

AFFECTED STATES: PARTITION/POST-PARTITION TRAUMA IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

The partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 was one of the key moments marking the gap between the colonial and post-colonial eras. My project is invested in exploring division, not only in the context of the events of August 1947, but as an ongoing process dividing the worlds of political, cultural, emotional and sex life in South Asia. My research seeks to map analytical pathways to explore partition and the attendant forms of minority and communal violence as continuous, unfolding processes of post-colonial nation-building. It examines the far-reaching presence of these structures in the current configuration of politics, culture and subjectivity with literary analysis, mediating trauma and memory studies, and the interdisciplinary fields of postcolonial studies. My article draws on a wide range of cultural artifacts such as poetry, cantilever displays, mourning rituals, testimonials, archaeological ruins, short stories and novels, to develop a heuristic and influential re-organization of post-Partition South Asia. It seeks to illuminate, through the framework of memory, sadness, trauma, impact and post-colonialism, how the ongoing effects of the past shape the present, which in turn provides us with ways to re-imagine the future. This research reaches out to recent work on developing a localized framework for the analysis of violence, trauma and harm in South Asia. Critics of trauma theory argue that clinical approaches developed in typical Euro American sociological contexts are often based on post-colonial systems of knowledge formation, bereavement, and recovery.

Keywords: Partition, Subcontinent, Pakistan, India, Political, Post-colonial, Sociological & Trauma.

Introduction

The creation of Pakistan as the homeland of South Asian Muslims involved the religious division of the then British provinces of Bengal and Punjab. At the same time, mass exodus and population exchanges of Hindu refugees from areas such as Sindh in Pakistan, as well as Muslim muhajirs from the Gangetic heart regions and Deccan into Pakistan, eliminated these cultural spaces. While celebratory narratives of colonialism and nationalism marked the official historiography of 1947, the trauma of Partition, particularly its ethnic sexual violence, was largely eroded in these constructions. According to revisionist historians such as Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), Partition displaced about twelve million people; Countless homes were abandoned or destroyed; Estates, families and cultures were divided as new, often controversial national boundaries were drawn on old ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities. These movements were accompanied by large-scale communal violence. Estimates of the death toll from ethnic cleansing, malnutrition, infectious diseases, etc., vary anywhere between the contemporary British figure of 20,000 and the later estimates of two million (Butalia). Butalia concluded that a million people were killed and that about 75,000 women were believed to have been abducted and raped by men of various religions (and indeed sometimes by their men) own religion (ibid). Many refugee camps were established and the Indian and Pakistani states suffered such extraordinary losses. Much of his practices, discourses and fantasies of nationality and citizenship were indelibly marked by this struggle.

Until the 1980s, the division found virtually no contentious or physical place in official historiography or memory. It was marked by a complete silence and its memories were encrypted in both the public and private sectors. As pointed out by Butalia (1998), there are no public memorials or memorial monuments on Partition, nor are there any tribunals or courts to provide legal/judicial compensation for violence (361–362). Instead, official division historiography by nation state has been marked by preoccupation with bureaucratic structures. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998) indicate that there is an abundance of written material on Partition: Official records, documents, agreements and treaties, political histories, memoirs, etc., and "a large amount of newspaper reports and pages of government information regarding the resettlement of refugees, the transfer of power, the division of property, and Parliament's records." Debate "

The 1990s and early 2000s saw a boom in revisionist historical, sociological and cultural scholarship on Partition. Feminist historians such as Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and subaltern school historians such as Gyanendra Pandey and anthropologists such as Veena Das reopened the division for scholarly analysis. While Butalia and Menon were particularly concerned with feminist narratives and oral testimony of violence, Pandey was interested in excavating "small" voices and fragments that represented divisions outside the realm of major historiography. Das was invested in the investigation of pain and the anthropology of its language. He argued that literary language and tropes were more productive transmitters of suffering and pain than legal or social and empirical methods. In *Critical Events* (1995), Das writes of two theories of pain: its communicativeness versus its disambiguation. Questioning Scarry's formulation on the non-communicability of pain, Das argued for a more sensory anthropology of pain through phenomenological methods. They believe that when "sensible" language becomes "dumb" in situations of violence, body language mediates between the individual and society. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Das searches for pain outside the individual body and finds it in the social sphere, receiving it as an invitation to another. This is external "turn" from non-infectiousness has an important role in the post-partition mapping of collective trauma. To illustrate his theories, Das turned to Urdu writers of stature to explain his arguments. Literary language provided metaphor and imagery for analysis of how violence was interpreted and "internal" communication in everyday life.

Due to the exceptional interdisciplinary scholarship provided by this "first wave" of Partition Scholars, silence, absence, "illegible" discourses such as rumor and gossip as well as empirical, positivist modes were excavated to reveal testimonial voices. Silence and forgetting were unraveled to be forms of memory. In the decades since then, Partition Studies has established itself as a significant field of inquiry. The question of why current scholarship continues to stage this "return" to the Partition persistently beleaguers its practitioners. Since many, though not all of these scholars are located in western academia, charges of exoticizing Partition or flogging a dead horse are rampant.

However, the grounds for a "return" as articulated by some of these "first wave" scholars stand as relevant today as it did then. Butalia, Pandey, Das and others reveal that one of the reasons

why Partition's specter was raised within the collective memory in those decades was the brutalizing sectarian violence against the Sikhs in 1984 and the gradual growth and entrenchment of Hindutva politics. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the Mumbai riots, and the growing ghettoization and insecurity of minorities in India (and in the region), provided the grounds for a re-evaluation of the history of this violence and an ethical imperative to go back to the past to understand the future. In *Mourning the Nation* (2009), Bhaskar Sarkar speaks of a "proleptic melancholia" of the nation. The postcolonial nation is born in loss, he argues. It represents "the death of a collective dream at the moment of birth". Sarkar contends that this proleptic melancholia "arises from a loss of futures and possibilities".

Works by Amrita Pritam, Qurratulain Hyder, Agha Shahid Ali and Githa Hariharan which my chapters examine, exhibit this proleptic awareness of a loss of future possibilities. At the same they use memorial routes to try to connect back to these very lost possibilities. Through my engagement with Pritam's Partition lyric "Waris Shah" (1947), Hyder's novel *Sita Betrayed* (1960), Ali's poetry collection *A Country without a Post Office* (1997) and Hariharan's novels *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009), my project, then, opens up a memorial terrain in South Asia where pasts, presents and futures are actively debated and recreated. The "return" to the Partition staged in my dissertation, should be located in this expanded memorial terrain.

In this memorial terrain, every act of sectarian violence is haunted by the Partition; "Pakistan or Kabristan (graveyard)! "Go back to Pakistan!" etc. remain "catch phrases and slogans" regularly employed against the Muslim minority by "rioters." This "haunting" is as much witnessed in the "sudden" flare-ups of sectarian violence such as the recent events in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, beginning on August 27, 2013, as in the protracted conflict around Kashmir whose roots lie in 1947 and beyond. Recent studies of social and political violence have urged us to look at the Partition violence and the subsequent communal "riots" as part of a "routine violence" that the State practices against its minorities (Pandey 2006). "Riots" as they are referred to, have been shown to be neither sudden, nor aberrant, but part of a sustained, systemic political terror that the nation-state practices towards its citizens and subjects. Gyanendra Pandey's *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (2006) offers us a way of talking

about that terror. He writes: “There is a violence written into the making and continuation of contemporary political arrangements, and into the production of majorities and minorities, which I have called routine violence” (Pandey 1). This is seen in “not the spectacular, explosive, visible moments only,” but in our very day lives and “especially in our behavior towards strangers” (Pandey 8). This production of minorities and majorities, of the violence written into the everyday encounters with the political, or alternately where the political becomes a subject of everyday life (manifest in our behavior towards strangers, for instance) is central to my analysis of the post-Partition trauma-scape. The impact of Partition’s affective train on these everyday encounters as on the explosive ones, cannot be overstated, and makes the “return” to the Partition more urgent than ever. Hence, my project is interested in mapping the Partition not as events restricted to the violent months of 1947, but as an ongoing process casting its shadow on the Hindu-Muslim/India-Pakistan dyad that grips the region’s political, cultural and emotional lives. I will use frameworks from trauma and memory studies and postcolonial studies to explore this shadow further, not in terms of causality or determinism, but in terms of a critical relationship with the past.

A further reason to continue to frame the Partition within critical inquiries of memory and trauma may be understood in the context of developing theories of literary and cultural analysis of collective traumas like the Partition. The explorations in the decades of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s were predominantly occupied with testimonial narratives, oral histories, and empirical studies, since they developed out of the social sciences. However, Veena Das, Gyanendra Pandey, Dipesh Chakrabarty and others also privileged looking at literary texts, to parse them for the semiotic depth and imagery that legal or historical narratives could not afford. In this context, literary scholarship on the Partition received a new lease. Realist naturalist depictions of violence, in particular the literature produced by the Progressive Movement (Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi) which had a wide critical life in Urdu/Hindi/Bengali Studies came to form the chief material for literary analysis by Anglophone scholars via translations.

In the first phase of literary and cinematic studies of the Partition, feminist historiographers such as Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon offered a reading of testimonial literature, anthropologists like Veena Das privileged literary language as a viable vehicle of Partition’s suffering and

trauma, and works of Saadat Hasan Manto, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and others of the Progressive Movement came under the radar of Postcolonial Literary scholars globally and in India. Rather than official historiography of the riots and records of bureaucratic transfer and exchanges, these literary and affective representations offered archaeology of untold histories.

Literary studies of the Partition in English and Comparative programs gradually began to draw from the developing field of Trauma and Memory Studies. Developments in trauma theory as it applied to Holocaust representations came to form a critical route through which Partition was accessed in many of these readings. Gender, trauma and the novel became important sites of Partition inquiry¹¹. Partition Scholarship drew on Freud-derived Caruthian models of literary trauma studies: in particular narrative disjunction and trauma¹². If Veena Das had developed an anthropology of pain harnessing phenomenology to access Partition's grief, there was now an additional turn to Caruth's presentation of belatedness as a means to plumb trauma's symbolic language. Apart from the interest in narrative, Holocaust-derived models also cast witnessing and testimony in new light¹³. Shoshana Felman in conjunction with Dori Laub, a psychiatrist working with Holocaust survivors, had argued for trauma "as a radical crisis of witnessing ... an event eliminating its own witness, in part on basing her conclusions on Holocaust testimonies (Felman and Laub 1992; xvii).

The eventive model of trauma examined violent disruptions but Laura Brown had proposed in her groundbreaking essay, "Not Outside the Range: Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" in Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), that the older frameworks for "calibrating" trauma had proved quite ineffective. She argued that anxiety, melancholia, withdrawal and other symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are not only long-term – belonging as they do to an extended temporality – but they can also spread laterally and intergenerationally through narrative and social transmissions and witnessing. Thus, not only may trauma be transmitted intergenerationally, but also among the members of a socio-political group. A number of fiction writers – many of them diasporic – like Shaun Singh Baldwin and Bapsi Sidhwa, began to stage second-generation returns to Partition traumas, opening up a transgenerational and diasporic terrain for situating Partition trauma. These allowed returns to be

staged across temporalities and spatialities, showing the way forward to a more nuanced development of collective traumas.

Accessing Partition through Affect and Trauma Studies

Studies of trauma, mourning and memory and melancholia have been influenced by the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences¹⁷. Studies of affect are a significant entry point into understanding embodied emotion, memory and trauma. They offer us among other things, a way to understand the subject's interaction with and immersion in the material, phenomenological world – a crucial aspect of understanding embodied, externalized and collective emotions such as those associated with socio-political losses. In their Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg present at least eight different theoretical orientations of affect in contemporary humanities. Stemming from Deleuzian and Spinozian roots, understandings of affect have ranged further and in diffuse directions. As they put it, affect remains at its basic “a way to understand the body and its immersion in the world”, to understand “a body's capacity to affect and be affected (2) Affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters (2). It is this responsiveness of the body, its openness and entanglement with the sensory world that allows us both a way to analyze the materiality of trauma and to break out of the representational paradoxes and aporias that trauma theory wrestles with. One of the key vectors identified by Seigworth and Gregg is work “undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power—that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, [...], and of "experience" (understood in ways far more collective and "external" rather than individual and interior), where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm(7.) It thus offers a way to access more nuanced psycho-analytically and post-structurally inflected understanding of violence and the body. Another vector is identified in critical discourses of the emotions (and histories of the emotions) that have progressively left behind the interiorized self or subjectivity to unfold regimes of expressivity that are tied much more to resonant worldings and diffusions of feeling. It is this trail that leads from exteriorization

of emotion and the worlding of the body with its concomitant rejections of mind/body, emotion/cognition binary that is of particular import to studies of trauma.

Ongoing Partition

In framing the Partition of South Asia within its memorial terrain and in terms of affect mediated Postcolonial Trauma Theory, then, I lay the ground for a view of the past's remnants in the present (and stakes in the future,) that goes beyond causality or determinism. My argument is not to look at post-1947 South Asia through a deterministic lens, as I hope my chapters will elucidate. Nor am I linking the events of 1947 to later sectarian violence and minoritization "causally." On the contrary, what my dissertation seeks to illuminate are theoretical framings via studies of memory, melancholia, trauma, affect and postcoloniality that elucidate ways in which the ongoing effects of the past shape the present and offer us ways to reimagine the future. This, then, is the thread that ties together the various theoretical lenses I bring to my analysis of the region's exigencies. Both Postcolonial studies and trauma and memory studies are heuristic formations that are invested in the shadows cast by anterior events, in the co-existence of multiple temporalities and in a critical relationship between present and past in the interest of the future yet to come. It is this interleaving of Postcoloniality and Trauma that lies at the critical center of my interrogation; my chapters develop their overlaps and divergences, as they apply to literary and cultural analysis.

Accessing State Violence through Affect and Trauma Studies

To discuss the social and political aspects of Partition and post-Partition traumas, it becomes essential to take into account the postcolonial State (and para-statist formations.) Here, too, affect-mediated studies of these formations have much to offer. Given that the state is experienced by those on the margins through violence, in embodied, penetrative ways (Aretxaga 396) how may the body (understood as an emotional, psychic, sexual, corporeal, affective conglomerate) be reframed, affectively, to comment on state power? Commentators such as Taussig, Feldman, Aretxaga, and Kabir have illuminated how, in contexts of terror and spaces of death, the body and its languages, sounds, fluids and wounds may be read, not only to document the effects of terror and exhume the repressed, but also to understand negotiations with terror, and modes (mimetic, parodic, cryptic, confrontational, compromising etc.) of resistance and

contestation to power³⁰. Nation-state making in South Asia continues to be premised upon violent fantasies of what it means to inhabit and safeguard communal identities; gender and sexuality remain central to the everyday grounding and defending of these fantasies. Victims of genocidal rape and violence – in Partition and post-Partition contexts – continue to be reduced into real and tropic boundaries between national and religious groups. In the Indian context, the figure of the traitorous, violent, rapacious Muslim male has become the threat against which the State ceaselessly produces itself as screen and fetish, turning its paranoid gaze upon him while eliciting, in return, a similar fear and mistrust. Partition memories, then, haunt the psychic life of the region and form the field through which further violence - in the name of the nation-state – is sanctioned and enacted against its “Others.” My work seeks to illuminate the affective, often violent faces of the nation-state while exploring concurrent modalities of belonging and community (in the region and globally) that may allow for more peaceable political trajectories.

Conclusion

How do we reconcile this preeminence of non-discursive visuality in a discursive novel, lyrical and diffuse though it is? I would want to term *Fugitive Histories* a somatic and epidermal text. As it enacts its own epidermalization and fragmentation, there are a number of ways Hariharan draws attention to an overwhelming embedding of trauma - not in the interiority of the subject alone - but in the socio-political world. The epidermalization of trauma is linked with a haptic visualization; a mattering of sight as touch and feeling, is, as we have seen, a leitmotif in *Fugitive Histories*. This form of seeing, and the empathic, embodied “transaction” it mobilizes, is especially important in the context of the “culture of impunity” and “percepticide” enacted by the Hindutvavaadi State upon the Indian Muslim. Facing or confronting is additionally linked to the ethical demands made on us by the other, the implications of which, are once again, grounded in the political world. *Fugitive Histories* then can be read productively alongside many Holocaust-derived epistemes (Levinas or Bennett). However, it locates a postcolonial episteme of trauma simultaneously.

References

1. Arabic-derived term with evocations of peripatetic migration from Mecca to Medina
2. Sanskrit-derived term for refugees or shelter-seekers.

3. Studies of the violence as spilling outside of the “1947” time frame are relatively recent: those revise these figures considerably.
4. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 3.
5. See Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence* (2006), *Remembering Partition* (2001); Veena Das *Mirrors of Violence* (1990); *Critical Events* (1995); *Life and Words* (2007) etc.
6. Gyanendra Pandey (2001), reminds us that face-to face local communities have to live with disturbing memories [of the Partition] more uncertainly and continuously than nations and states. This particularly uneven mosaic of remembering and eliding that marks their memory-making (acknowledging the violence even as they seek to dismiss it) is informed crucially by not the pastness of Partition violence but its continuing presence. In the affective and creative productions of these “local” communities may be found traces of such continuing presence that sits at odds with the horizons of the nation-state.
7. Literature of Riots by Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi writers of the Progressive Movement that often represented the violence in realist, stark modes.
8. See for example Mahmood Mamdani’s conversation with Bhakti Shringarpure in “Warscapes”:
9. See, for instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty *Habitations of Modernity*, 2002.
10. Thus, compilations like Suvir Kaul’s *The Partitions of Memory* (2002) and Alok Bhalla’s *Partition Dialogues* (2006) paid attention to memoirs, testimonies, letters, petitions, monuments but also Saadat Hasan Manto’s or Bhisham Sahni’s stories.
11. See for instance Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s “Gender, Memory, Trauma: Women's Novels On The Partition Of India” (2005) or Jill Didur’s *Unsettling Partitions: Literature, Gender and Memory* (2006) that include analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* or Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.
12. Holocaust Studies in particular has brought into focus the epistemology and politics of representing violence. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) has argued that trauma is marked by belatedness and the search for a narrative that is never quite able to catch up with the belatedness and close the gap. Dori Laub and Soshana Felman in *Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992) while discussing the poet Paul Celan argue about the failure of language and the impossibility

of witnessing, and yet go on to affirm that in the aftermath of violence creative narrative remains one of the most important terrains where the implications of the trauma can be worked out. Trauma was thus developed into an “expository device” an excavation of symbolic language. Shoshana Felman in conjunction with Dori Laub, a psychiatrist working with Holocaust survivors, argued for trauma “as a radical crisis of witnessing an event eliminating its own witness, based in part on basing her conclusions on Holocaust testimonies (Felman and Laub 1992; xvii).

13. See especially Priya Kumar, *Limiting Secularism* (2008) or Tarun K. Saint’s *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction* (2010).