figures of the chaotic society. Amit Majmudar, through his novel Partitions, unfolds some realistic episodes of the chaotic atmosphere of the subcontinent at the Partition. The plot, characters, and the diction of the novel recreate the travails of the Partition.*

**Key words:** Partition, trauma, victim, communal feud, violation

### INTRODUCTION

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent on 14 August 1947 was a catastrophic incident that turned the future of the subcontinent upside down. Cyril Radcliffe, the British cartographer proved his expertise by doing the consequential

act of drawing the Raddiffe line across the bosom of the map of the Indian subcontinent which caused to invite ceaseless bloodshed on the frontier. The Radcliffe line, with the sharpness of a scythe, cut the subcontinent into two parts--India and Pakistan--thereby separating the siblings, Hindus and Muslims. *The Other side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, which can be addressed as an anthology of the Partition memoirs states that almost ten lakhs of people were killed and around seventy-five thousand women were kidnapped and raped at the time of the Partition (4). The Partition witnessed the most heinous forms of violence like castration, tattooing, and mutilation of sexual organs. Women and children were the weaklings among the victims of the Partition. They were victimised to the violence performed by the "own" and the "alien" patriarchal clans. Hence, trauma spun the warp and woof for the horrendous experiences unleashed by the Partition. This paper intends to aim at drawing a panoramic view of the event of Partition through the fictional terrain of *Partitions*, a true to life novel written by Amit Majmudar.

### ***PARTITIONS: A TAPESTRY OF THE PARTITION***

The Partition and its aftermath have ignited the stream of thoughts of the writers of the subcontinent of any time. The genre of Partition fiction is rich with throbbing and empathizing novels and stories. Among the post-partition novels, *Partitions* by Amit Majmudar bears a unique status by virtue of its verisimilitude. The novel that reflects the severance of a mother and her twins at the time of the partition turbulence symbolises the partition of Mother India and the severance of the twins, Hindus and Muslims.

The untold experiences from real life situations raise hoods in *Partitions*. The historically silenced voices of women, children, and the untouchables start speaking through the

fictitious characters like SimramKaur, Mayarani, and above all the two kids--Shankar and Keshav.

Hardships of sexual violation, alienation, deracination and orphaned childhood are recreated with a realistic effect in the novel. The two boys Shankar and Keshav represent the cursed childhood mutilated by the Hindu-Muslim hordes at the Partition. The description of the tedious journey of the two boys brings home the plight of orphaned childhood whereas the description of the hardships of Simran Kaur, a female Sikh teenager, brings home the savagery of three human scavengers. Even in the midst of the fire spitting repercussions of the Partition, the spell of love is chanted by Ibrahim Mazud, a Muslim doctor from the west Punjab, who strives to conjure up the spirit of humanity.

## **VIOLENCE, HOMICIDES, AND SEXUAL DEPRAVITY**

Revenge is the psychological fact behind violence. The first chapter of the novel entitled "Connections," gives a verbal picture of the chaos created on the India-Pak frontier. Violence erupts in an uncontrollable manner as a result of communal reprisals. When the railway station in Lahore heaves due to the hectic movements of the Hindus who take to their heels towards India, the East Punjab witnesses the clinic of Dr. Ibrahim Mazud, a workaholic humane Muslim doctor, being collapsed along with a number of other Muslim buildings. In Lahore, when Sonia, the Christian untouchable widow of the Brahmin doctor Roshan Jaitly stays stunned on the platform with her twins Shankar and Keshav to board the train to India, she gets separated from her sons. Coercive migration and accidental separations of parents and children at the Partition are prefigured through the plight of Sonia and her twins. "As the violence increased, however the migrations took an urgent and treacherous character; convoys were ambushed, families

separated, children orphaned, women kidnapped-and whole train loads massacred” (Menon and Kamla 35).

The course of development of violence takes on different forms like disfigurement, mutilation, disembowelment, castration etc. The novel draws a gaudy picture of the catastrophic outcome of communal reprisal through the description of a historical incident of a train from Lahore to Amritsar bearing Hindu and Sikh migrants being attacked by some Muslim hooligans:

“The platform will stay quiet as the train inches into place. The absence of anyone on the roof, maybe or the emptiness of the windows. The station master will part the crowd and throw wide a compartment door. The first gush will reach his feet. He will skip back and leave his sandals in place, soaked, the bottom step still dripping” (Majmudar41-42).

The communal feud especially targeted the women folk of both the religions. The episodes of sexual savagery bring to surface the patriarchal arrangement of gender relations. The most pronounced form of violence was unleashed towards the female body as an object of communal reprisal. The mean patriarchal attitude of treating woman as a sexual commodity finds solid root in the comment made by Qasim: “The money these days,” Qasim explains, “is in girls” (Majmudar95).

The status or honour of a Hindu or Sikh community was determined by the honour of the women of that particular community. So the patriarchal sector of the religion was so vigilant to preserve the chastity of the womenfolk, at any cost. Naturally, the two rival nations wanted to dishonor each other by dishonouring women of their rival community. Consequently, at the Partition Hindu-Sikh women were victimised by the attacks from the men of their own religion too. Being born as women, they were denied their right to opt for a chance to survive. The Sikh women in Simran Kaur's family in the novel, pull through the crisis of violence inflicted by the

men folk of the same family. The massacre was done as part of saving the chastity of their women.

His brother, he realizes, is right. It must be done; it is the only way to protect them. It annihilations were all then they might as well risk flight. But the women and the boy risked something worse. To line in their shacks: his girls, their wives, daily servitude, and nightly violence, in a few years not even remembering their true nature... Dying Sikh for being a Sikh: this must be the women's glory. (Majmudar 39)

At the stage of utter helplessness, the women did not have any other option than embracing suicide or getting yielded to mass killing destined by their men. The men folk of these communities had never taken such incidents as actions of violence, but they regarded those suicides as heroic deeds to be honoured. Some consensus that led to violence against women are "patriarchal notion of safeguarding honour" (Menon and Kamla 58).

Partition was the time when women were enslaved to the "shame-fear-dishonour syndrome" (Menon and Kamla59) which grabbed those women who were subjected to sexual violation by the men of other communities. As part of seeking rescue from the shame-fear-dishonour syndrome, most of those women resorted to the act of committing suicide, whereupon the menfolk started honouring by praising it as a deed of courage. The Hindu-Sikh women who were abducted by Muslim hooligans were compelled either to choose a life with the kidnappers or to choose a life of call girls at the zenana of nawabs: "certain nawabs are paying three thousands rupees for each piece..." (Majumdar95).

## **TRIUMPHALISM OF TRAUMA OVER MUTILATED CHILDHOODS**

The term *trauma* represents fatal experiences and human mind's belated response to the events through recurring

hallucinatory dreams. To borrow the word of Cathy Caruth, trauma is “the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life” (Caruth7). The cataclysmic events related to the Partition caused trauma to win victory over innocent childhoods. Childhood and adolescence are two productive phases that make a human life no more sordid, but solid. The Partition holocausts ruptured the lives of thousands of children and teenagers who got victimized by the traumatic events which made them get yielded to post traumatic stress disorder.

The two children Shankar and Keshav, the twins born to the Brahmin doctor Roshan Jaitly and the untouchable Sonia, are two fictitious characters echoing the traumatised lives of thousands of children who were pulled through the Partition saga. Keshav and Shankar, the two kids of six years old, begin their encounter with the partition trauma on the railway platform at the Lahore station where they get separated from their mother Sonia. The novel narrates their physical trauma: “Keshav just makes it: forearms, stomach, fall just a second later... He hits the tracks, tumbles and skids a few feet and come to a stop in the train’s monstrous shadow” (Majumdar 11).

Thorns of trauma appear to be embedded in the trajectory of Shankar and Keshav. The boys meeting with Saif, a Muslim who is engaged in the job of kidnapping orphaned Hindu boys, becomes a cause for them to reach the house of Shanaz Bibi who has been searching for a wise Hindu boy to make him her foster child. The conspicuous conspiracy between Saif and Shanaz Bibi arouses suspicion in the minds of the kids. Their mental trauma increases as the delay in meeting their mother gets longer. While escaping from the house of Shanaz Bibi, Shankar cannot keep going with Keshav due to his illness called “blue disease.”

The emotional trauma of the boys reaches its zenith at the hands of a gang of Hindu hooligans. The rioters are least concerned about the safety of the two kids; they try to relish a

sadistic pleasure out of the dejected condition of the kids. The Partition was a time when the child community of the East and the West Bengals got victimised to a chain of attacks and reprisals. It was a time when childhood was measured with the yardsticks like religious identity, caste system, and sexuality.

If the hardships of Shankar and Keshav weave the central threads of the traumatic plot of the novel, Simran Kaur's life seems to be a reminiscence of traumatised gendered sexuality. Being a teenager, Simran is susceptible to every kind of heinous outcome of the Partition which any child or teenager is vulnerable to. Being a female teenager, Simran's experiences bear the shade of the struggling of the marginalised sector of any society which is none other than the female sector itself. Being a female adolescent, she is doubly traumatised. The emotional trauma of Simran takes its root from her own patriarchal domestic realm where she remains shocked at the gun point of her father and his cousins. The unexpected chain of dreadful sights of the mass homicides of her mother and her siblings makes her shudder and emotionally desiccated. The physical anarchy generated around her puts her mind under stress. She starts exhibiting light symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder like insomnia. The corpses of her father, mother and siblings create some sort of empathy in her. She feels as if she were a dead body and she lies near her mother's dead body. The wetness of blood oozing from her mother's dead body does not generate any repulsion in her, on the other hand an abnormal numbness swallows her. Simran's trauma reaches its zenith when she falls in the hands of the triad--Ayub, Saif, and Qasim; "Qasim and Saif have got down, their bared teeth and eyes gleefully white while Ayub strips Simran of her clothes" (Majmudar132).

Keshav, Shankar, and Simran Kaur are portraits of mutilated childhood and teenage at the Partition. Series of violent attacks and riots made millions of children acquiescent to psychological trauma and post traumatic disorders. The

Partition witnessed the monopoly of trauma which had overpowered the psychological terrain of children and women.

## **THE PASSIVITY OF UNTOUCHABILITY**

The untouchables at the Partition accepted a detached attitude towards the events related to the Partition as they were not included either in the Hindu community or in the Muslim community. The Harijans or the Dalits were the untouchables in the Indian society. The Dalit children regarded the Partition events as great bliss as they could easily inspect the abandoned houses of both the Hindus and the Muslims and loot valuable items. The marvelous fact behind their detachment towards the Partition was that they were not affected either emotionally or physically by the brutalities unleashed by the Hindu-Muslim communities. They felt blessed that both the Hindus and the Muslims excluded them from attacks as they were untouchables.

*Partitions* draws the picture of Dalit teenagers at the Partition through the character named Mayarani who provides Shankar and Keshav with food and shelter for a single night at the time of the Partition. At that particular night, she is on the roof of an abandoned house as she aims at piling up as many articles as she can, from the house. The Muslim rioters time and again threaten her and her friends, but they are not frightened in the least: "why would I be afraid? They come sometimes and shout at me. But no one dares touch me" (Majumdar125).The identity crisis inflicted by the castes system that had once existed in the subcontinent really made the Dalits take an indifferent approach to a severe crisis like the Partition.



## CONCLUSION

*Partitions* delineates some historically untouched perspectives associated with the Partition like the emotional and psychological discourses of the affected persons of the Punjab and Bengal. In the novel historical facts, statistical data, and political scandals give way to personal experiences. The characters in the novel serve as the mouthpieces of the silenced sectors like women, children, and Dalits. By recreating the Rawalpindi massacre, the ghostly Lahore-Amritsar train massacre, and the most pitiable experience of mass migration, *Partitions* serves as the vantage point of the Partition.

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