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## MIGRATION: SHATTERED DREAMS DURING 1947 PARTITION

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### **Abstract:**

The world is breaking into smaller fragments since time immemorial, making the Partition of countries a salient feature of world history. India got its Independence from Britishers in 1947, but unfortunately, it was partitioned on ethnic grounds. The Partition led to the inception of two independent states, India and Pakistan. Independence brought in much more than attaining freedom and an end of hundred years of struggle. It was an eagerly awaited but joyless birth of a nation that created one of the world's dangerous borders. A lot has been written about Partition from the political, sociological and economic viewpoint, but there is a gap in the psychological study of the trauma experienced. The present paper focuses on the robust understanding of the trauma of the people who have experienced immigration during the country's Partition through literary representations and advocates a rethinking of cross-border migration. The select texts, univocal, offer rich multiple interpretations. The narratives refer to the country's Partition either directly or indirectly and deal with the entire community's individual trauma and collective trauma. Thousands of citizens crossed the India-Pakistan border during 1947, during the Partition of British India. Although much has been written about these so-called Partition refugees, a complete picture remains abstruse.

**Keywords:** Partition, Britishers, Borders, Nation, Freedom, Migration

### **Introduction**

The literature on Partition offers crucial insights into the entire experience of 1947 migration, which lends a historical, social, and psychological perspective. The Partition of India was proclaimed by Lord Mountbatten on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1947. Almost nearly about 200 years of colonial rule, the transfer of power in the Indian sub-continent in August 1947 was marked by a historical event that has become known by the unfortunate term Partition. India and Pakistan, two nation-states, were formed on religious grounds. The Partition continues to taint the attitudes of the successive generations. The Partition had traumatic repercussions on the psyche of all who had a taste of it. The Partition instantly jeopardized the lives of the people who were on the opposite side of the border. The moment of Partition in 1947 was marked by the unprecedented disruption of accepted norms, particularly in North and Northwest India. However, at least one million people were slain and twelve million were forced to flee from their homes during the largest mass migration in history. Urvashi Butalia writes, "Twelve million people were displaced as a result of Partition. Nearly one million died." (45)

The Partition of the Indian sub-continent was a human tragedy of enormous proportion and the scale of violence was incomprehensible with mass genocides bordering on ethnic cleansing. The Partition created violent massacres based on religion, caste, political allegiance and the region of existence. During the Partition, erupted, newly found and deadly hatred communities – Hindu and Muslim. The Muslim leaders felt that the Muslim's identity would come under great threat with the departure of the British, so they decided to have a separate nation for them. The Congress leaders, unconvinced initially, were compelled to relent to the division to avoid a communal war of enormous proportion. At the same time, the makers of nations were thrilled at the prospect of nation-building and dreamt of a golden era of social harmony and material progress. But, on August 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, British colonial rule in India ended, and the Indian subcontinent was divided into two independent dominions – India and Pakistan. The procedure of Partition and drawing political boundaries was notable by disastrous brutality in large parts of North India, especially Punjab, which resulted in mass displacement of people. The Partition of India resulted in large-scale migration from both East and West Pakistan. Around 18 million people were forced to flee from their homes due to the brutal frenzy that erupted. Urvashi Butalia, in her book *The Other Side of Silence*, says, "People travelled in buses, in cars, by train, but mostly on foot in great columns called kafilas, which could stretch for dozens of miles.



The longest of them, said to comprise nearly 400,000 people, refugees travelling east to India from western Punjab, took as many as eight days to pass any given spot on its route." (1-2)

During Partition, mass movements attracted the most heinous crimes – killing, looting, abduction, and rape. The two states of Punjab and Bengal, geographically, became the focal point of inhumane brutality. The methods of violence were unimaginable, with attacks on trains, deliberate derailment and physical humiliation. During communal rioting, women and children were heavily targeted. Women, always protected in the family's cocoon, were worst caught in the dilemma in the open territory. In the words of Hijari, "Pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits." (xviii) Hajari highlights that violence plays a significant role in explaining the mass exodus.

Contrary to the expected joy of freedom, people were worried about their lives. The question of survival belittled every other concern of life. People left their ready-to-be reaped crops, valuables, homes, bonds, and self-respect to move towards a safe land. Those who could not give up their homes and motherland either gave up their lives or religion. Partition shattered the centuries-old bonds that had existed between the communities. The massive influx sparked a severe refugee crisis. The unwelcoming sides termed the people as refugees, changing their identities forever.

Migration is a painful process for all humans, but it is made more dangerous when it occurs under terror and is imposed by force. Migration is a global phenomenon and one of the most burning issues during Partition till date. People migrated from the current location to a different land which they have not seen before, from village to town, from one state to another, or it may be from one country to another for social, economical, political or cultural reasons. Butalia states, "between August and November 1947, up to 673 refugee trains moved 2,800,000 refugees within India and across the border. In just one month, the MEOs used one million gallons of petrol to evacuate people in East Punjab." (60) When people migrate from one nation to another, they bring their skills and emotions of leaving their land with them. The act of migration brings mental distress in the lives of people. Migration created not only a constant risk but also an emotional trauma of uprooted and demolished identity. When people move into a new environment, they may be reluctant to discuss the trauma they have experienced. Migrants had to re-establish their lives in a bizarre environment at the end of an excruciating and often terrifying journey. In the words of Talbot and Singh, "Migration was not just a single journey. Many refugees, especially those from an urban background, travelled from place to place in their new homeland before finally settling permanently." (98-99)

### **Trauma**

Trauma is a stressful term. Trauma is

- (a) A psychological reaction to an incident that an entity considers.
- (b) Too intense, highly stressful, A wide variety of physical and mental effects have been triggered.
- (c) An irrational reaction to an awful incident.

Trauma comes from the Greek word, which means 'wound,' referring to an injury inflicted in the body. Later, the meaning of the term evolved as a wound inflicted upon the mind. A traumatic event causes a corrosive effect on an individual's physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual facets. Studies have revealed surprising changes in the structure of the brain as a consequence of traumatic experiences. Once a person faces any kind of trauma, he/she comes in a shattered personality. Trauma destabilizes the mind, jeopardizes emotional security and threatens the development of the individual. American Psychological Association states, "Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster." (Medical News Today)

Lacan refers to the trauma as an absence that recedes periodically. The sense of absence destroys the traumatic experience of knowledge. Thus, what remains is a lack of linguistic representation, vague references, dissociation and aporia. Caruth's classic model of the trauma theory claim that trauma is irreversible damage to the individual's psyche, resulting in the absence of experience and an inability of language to express the traumatic experience. In her book *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth presents her theory of trauma profoundly influenced by the theories of Freud, based on the concept of 'suddenness and belatedness.' Caruth gives the idea that an individual's encounter with an overwhelming event is so sudden that it creates a traumatic impact on the individual. The fundamental premise of the theory is the shock that emerges from the suddenness of the overwhelming event that causes the trauma. Thus, trauma is the outcome of an individual's inability to cope with the emotions generated by an experience.

### **Migration during Partition**



Time failed to be the best healer in the context of the relations between India and Pakistan. Not only was their constant danger, but there was also the emotional trauma of uprooting and losing one's identity. The line drawn by Radcliffe was an unapologetic act that remains on in our consciousness; its legacy still haunts us. Movement from one country to another is immigration. When immigration is caused by some political or other pressure, it is called Emigration. Those who immigrate from one country to another are immigrants. There can be many reasons behind migration or immigration: economic, educational, marriage, trade, job opportunities, military deployment, war, search for stress-free lives, better living standards, etc.

Migration is a global phenomenon and one of the world's most burning issues. People may migrate from their current location to an alien land, from village to town, from one state to another, or from one country to another for social, economic, political, or cultural reasons. Migration has been a common trend throughout history. Throughout the summer of 1947, violence was carried out, particularly in cities such as Lahore and Gurdaspur. People had no idea where the routes would be drawn in the part of Punjab. According to Yasmin Khan, "The mass migration was the sting in the scorpion's tale, the unknown face of the Partition Plan." (156) Cyril Radcliffe, a British administrative officer who never visited India before or after the Partition, was flooded with petitions supporting various frontier areas, whereas Lahore went to Pakistan and Gurdaspur remained with India, leading to the widespread tumult. Most people did not know about border areas, their nationality, and whether to stay or move. The number of refugees crossing Punjab and fleeing the state increased at an alarming rate as soon as the Radcliffe line was established.

In 42 days from September 18th to October 29th, 849,000 refugees entered India in formally organized foot convoys alone. Between August and November, an additional 2.3 million crossed the borders by train. Thirty-two thousand, mostly the rich, the privileged or essential administrative staff, arrived by air in both directions. (Khan 156)

The atrocious disaster mix with brutality is the generalised picture of the Partition. In March, across the border, the majority of people did not have access to transportation. They were forced to move on foot, "Foot columns sometimes 30 - 40,000 strong, created human caravans 45 miles long in places. It was 150 miles for those Punjabis coming to India from Lyallpur or Montgomery districts, and Muslim Meos from the Gurgaon region of India took three weeks to reach Pakistan." (Khan 160)

The most enduring depiction of Partition are those of overflowing trains. The railway workers would usually be the first ones to find their positions in the train for their families. Sometimes the train timetables and their platforms would not be announced until around half an hour before the departure as a safety measure. The railway workers could access the information more effectively than anyone else through their personal networks. They could reach with their families at the right time to board the train before the rush began. Many peoples have to give incentives to the railway employees to obtain the information. Military trucks were used for short distances such as from Lahore to Amritsar and for transporting passengers from remote areas to the train stations for further journey. "What had begun as a spontaneous exodus was rapidly merged into an organized evacuation operation. In the first week of September, a Military Evacuation Organisation was formed and by late October, 1,200 military and civilian vehicles were being used to transport refugees across Punjab." (Khan 158)

Millions of people who had been uprooted were in a terrible mental state. They were evicted from their ancestral home amid unfathomable terror and misery; the majority of them did not have much time to plan their escape. They had no choice but to accept their bleak fate. They had seen their loved ones hacked in front of their eyes and their home had been ransacked and set ablaze by their neighbours. In the case of Hindu refugees from Eastern Pakistan, however, the situation was quite different. Hindus were treated as if they were in a cage. The Hindus of Eastern Pakistan were forced to flee from their homeland after being tortured and humiliated. While foot columns were the preferred way for the rural masses to evacuate them, trains were being used to transport the town Population. At that time, trains were named as the 'India Special' or 'Pakistan Special' for refugees. Many times the trains arrived at their destinations piled with dead bodies. Such trains unleash another round of carnage to bring back an equivalent number of dead bodies on their return journey. Prakash Tandon, a Hindu Punjabi from Gujarat, recounts that:

One day, train crammed with two thousand refugees came from the more predominantly Muslim areas of Jhelum and beyond. At Gujarat station, the train was stopped, and Muslims from the neighbourhood, excited by the news of violence in East Punjab, began to attack and loot. There was indescribable carnage. Several hours later, the train moved on, filled with a bloody mess of corpses, without a soul alive. At Amritsar, when the train



with its load of the dead arrived, they took revenge on a trainload of Muslim refugees. (qtd. in Kaur 131)

Their property was whelled out, rape and murder became common and women's dignity was jeopardised. However, in Punjab, the population exchange process was completed in the time frame specified, "They had no choice but to seek safety in flight, filled with wrath at what they had seen, and full of anguish for numberless missing kinsmen who were still stranded in Pakistan, and for their womenfolk who had been abducted." (Menon 418)

### **Results of Migration after Partition**

Migration is not a perfect word because it transmits a tone of desirability. Hindus and Sikhs moved from Pakistan to India and Muslims from India to Pakistan during Partition did so because they thought that their lives would be in danger if they continue to remain there; they felt they hadn't any option except to move from one border to another. "Migration was not just a single journey. Many refugees, especially those from an urban background, travelled from place to place in their new homeland before finally settling permanently." (Talbot and Singh 98 - 99)

Though there is a lot of literature on partition refugees, the analysis of the spectacular population movements across the boundary is still not comprehensive. Moreover, the displacement bestowed them with discrimination and humiliation, as the question of resettlement still tormented their minds.

"...They are now without food and their cattle are rapidly dying for lack of fodder, or being slaughtered by them for eating; their bullock carts (wherever they had any) are being used as fuel-wood and other difficulties are aggravated by the onset of winter which with their physical debility will make them easy prey to diseases like pneumonia and influenza. (Khan 160)

To make it worse, infernal temperatures on the Punjabi plains in June were accompanied by dust storms, making it seem as though all the fates were plotting against the refugees. Margaret Bourke-White, an American photographer, says, "We went on with the convoys week after week...until our hair became stiff and grey with dust, our clothes felt like emery boards, my cameras became clogged with grit." (qtd. in Khan 160).

For many, the journey itself was a brutal physical punishment. Women gave birth to babies on the route, and people died of malnutrition, fatigue, cholera, and grief. The pain of physical humiliation and the shattering of self-respect that the women endured can never be articulated without the insights provided by the women. Luggage was often seized or stolen along the way or simply abandoned as people were too poor to bear it; sores grew on their feet. People's lives, and property were severely impacted due to the new borders, which resulted in an exchange of population or forced migration and uprooting of over 18 million people amid prodigious brutality. The result of Partition was mass migration, murder, rapes, etc. People have been uprooted from their motherland. It was the most disastrous experience. Migration causes stress, which leads to psychological injury. Theoretically, this should result in a proportionate increase in common mental disorders.

Many citizens with large property and businesses left troubled areas as a precautionary measure. They would either take temporary homes for their stay on rent or go to the hill stations in Hindu-dominated cities. They also sold or traded their belongings with Muslims who were on the other side of the border. The foot pillars of refugees were predominantly rural in nature, the major possession of which was not carried by trains or motor transport, as was the case with the livestock and the farm machinery. The tidal waves of people escaping from Pakistan and India were so fantastic, massive, and so detailed that they put Pakistan's entire substructure unbalanced. They were prone to attacks as the hostile cities and villages passed by. So it was important for survival to have an organisational degree. They were organised with young women and girls in the center, older women and men in the back, and young men with raw weapons, such as lathis (high wooden sticks) or rifles, wrapping the last defensive ring around them. Mothers threw babies into bushes on the roadside and left them to die. The urgent need among the columns was to escape from Pakistan and to cover the journey as quickly as possible. Those with bullock carts could put their bundles in the carts, and those who travelled by foot carried bundles on their heads. Among them were landless Harijans and village workers, who had no bullock carts of their own and were accompanied by their fellow villagers.

A large number of the arriving refugees came from various occupational backgrounds and were unable or unqualified to fill the holes left by those who had left. The refugee movement in the autumn of 1947 was both a disaster for the refugees and a tragedy for two new states. People have no idea where they were going. Rajinder Singh, who arrived in Delhi after a long journey from Punjab, told Urvashi Butalia about how his family left in the middle of the night, "Whatever people could pick up, big things and small, they put clothes on top of those they were wearing, and throw a *khes* or sheet



over their shoulders. They picked up whatever they could and then they joined the *kafila*. Who could take along heavy things? And the *kafila* begins to move.” (Khan 157)

Refugees were dying of cold on the roadside in Lahore by the end of 1947 when the temperature fell to near freezing point in mid-December. The refugee’s severe trauma was evident in their frozen and fixed expressions, uncontrollable tears, and astonished inertia. Some people went utterly insane.

Gandhi was a staunch supporter of replanting uprooted populations and made a strong argument for resettling refugees in their original homes. Muslim communities were driven out of central and western India, just as Hindus and Sikhs were driven out of large swathes of Pakistan. At the Wagah border, another convoy was brought together in relief as people chanted ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ (Long live Mother India). Passengers arriving by boat in Karachi cried out ‘Allah-O-Akbar’ when they saw the unknown Pakistani coastline for the first time. They were going through unspeakable hardships regularly. Refugee camps were ubiquitous, and the crisis spread across the subcontinent. Bullying, bribery, and exploitation were faced by the refugees. Cholera broke out in several Punjabi districts, with especially severe epidemics in Sheikhpura, Ferozepore, and Lahore, while dysentery and smallpox also led to the deaths of hundreds. It was difficult to avoid sharing rooms with other, less suitable castes while preserving old hierarchies and ideas of ritual purity. There was inadequate sanitation, ancient customs were ignored, and taboos were broken. Refugees began the long path to recovery, acclimating to their new lifestyle, which would never be the same again.

The construction of classrooms, dispensaries, homes, and workshops was funded by the government. The government established job centres, hired refugees to work on public projects, cleared land in forested areas for displaced people to live, built training centres to teach women skills like soap-making and embroidery, and retrained men as mechanics carpenters, spinners, paper-makers, shoe-makers, and printers. Welfare homes were set up for orphans and widows.

In the extract given below, the tense atmosphere during long journeys is strongly recalled, by an educated Muslim woman, Dr. Zahida Amjad as,

All passengers were forced into compartments like sheep and goats. Because of which the heat and the suffocating atmosphere was intensified and it was very hard to breathe. In the ladies compartment, women and children were in a terrible condition. Women tried in vain to calm down and comfort their children. If you looked out the window you could see dead bodies lying in the distance [...] These were the scenes that made your heart bleed and everybody loudly repented their sins and recited verses asking God’s forgiveness. Every moment seemed to be the most terrifying and agonizing. (qtd. in Talbot 49)

The experiences of refugees upon their arrival in their new homeland varied greatly. Some had family members and relatives who supported them get back on their feet and soon resume their old jobs. This aspect of the Partition has been completely ignored by historians, but it is central and still has a profound psychological effect. In *Azadi*, Chaman Nahal points to the theme of migration through the leading protagonist of the Sialkot family, Lala Kanshi Ram. In addition to his extensive property, which will never be restored, he arrived with his family in Delhi safely but suffered a severe emotional loss.

The main constraints that made their lives unbearable were a lack of adequate drinking water, a lack of proper medical facilities, and an irregular rationing supply. Many children died of dysentery and other epidemics in the camps as a result of unsanitary conditions. Due to a lack of funds, the dead bodies of the children were seldom buried. The camp inmates were frequently forced to throw the dead bodies into jungles. The government-sanctioned Rs.16 for a body’s burial. The government declared July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1949, as the cut-off date, the majority of the displaced people were disenfranchised. Refugees arriving after this date would not be granted the right to Indian citizenship unless an act of parliament making a special provision for acquiring citizenship act was passed. Refugees’ lives were not like a bed of roses after India’s Partition. Although their stories were not lettered in black and white, they bore witness to the struggle they had gone through in order to rebuild their lives.

Countless people from various walks of life and states became martyrs for the cause of emancipation and subjugation of British colonialism. Thousands of people were imprisoned, thousands were hanged and countless people became victims of the oppression of Britishers. Women did not lag behind either. Independence was achieved through the combined efforts of all the sections of the population.

### **Condition of Refugee Camps**

The camp life was unpleasant and at times, subhuman in nature. In those camps, each occupant was given a small space to live in, with pebbles and stones; each family determined the size of their



allotted land. They frequently had to deal with acute lack of sleep. A family of four was permitted to stay in a single tent, and each family member over four was allowed to live in more than one tent. They had no idea what the terms privacy and secrecy mean to them.

### Conclusion

Just as Partition is not an event with a beginning and ending date, its effects cannot be measured. Many things remain untouched; many subjects remain vague. By 1948, after the great migration had finished, more than 15 million people had been rooted, and one to two million were killed. Partition in India has a central identity. Finally, we can say that immigration during the Partition came with a traumatic story of various kinds. Of course, India's Partition added 'black memories' written in 'blank pages' in Historical-Episodes. The new nation is built on the battle, sacrifice and unbearable spirit of the refugees who have lost all but managed to reconstruct their lives. The difficulties of the motherland's catastrophic dislocation where families had been rooted for generations can only be understood through literature. Was it expected that the people would become landless in their own country, isolated from their family and friends and lose their loved ones as a result of Independence?

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