

Memory, Violence and Identity in the Partition Narrative

Dr. Bappa Adhikari¹, Dr Arun Kumar Yadav², Dr Ajay Kumar Yadav³, Dr Pradip Kumar Yadav⁴, Dr. Pankaj Kumar⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Brahmavart P.G. College Mandhana, Kanpur. Email: bappabhu90@gmail.com. Orcid ID: 0009-0009-5150-0922

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Armapore PG College Kanpur. Email: arunlkovarsity3@gmail.com, Orcid Id: 0009-0002-1326-7209

³Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Government Degree College Phaphamau, Prayagraj. Email: akyadav01091988@gmail.com. Orcid ID: 0009-0000-8996-214X

⁴Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Armapore PG College Kanpur. Email: pradipkumarp123@gmail.com Orcid ID: 0000-0001-8282-2187

⁵Assistant Professor, Department of English, A K PG College Shikohabad Firozabad. Email: allpankaj1990@gmail.com. Orcid ID: 0009-0009-4848-6875

HOW TO CITE:

Bappa Adhikari, Arun Kumar Yadav, Ajay Kumar Yadav, Pradip Kumar Yadav, Pankaj Kumar (2026). Memory, Violence and Identity in the Partition Narrative. International Journal of Special Education, 41(19s), 323-333

ABSTRACT:

This paper tries to examine the legacy of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, analysing the partition violence and trauma that continue to resurface in the forms of national animosity, communal strife, and identity displacement between India and Pakistan. By implying theories of cultural memory—such as Maurice Halbwachs' living and collective memory, Jan Assmann's communicative and cultural memory, and Pierre Nora's lieux de mémoire—the paper attempts to critique Indian historiographies and literary mediation of the partition that push aside or deny partition violence as an aberration of decolonization, arguing instead for its recognition as a collective responsibility to foster democratic maturity. By implying mnemohistory, the paper examines Khushwant Singh's canonical novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) as a site of memory. This paper seeks to locate the constant denial of the partition as the poison fruit of external manipulation, which fails to achieve what it is intended to foster: peace and harmony. Taking responsibility for the partition violence as the collective failure of the communities can heal the wound for good. Employing Paul Ricoeur's mimesis framework, the paper explores how the text mediates pre- and post-partition identities, communal harmony, and violence, emphasizing the role of cultural memory in healing historical wounds. By comparing historiographies with literary mediation of the partition, the study advocates for active remembrance to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities, positioning India as a model of pluralistic democracy in the Global South, as Germany did in the context of the Holocaust.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: Partition of India, Cultural Memory, Historiography, Communal Violence, Identity Formation, and Sites of Memory.

Introduction

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, marking the end of British colonial rule and the birth of India and Pakistan, remains a profound scar on the collective psyche of both nations. Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent, almost the life span of three generations has passed, and the issues of the unexpressed violence and trauma keep resurfacing as the national animosity between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, communal violence, and the displacement of home and identity. These challenges are undermining India's potential to serve as the sole representative of a pluralistic democracy in the Third World, or the Global South. The partition of India through the communal demography and the violence during and after the partition still continue to challenge the democratic space of Indian society. It is the need of the time to address or acknowledge the partition violence as a collective responsibility, rather than push it aside as an aberration of the decolonisation movement. Memory and historiography serve as critical lenses for understanding this legacy. From the perspective of memory studies, the events of partition have been mediated through the lens of collective memory, which can reveal silenced aspects of partition historiography. The analysis of Alieda Assmann of the stages of historiography—from premodern identity-power linkages to modern objectivity and postmodern convergence with memory—highlights how Indian nationalist histories have emphasized unity in diversity while sidelining communal violence. This paper attempts to locate the excluded aspects of the partition narrative in historiography and in canonical partition texts, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*.

Focusing on Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* as a canonical partition novel, the study employs Paul Ricoeur's mimesis model to dissect its mediation of identity transitions, communal harmony, and violence. By highlighting the partition historiography and the literary mediation of the partition, it argues that embracing the social responsibility for the partition violence can help heal the historical wound and promote peace

and harmony among heterogeneous communities in South Asia. The act of remembrance has distinctly two ways: the first is the organic or community reminiscing, in that process, the participants are reminiscing of their experienced past, not someone's past, they are the actors of the past events and at the same time, sharing their experience among themselves, what Maurice Halbwachs calls living memory, and the second is the memory mediated or re-mediated through external things or objects. The distinction between the two types of memories has become the principal argument of many memory scholars. Maurice Halbwachs distinguishes these memories as living memory and collective memory, Pierre Nora implies these ideas as *milieu de mémoire* and *lieux de mémoire*, and Jan Assmann calls communicative memory and cultural memory, vernacular memory and official memory by John Bolssar and livid and distant memories in the terminology of William Hirst and David Mcuner, respectively. For the sake of analysis, Assmann's terminology – that is, more precise and accepted among the memory scholars-has been referred to or used in this paper to delineate these ideas.

History and Cultural Memory

History and historiographies are often called the touchstone of objective truth about the past, or the yardstick by which subjective opinions can be judged, whereas memory is mostly malleable and vicarious. When the embodied aspect of past events or experiences in the memory paradigm loses its value due to cultural amnesia or a lack of contemporary relevance, memory is gradually replaced by disembodied history. History is often considered the objective, scientific narration of the past, grounded in verified, academically accepted norms and procedures. In the process of history writing, various scholars have repeatedly argued that history is not pure or “objective”; hidden agendas have always manipulated it. In this, Alieda Assmann points out the three distinct stages of the evolution of history or historiography:

- 1.The Premodern Stage
- 2.The Modern Stage

3. The Postmodern Stage

The first premodern stage presents that history and memory are not clearly demarcated. It was considered that the cultural function of history is to present the memories of dynasts, warriors, and religious institutions, and, in this process, to legitimize the authorial status of these institutions and figures. It is primarily concerned with the selection of people and events of ruling elite classes, guaranteeing the collective memory or history of that particular society or nation is the deeds and achievements of that particular class, thus ensuring the authority and legitimacy of a tiny selection of people over the masses, as Assmann notes: The identity between history and memory is grounded in a quadrangular relationship between memory, history, identity and power(Assman 58). The modern phase is predominantly concerned with scientific, objective historiographical approaches, at the eve of the emergence of the academic pursuit of historical truth over authorial truth, which delinked itself from memory by discarding it as subjective and unscientific. Professional or trained historians systematically discard the role of memory in historical writing by developing their own ways of selection, representation, and interpretation. The third phase, the Postmodern phase, is marked by the convergence of memory and history in a new paradigm that emerges as complementary. This change in approach by historians can be dated to the 1980s and 90s, when renewed enthusiasm for Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory and the social framework of memory began to enter academic discourse. The realization of what has been written as the objective history turns out as a biased construction/a manipulated or political memory. Apart from this, a new branch in historiography- a new configuration of memory and history-mnemohistory- comes to the fore. This new historical approach is the culmination of what Assmann points out three practices that influence this configuration of memory and history:

1. Since the 1980s, historians have become increasingly interested in modes of remembering as a form of social and cultural practice.

2. They began investigating and analysing the symbolic practices of their contemporary culture.

3. (while) reconstructing events in the past and showing how and why they happened, historians ... also reconstruct the symbolic practices with which the events of the past were collectively experienced, interpreted, remembered (62)

Methods

The analysis of various historiographies and the literary mediation of the partition of the Indian subcontinent from the perspective of cultural memory has been guided by these theoretical paradigms. Maurice Halbwachs's theory of the social framework for the constitution and recollection of memory, along with the

distinction between living memory and collective memory, has been incorporated to analyse pre-partition Indian society and the variables of identity formation. Jan Assmann's distinction of communicative and cultural memory has been used to distinguish the social milieus of pre- and post-partition Indian society. Next, this analysis incorporates Pierre Nora's theory of lieux de mémoire or sites of memory. Nora argues that sites of memory have emerged as a prominent theoretical framework in cultural memory studies. The site of memory refers to both actual and virtual locations, offering the maximum meaning in the fewest possible signs. These sites or signs include monuments, historical locations and events, various texts and geographical locations. Nora notes three distinct characteristics of the site of memory: the material dimension, the functional dimension, and the symbolic dimension. The event of partition has been commemorated through various museums, monuments, historical texts, and literary representations. These sites have been generating the meaning of the partition through the interpretation by various generations. In this regard, it is crucial to note Ann Rigney's observation on the dynamics of mediating cultural memory: Ann Rigney points out that there is no fixed meaning of the past; it changes with new interpretations of the past. Her theoretical observation on the shift from sites to its dynamics of mediation has been incorporated

to understand the impact of violence on partition victims.

As this paper tries to analyse the canonical partition text, *Train to Pakistan* as a site of memory, the very process of canonization, a theory propagated by Aleida Assmann, has also been incorporated to delineate the canonical status of the text. Jan Assmann categorizes two distinct memories: archive and cultural memories; the archive memory, according to Assmann, is the memory waiting to be studied or read to understand the aporias in the existing narration of the partition. Finally, in analysing the historiographies of the partition, this attempts to locate the dominant strategies of various historiographical narratives of the Indian decolonization movement and the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

The Brief History of Partition

The partition of the Indian subcontinent on the eve of independence from a long colonial rule turned the euphoria into a gloomy contemplation or a national trauma. The swiftness of the culmination of the partition or the creation of Pakistan within the seven years from its inception in 1940 at the Lahore Conference of the Muslim League raises two questions: the existence of enmity and intolerance among the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh was there in the pre-partition Indian society, or it has been politically manufactured by exploiting the existing communal tension. In this section, the events from 1945 to the partition of India are briefly presented to understand the chronology of the partition. In the next sections, the historiographies of the partition are analysed to locate the various mediations of the partition through history.

With the end of World War II, although the Allied Forces won, the cost of the war on the leading nations was too much to change the geopolitical scenario: the war changed the military, economic, and political position of Britain as the global superpower. Holding the colonies all over the continents became quite problematic, not only due to weakening position as a superpower, but also rising demands of political independence from Britain in the

colonies were intensified by the possible military coups by the World War II native veterans. The growing demand for independence in India culminated in the election of 1946, in which both Congress and the Muslim League participated with their agenda for separate Muslim governance in the Eastern and Western parts of undivided India. In this election, the Muslim League performed well and emerged as the sole representative of Indian subcontinent Muslims. It is important to note that this election was projected as the ‘=plebiscite on the question of Pakistan’(Pandey 22). The Congress and the Muslim League came to an agreement on the Cabinet Mission Plan, on the formation of a decentralized Indian federation with two Muslim dominated north-east and north-west wings and the rest of India as the third unit. With the collapse of the agreement between the Congress and the League on a joint cabinet mission, the Congress leaders “believe that this was the most urgent need of the day, with or without the participation of the Muslim League: once the power was transferred to Indian hands, the people of India would themselves resolve all remaining issues”(22).

The constitutional demand of the separate states or regional autonomy for Pakistan turned into unconstitutional methods- extra judicial killing, the mass movement for the separate nation transformed into mass killing, arson, violence, rape and communal riot with the call for “direct action day” by the Muslim League on 16th August, 1946. Several thousand people were killed in the four-day riot in Calcutta. It has often been considered as the turning point in the history of the Indian subcontinent. It proliferated like wildfire: after the Calcutta riot, reports of the violence and riot surfaced in Bombay in September, in East Bengal and Bihar in October, in UP during November, and it engulfed the north-western Frontier from January to March, 1947.

Gayandra Pandey distinguishes three stages of the partition: first, the idea of Pakistan did not include any separate independent nation, or it was at the initial stage of state-formation, as he observes:

It was never clarified how Muslims spread out over the subcontinent, and divided by class, sect, gender, regional interest and language would become part of one separate country; or indeed exactly where this new state called Pakistan would be ... (30)

Indeed, the idea of Pakistan, for most of its supporters, till before the riots and massacres all over the subcontinent, is to gain autonomy for Indian Muslims in the Muslim-majority parts of the Indian subcontinent- the north-east and north-west parts of undivided India.

The second partition, as Pandey refers to the period or initiatives oriented towards splitting up Muslim populated province of Punjab in

north-west and Bengal in north-east, initiated with Calcutta riot. From March 1947 onwards,

the demand for splitting up these two provinces was projected as the necessary evil. It is interesting to note here that, in this juncture, the proposal espoused by the Muslim League of the two-nation theory, was rejected by the remaining stakeholders, such as Congress, Sikh leaders and Hindu Mahasabha, but later, the very idea of the separate nations on the basis of religious identities was accepted. This culmination of the two-nation theory was a shock to the League. The Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal demanded the partition of Bengal on the basis of religious identities long before the Congress leadership called for, later, the Sikh leaders also accepted the proposal for the division of Punjab. The consequences of such initiatives were not imagined, what would be the cost and who would pay.

In the month of July 1947, both the Bengal and Punjab legislative assemblies cast their vote to decide the division of these provinces. The legislative members of eastern Punjab and West Bengal voted for the division. In the upcoming months, the Indian subcontinent will witness unprecedented events of mass migration, massacres, rape, forced religious conversion, arson and displacement from home for national identities, as Pandey wrote:

The events of August provided the final, deadly

push. ... The third 'Partition' in which hundred of thousands were uprooted and slaughter, rape and forcibly 'converted' in a display of almost unimaginable malevolence was under way. (35)

The Impact of Partition

The third partition can be demarcated by the official declaration of the partition of the Indian subcontinent into two nations, India and Pakistan, on 15th August 1947. The third partition of the Indian subcontinent addresses the immediate impact on those who were on the wrong sides of their would-be nation/home. While officially the partition was announced on 15th August, 1947, the boundary lines between these nascent nations were not announced until 17th August, 1947. There was greater

uncertainty among the people residing near the border lines, the persistent fear of frenzied mob attacks, and the desire to stay at home created confusion. It followed a mass migration from both sides: Menon and Bhasin point out that 'about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab and Bengal ... and about 500,000 – 1,000,000 had perished' (Menon and Bhasin 20, 35). These exoduses from both sides of the border gradually increased due to the attacks on the Sikh and Hindu locations by the Muslim mob in Pakistan and the Muslim localities by the Hindu mobs in India. The massacre and violence against women to avenge theirs followed are often fuelled by rumours and propagated as testimonies of such heinous crimes, as Pandey notes:

Hearsay transformed into truth- the 'truth' of the riot, and the 'truth' about India in the last days of Raj.

(Pandey 71)

In this rumour circulation, various government officials and public representatives also participated: they lodged various emerging narratives as official documents. One such incident narrated by the government officer of India, the migration of the Muslims out of Kapurthala state, pointed out by Pandey:

The refugees walked in rows of ten or twelve, the officer(continues). The women and children

walked in the centre, flanked on either side by men. "The groups of armed Sikhs stood about in the fields on either side of the road. Every now and again one of the groups would make a sally at the column, drag out two or three women who sought to resist were killed... 'By the time the column arrived at Jullundar..., we are told, 'almost all the women and young girls had been kidnapped in this manner'(72)

In this narration, the most important crux is that "we are told", and the officer documented it as he witnessed the entire process personally. These types of circulated and propagated narratives have become the official discourse. Later, Bengal Muslim League leader, Husain Suhrawardy, vehemently propagated this narration as the 'Sikh method' of attack on the Muslims, escalating the intensity of tenacity for avenging their own people, which ultimately created a domino effect of riot, arson and massacres.

Another essential characteristic of the partition was the violence against women: rape, forced conversion and mutilation of women's body parts. The border lines were not only curved upon the topographical land; the mark of the partition can also be found on the bodies of women. Urvashi Butalia describes the wild spread sexual savagery: "about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion)" (Butalia 3).

The riot incidents across the border often seemed a war on each other's women. The violence targeted towards the women of other religions often appeared to be the primary goal of the partition. The objectification of the women's body is not limited to violence, but it has been projected as the symbol of the community's dignity. To preserve or maintain this sense of dignity, lots of women were encouraged to be murdered or to self-immolate. The abduction of women, during the attacks, had been considered a souvenir of the war. The violence against women was eulogized and projected as a token of the restoration of the communities' pride and honour. The stories of rape, murder, mutilation,

abduction of other women and sacrifices of one's own women were narrated with such tempo that it actually instigated to commit the same crime against other women.

Locating Partition in the Historiograph(ies)

The Indian historiography and history writing tradition in academia began with the introduction of the colonial education system in India. Like in most colonies spreading across the continents, historiography in India has the baggage of a decolonisation mission: in this pursuit of writing the history of India in the western scientific, objective tradition of historiography, it has constantly been dealing with colonial oppression or a critique of colonialism. The second most salient aspect of Indian historiography is to present the Indian past or tradition and culture as the most antique, civilized and most profoundly rich or sophisticated. Along with this agenda, there is a predominant theme of this nationalist historiography, a demonstration of 'unity and diversity' in Indian society, culture and tradition. The events of the partition of Indian subcontinent and emergence two independent nations- Indian and Pakistan have been following this tradition of Indian historiography with minor addendum of argument in the regard of communal violence, massacres in the preceding years, during and after the partition: nationalist historiography extensively emphasizes the struggle of Indian freedom culmination into independence as the authentic history and the communal violence and massacre as the aberration of nationalist movement and the outcome of the grand evil design of British-divide and rule, or the momentary deviation from the unity in diversity logic. This approach to analyse the partition violence does neither do any justice to the people who succumbed to the partition violence, nor does it project India as a mature or responsible democratic nation.

The constant marginalization of the partition history and the taciturn attitude towards addressing violence during the partition by prominent historians, or presenting the violence perpetuated by the anti-social elements due to the abdication of political as well as moral

responsibility of the state, have neither addressed the violence nor done any justice to the victims of the partition. It is to deny the existing antagonism between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, although there are myriad pieces of evidence of communal harmony. But there is also existing communal animosity. It cannot be denied. It is the state that imposes external necessary pressure to control the communal and violent impulses in order to civilize the subject of the state, and through the physical as well as external use of the state apparatus, the state succeeds in self-control and civilizing the masses, as Norbert Elias aptly points out:

... the peculiar stability of the apparatus of

psychology self-restrain which emerges as a decisive trait built into habits of every civilized human being, stands in the closet relationship to the monopolization of physical force and the growing stability of the central organs of society. (Qtd. In Pandey 54)

The responsibility to contain the violence during the partition years had been intentionally denied; it can be found in Sumit Sarkar's analysis of the partition years:

... the British, who as late as June 1946 had been making plans to bring army divisions to India in the context of a possible Congress movement, made no such move while presiding over the awesome human tragedy (the partition massacre).

(sarkar 120)

The same thing can also be highlighted in the context of the post-independence violence, although the intention of the nascent government was not like the Britishers', but the newly independent nation, due to massive uncertainty and unprecedented challenges of a civil-war-like situation, failed to uphold the civilizing process of the state.

The interpretation of the socio-political situation of the partition years in these historiographies remains unable or remains taciturn to address the violence or archive the violence, or are hesitant to present a way to deal with it. It is also necessary to present another perspective of the partition, as Javed Alam distinguishes the partition violence

and greater organization of the historical process as the particular or unhistorical or 'little event' and general or historical events, respectively. Alam points out again the state responsibility or the British inactivity to curtail the communal elements of the society, or the British systematic singular agenda of divide-and-rule, leads to the little events of massacre and violence. Then he categorizes three types of violence: first, the state organized violence, as in Germany, second, the collective violence, a large organization perpetuates mass killings, and the state does nothing to stop it, and the third, in this act of violence, the people become the victims of

violence at the hands of other people. Alam concludes with the suggestion that it is better to forget the partition violence for the betterment of society, and notes that during the partition violence, most of the testimonies of violence suggest that there is always someone to extend help.

It is very crucial to note that the dominant theme of Indian historiography – unity in diversity- has always been resurfaced in generation after generation. But the question of moral responsibility of a mature democracy or a society to accept it as part of history, rather than merely discarding it as an aberration of the main discourse, still remains unanswered. Here, the importance of the mnemohistory or cultural memory or the sites of memory can play an important role to heal the historic wound by including/ exhibiting/accepting the partition violence committed by the same people who have been living as the community. The local memory sites of or for the partition victims can do justice. In Javed Alam's argument, the memory of the partition violence, that can inculcate the bitterness, reiterates to forget or suppress or archive is only way out from the bitterness of the partition violence memory. I want to point out that the nature of memory is indeed malleable; it has the potential to inculcate bitterness, as did in the interregnum period of World War I and WWII in the collective psyche of Germany, but it is indeed the memory of the holocaust which also

leads the acceptance of moral responsibility such that heinous crimes shall never take place in future.

Discussion: The Literary Mediation of the Partition

This paper attempts to examine the canonical partition text, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, analysing how Indian historiographies presented the partition in the previous sections. In this part, the aspects and characteristics of the partition are highlighted or mediated through the canonical text. In the *Locating Partition in the Historiographies* section, the unanswered question of violence or how it can be addressed through mnemohistory/ cultural memory/ the sites of memory have been discussed. In this section, it first highlights the canonisation process of any artefact through the course of history. *Train to Pakistan* is discussed as a canonical partition text. Next, it tries to locate how the text addresses the partition and the process of identity formation on the eve of independence.

As Aleida Assmann defines the process of canonization:

the working memory stores and reproduces the cultural capital of a society that is continuously recycled and re-affirmed. Whatever has made it into the active cultural memory has passed rigorous process of selection, which secure for certain artifacts a lasting place in the cultural working memory of a society. This process is called canonization.

(Assmann 100)

These three phases- selection, value and duration- of canonization are the litmus test for any artifacts for transforming into canon. In this regard, *Train to Pakistan*, the first novel in English on the theme of the partition, published in 1956, gains a canonical status in this genre, although multiple novels have been written since the publication of *Train to Pakistan*. As Assmann describes that ‘the canon is not built up anew by every generation; on the contrary it outlives the generations who have to encounter and reinterpret it anew according to the time’(100). To note a few names of historians, literary

critiques, and authors from the preceding generations, it would be long list, who have praised or emphasised the importance of *Train to Pakistan* as the partition fiction, the prominent ones are Stanley Walpert, eminent partition historian, R. K. Srinivasa Iyengar, Meenakshi Mukherjee, William Walsh, literary critics and academicians, and Salman Rushdie and Amitabha Ghosh, renowned novelists. So the importance of this literary text has been iteratively emphasised by the stalwarts of various generations. Another most important aspect of the process of canonization is the mediation and remediation: the text has been translated into various Indian languages and adapted completely into a different medium such as cinema in 1998 by Pamela Rooks. Finally, a literary text turns into a canon that must serve in the academic curriculum, also, as Assmann observes:

... canons change, they remain indispensable tool for education; without them academic fields cannot be established, university curricula cannot be taught. (101)

The debut novel of Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, is an integral part of the English departments of Indian universities. Thus, this novel justifies all the criteria to be termed as the canonical partition fiction.

Analysis

As mentioned in the Method section, the mimesis theory of Paul Ricoeur has been implied to arrange the text, *Train to Pakistan*. Paul Ricoeur, in his book *Time and Narrative*, provides the theory of mimesis to understand how literary text delineates the past within the context of the present through mimesis models: mimesis1, mimesis2 and mimesis3. Mimesis1 is the prefiguration process in which heterogeneous mnemonic variables are converged into a single text. It is a paradigmatic model and its selection process of mnemonic constituents are of three distinct dimensions- material, social and mental. The next, mimesis2 is the configuration process in which the text stands essentially distinct from the prefiguration phase, and finally, mimesis3 is the refiguration process in which the text enters into the realm of audience and reader. Thus, it

becomes ready again to prefigure into another text. In his autobiography, *Truth, Love and Little Malice: An Autobiography*, Khushwant Singh recounts his Lahore days when he practiced law and used to visit rural Lahore, from where most his clients came. The characters in his debut novel are from his past encounters with his clients from the rural parts of Lahore. In another instance, his recollection of his train journey from Abbottabad to Lahore via Taxila and his hairbreadth escape from the impending massacre of the fellow passengers near Taxila has become the predominant theme of his novel and later, the very theme or the trope of train journey emerged as the symbolic representation of the partition in the various modes of representations. The autobiographical dimension of mnemonic events has provided Singh to delineate the partition into literature. Apart from these various newspaper reports describing the horror of partition and the gloomy political atmosphere during this period, and his professional experience serve as the components for his literary mediation of the partition.

Before indulging in an analysis of the text, *Train to Pakistan*, it is mandatory to discuss the usage of the train in the mediation of the partition throughout multiple literary and various other modes of presentation. Indeed, the pictures of train loaded with people, mutilated human parts, dead bodies and blood are intrinsically related to the partition. The image of the overcrowded train is the *liuex de memoire* of the partition, it narrates stories of hairbreadth escape, loss, pain. It remains the sole witness of massacres, violence, exodus and transition from home to nation or fear of annihilation to hope. In Singh's narrative, the train does not appear momentarily, but it is an integral part of the mundane life of Mano Majra; actually, the daily life revolves around the arrival and departure of trains at Mano Majra:

Not many trains stop at Mano Majra. Express trains do not stop at all, of may slow passenger trains, only two, one from Delhi to Lahore in the mornings and the other from Lahore to Delhi in the evenings, are scheduled to stop for a few minutes... Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore, and as it

approaches the bridge, the driver invariably blows two long blasts on the whistle. In an instance, all Mano majra comes awake. ... when the evening passenger from Lahore comes in everyone gets to work again... when goods train steams in they say to each other, 'There is the goods train'. It is like saying goodnight. (Train 323-333)

From morning to night, religious practice and daily chores are tenaciously stipulated with trains. Trains are the only link to the world for these villagers.

The disruption of the train schedules creates a stir within the enclosed rural life. Khushwant Singh does not provide any detailed description of the refugees' journey from Pakistan to India or report any violence on the journey, as he does in his autobiography. The novel presents the impact of the partition/violence through the arrival of the trainload of dead bodies at Mano Majra and how these corpses are disposed of with the help of villagers. With the eruption of violence, the arrival of the trainload with corpses, and the disruption of train schedules, the normalcy of this village has been shattered:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seems as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for mullah's call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that time had changed and the mail train might not run through at all... In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by- if it did not come by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether... Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra.

(81)

This topsy-turvy is only the prelude to the chaos and anarchy going to engulf Mano Majra, Bhai Meet Singh recounts at the end of the novel to

Iqbal Singh the succession of events during this time:

Trainloads of dead people came to Mao Majra. We buried one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated, and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. (175)

The usage of the words “refugees” and “Pakistan” by Meet Singh indicates the transition of the variables for identity from socio-cultural to national and politically charged ones.

Identity: The Transition from Country to Nation

The literary mediation of the partition and the formation of new nations-India and Pakistan has iteratively followed these thematic aspects- the transition from local to national and presentation of a communally shared social space in the pre-partition India through imaginary locality, and the presence of essential feelings of community among Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. This sense of belonging among these heterogeneous communities emanates from the social framework constituted by the social-culturally shared variables. It is not that the partition fiction has been presenting the pre-partition India as a social utopia, but as Alok Bhalla observes aptly:

These texts(partition fiction) do not claim that relations between the different religious groups were always free from suspicion, distrust or stupid abuse.

(Bhalla 3120)

Indeed, these narratives acknowledge the sporadic conflict among these communities, but it did not disrupt their world, as Bhalla points out that “the experience of life was sufficiently secure and rooted to enable the society as a whole to evolve mechanism for containing tensions”(3120)

In this canonical partition fiction, the entire narrative follows the same trajectory: the narrative is set in an imaginary countryside, and the world of Mano Majra revolves around the arrival and departure of trains. The disruption of their world was presented through the arrival of a

trainload of corpses from Pakistan. The action of the novel revolves around these five events:

1. Arrival of trainload of corpses
2. The arrival of the refugees in Mano Majra
3. The evacuation of the Muslims from Mano Majra
4. The destruction of neighbouring villagers in a riot
5. The arrival of the trainload of corpses for the second time and the departure of a train full of Muslim passengers for Pakistan

The arrival of trainloads of corpses and the refugees from the western part of India to Mano Majra intensifies the disruption and impending chaos. The cremation of corpses with the help of the villagers, the narrative explicitly presents that agencies outside the purview of Mano Majra are responsible for the spiralling chaos after the arrival of the trainload of dead bodies. This spiralling action reaches its acme when the villagers are at the passive receiving end of various agencies actively operating or manipulating the world making of Mano Majra. To list these agencies, it is the District Magistrate, Hukum Chand, with the help of an inspector tries to push the Muslims back to Pakistan safely, the arrival of second trainload of corpses from Pakistan, the Sikh vigilant group who appeared at the Gururdwara of Mano Majra to recruit the Sikhs for the retaliatory action of massacring Sikhs by Muslims in Pakistan.

It is important to note that the narrative implicitly hints to the urge of violence among the villagers:

Four of Mail's companions steeped over the threshold. They were followed by many others, mostly refugees. Some villagers who had only recently wept at the departure of their Muslim friends also stood up to volunteer. (Singh 160)

This is the first time the villagers actively participated in the partition violence. The agencies of violence and manipulation enter into the core of Mano Majra, the evicted Muslims' properties have been in the control of Mali and his dacoit gang, the radical Sikh brotherhood swayed the Mano Majra to participate in the

retaliatory revenge. The partition violence, communalism and massacres are not mere variables of the external world, these are the reality of Mano Majra.

Conclusion

The tenacity of Indian historiographies and the partition literature focus on the positive aspects of the pre-partition communal harmony and civilization values. Indeed, it is the reality that there was a space for shared communal coexistence, but it is also the truth that the violence, may be instigated by the external agencies, unleashed upon each other, is the act of emics or insiders. The concern of the partition literary stalwarts is genuine to inculcate a space of harmony, peace and civility by only emphasizing the positive aspects of during or after the partition or not poking old memories of violence. By doing so, they accept the malleability nature of the memory, that may influence or create tension or a sense of revenge in the present times, what

Dipesh Chakraborty calls “historical wounds” (Niven 4), but memory has also healed and normative or formative aspects, too. If the memory of WW I, particularly the post WW I peace treaty or Versailles Treaty, created a sense of bitterness and humiliation among Germans that later culminated in chauvinistic Nazi nationalism, the collective memory of WW II “focused on ensuring that such acts of aggression never happened again” (Niven 3).

By denying the partition violence or acknowledging the existence of communal tension and censoring or pushing it into the archive, the inculcation of peace and harmony will never be possible. The holocaust memory, taking cue from the mediation of the holocaust horror, has been exhibited as much as possible and acknowledged as the collective failure of the German society. It can surely be affirmed that the acceptance of the partition violence as the collective responsibility will heal the wound of the partition, rather than censoring it.

References

- Assmann, Aleida. “Canon and Archive” A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies, edited by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nunning, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 323-333.
- “Transformations between History and Memory”. *Social Research*, Vol. 75, No. 01, Spring 2008, pp. 323-333. URL: <https://WWW.Jstor.Org/satble/40972052>.
- Bhalla, Alok. “Memory, History and Fictional Representations of the Partition”. *Economic Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 44. Pp. 323-333. URL: <https://WWW.Jstor.com/stable/4408572>.
- Butalia, Urvashi. *Other Side of Silence*. Penguin. 2000.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Niven, Bill and Stefan Berger. Introduction. *Writing the History of Memory*. Edited by Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, Bloomsbury, 2004, pp. 323-333.
- Sarkar, Sumit. *Critique of Colonial India*. Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985.
- Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. Penguin. 2016.