PERSPECTIVES ON THE PARTITION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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Abstract: For a long time, the Indian subcontinent was under British rule, but more and more Indians fought for independence in the twentieth century, and the British were forced to renounce their rule. In 1947, the British offered independence to two different states, Pakistan and India, which provoked only violence, as the two peoples had lived together for a long period of time and were suddenly being made to choose a side according to their religion; thus began a time of death and sorrow. The traumatic experience of the partition of India from Pakistan is not only recorded by historians, but also by writers, and the current paper will present both the way in which this event is reflected by history and in novels.

Keywords: the British Empire, South Asia, India's partition, Pakistan partition, World literature.

In the beginning, the British had a weak influence in the East, as exploration and trading in South Asia was in the hands of the Portuguese. Overtime, gradually, the London East India Company, founded in 1600, began to grow in influence in the Asian space. "Unlike the pioneers of the Asia trade, the Portuguese, who adopted a wholly state-led strategy, or the Dutch, who introduce a mixed public-private model, the English pushed forward a private sector strategy for tapping the wealth of the East"[1]. This control of the wealth of India was made through the English merchants that managed to convince the local rulers to give them freedom to establish their trade in the Indian subcontinent. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, "England had received almost unlimited rights to Indian property when Great Moghul Jahangir sent a letter to King James I stating that "in whatsoever place they (the English) choose to live, they may have free liberty without any restraint," asking only that his Majesty command his merchants"[2] to bring valuable goods.

In the nineteenth century, the area controlled by the English company expended "in two ways. First was the use of subsidiary agreements between the British and local rulers, under which control of foreign affairs, defence, and communications was transferred to the Company, and Indian rulers were allowed to govern more or less as they wished on other matters. This development created what came to be called Princely States. The second method of control over India was outright military conquest or annexation of territories; it was these areas that were properly called British India, and nearly all of northern India was annexed by the British"[3]. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the leadership of the Indian territory obtained by the East India Company and the sovereignty of the Indian princely states was transferred to the British Crown. In 1858, Queen Victoria "announced to the people of India that they were to be admitted freely and impartially to political office"[4]. Unfortunately, by

[1] Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World. How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational,* London, Pluto Press, 2012, p. 19.
[2] Beverly Rorem, *Passion for Tea,* Bloomington, Author House, 2008, p. 36.
[3] *Ibidem.*
[4] Stuart H. Graham, "Home Rule for India", in *The American Political Science Review,* vol. 13, no. 2, 1919, p. 301.

1909, through various reforms, the British only "gave the peoples of India a larger consultative voice in Indian affairs without making their voice count. […] [This led to the rise of] [f]resh agitation"[5].

As the British Empire entered the World War II to fight against the Axis powers, the Viceroy of India also "proclaimed India at war without bothering to consult either Mahatma Gandhi or Congress President Barrister Jawajarlal Nehru. […] Linlithgow's arrogance in coldly ignoring Nehru and Gandhi triggered Congress's refusal to cooperate […], leading to the arrest of their entire high command […]. Quaid-i-Azam […] Jinnah's Muslim League, on the other hand, strongly supported the Raj […]. Therefore, when the League met in 1940, demanding that a separate nation called Pakistan ("Land of the Pure") be carved out of the north India's Muslim majority provinces after war's end, British officials agreed"[6]. As such, in 1947, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Albert Victor Nicholas Louis Francis Mountbatten, decided that the United Kingdom will withdraw from India on 15 August 1947, "ignoring the advice of Gandhi and Jinnah to slow down the deadly partition process, and refusing even to allow British governors of Punjab and Bengal to view the new partition map lines for their own provinces". This gave rise to "communal violence"[7] against religious minorities and millions of "terrified Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs across all of North India ran for their lives, desperately seeking to escape the knives, guns, and flames that consumed most of what had been peaceful Punjab and Bengal"[8].

While the fate of the territories governed by the Crown were decided by the British, the princely states had to decide on their own if they would be part of Pakistan or India. The "princely states located in Pakistan, one after another, decided to opt for Pakistan as these were predominantly Muslim states with 90 per cent or more of their population being Muslims"[9]. In the case of the Jammu and Kashmir princely state, the situation was more complicated as there was a Hindu majority in Jammu, a Buddhist community in Ladakh and a Muslim majority in the Kashmir valley and in the far north of the state. If in the beginning, the Maharaja was more inclined to accede to Pakistan or organize a referendum to see the opinion of the population, because of the tribal invasion, "the Government of Jammu and Kashmir seemed to have no alternative left but to seek help from India. […] In return for the military assistance [Prime Minister] Mahajan agreed to accept"[10] their accession to India. This led to the First Kashmir War, as the attacks of the Muslim tribes increased and, in the end, even Pakistan intervened, as the government did not accept the accession of Kashmir as a correct path. At the end of the war, a cease fire was issued and United Nation proposed a plebiscite. As the plebiscite did not come to pass, conflicts arose in this region, and new wars were erupted in this area in 1965 and 1999, fought by the Indian and Pakistani armies.

The Partition in Literature

When authors depict the partition of India and Pakistan, they also focus on the thousands of people that fled from one country to another, driven by the way in which the locals killed Hindus and Sikhs in the territories of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Hindus killed Muslims in the Republic of India. Furthermore, the literary "Partition narratives represent non-standardized versions of Partition that often stands in disjunction with an

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Stanley Wolpert, "A Mixed Legacy. From Raj to Modern India", *Harvard International Review,* vol. 32, no.4, 2011, p. 37.

[7] Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Partition", *Key Concepts in Modern Indian Studies,* edited by Gita Dharampal-Frick et al., New York, New York University Press, 2015, p. 203.

[8] Stanley Wolpert, *op.cit.,* p.37.

[9] Qazi Shakil Ahmad, "The Partition Plan, India Design and Kashmir Issue", *Pakistan Horizon,* vol. 56, no.2, 2003, p. 18.

[10] *Ibidem,* p. 34

otherwise one-dimensional and often heavily censored (national) version of an historical event, which in actuality is characterized by its diverse dimensions and narratives"[11]. This image is reflected in the novel *Train to Pakistan*, by Khushwant Singh, as the author describes how a train with dead Hindus and Sikhs arrives in India through the border village of Mano Majra, where Hindus and Muslims live besides each other. As this train appears, the peace of the village is destroyed, and the locals want to eject the Muslims from their homes. Firstly, they are sent to a refugee camp. Afterwards, they board a train to Pakistan, but Malli gangs and the locals that have grudges against Muslims want to "attack the train near the bridge tonight. It is taking Muslims of Chundunnugger and Mano Majra to Pakistan"[12]. Another profound book on the subject of partition is Veera Hiranandani's, *The Night Diary*, in which Nisha, a half Muslim half Hindus girl, escapes with her father and brother from the city of Mirpur Khas, as her brother is bullied, and the father is afraid that the Muslims might kill them. As they travel to India, they encounter other thousands of Hindus that have the same ideas, some of which are killed by fanatic Muslims, others die of thirst in the Thar dessert, others become crazy, and only a few manage to arrive to India and start a new life. Nisha's family is among the lucky cases.

Unlike the previous books, in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, the partition is described through an allegory with the house of Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother. Like India, the house "is made up of a diverse population of inhabitants who have trouble finding commonalities or a shared history. The parallel continues when the grandmother's grandfather dies, the absence of his controlling personality leads to petty conflicts between the family members"[13], which led to the decision "to divide the house with a wooden partition wall"[14], very similar to the division with borders between India and Pakistan.

The Partition in Movies

In a similar way to the aforementioned books, Indian movies illustrate the traumatic experience of the Indian and Pakistani partition. One of the most representative movies is *The Train to Pakistan*, which was adapted from the book with the same name in 1998 and directed by Pamela Rooks. This movie "provides a picture of Mano Majra, a village in Indian Punjab, close to the newly formed border, in which trains play a vital part in the everyday life of the villagers, and subsequently, trains become the cause of turbulence in an otherwise calm and peaceful village. It is where train loads of dead refugees arrive; the iron railway bridge on a nearby river is the site of the climatic action"[15]. The movie realistically represents the way in which "ambushes and killings in trains and at various railway stations in Punjab make the communal massacres difficult to forget or ignore"[16]. Another dramatic movie is *Refugee*, from 2000, directed by J. P. Dutta. It tells the stories of the refugees from 1947 and 1971, after Bangladesh had obtained its independence from Pakistan. Manzur Ahmad, who had migrated to East Pakistan after the partition of India, must get to West Pakistan with his family after Bangladesh becomes an independent state. But in order to do so, they need to follow an agent that smuggles them inside India and, afterwards, into Pakistan. The *Refugee* tells a sad story, but as the agent falls in love with Nazneen Ahmad, the movie is transformed into a love story

[11] Mohd Farhan Saiel, "Alienated Suffering of Divide and Cross: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines", *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences,* vol. 6, no. 6, 2021, pp. 39-40.
[12] Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan,* Haryana, Penguin Books, 2016, p. 176.
[13] Thomas F. Halloran, "National Allegory and the Partition in The Shadows Line", *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Essays,* edited by Bibhash Choudhury, Delhi, Rimhhim House, 2018, p. 52.
[14] Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines,* Haryana, Penguin Books, 2019, pp.135-136.
[15] Prabhjot Parmar, "Films & Partition. Train of History", *The Tribune,* published on August 5th 2007, accessed on September 11th 2023, available at https://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070805/spectrum/main1.htm.
[16] *Ibidem.*

wherein the agent starts seeing the refugees not as things that have to be shipped from one place to another, but as human beings that suffer.

The most impressive partition movie is the 2019 *Bharat*, directed by Ali Abbas Zafar. The movie has some similarities with the South Korean film from 2014, *Ode to My Father*, directed by Yoon Je-kyoon. *Bharat* tells the story of Bharat Kumar, a shopkeeper in Delhi, who refuses to sell his shop to a mall developer. On his birthday, Bharat Kumar tells his life story to his grandniece, from when he was 7 and boarded a train to run from Pakistan to India together with his parents, as Muslims had started to kill the Hindus in Pakistan. Arriving in India, he started working at the store owned his father's sister. He fell in love with a circus worker and also started working there. After an accident at the circus, Bharat tried to earn more money at an oil company in Saudi Arabia. After leaving the job in Saudi Arabia, where he had fallen in love with Kumud, he found out that his uncle needed to sell his store, and in order to buy it he got himself hired on a cargo ship. After buying the store with the help of Kumud, the viewer is shown how he managed to reunite with the sister he lost in the Indian partition.

In conclusion, we might say that the traumatic experience of the partition of India and Pakistan is not only a historical reality that is described in history books and articles, but an important reality that is also presented in novels and movies, so that large masses of people can learn about this tragic event. Furthermore, if the younger generations will learn about this traumatic event from movies and novels, it is possible that the newer generations from all over the world will be more understanding with the people who have a different religious or political opinion from them.

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