

## Conclusion

In my dissertation, I have tried to bring fictional representations of Partition out of the context-free domain in which the existing scholarship put them. As the reader moves from a pre-eighties novel to another written after the paradigm shift of the long nineties, she discovers many points of political difference in the profiling of Partition. I have argued that the critical apparatus needs to be readjusted as the scholar's attention moves along the timeline and encounters the decline of the Nehruvian secular-liberal problematic near the end of the nineteen seventies. During the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, the Indian socio-political arena has been a fertile ground for movements from the subaltern and the disinherited, leading to a rethinking of the issues of development and community.

In my work, I have explored how fictional representation of Partition is directly linked with the existing power/knowledge regime of an era. Though not *determined* by the epistemic framework in a narrow sense, the representation of Partition responds to the existing order of things, and that response is disciplined/made possible by the horizon of contemporary discursive matrix. The authorial

politics of representation shifts as the concept of community is disentangled from colonial narratives of progress and civilization, and put under erasure. Thus, community, a fundamental category in the sociological literature on Partition, becomes conceptually fractured and politically loaded in the wake of the turn of the millennium representation. Consequently, the fictional representation of Partition does not remain a monolithic structure of violent images and universal values. The shifting authorial politics enables completely different readings of ethnocentrism, violence, women's issues and migration – four major aspects of the fictional representation of Partition.

Ethnocentrism and violence are differently understood on two sides of the long nineties. In the pre-eighties works of Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz and Attia Hosain, a conceptualization of “organic” community was entangled with the colonial narrative of progress and civilization. During this era, the colonial knowledge of “communalism” was represented as an aberrant force challenging either the process of modernisation, and the timeless cohesiveness of organic communities. These conceptualisations of community and ethnocentrism evoked apocalyptic visions of ethnic conflict. At the turn of the millennium, these constructions are replaced by a much keener authorial awareness of the imagined nature of community. The novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, Amitav Ghosh, Shauna Singh Baldwin and others, written after the long nineties, focus on the structural violence ensuing from a colonial governmentality, as well as

the symbolic violence born of discourses. The pre-eighties authorial representation of violence *per se* and its reading as the failure of the universal values of humanism and civilization are replaced with the understanding of violence as the expression of a desire to inscribe one community's signature on the body and self of the Other.

The chasm between the two modes of representation widens when they deal with the woman question. Representation during the Nehruvian liberal-secular discursive regime exhibits a politics much different from the postcolonial introduced in the long nineties. The representation of the early novels is implicated in the colonial narrative of community and its parochial standards. On the other hand, the post-nineties fiction interrogates the roles assigned to women by their communities and attempts a *gendered* historiography of Partition. However, the difference between the two modes of representation is possibly the most pronounced on the issues of migration and territoriality. As the colonial conception of *gemeinschaft* spoke of an organic community inextricably tied to its patch of land, migration necessarily was an *uprooting*. However, defining diaspora by a nostalgic association with the mythical "homeland" overlooks the economic and culturally productive nature of their identity. The second generation novels represent the life of the displaced Partition survivors as hybrid and porous, achieved through a complex discursive negotiation with their host cultures.

Partition still remains a major theme in contemporary publications: fiction and non-fiction, translation, scholarly work in the disciplines of history and the

social sciences. It is evident that the steady stream of novels with a Partition theme has not dried: possibly an increase in its volume might surprise us in the years to come. Though I have been in a comparative mode until now, it is only fitting that this dissertation should end with an appraisal of the turn of the millennium novels that deal with the Partition motif in *contemporary* violence. It is worthwhile to explore how they put community under erasure, and move towards a democracy-to-come.

Partition scholarship at the turn of the millennium evidently is a result of the renewed strife among ethnic groups, as India witnessed the rise of organised *Hinduvta* in the nineties, while Islamic radicalism swelled in the neighbouring countries. The ethnic cleansing of the 1980s and the 1990s genocides is the primary impulse behind the flood of recent Partition scholarship. Titles of recent works such as *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender and National Culture in Postcolonial India* and *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts* underline the fact that the spectre of Partition, its legacy of distrust and violence, still haunts the three postcolonial nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: its shadow falls on the dialogues that tentatively begin and often fail to reach an amicable closure. The recurrences have forced to change the position of academia (Didur 4), which had earlier sought to push the violence of 1947 under the carpet, presumably in the hope that time will heal the wounds, traumatic incidents would be forgotten, and communal peace would be restored in the postcolonial India. Chronic ethnic violence has compelled

scholars to address the legacy of Partition, and understand the psychosis that characterises life in the Indian subcontinent. As the narrator of Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* ponders over its unique nature:

It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the fear of the nature ... nor to the fear of the violence of the state, ... It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (204)

Apart from an acute consciousness of the fragility of normalcy, *Shadow Lines* is remarkable for its criticism of the absurdity of borders drawn based on demographic profiling and imagining of nations, which led to the dispossession of minorities:

Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. (*SL* 215).

Once enumerated communities start pursuing the logic of territorial rights based on difference and demographic strength, further partitions must follow. This was the fate of Pakistan: it survived for a mere twenty-five years before being further partitioned in 1971. East Pakistan vanished from the map to make place for the Bengali nationalism, which was much stronger than Islamic solidarity. This proud linguistic nationalism expressed itself through the name of the newborn country: Bangladesh. Bihari Muslims who migrated to East Pakistan became unwanted citizens there, as did the Mohajirs in (West) Pakistan. In Salman Rushdie's magic universe of *Shame* (1983), Bilquis represents the curse of migration. Her clothes and eyebrows are burnt away by the fiery blast of Partition – her youth flies past her, carried on the wings of the explosion:

All migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes – but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognise them, because it is the fate of the migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see *the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging ...* (63-64)

However, married to the great hero of the proud nation surging ahead, Bilquis has to disown history like one rebuffs poor cousins who visit occasionally to seek help. The other side of the hopeful career of new nations is an arbitrariness of borders and

forced migration. The narrator of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* wishes to tell his Egyptian friend Nabeel how his family was in an absurd situation after the creation of Bangladesh. His father, who had migrated from Dhaka in 1947, was sent to the Indian diplomatic mission in Dhaka, the new capital of Bangladesh.

There was an element of irony in our living in Dhaka as 'foreigners', for Dhaka was in fact our ancestral city: both my parents were from families which belonged to the middle-class Hindu community that had once flourished there. But long before the Muslim-majority state of Pakistan was created my ancestors had moved westwards, and ...we were Indians now, and Dhaka was foreign territory to us although we still spoke its dialect and still had several relatives living in the old Hindu neighbourhoods in the heart of the city. (AL 205)

There were many occasions when strangers would come inside the high walled compound of their house, stay for some days, enjoy their hospitality and go away. Years later he understood these were people belonging to the Hindu minority, seeking shelter at the only fortified Hindu house in the locality. On an evening in January 1964, a violent mob surrounded their house, but the police, alerted by his father's Muslim friends, arrived swiftly and drove the mob away. Later he learnt that in Calcutta, there was a riot on the same day, and not only violence but also acts of kindness were mirrored on both sides. The doctor-al-Hindi "Amitab" could not expect his Egyptian friend to understand an Indian's terror of symbols: a man's dhoti

or foreskin did not become in their part of the world signifiers of realpolitik.

Pogroms could easily begin in the Indian subcontinent any moment, with a simple act of flaunting or violating symbols such as a dead cow or a pig. Their world was far less violent in spite of the occasional turbulence they have witnessed.

Tagore understood India's problems arising out of the western nation's infusing of its poison to Asiatic peoples who were not nations. "A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose", he feels, "[S]ociety as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself" (19). Its inherent greed, selfishness and cold, hard rationality can only follow the logic of expansion and aggression towards other people. He vividly compares the emotionless ruling of India to hermetically sealed tinned food imported to the India market (24). The Asiatic culture "is already carrying in her quivering flesh harpoons sent by the unerring aim of the Nation, the creature of science and selfishness" (43). Images of man threatened by organised, gluttonous machines confirm the absence of affect that he thinks to be nationalism's problem. The age of intellect and science, lauded so much by Nehru, is like the grammarian who walks through poetry and goes straight to the roots of words, because "he is not seeking reality, but law" (47). The unbridled rush for power leads to the loss of ethical moorings of a culture:

Take away man from his natural surroundings, from the fullness of his communal life, with all its living associations of beauty and love

and social obligations, and you will be able to turn him into so many fragments of a machine for the production of wealth on a gigantic scale. Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living flowers and fruit. (50-51)

This process of dehumanizing has gone on in commerce and politics, in an unbridled manner, and a quest for power has greatly damaged the composite culture of pre-colonial India. In place of cohabiting and mixed cultures, India has communities competing for power, separating themselves from their beloved neighbours and thriving on their powerlessness. Amitav Ghosh elaborates this point in *In an Antique Land*, where the anthropologist “Amitab” and the short-sighted Imam of an Egyptian village have an altercation about the superiority of their national arsenals: “the Imam and I: delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence” (AL 236).

The way of salvation from this de-humanising influence of nationalism is a synthesis of conflicting demands and ideologies. That is possible if the contending cultural claims could be brought to an open political arena where a synthesis could be achieved. India’s difference from other two nations carved out from her rests on the fact that in spite of major genocides, state repressions and social prejudices she has worked slowly on the essentially Tagorean ideal of hospitality and synthesis. Though she has not abandoned nationalism, she modified it constantly. This is

evident from the constant lamentations of *Hinduvta* purists who have not achieved their ideal of Hindi-Hindu-*Hinduvta* yet. This is a point made by an old Sikh Partition survivor in Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* at the critical moment of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. Talking to the reporter who comes to investigate Priscilla Hart's mystery murder in the Jalilgarh riot, the Superintendent of Police, Gurinder Singh mentions the Sikh genocide of 1984 after the death of Indira Gandhi. Gurinder's brother-in-law and his nephew ran into a rioting mob while returning home after a cricket match. They were roasted alive inside their car. The state not only shut its eyes to such incidents but also clandestinely supported them: the involvement of politicians and the complicity of administration in pogroms have become common knowledge. Gurinder, mad with grief at this fate of his favourite nephew, decided to resign from the IPS and take up arms against the administration as a Khalistani rebel. His father, who had lost everything in Partition and painstakingly rebuilt his fortune in India, prevented him. He pointed out that such a step, instead of deterring the insensitive majority, would only foreclose the possibility of a future multiculturalism:

“If I brought you up to believe everything would be easy, that the whole world would act with integrity and honesty and decency and fairness, then I have failed you ... You can only be true to yourself, and the soil from which you have sprung, and to the oath that you have taken.... Whose country is this if not yours? Since the days of

Gandhi, we have tried to build a country that is everyone's and no one's, a country that excludes nobody, a country that no one group can claim theirs. When Jinnah and the Muslim League wanted to create a country for Muslims, their Pakistan, did the Congress leaders say fine, we will create a country for Hindus? The whole point about India is that this is a country for everybody, and everybody has the duty, the obligation to keep it that way. (197)

Though somewhat heavy-handed, it is a timely reminder from Tharoor that it is not in the ideals of a pure nation but hospitality for all cultures that India's future lies. This position is different from a Nehruvian secular-liberal stand, which is still echoed by authors such as Gurcharan Das. His *A Fine Family* traces the growth and rise of the new middle class in the postcolonial India. Bombay is the symbol of the new economy, a faithful replication of the American dream, a space where the middle class Indian of any caste and creed is free to thrive:

“... Bombay belongs to no one. Muslims, Parsees, Hindus and the British – all of them made it into what it is today. And now people from all over India come to make their fortunes here ... ancestral attachments fade away and we begin to call Bombay our home.” (240)

“Ancestral attachments” do not really fade away as Nehru had predicted. Threats of Hindu fundamentalism and pan-Islamic terrorism continue to trouble India's cultural synthesis, but it is clear that in spite of all their advances, Indian democracy

will thrive. The eighties and nineties saw a surge of movements by women, dalits, environmentalists and ethnicities. They have been able to leave significant marks through policy changes and creating an arena for constant attacks on the state-capital collusion. If the almost universal voting resulted in politicians thinking more about impending elections than future development, it has also secured a space for dialogues between demands of different groups and the state. Closure of dialogues or heavy-handedness on the part of the government cannot succeed in India for a long period. In the words of Jacques Derrida, sustained criticism and re-scripting of the categories of nation and democracy is the urgent need:

... why are we interested in questioning, deconstructing if you want, the canonical concept of friendship? *It is in the name of democracy ...* when I speak of a 'democracy to come', I don't mean a future democracy, a new regime, a new organisation of nation-states (although this may be hoped for) but I mean this 'to come': the promise of an authentic democracy which is never embodied in what we call democracy. *This is a way of going on criticising what is everywhere given today under the name of democracy in our societies.*

(n.pag., italics added)

This unconditional act of opening the border gates of the nation, archival research and a patient listening to the prevailing silence helps the story-teller to find “the

remains of the small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories” (*AL* 339) that were partitioned long ago.