

An Overview of Non-fictional Literature in English About Partition of Indian Subcontinent

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Abstract

It is said that literature is the mirror of the society. The reflection of the partition of India can be seen in the partition literature. Partition literature has mainly been divided into two types. First is fictional partition literature and second is non-fictional partition literature. Fictional partition literature sheds light on the partition of India through a fictionalised manner and is seen more as an art. Non-fictional partition literature talks about real life events and happenings that took place during the partition. They are presented by real life people such as eye-witnesses, survivors and their descendants and are penned and documented by writers from both India and Pakistan based on true events, stories that have been passed down from generations to generations. Fictional partition literature revolves around the partition with an essence of love stories and artistic expressions where as non-fictional partition literature is made of the actual experiences and does not contain artistic expressions.

Keywords: Partition, Partition literature, Non-fiction, Interviews, Eye-witnesses, Survivors, Experience, Violence, Conflict, Religion, Community, Migration, Murder, Rape, Kidnap, Generation, Refugee, Borders, Boundaries

Introduction

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was one of the biggest events that changed the course of the history of India forever. It also has shaped the future of the two nations formed, India of Hindus and Pakistan of Muslims. India and Pakistan were celebrating their independence while facing the most ruthless and gruesome communal riots. It was definitely a victory in the political context but it was a defeat of India's colorful tradition, culture, multireligious identity and dignity. It was a defeat of human and moral values. Evil had certainly taken over humanity. India was known to the world as the land of peace and love. It was called the golden sparrow. But this sparrow was crushed brutally by the hatred and anger between the people who had been living peacefully for centuries. India's long awaited freedom was accompanied by unimaginable, unexpected and unprecedented holocaust at the hands of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who targeted each other in the name of religion. The independence of India was gained by paying a heavy price. That price was widespread violence and massacre on the religious grounds. The partition was one of the most momentous events not only in the history of India but also in the history of the world. It is difficult to trace any other event with such a magnitude having far-reaching consequences. This tragedy has touched each and every human that lived in both the countries directly or indirectly. It took lives of men, women, children, animals and most importantly it tarnished the purpose of the human existence.

The division of the subcontinent immediately catapulted widespread discussion and creation of a specific type of literature. This condemnable event boosted debates and made writers express themselves profoundly and profusely. This gave rise to the partition literature. This literature can be classified into two categories. One is the literature which highlights the causes of the partition and the violence caused by it. The othersheds light on the suffrage, trauma and loss faced and beared by the common people of both the countries. The partition literature can be found written in many genres like fiction, non-fiction, poetry and novels.

Non-fictional literary works like “The Other Side of Silence:Voices from The Partition of India” written by Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin’s “Borders and Boundaries:Women in India’s Partition”, “The Footprints ofPartition:Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians” penned by Anam Zakaria tell the stories of people based on the real life accounts narrated by victims of partition and their descendants who have faced the unbearable turmoil of the partition. Some writers have created the most intriguing stories through their non-fictional writings. These include “Partition:The Long Shadow” edited by Urvashi Butalia, Kavita Puri’s “Partition Voices:Untold British Stories”, “Forgotten Atrocities:Memoirs of a Survivor of the 1947 Partition of India” by Bal K. Gupta, Yasmin Khan’s “The Great Partition”, “The Punjab Bloodied,Partitioned and Cleansed:Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy Through Secret British Reports and First Person Accounts” by Ishtiaq Ahmed, Shadakshari Settar’s “Pangs of Partition : The Human Dimension Volume 2” and “The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia : Refugees,Boundaries,Histories” penned by Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar.

In order to unveil the hurt and pain beared by innocent peopleand their loved ones before, during and after the partition, we ought to dive deep into the writings of the writers mentioned above. Some have written about the real life accountswhile some have voiced the muted victims through non-fictional works. The Partition of India brought with it the never imagined exodus of human lifewhich shook India and Pakistan from inside. In this regard, many writers have tried to recover the history of partition through recording personal accounts and oral narratives of those who survived in the violence and trauma of partition. This has offered a different perspective on the history of partition. Thus, this research paper will focus on the recovery of the history of partition which tries to look at how ordinary people have experienced the partition, their quest for identity, the way the state and the community tried to control the society.

This research paper will study the non-fictional writings of writers from India, Pakistan and Britain that chronicle and explore the event from all sides of the borders. It will highlight how India was divided into two nations on the basis of religion. The religious conflict that took place between the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities will be thoroughly studied and discussed in this research with the help of non-fictional English literature which includes personal experiences, first-hand accounts, oral narratives, memories of the victims of the partition of India. It will also explore the writers, whose families were affected by the partition, expressing their thoughts and ideas about the partition, it’s impact on the common people in the short as well as the long run.

3. Discussion

1) Famous Indian feminist writer and activist, Urvashi Butalia in her famous book “**The Other Side of Silence:Voices from the Partition of India**” says that “Twelve million people were displaced as a result of Partition. Nearly one million died. Some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the ‘other’ religion, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and destroyed, villages abandoned. Refugee camps became part of the landscape of most major cities in the

north, but, a half century later, there is still no memorial, no memory, no recall, except what is guarded, and now rapidly dying, in families and collective memory". In the same book, she has recalled a memory of her household as follows :

“Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in theirs and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. If they would come to our houses we would have two utensils in one corner of the house, and we would tell them, pick these up and eat in them; they would then wash them and keep them aside and this was such a terrible thing. This was the reason Pakistan was created. If we went to their houses and took part in their weddings and ceremonies, they used to really respect and honour us. They would give us uncooked food, ghee, atta, dal, whatever sabzis they had, chicken and even mutton, all raw. And our dealings with them were so low that I am even ashamed to say it. A guest comes to our house and we say to him, bring those utensils and wash them, and if my mother or sister have to give him food, they will more or less throw the roti from such a distance, fearing that they may touch the dish and become polluted... We don't have such low dealings with our lower castes as Hindus and Sikhs did with Musalmaans".

This shows that there was hatred prevailing between the communities which had not come out until the partition happened. The partition of India paved a way for these communities to bring out their sentiments and emotions in the name of religion. This, according to her, was one of the major reasons behind the great division of the Indian subcontinent and creation of India and Pakistan on the basis of religion.

“The Other Side of Silence:Voices from the Partition of India”, published in 1998, directly deals with the feelings and emotions of the people who have gone through the upheaval of the partition. It is written by interviewing the victims and their descendants based on their oral narratives and testimonies. This work focuses on the people who have suffered rather than the politics which led them towards the partition. It talks very less about who did it and talks more about what it did to us. The partition has long been seen as a political event by generations. Very few people know the actual events. But they always have been curious about the actual happenings. There is a gap between the real history and the common people. Urvashi Butalia has tried to fill this gap by placing the common people and their experiences at the center. She has explored the human aspect, the most important part of any society. Urvashi Butalia conducted interviews of actual victims of the partition violence as well as their descendants for over a decade. She studied diaries, letters, memoirs, documents of the parliament in order to concretise her say about the partition. Before doing so, she unfolds the history of her own family which witnessed the events that occurred before and after the partition and the various aspects of her own family in order to understand the common household and its mindset. The people she interviewed say that the partition still continues to haunt them and they still can not come to a conclusion. The mindset and the bitterness out of it still prevails.

“The Other Side of Silence:Voices from the Partition of India” brings forward the plight of Hindus and Sikhs who were forced to migrate to India. This work focuses on the people from the Punjab region which is the most affected geographical area during the partition. Urvashi Butalia has made 70 people speak from their heart and pour out everything that was suppressed within them. She has made them express themselves and has connected it with her own thoughts. She has written about the marginalised people of the Indian society and how they dealt with the partition. She tells about how the Hindu and Sikh families killed their own wives, daughters and children in order to defend familial honour and pride associated with the women in the society. Butalia stresses the trauma beared by women and children who suffered the most because of the partition. She points out that none of this reality has ever been mentioned in the official

documents. The stories about the partition of India would have died with its victims and survivors if Urvashi Butalia had not interviewed them thoroughly for her book “The Other Side of Silence:Voices from the Partition of India”.

2) **“Borders and Boundaries:Women in India’s Partition”** is a work authored by Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon published in 1998. They have penned it by keeping women at the centre. We have a lot of official accounts of the partition. But we have very less number of works citing social and personal history of people and especially women who participated in the partition. There are very few female-oriented accounts. “Borders and Boundaries:Women in India’s Partition” focuses the personal experiences and narratives and takes help of the official documents in order to bring out womens’ world during and after the partition. Bhasin and Menon talk about women’s struggle with their citizenship, dilemma regarding where to go after partition and their struggle for religious identity. Through this book, both the writers have highlighted womens’ lives during the holocaust of the partition and its impact on ordinary women. Their feminist perspective brings out the suppressed emotions and thoughts of women. They have interviewed survivors on both sides of the border dividing India and Pakistan. They have used women’s experiences, official accounts, archives and the reports of many charitable organisations dedicated for upliftment of victims of partition. The partition of Punjab is the central theme of this literary work. Apart from studying the torture and loss of life, this work focuses mainly on the various ways in which women survived.

“Borders and Boundaries:Women in India’s Partition” is the story of women who were killed, lost, raped and widowed during the massacre. It tries to get to know how they struggled for survival as some lost their families, some were raped, some widowed and some disowned by their loved ones. During this great migration, some women succeeded in crossing the border but many could not do it. Such women were kidnapped and abducted by the men of opposite communities. They were manhandled, tortured, raped and were made to forcibly marry the abductors and rapists. Some were even married with their rescuers. They had to choose what came their way out of having no option. Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon begin their work by emphasizing on how women were instructed or forced to commit mass suicide, had their body parts such as their feet, hands, and breasts cut off, and were kidnapped and raped in the midst of the regional conflict between the different religious ethnic groups such as the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. But they try to touch another aspect. They divulge in the historic process of recovery of targeted women. In this work, the authors portray the women who were targeted as victims and the women who rescued and rehabilitated them as saviors. They focus on the victimisation and rescue of the women at the hands of another women.

3) **“Partition : The Long Shadow”** Urvashi Butalia is a collection of essays by scholars. They have expressed their views regarding the partition of India. The partition has cast a long shadow on the lives of people of India and Pakistan. The borders that were drawn in 1947 not only divided nations but also families and friends. The essays in this collection explore the idea of identity, belonging and foreignness. This collection contains essays from scholars talking Bangladesh which was once a part of Pakistan until it was divided in 1971. This collection contains twelve essays from twelve different scholars talking about different things related to partition in some or other way. This collection not only explores the event and its consequences but also other things such as culture, literature and art that came out as a result of the partition of India. It explores all these things as mediums of expression in the post-partition India. All the essays in this collection touch a new dimension as they examine regions like Ladakh and Assam which are less talked about when it comes to the partition of India and its consequences.

4) Bal K. Gupta's "**Forgotten Atrocities: Memoirs of a Survivor of the 1947 Partition of India**" is an eye-witness account which tells the horrific stories of the holocaust during the religious cleansing of India in 1947. This book talks about the killings of Hindu and Sikh people at the hands of the Pakistani army done in Mirpur, a village in Punjab. Mirpur was a small city situated in Jammu and Kashmir on the border of India and Pakistan. Like millions of people, the people of Mirpur too were forced to migrate to India after it was invaded by the Pakistani army. This army was supported by the Pathan community, a clan related to Islam.

The migration was supposed to be a peaceful and an orderly event. But lack of proper attention by the Indian administration led Mirpur into havoc and it saw one of the most brutal and gory atrocities done on Hindus and Sikhs by Muslims, including the Pakistani army. Nearly fifteen thousand Hindus and Sikhs were killed by the Pakistani army in the name of religion. Bal K. Gupta himself is a descendant of the people who were murdered during the invasion in Mirpur. His grandmother, paternal uncle and great grandfather were killed. Many of his loved ones and close family members were victimised in some other way by the Muslim community and the Pakistani army.

5) Indian Council of Historical Research has brought forward the people's history through their experiences, recollections and reminiscences in "**Pangs of Partition : The Human Dimension Volume 2**". Edited by Indian scholars Shadakshari Settar and Indira Gupta, it contains eyewitness accounts, testimonials and oral narratives of the existing victims, descendants and survivors as well as people who had played different roles during and after the partition of India.

6) "**The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians**" is a recollection of memories of four generations of Pakistani and Indian people who have directly or indirectly experienced the great partition of India. It is written by modern age Pakistani historian and educationist Anam Zakaria. She takes interest in oral history and politics related to identity of common people. She throws light on the facts by interacting with the actual victims of the partition and their successors. She has tried to make them recall the scenario of the partition. She also has urged the survivors of the partition victims to narrate the stories told by their elders who had actually seen the communal riots and its results and impact on India and Pakistan at large. Anam Zakaria has interviewed seventeen people of different age groups who have shared different experiences and expressed different thoughts about one common thing, partition and how it affected them. The idea about writing this book was instant, she says. While on a train journey one day, her mind was stuck with this idea as she had conversed on the previous day with an old man about his trial to return to Amritsar which he had left during partition as a child. His choked words made her take more interest in the partition and its impact on individuals. "The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians" voices the muted Pakistanis and Indians who have never been asked about their feelings, thoughts regarding their upheaval because of the partition. Zakaria has done close conversations with seventeen people in and around Lahore having different backgrounds and from different socio-economic classes. She has tried to understand the consequences partition had on different strata of the society. Most of the interviewees have shared the memories of torture, rape, abduction, looting, kidnapping, death and displacement. All the information she got from them is general in nature that is the scenario of partition and its impact. But she stumbled upon one more important thing which she considers very important.

Many of interviewees shared the human side. The human emotions that had been under wraps for years have been unwrapped by Anam Zakaria through her book. Many of the interviewees have shared their personal lives, how their families were affected in the short as well as long term. They have talked about

how Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs participated in different festivities, how they ate sweets given by one another and how these familial relations were instantly shattered due to partition. But most of them have said that the love and affection they shared with one another is still there. This human angle has been explored by Anam Zakaria through her impelling book. “The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians” has been divided into four parts which contain fourteen chapters in total. Each chapter is attributed to one person, either Pakistani or Indian, expressing her memories of the pre-partition and post-partition scenarios and their impact on their lives. Each part has been written with a specific purpose. The first part focuses on the border disputes, the second one highlights the familial trauma, the third chapter talks about memories of the past whereas the last one sheds light on people who try to make sense of everything that took place.

7) Swedish political scientist and author of Pakistani descent Ishtiaq Ahmed has unravelled the bloody and inhumane history of the partition of the Punjab region through his book “**The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy Through Secret British Reports and First Person Accounts**”. It is a chronological account of what happened in 1947 when the Punjab Province of British India was partitioned. Ahmed has traced survivors and eyewitnesses and have recollected their memories in this book. Besides shedding new light on the events through secret British reports, this book contains touching accounts by eyewitnesses, survivors and participants in the holocaust, from both sides of the border of India. This book highlights the role of religious differences and these differences were used by the political leaders who knowingly led the innocent people towards the unwanted bloodbath.

8) “**The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia : Refugees, Boundaries, Histories**” is an impelling book written by Pakistani author Vazira Fazila Yacoobali Zamindar. She has brought out the role of the Indian and the Pakistani administrations in shaping the massive displacement of millions of people during and after the partition. She underlines how these administrations were busy in drawing the political borders by forgetting the human angle of their actions. This book explores ethnography and archives and focuses oral history of the partition of India. Fazila has documented the heart-wrenching stories of the north Indian Muslims who were divided between Delhi and Karachi because of the partition. She has studied Urdu newspapers and government records of both India and Pakistan. Ordinary people, their lives and thoughts have been put forth in this book. It talks about the Muslim community and its marginalization at large. Divided in seven chapters, this book discusses various angles of the partition.

9) “**Partition Voices: Untold British Stories**” is a non-fictional book written by Kavita Puri, a British writer. This book contains interviews of the British people who witnessed the partition of India in 1947. All these British people originate from the Indian subcontinent but reside in Britain. Published in 2019, this new age work talks about the turbulent scenario of the great division of India and shattering creation of two countries based on religion. It offers real life stories narrated by the people of the Indian origin during the partition. This book has stories which tell about the collateral damage partition did and how people of both the countries were caught in the chaos. Kavita Puri has made these people express themselves. She has explored the humane side of the partition. Kavita Puri, while living in Britain, came across many people who were of the Indian origin and were displaced because of the partition. They were made to flee or left India according to their own will. Experiencing the trauma of the partition or ashamed of what they did during it with their own hands, they were silent and were dealing with it emotionally and mentally over the years.

Kavita Puri’s own father is one of the close witnesses of the partition of India. He has provided the details of the months leading to the partition in 1947. He has talked about the division and uncertainty regarding

citizenship and how millions had to suffer and pay unaffordable price. In this book, we come across people who were children during the partition and saw women being raped and killed, saw mass killings and destruction everywhere. They also provide stories of bravery and heroism of the people who tried their best to fight the violence that had erupted. We meet many characters throughout this memoir telling different stories about one common thing that is the partition and their involvement in the whole process. They talk about their personal lives and their connection to the events. All of them regret doing one or other thing during the partition. Some of them can be seen as contended souls as they consider their acts justifiable. Each and every story in this book makes us understand the partition, its background and its consequences and how it still continues to live in the minds of people.

10) Prominent British writer Yasmin Khan has examined the context, execution and aftermath of the partition of India in her book “**The Great Partition**”. She talks about death, displacement, rape and plunder which hit the common people at large in this book. She also draws our attention towards the mindlessness and recklessness of the process through which the partition took place. “The Great Partition” mainly focuses on the great human loss and how it still continues to haunt the generations. Through this book, she has analysed all the aspects of the partition including the past, present and future of the countries created after it. Yasmin Khan has touched all the aspects of the division of India through political, social and human perspective. So it is necessary to study her non-fictional book to understand the legacy of the partition. It surely helps us to understand the consequences of the communal violence and how it makes the human society pay vehemently.

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