

The Agonies of Nationhood: Perceiving Partition in a Postcolonial Context

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Abstract

In the recorded human history, since the Second World War, the partition of 1947 can be deemed as one of the largest displacements of people. About one million people died by the resultant violence and some twenty million people were brutally displaced. However, in 1971, Pakistan's East wing was again separated as Bangladesh. Sadly there is very few critical examinations of the politics of national identity formation in the light of partition memory. Hence, this paper critically examines the dynamics/politics of the relationship between the official narrative and the collective memory of the partition. It is primarily interested in not what happened in history but how we remember it. This paper is largely concentrated on different relevant theoretical premises instead of any singular text. To do so, it elaborates on Anderson's proposition of how the construction of collective memory legitimizes the process that creates, sustains and reproduces an "imagined community" by providing them with a "sense of history, place and belonging". It also takes into account the notions like "selective tradition" and "structure of feeling" from Raymond Williams' seminal essay namely "The Analysis of Culture" to illustrate that the shared memory of the past or the rejection of the past provides groups with a kind of sense of community. In this way history of a period has always been a gradual composition where there is an essential invention of later/ different periods or generations. Power relations are tacitly at play in constructing this sense among citizens. Thus, the politics of memory engages, to borrow Confino's phrase, the questions of "who wants whom to remember what and why". Finally, this paper submits that in the absence of official commemoration, memories of the partition projected in fictional works rather create a counter-narrative as these fictional works have facilitated, altered or challenged the collective identity meta-narrative. As people's future social and political actions are guided by the way they envision their past; so this paper aspires to give voice to the spiral of silences around the 1947 partition by delving deep into the dynamics of remembering and forgetting in forging the national identities in this part of the globe, specially, in the light of postcolonial discourses.

Keywords: Partition, Nation, Postcolonialism, Memory, Trauma, History.

One of the greatest lessons we can learn from history is that our past is no longer past to us as long as we don't forget them voluntarily. There is always a simultaneous amalgamation of the pastness of the past and the present moment of it. Hence, for any critical discursive deliberation, it is almost impossible to overlook our pre-partition past and how the glaring events surrounding the partition period have still been massively impacting our thoughts, actions and lives even after almost seven decades of the post-colonial and post-partition period.¹ The extent of these effects is so massive that the period since 1947 is still too brief to permit a fundamental reassessment of the significance of the event which meant so much to everyone involved.²

Wherever and whenever we long for addressing partition issues by taking into account both fact and fictions surrounding it, it becomes almost inevitable that the issues like nationalism, religion, ideology, power relations, identity formation and especially the complex dynamics of the intra-traffics between memory, fiction and dream will immediately jump into our discursive frameworks.³ Sharma aptly comments

¹ Charteji, Joya. "Partition Studies: Prospects and Pitfalls." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 73, no. 2, 2014, pp. 309–312. P. 311

² Smita Tewari Jassal, and Eyal Ben-Ari. "Listening for Echoes: Partition in Three Contexts." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 22, 2006, pp. 2213–2220. P. 2217

³ For details see Chhabra, Meenakshi. "Memory Practices in History Education about the 1947 British India Partition: Opportunities and Challenges to Breaching Hegemonic Remembering." *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 10–28.

that “Memory, as they remind us, is not just about remembering; it is also about forgetting.”⁴ In the similar line Paul argues that: “The main point (in this chapter) consists, therefore, in denouncing the illusory attribution of memories to ourselves, when we claim to be their original owners.”⁵ Ernest Renan, in his top-rated essay “what is nation” categorically asserts:

Man is neither enslaved by his race, nor by his language, nor by his religion, nor by the direction of mountain ranges. A great aggregation of men, sane of mind and warm of heart, creates moral consciousness called nation.⁶

If we simplify Renan’s take, it seems that the existence of nations is rather good and even to some extent necessary as their existence tends to ensure liberty for the citizens. According to him, there always have been two essential constituting ingredients of nation-building. The first one is ‘past,’ and the later is the ‘present.’ The past, Renan observes, is the joint possession of rich heritage of memories while the latter is “...actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve the undivided inheritance. The nation, like human relationships, is the outcome of long past efforts, sacrifices and devotions.”⁷ In short, his submission is that the construction of any nation inherently demands a dynasty representing an ancient conquest that is first accepted and then forgotten by the mass people.⁸

In the recorded human history, since the Second World War, the partition of 1947 can be deemed one of the most massive displacements of people. About one million people died by the resultant violence and some twenty million people were brutally displaced. However, in 1971, Pakistan’s East wing was again separated as Bangladesh. The Indian subcontinent has seen many wars and partitions over the last century. These partitions changed and reshaped many geo-political boundaries and socio-cultural aspects of the subcontinent. The liberation war of 1971 is the latest major event in the subcontinent which led to the formation of the new country of Bangladesh. Bangladesh, which was earlier known as East Pakistan, was internally colonized by the West Pakistanis, now known as Pakistan. Although both being part of one country, they were people of two different cultures, languages and were separated by hundreds of miles geographically. This difference led to the strife and as a result, West Pakistan dominated East Pakistan and subjected it to various forms of racial oppression and cultural superiority. The failure of the two-nation theory testified the fundamentally fluid and porous nature of the borders.⁹ Unfortunately, since 1971, Bangladesh has been struggling in subtle ways to define its ‘national’ identity. The official/ national narrative of Bangladesh rarely acknowledges the role of the 1947 partition. It has been overlooked and hardly there is any serious critical examination of the ‘politics of national identity’ formation¹⁰ in the light of partition memory.

Therefore, Professor Abdullah Al Mamun sharply comments¹¹ that if we rewrite Kundera’s “...the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”¹² as the struggle of the people against the man in power is the struggle of continuing telling stories of dreams against all-enveloping historical amnesia and forgetting, we may aptly participate into the whole nexus of the problematics of identity formation which is precisely premised on hyper-nationalism and the resultant fissures into the very fabric of sub-continental societies haunting and taunting the reality of fiction as well as the fiction of reality. This struggle is primarily against our amnesia, against our own deliberate choices of forgetting. The more we become self-reflexive and self-critical, the more we discover the contradictions, the paradoxes and the aporias that shape and condition what we call ‘we’ or ‘I’.¹³

By the time its frenzied violence was almost ebbed in 1948, the partition of the Indian subcontinent had already displaced “8-10 million persons, left 5-10 million persons dead, and 75 thousand women raped,

⁴ Sharma qtd in Ayesha Jalal: *The Pity of Partition*. Lecture at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 2 August 2012.

⁵ Paul Recouer qtd in Samaddar, Ranabir. “The Historiographical Operation: Memory and History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 22, 2006, pp. 2236–2240. P.2236

⁶ Renan, Ernest: “What is a Nation?” in Pecora, Vincent (ed.): *Nations and Identities*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001 pp.162-176. P. 169

⁷ Ibid, p.164

⁸ Also see for details Chhabra, Meenakshi. “Memory Practices in History Education about the 1947 British India Partition: Opportunities and Challenges to Breaching Hegemonic Remembering.” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 10–28.

⁹ Upreti, B. C. “Nationalism in South Asia: Trends And Interpretations.” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 67, no. 3, 2006, pp. 535–544. P. 538

¹⁰ Gilmartin, David. “The Historiography of India’s Partition: Between Civilization and Modernity.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2015, pp. 23–41.

¹¹ For details see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WwyTY-rSq0&t=36s>

¹² Kundera qtd in Pifer, Ellen. “The Book of Laughter and Forgetting”: Kundera’s Narration against Narration.” *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1992, pp. 84–96. P. 92-93

¹³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WwyTY-rSq0&t=36s>

abducted or widowed”.¹⁴ Mushirul Hasan, who is recognized as one of the prominent Indian Historians, therefore, rightly remarks that “...one cannot help concluding with a not-so-comforting thought: never before in South Asian history did so few divides so many, so needlessly.”¹⁵ Moshirul, for instance, highlights one of the paradoxes in one of his best-known essays namely ‘Memories of a fragmented nation, rewriting the histories of India’s partition’ writes:

Not everyone who raised the green flag was inspired by a shared ideal of creating an Islamic state. Many were pushed into taking religious/ Islamic positions or used Muslim League as a vehicle to articulate, define and promote their material gain.¹⁶

Unfortunately, we have a tradition of confusion and contradiction concerning all these terms— partition, history and memory. They have a different meaning to different classes, ethnic groups and religious segments. Due to this differentiation, these terms hold problematic relations with the concept of our ‘independence struggle’ and the emergence of the independent states— especially the emergence of Bangladesh that gives, for the first time in history, a separate independent identity to a portion of the Bangalees. Ayesha Jalal in her recent works clearly shows that the internal dynamics of different sects of contemporary societies/groups transcend the known boundaries of partition discourse.¹⁷ For instance, Mufti, taking one of the identity tokens namely the ‘gender’, suggests that the recurring figure of the prostitutes in partition literature can very well be conceived in the context where “Mother India” as well as the notion of being a woman/womanhood were problematic venues of modernist nationalism.¹⁸ All these aspects together actually, these researchers observe, make the whole field almost intelligible for those who so readily take as a linear or clear cut event. Therefore, despite all attempts from different powerful spheres to simplify the partition discourse, it remains pregnant with highly dense complexities. Therefore, based on his experience as head of the fact-finding mission Gyanendra Pandey makes a strong point that to interpret any communal violence holistically, it is essential to go beyond the meta-narrative and graph the cases of individual memories of trauma as well as the traumatized memories.¹⁹ Here the never-ending process of reconfiguring and readapting memory is a key to interpret the inherent contradictions in memory places of partition.

Fictions too can offer alternative zone of reflecting. Ramu Nagappan, for instance, remarks:

To argue is to probe the moral dilemmas that envelop remembering. And yet in that arguing lies a plangent worry that texts do not matter enough in a world of powerful and unstable political forces. Fictions confront eschatology; a fear that those forces will wreak further, unimaginable havoc.²⁰

Hence, Ravikant points out that there has always been a sharp contrast between the progressist and homogenizing metanarratives and the fragments of individual memories which instead “originates in an undefined elsewhere.”²¹ He posits:

While historians of Partition wrote histories of miscalculation, errors and sins committed by “great men” and of executors of their sinister plans, in short stories a complex moment of recognition occurs at a focal point. A person (or people) finds herself in a position where her entire identity is being defined by the rules of somebody else’s game....the horror of the moment of focus becomes, in effect, betrayal.²²

Partition events have had ongoing reverberations in the socio-cultural and political spheres in a way that we are bound to acknowledge that the experiences we have as Bangladeshi are inseparably connected to the broader South Asian Scenario. It can only be understood under the background of that totality. Taking Renan’s logic about the role of memory in nation-building, we may readily assume how disturbing and confusing the memory of partition can be. The complexities are multiplied because the actual physical spaces associated with partition ceaselessly go on showing symptoms of prolonged trauma.

Partition naturally has many stories. It has stories of belonging, love and loss, power and survival on the small and differentiated scale as well as those that reveal small scale to naked and blind interests and

¹⁴ In the absence of official statistics, these figures are approximate estimations of scholars, based on newspaper reportage, eyewitness accounts and other sources. Finding the above estimates on the conservative side, some scholars peg the estimate of those killed as a result of partition violence at 20 lakh..

¹⁵ Mushirul Hasan (ed.): *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation*, Oxford University Press, 1993. p.43.P.27

¹⁶ *ibid.* P. 71

¹⁷ Ayesha Jalal: *The Pity of Partition*. Lecture at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 2 August 2012.

¹⁸ For details see Virdee, Pippa. “Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947.” *Oral History*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2013, pp. 49–62.

¹⁹ Pandey mentioned in Chowdhury, Indira. “Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 49, no. 30, 2014, pp. 39–42.

²⁰ Nagappan, Ramu: *Speaking Havoc: Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives*, Oxford University Press, 2005 p.16

²¹ Ravikant: *Partition: Strategies of Oblivion, Ways of Remembering in Saint*, Tarun K.: *Translating Partition*, 2001 p.170

²² *ibid*

discourses of state and empires. These researchers suggest that new metaphors are needed to capture all these and a new approach of ‘re-membering’ to find out the real sense prevailing all through the partition period. Today, therefore, we must learn to look at our history and its processes of documentation in an altogether new light. As Edward Said says:

My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated.²³

Our understanding of the “multiple sociological and cultural implications for post-national societies in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan” largely depends on our understanding of the fissures, ruptures and lacunas which are consequent results of these contradictions and paradoxes, and inherent in our concepts of nationhood and citizenship based on the acceptance of the boundaries imposed on us (which are not only the visible geographical ones).²⁴ The emergence of Bangladesh based on Bengali nationalism in 1971 was a negation of the so-called ‘Two-nation Theory’ and created space for the composite ethnic-linguistic identity of nationhood. Therefore, it is indeed crucial that we sincerely and critically examine the process of differentiation concerning the meaning of the terms and explore the possibility of having or creating a ‘space’ for the ‘Other’—a ‘space’ that permeates fusion and reconciliation. This space may successfully dismantle the strained relations between the subcontinental neighbours – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh can obliterate the syncretic culture – linguistic, visual, culinary, and aesthetic – and legacies of a common heritage that we share. Then, we may genuinely realize the meaning of the shadow lines and the overabundance of so-called geopolitical borders. While qualitative differences between individuals are inherent, they are prone to lead to inequality, these researchers assume, only when a society loses sight of the uniqueness of each human being.

On the other hand, if our minds are trained to respect differentness and to focus upon the beauty that is latent within each living being, it is possible to comprehend the deeper meanings of heterogeneity that constitute a cosmic wholeness. While this is a long-drawn solution that societies must strive to arrive at, it is crucial to understand that inequality as its obverse can only breed intolerant aggressiveness that leads to nowhere. It is incumbent upon us not only to address this source of aggression but also to neutralize it in the course of realizing that we are by default part of an intangible but altruistic whole that must be attained. The quintessence of meaningful human societies lies in realizing this essential understanding of the need for transcendence.²⁵ Here, we may remember Tagore who forcefully insisted again and again on the urgency for society to be ‘armored’ with an aesthetic understanding of the deep-rooted meanings of humanity that make redundant whatever societal discriminations stand in the way of our ‘horizontal comradeship’ both as citizens of nations and global citizens. Therefore, Yasmin Saikia, in her book *Woman, War and the Making of Bangladesh* comments:

The partition of 1947 is not over and done with, but in the abyss of contemporary national history created by the complex entanglements of personal memories, political manipulations, collective amnesia, and national lies, the traumatic moment of Partition and the shared past are dispersed and become evident in different sites triggering violence over and over again.²⁶

Gyanendra Pandey, while addressing this problematic, sharply observes that there are two significant ways through which elitist academia/history generally try to understand (and consequently normalize) the enormous violence of the partition period. The first strategy is that they officially try to render the whole burden of responsibility of the entire violence (both political as well as actual) on some ever-elusive ‘Other’, an other which is either the carrier of some nationalistic identity marker (for instance: Pakistan) or a particular community (Muslim). Pandey’s submission is that “the nation repudiates the historical memory of partition, thereby avoiding its memorialization, by refusing to acknowledge the culpability of the Indian citizen in partition violence.”²⁷ Pandey sharply observes that as the facts of partition are too huge to be altogether ignored, manipulative efforts have been there for long to depict it as inferior—an out and out result of merely petty politics or personal/collective ambitions—in comparison to the ‘greater truth’ of independence or in comparison to the sweeter fruits of nationalism which sprout from the blood of valiant national heroes.

²³ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/16770310.Edward_W_Said

²⁴ For details see Samaddar, Ranabir. “The Historiographical Operation: Memory and History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 22, 2006, pp. 2236–2240.

²⁵ Chowdhury, Indira. “Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 49, no. 30, 2014, pp. 39–42.

²⁶ Saikia, Yasmin. *Woman, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. p.21

²⁷ Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition*, Cambridge University Press, 2002. P. 44

In a similar line, outbreaks of massive violence are systematically localized by naming them as ‘riots’, which inherently implies that “these are local affairs of little significance to the grander national narrative, and therefore, aberrations or chance occurrences that would not occur in normal conditions.”²⁸ Because of the operations of such subtle strategies, most of the Indian sub-continental people recollect Partition as a specific historical moment of innumerable instances of large scale massacre, rape, migration, displacement and brutality. The whole complex events and subsequent consequences have been pigeonholed simply as a traumatic chapter of Indian history.²⁹ Such is the selective memory and understanding of ours about partition.

With the advent of Cultural Studies, different newer critical histories are opened to look at the process of history-making which is simultaneously valid. It has lately been regarded as an academic site for the marginal and the peripheral. The Documents of History, Cultural Studies assert, are never autonomous production disjointed from the lived life of that time or the life practices around it. Para-literary issues too should be considered. History must be understood in relation to lived experience and other life practices. Therefore, Cultural Studies reading of History is by default a political reading because we look for the dynamics of power relations. Cultural Studies find inherent social inequalities and how the canonicity of a particular historical narrative comes into the front and takes the place of the dominant discourse. It discusses the total meaning-making system—censorship, upbringing, publishing industry politics meaning how market and media influence the production of a dominant mode of historical narrative/interpretation by mercilessly downplaying other possible versions of it. It also critically engages with the role of mass media in ‘popularizing’ a particular version of history and determining the ‘pattern of consumption’. Mass people are not certainly in control over the production, circulation and consumption of this manufactured dominant discourse. It is instead imposed upon people and the hegemony is that people are convinced that it is ‘their’ History.³⁰ Thereby it tries to detect the silences/lacunae. We must not forget that there were and are always paid historians. S/he will produce a kind of ‘truth’ that is not nearly truth. This type of documentation is massively problematic because it provides stereotypes, prejudiced views about people and their community. This inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary, hybridized academic field of study often scrutinizes and challenges the traditional notion of history of the culture of a given period and also of the very making of the culture of historicization with a particular intention to embark a democratic approach to things instead of the elitist vision of them. It takes on plural perspectives on history and, therefore more inclusive. Of course, this doesn’t necessarily mean that all elements of a given period are equally qualified to be considered as constituting elements of history. Its simple assumption is that minor items must be taken under consideration for serious academic scrutiny; hence the question of elitism is dutifully disregarded. It is more so because, according to Williams, ‘culture’ is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Dictionary.³¹ Hence, Cultural Studies is bluntly against aggressive generalization and cast a critical eye on the formulation of the notion of cultural representation. Gramsci considers how ruling elites tend to construct the ethos and values of society to secure their vested sociopolitical interests, and he suggests that political civil society ‘hegemonizes’ nationalistic values in support of ruling objectives.³² Following from this argument, the silence around the memories of 1947 partition is prompted by the hegemon in order to sustain and advance the exclusionary identity meta-narratives.³³ They claim that they are being inclusive, tolerant, heterogenous, that differences are accommodated in the meta narrative of history. But it is only officially so; actuality is totally different. Diversions rather exist and struggle here but never can mingle/ assimilate themselves to the mainstream. Dominant discourse camouflages the entire process of discrimination.³⁴

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 49-51, 56-57

²⁹ Recently Sucheta Mahajan pointed out and condemned this attitude in the closing section of her “Independence and Partition” in *The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, Sage, 2000.

³⁰ Chowdhury, Indira. “Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 49, no. 30, 2014, pp. 39–42.

³¹ Gallagher, Catherine. “Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies.” *Social Text*, no. 30, 1992, pp. 79–89.

³² Aijaz Ahmad. “Nationalism and Peculiarities of the Indian” in Vijayasree et al. (eds.): *Nation in Imagination*. pp.37-57.

³³ For a discussion on the construction of these meta-narratives see: Riaz A (2015) Constructing and deconstructing narratives: Shahbag and Islamist politics in Bangladesh. Presented at the 4th International Congress of Bengal Studies, Japan, 12–13 December 2015. Tokyo University Foreign Studies.

³⁴ Mehra, Rachna. “A Nation Partitioned Or Homes Divided? The Severed Relationship Between The State, Community And Abducted Women in The Post Partition Period.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 73, 2012, pp. 1391–1397.

History-making is always a ‘selective’ study.³⁵ The raw historical event can’t be transmitted in its original forms. Facts have to be transformed into a story/narrative. So, it becomes subject to formal rules of ‘discourse/structure in dominance.’ Nationalism continues to act as the binding agent in order to weld people together as a nationalist entity; its rigid and codified boundaries limit the entry of the ‘foreign’, ‘illegal’ and ‘extra-territorial’ elements branded as not suitable for inclusion. Giorgio Agamben in his seminal work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), reinvigorated the term ‘Homo Sacer’ to signify the arbitrary use of absolute power—either by societal institutions or state government—that not only robs of the constitutional rights of individuals but also ceases their rights to live. Keeping India in focus, Arundhati Roy also has voiced the agonies of those unconsolated who under the repression of the societal and governmental institutions are merely living a bare life.

Theoretically, a period is recorded but in practice this is still a record of a selective tradition. This Selective tradition pretends, and always fails, to capture what Williams calls ‘structure of feeling’ of the period, meaning ‘the actual sense of history’ or in other words, the collective cultural consciousness, the general essence of all the characteristics, elements in a particular way of life. This pretended culture of feeling comes into conflict/ tends to ignore the desire for deviation on alternative and minority trends. Certain magic formula is evolved to postpone the conflict/gap between the dominant values and lived history as it is. Such historicization always intends to remain in a particular boundary and forever remains in the anxieties of crossing over. The paper plans to challenge that limit. That is why it is always crucial to understand how politics of selection operates in recording, defining, and analyzing the history of a period or event and how crucially it reduces the complexity and is different, therefore, from the ‘lived life’ of that particular time. Evidently, there is a rejection of a considerable amount of elements that were once a part of the ‘actual’ history. This approach to history tries to erase the details that may confuse. Generally, sub-culture is never welcomed. State policy usually criminalizes the ‘difference’. But for that small group—it gives meaning and significance for their life. Sometimes they are even punished for their beliefs, attitudes and expressions.

A subculture is generally perceived as unfavourable since it deviates from the so-called accepted standards and established codes of conduct. It nullifies received ideas and oppositions and thereby threatens the status quo. A sub-culture does not exist with all its subversive potential for a long time, since the Market and the Capitalist arrangements discover in a sub-culture commercial potential, they intervene duly and exploit the market and in the process, subculture becomes a part of mainstream/mass culture. Hence, it loses all its subversive potential. This is one of the subtle strategies of the capitalist system (e.g. containing the opposite). Subversion/Deviation then becomes a ‘product’ in itself. The dynamics through which the counter/micro-narratives are obscured/subsumed by the dominant metanarrative deserve in-depth scrutiny if we are really willing to achieve a comprehensive understanding of history-making. In examining these dynamics, we shall find that those counter-narratives are readily subsumed mostly because of their incapacity to produce their autonomous aesthetics. History is a contested space and media plays an important role in projecting history. The role of historians and media players is different, but both have importance in understanding the past and defining the present.

Therefore, Javeed Alam³⁶ strongly argues that instead of an obsession for brutality, the most prominent concern should have been given on the processes of how the state (or other large organizations) attains the central position through the process of partition. In other words, Alam wants to focus on the long term processes/effects of the formations of different nations. He argues that if it is true that “there are large historical forces behind the little events that happen”³⁷ rape, mass murder and expulsion of communities are ‘little events’ in the context of the real cause behind the partition, that is, the role of Britain as a ‘state apparatus’ which systematically launched the heinous policy of divide and rule. Hence, Alam rightly concludes that “The use of memory as a way of building the collective past seems inadequate to capture these larger forces as important factors...The everydayness of life becomes normal when you forget this experience”.³⁸ Now, if we take Alam’s observation seriously, we enter into the complex nexus of deciphering the question of ‘nation’ itself in a post-colonial context. Also, we need to interrogate the emotional and personal dialectics of negotiating this cartographic, geopolitical and geospatial splits and the existing discourse of displacement and loss on both sides of the border through generations. It is vital

³⁵ Butalia, Urvashi. “An Archive with a Difference” in Kaul, Suvir (ed.): *The Partitions of Memory*, Indiana University Press, 2001 pp. 208-241.

³⁶ Gyanendra Pandey built one of the chapters of his book “Remembering Partition”. Op. Cit. around the criticism of it.

³⁷ Javeed Alam – Suresh Sharma: ‘Remembering Partition’ dialogue *Seminar* January 1998 p.101

³⁸ Ibid p.103

because easy conceptualizations, which often pervade our academia, of overused tropes as the home-world, public-private often occlude a proper understanding and evaluation of the processes through which nation formation and national identities impacted the trajectories of personal and individual experiences.

In this context, Sylvie Guichard claims that “nationalist claims are based on the argument that the members of the nation share certain qualities – cultural, linguistics, ethnic or religious.”³⁹ But Renan here ultimately defers from Sylvie’s position. According to him:

History only allows for fictional blood ties ... England, France or Italy, not to mention Germany, is anything but racially homogenous. Similarly, given the immense linguistic and religious diversity of early modern times, neither language nor religion can be the basis of nation formation. Geography also has little role to play as it is all about the will to stay together.⁴⁰

Hence, Renan argues, whenever we exaggerate the role of these factors, we enslave our thoughts in narrow positivism. He instead thinks that in order to make a nation stand firm in a world full of diversities, it is very crucial to ignore things that hamper the nation’s stability in the long run: “it is good for all to know how to forget.”⁴¹

Here, we must not be carried away by the wave of broad generalizations because memory can never be an altogether evil thing. Renan also didn’t mean that at all. For Renan, rather, “mourning worth more than triumph, for it imposes duties and demands common effort.”⁴² Furthermore, almost hundred years after Renan, Pierre Nora comes to an almost similar conclusion in one of his seminal essays: “Memory can reveal hidden or repressed historical processes, particularly when misfortune or shame is involved. It can also be an instrument for exploring collective identity (or identities).”⁴³

Now, if we carefully follow Renan’s propositions, it turns out to us that if the historical partition of 1947 is really part of our realms of memory, it should be conducive to national integration. But in the case of the history of the Indian subcontinent, several ambiguities are to be faced by us. For instance, Aijaz Ahmed almost completely disregards Benedict Anderson’s famous formula of nation construction.⁴⁴ Aijaz observes that the western version of nation formation is not fully applicable to our part of the globe. He argues that in our peculiar case, “The nation is then imagined, not as an already existing community of merely horizontal comradeship despite material inequalities, but as a community of radical equalities which is yet to come.”⁴⁵

Nation and nationhood have been subjected to various interpretations. For some, it was a boom to enjoy the sweet fruit and for other the fruit had always been extremely sore. The distribution of privileges was never just. It varies between interests of majority and minority in number or sometimes based on loyalty or disloyalty to exiting framework of nation, as in the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell: “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.”⁴⁶

The theories of the nation either highlight the essentialist or the constructivist nature of nation. The different modes of conceptualizing nation and nationality like territory/ geography, linguistic oneness, shared religion or culture etc have been attempted over the years by different theoreticians. Nevertheless, the ambivalence, ambiguity and consequent inadequacy have always been unmasked implying the untenable nature of the terms. The politics of globalization, migration and diaspora has further problematized these concepts. Hence, this very question of nationalism has been approached from numerous vantage points by historians, creative artists as well as critical thinkers. Many of them have conceived nationalism as a form of narrative. Like many other ism-s culture for survival, heritage and dignity of art had been assaulted and injured in the name of nationalism. Their simple submission is that the very imagination of nationalism is nothing but a purely political ideology and it functions not only by manufacturing consent among citizens of a community but also by producing, reproducing as reinforcing carefully chosen aesthetics and affective orientations among mass people. It is deeply premised on meta-narratives regarding history. The phenomenon of the nation-state is as much a ‘hybrid’ construction as is the uniqueness of an individual located in the third space. It becomes difficult to locate fixity if one swears by the exclusionary logic of the

³⁹ Guichard, Sylvie. *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India: Textbooks, Controversies and Politics*, Routledge, 2009. p.14.

⁴⁰ Renan, Ernest: “What is a Nation?” in Pecora, Vincent (ed.): *Nations and Identities*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001 pp.162-176. P. 172-73

⁴¹ ibid

⁴² ibid

⁴³ Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire” in Jacques Revel- Lynn Hunt (eds.): *Histories. French Constructions of the Past*, The New Press, New York, 1995. pp. 631-643.

⁴⁴ As developed in the influential Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso 1991. See especially chapters 10 and 11 for colonial Asian and postcolonial conditions.

⁴⁵ Aijaz Ahmad. “Nationalism and Peculiarities of the Indian” in Vijayasree et al. (eds.): *Nation in Imagination* p.40-41.

⁴⁶ Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*, University of Adelaide, 2014. P.100

principles of the nation-state. The mirage that national homogeneity fabricates is fatal to the existence of those who are primarily ignored by this circumvented project of nation-building.

In this light, it can very well be assumed that 1947 is then rather a site of rupture that is one of the massive obstacles for imagining equality in the Indian subcontinent and cannot be so readily conducive to building a nation. Paradoxically,

the production of inequality has its roots in homogenizing. In both popular and political imagery, we do not only see two nations but two communities that turned against each other. Recent academic literature calls attention to heterogeneity and thus falsifies the common textbook wisdom that Muslims and their common political wing, the Muslim League shall bear the brunt of responsibility for the screams and pain of 1947.⁴⁷

In this context, post-nationalism is one such recent development that enables us to conceptualize an alternative framework for reimagining borders and establishing collective solidarity. It has the potential to reclaim the political space which is hijacked by the national entrepreneurs. By disrupting nationalist framings, it helps to get over the fetish or hegemony of nationalism. Its semi-permeable boundaries enable increasing fluidity, enlarging the scope for increasing membership and thereby puncturing the conventional membership regime proposed by nationalism.



⁴⁷ Kumar, Krishna. *Prejudice and Pride: School Histories of the Freedom Struggle in India and Pakistan*, Penguin 2002. p.54