

HISTORY OF RIOTS DURING THE PARTITION OF INDIA: A STUDY OF URDU LITERATURE

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Independence along with the Partition of British India in 1947 was obtained at a great human cost. Communal riots already rampant since 1946, saw a mounting upsurge during the 1947 Partition process. All the three major communities Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs became victims of the most vicious atrocities. Whether Partition caused riots, or riots caused Partition has become a topic of historical debate, ever since Penderel Moon put forward the view in 1961, that Partition had caused the communal riots. In this context we turn to Urdu fictional accounts of Partition, because Urdu is the only language of literary expression common to all the three affected communities. Our inquiries reveal that literary critics were not as accommodative as the creative writers. We submit, that at times, works of fiction re-create the atmosphere and milieu of an era more authentically than those contained in bare documents like Police records. On another plane, riot history is also People's History, because anonymity offers greater scope for imagination and it is imagination which creates the ambience which is needed to bring events closer to human conscience. In South Asia there is a tradition of drawing upon literature to comprehend history. In the first layer lie the fictional accounts themselves. Two important, though not exhaustive anthologies of riot fiction, are Mumtaz Shirin, *Zulmat-i-Neem Roz*, Lahore, 1991 and Zubyar Rizvi (ed.) *Fasadat ke Afsane*, New Delhi, 1995

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The Partition of British India and the accompanying riots are framed by three historical decisions. (A). The Partition of India as demanded by the All-India Muslim League (B). The partition of the provinces as demanded by the Indian National Congress and (C). The Radcliffe Award

1947, which deviated from the 3rd June 1947 Plan. The first phase caused tension because the Congress at first accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan of 16 May 1946, a constitutional proposal which would have preserved the unity of India and then resiled from it. The second phase caused tension because the Congress called for the partition of the provinces which affected mainly Bengal and the Punjab. The third phase caused tension when despite the exhortation of his Governors; Lord Mountbatten delayed the announcement of the (Sir Cyril) Radcliffe Awards till after Independence on 15 August 1947.

No one was sure where the boundary was being drawn and a large number perished because they found themselves on the wrong side of the border. Following the Lahore 1940 Resolution, C. Rajgopalacharia had identified the Muslim majority areas and it was he who pointed out that Muslims did not have a majority in the western part of Bengal and the eastern side of the Punjab. Radcliffe awarded three Muslim majority districts of the Punjab, namely, Gurdaspur, Ferozpur and Zira to India. Which is why conflict—and riots continue 72 years after partition. The communal riots have been recognized as a crucial factor in Indo-Pakistan and Hindu Muslim relations and at least four academic accounts have been published.

1. Richard D. Lambert, *Hindu-Muslim Riots*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2013 [This thesis was defended at the University of Pennsylvania in 1951]
2. Asutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Life*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001
3. Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003.
4. Ward Berenschot. *Riot Politics: Hindu-Muslim violence and the Indian State*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2011

Apart from these are a 4 volume anthology of translations into English of riot stories, in which Urdu is also represented. Alok Bhalla (ed.) *Stories about the Partition of India*, New Delhi, Indus, 1994.

As such riot literature has been and remains a topic for academic discourse. Both historical and fictional accounts need to complement each other if true empathy with the victims is to be raised. As far as Urdu is concerned, for the sake of convenience, we can access Mumtaz Shirin, *Zulmat- i-Neem Roz*, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel 1991. It had first appeared as Mumtaz Shirin (ed.), *Naya Daur, Fasādāt Number* Karachi,

1949 it is not exhaustive but fairly representative. Slightly overlapping is Zubayr Rizvi (ed.) *Fasādāt ke Afsāne*, New Delhi, 1995.

History it has been said, is written by victors. This rule has been broken in riot literature, because riots produced no victors, only victims. The three leading fiction writers of Urdu also happened to belong to three religious denominations. Krishan Chandr (1914-1977), Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) and Rajinder Singh Bedi (1910-1984) belonged respectively to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. Krishan Chandr wrote about the riots in a short story called "Peshawar Express", in which the train becomes the narrator and gives graphic descriptions of massacres carried on both sides of the borders by majority communities on both sides. The Partition Riots had invested trains with a symbolic nature, therefore the allegorical method of narration carried conviction.

As a statement it was effective but "Peshawar Express" does not represent the best of Krishan Chandr's art. This finds its expression in the as elaborate, but as sincerely written novel *Ghaddār* (The Traitor) Lahore, Naya Idara, 1960. By his masterly descriptions, the narrator brings to reality the gruesome details of massacres, rapes and arson. Although published years after Partition, *Ghaddār* is one the classics of riot literature. Here Krishan Chandr resumes his *forte*, the first person narrative

The writer, a Hindu takes refuge in the house of a Muslim.. At night he treads down and hears his host's wife demanding that they hand him over to a band of Muslim hoodlums. In the morning when his host drives him to the Lahore Railway Station against his wishes, the narrator reproaches his host. His Muslim host replies:

'You don't know. Last night when Haji sent hoodlums to my house after he returned home. They knocked continuously on our door. They were insistent that I hand over you to them'.

'You might have fired a pistol at them'.

'They also had pistols, moreover, I was alone and they were twenty'.

'Then?'

'I tried a sleight of hand and said that I would have the Pundit (the narrator) handed over in the morning—dead or alive!'

‘Did they agree?’

‘Yes, but before they left they took both my sons as hostages’.

“Tariq and Naseem?” I shouted.... “¹

Sa‘adat Hasan Manto appears as more cynical due to his collection of sick riot jokes called *Siyāh Hāshiyē* (Black Margins) Lahore, Maktaba-i-Jadeed, 1948. These are full of irony. Behind the cynic lay the sage as Manto in his preface to a short story, “Sahaye” writes:

Don’t say one hundred thousand Hindus and one hundred thousand Muslims have died. May be after killing one hundred thousand Hindus, Muslims may have thought that the Hindu religion is finished. In the same manner after killing a hundred thousand Muslims, Hindus may have thought they have destroyed Islam, but the reality, which is before your eyes is that Islam has not suffered even a scratch. Religion, creed, faith, belief, and veneration whatever they are, are not in our bodies they are all in our souls. How can they be destroyed by knives, daggers and bullets?²

Thus while Manto never wrote a novel, his range is quite wide. Sahaye for example, is a pimp who genuinely looks after the welfare of prostitutes. In his short story “*Khol Do*” (Open Up) he tells, how the Muslim refugees migrated to Pakistan and looked for their loved ones. Manto expressed the sorrow of a father through the character Sirajdin and explained his grief in following words:

Sirajdin thought a lot with his exhausted mind but did not reach to any conclusion. “Did he bring Sakina to the station with him?,,,,,, had she got into the train with him?,,,,,, On the way, when the train stopped and the *Bulwai* (miscreants) came in , did he faint, and they took Sakina? There were questions in Siraj’s mind but he had no answer. He was in need of sympathy but all around him were people who were themselves in need of sympathy. Sirajdin wanted to cry but the tears did not help him.³

And when Sirajdin got his daughter, she was in a condition which was shameful for everyone, even strangers but here his own people tortured them in such a way that broke humanity into pieces.

People left the girl in the hospital and went back. For some time Sirajdin stood still outside the hospital with a wooden pole and then moved in slowly. There was no one in the room, only a bed with a dead body. Sirajdin moved quietly towards it. Suddenly, the room lit up. Sirajdin saw the bright mole on the pale face and shouted "Sakina".

The doctor, who lit the room, asked Sirajdin "what is this"?

Sirajdin only uttered "yes,yes..... I am her father"

Doctor saw the patient bed and checked her vein and said to Sirajdin "open the window".

The dead body of Sakina moved and put off her trouser.

Old Sirajdin shouted in happiness "alive, my daughter is alive."

The doctor sweated from head to toe.⁴

A number of people blamed Manto for spreading vulgarity through his writings. For this particular story he had to stand trial for obscenity. But this did not deter Manto from writing the truth about Pakistani society.

While in "Khol Do" the horror of gang rape and what it entails is most dramatically presented, in "Tooba Tek Singh" the sardonic side of partition is presented. The class consciousness of British lunatics is remarked upon, as well as how ambiguity regarding the border line caused distress and bloodshed. In one of his later stories "Mosselle" the protagonist is a Sikh whose wife is trapped in a Muslim locality of Bombay. Here Manto is unsparing of Muslim hoodlums in a Bombay locality and depicts their brutality unrelentingly. Mosselle is a coquettish Jewess who, in order to save the life of a Sikh woman, sacrifices her own life.

Rajinder Singh Bedi in this genre is best known for his *Lājwanti* written in 1950 but first published in a volume in Pakistan by Naya Idara in 1966. Here Bedi does not depict the actual horrors of partition. He discusses instead one of the after-tremors, the rehabilitation of women who had been abducted during the violence, and then, after great effort restored to their family. In *Lājwanti*, Bedi shows that though the abducted woman's husband welcomes her, a psychological bar prevents him from resuming conjugal relations.

It was Rajinder Singh Bedi who first complained (although to Upendra Nath Ashk in a private letter) of the even handedness in riot literature:

When in stories about riots even great writers apportion blame to Muslims and Hindus evenly they appear to be self-conscious and dishonest. They don't have the moral courage to show unarmed Muslims being killed in Delhi or Jammu...this is because they want to show the other side of the picture.⁵

The letter is undated, but it is the same letter in which Bedi thanks Ashk for his praise for *Lājwanti*. It appears that Bedi's objection is based on aesthetics. A similar objection to balance and impartiality was raised by Muhammad Hasan Askari in his Preface to Manto's *Siyāh Hāshiyeh*. The same charge was repeated by Mumtaz Shirin in her Editorial to *Naya Daur Fasādāt Number*. Mumtaz Shirin complained that a feeling of shared guilt was the cause of Muslims being killed.⁶

It must be noted that this was not how the Quaid-i-Azam saw it. When rioters in Karachi set upon Hindu and Sikh refugees seeking a safe passage to India, the Governor-General Mohammad Ali Jinnah broadcast on 9 January 1948:

I quite understand the feeling of the Muslim refugees and those who have suffered, and they have my fullest sympathy, but they must restrain themselves and act as responsible men, and not abuse the hospitality that has been extended to them and forget all that is being done for them to make their lot happier."⁷

This killing and looting was not at its peak only in Pakistan but also in India. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his grief on the communal violence before and after independence and called these riots inhuman and declared the Hindu Muslim participants of these riot sinners. He said that only a just person could ask for justice, who is just himself. Gandhi requested the Hindus and Sikhs to call the Muslims back who were forced to leave their house.

It is here that we can judge whether Sir Edward Penderel Moon was being fair for blaming Quaid-i-Azam for the riots: "In so far as Jinnah really wanted Pakistan, despite all the calamities it would entail...."⁸

Had riots begun after the announcement of the 3rd June 1947 Plan there could have been some substance to Moon's arraignment of Jinnah or the demand for Pakistan. Even if we disregard the incidents of communal riots dating from Arrah, 1917, the last round of riots-had begun in August 1946, when the Congress refused to abide by the Cabinet Mission Plan, a device for evading Partition. It was after the 10 July 1946 Bombay Press Conference by Jawaharlal Nehru saying that he would not be bound by Grouping of provinces or any other provision of the Cabinet Mission Plan that Jinnah and the Muslim League announced their withdrawal. Sir Patrick Spens, the Chief Justice of India exonerated the then Bengal Chief Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy from responsibility for the Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946.

In such a background reflection becomes important. Ashfaq Ahmad (1925-2004) made his name by writing "Gadariya" (Shepherd) where a Hindu teacher, selfless and devoted, steeped in Islamic culture, much respected in his own community finally faces insults and assassination by a Muslim mob which descends on the village from outside. Thus cultural alienation is introduced as a factor in the communal riots. In fact, Ashfaq Ahmed raised the question; why did the people have to suffer for sins they had not committed?

In so far as culture is concerned, we have been discussing writers belonging to the Punjab. Riots affected Muslims more in provinces in which they were in a minority. Here we encounter the novels *Khāk aur Khoon* by Nasim Hijazi. This author catered to the Jihadi spirit among readers and this novel as his other novels proved popular.

Qurrat-ul-Ain Hyder (1927-2007) in the concluding, contemporary part of her renowned novel *Aag Ka Darya* ———1959 depicted the effects of riots. According to Dr. Laiq Fatima Naqvi:

The breakdown of shared civilization, the division of United India and the tragic feelings of communal tragedy emerged in various short stories of Qurrat-ul-Ain. She showed the scenes of Hindu-Muslim unity in India, where both the nations: lived peacefully and lovingly. But this shared culture which was cultivated by the blood and sweat of the people was destroyed by the politician in minutes for the sake of their political interests. In 1947, India was awarded such independence which changed the history and geography of South Asia. Such shock was unbearable for a sensitive lady like Qurat-ul-Ain Haider.

The tragedy of partition and sectarianism has emerged in her novels.⁹

Hindu-Muslim denominationalism was present even before the riots of partition which was discussed by Qudrat Ullah Shahab in his "*Shahāb-nāmāh*". In this context Muhammad Ghiyas ud-din said:

The bloodied face of the communal differences appears when the independence of India started getting closer and the Muslim League emerged as the opponent of Congress. Obviously, the Muslims and Hindus were divided in two separate sections at that time.¹⁰

Khadija Mastoor (1927-1982) in her novel *Āngan* (inner courtyard) showed the struggle in Hindu majority areas. This novel has proved to be perennial as it graphically displays the ways of life and ideological tensions within a family.

Another writer, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas discussed partition in his novel "*Inqilāb*" (Revolution) like a story. Abbas explains the problems of common people in a unique way:

He was the son of a Hindu, was born by the unluckiest woman from the most hated community. He was brought up in a Muslim family and as a Muslim became a unique sign of unity. Such an amalgamation of humanity, in which many streams of blood and culture got united. He started thinking about the communal differences, enmity and hatred in the country, about that strong Hindu Muslim rivalry whose fire was lit again. Last night's meeting was a signal of those dangers and many such things pointed toward this. If Amjad Ali was dreaming of a separate state many were dreaming of Hindu rule. There was hatred among the people. But worst of all was that there was fear, Muslims were afraid of Hindus and Hindus were afraid of Muslims; when human dreams of rule through fear then bloodshed is a must.¹¹

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas had written such incidents in his novels which are shameful for humanity. In this context the example of "*Intiqām*" can be given in which the writer had discussed the Hindu father whose daughter's breast were cut and this incident became un-forgettable scene

for him. From here a sensation of revenge arises and when he got a chance; he took the knife to cut the breast of a Muslim girl but he saw that her breast were already cut by another Hindu. Such incidences are discussed again and again in Urdu Literature.

Apart from his novel, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas wrote a short story called "*Sardārjī*" The narrator is a Muslim boy whom Abbas depicts as being a fanatical Muslim. The same boy goes on to recount how a Sikh sacrificed his own life to save the life of the narrator and his whole family. This is one of the most moving stories written by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas.

At the time of partition, there was a great amount of destruction due to religious violence. This violence was not one sided. Pakistan and India both oppressed the other as much as they could. Killing of the non-Muslim citizens in Sind and Karachi was named "*Jihad*". The main objective behind the murder of the non-Muslims was to loot their belongings and get their houses. Apart from this, a lot of dreadful incidences took place in many areas of the Punjab and Quetta. Although Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Gandhi tried to stop this violence but were unsuccessful. After independence, the Muslims, who were the Minority in British India, became the Majority in Pakistan, whereas the Hindus living in Pakistan became the Minority. So after the partition of united India, as a result of religious violence hundreds of thousand innocent people (Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs) were killed.

In between fiction and history we have Quadratullah Shahab's *Yā Khuda* (O God) Shahab, in his preface to the second edition shared this confidence:

All the characters of *Ya Khuda* are real, I have only changed their names. One of them rose to become a Minister of State. Only God can honor any one at His will. He knows His own expediency¹²

Shahab describes his own experience in this Introduction. He had gone to the Wagah Border hoping to see his cousin Ne'matullah Shahab. He had not been able to recognize his cousin, and it was his cousin who called out his name in a very weak voice. His cousin had drunk from an arsenic laced well, while his wife had burnt her face to save her honour. Both his cousin and his wife, already debilitated, passed away in the border camp and Quadratullah Shahab despite having located the relatives he was looking for, had to return empty-handed.¹³

In the context of this violence Abu Saeed Bazmi says “at the time of partition Hindus and Sikhs tried their best to eliminate Muslims from India. The writer has written that at the time of partition, the Muslims were blamed for only 9 bomb blasts out of 151 in Punjab, whereas the non-Muslims were blamed for the rest of 142. Similarly, if we talk about the attacks on trains, the Muslim groups only attacked 25 trains in which only 96 non-Muslims died. While the non-Muslims attacked 54 trains, fully armed and martyred 2300 Muslims.¹⁴

The sordid sentiment behind the statistics was sickening. Khwaja Iftikar wrote about the condition of Muslims in Amritsar at the time of partition: Hindus and Sikhs killed the Muslims, they entered the Muslim houses and killed the men hiding in the houses, raped the women and put the children on the spears and swords to celebrate their victory. A lot of Muslim women jumped from their roof tops and killed themselves in order to save their dignity. Not only that, many Muslims’ houses were burnt, the dead bodies of Muslim martyrs were destroyed to make them unidentifiable. At many places, not even the Hindu and Sikh neighbours spared the Muslims lives.¹⁵ Later, the brutality of the Sikhs had been discussed by the writers in these words: ‘the Muslim women were taken to the inn of Guru Ram Das, naked, those who were never seen even by the day-light as well as moon-light.¹⁶ In this context, the author wrote that the master of the gang that kidnapped girls was Master Tara Singh.¹⁷ Iftikhar labels the future of kidnapped women horrible and says that more than one thousand Muslim girls were kidnapped by the Hindus and Sikhs from a village named Bhopal, almost 10 miles away from Amritsar. Those girls belonged to respectable Muslim families but could not be freed by any one. Their future was that, despite being a Muslim they bore non-Muslim children.¹⁸ The author writes about the Muslim refugees from Delhi to Pakistan that the streets were blooded due to the excessive killing of the Muslims in Delhi. At the same time women were kidnapped and nothing about them was known.

Sikhs announced that if any non-Muslim would give protection to any Muslim in his house, his house would be burnt. That was why the Muslims were left with no other option than migration. In this calamity, they left their belongings, suffered hunger and thirst, travelled miles to come to Pakistan. These people not only suffered hunger and thirst but had the fear of being murdered at every step. However, the author also says that at some places in Amritsar the non-Muslims did not care for their lives in order to help the Muslims and sheltered them.¹⁹

The famous fiction writer Abdal Bela in his “*Pakistan Kahāni*”

(the story of Pakistan) tells about the problems of a Muslim family that migrated from Ludhiana, that Muslims had to sacrifice all their possessions and had to hide from those Hindus and Sikhs, with whom they had played throughout their childhood. Although many camps were also there for the refugees but in order to reach these camps, Muslims had to travel long and dangerous routes and they had to pass the decaying dead bodies of other Muslims on their way. Moreover, they had to bear hunger and thirst with a hope that after reaching Pakistan all their problems would come to an end automatically.²⁰

In “*Roadad-e- Pakistan*” (events of Pakistan) Agha Ashraf says that the horrible way in which India was partitioned could not be seen ever in history. At Independence of India and formation of Pakistan, both were unacceptable for the imperialist, so as a result violence started in the subcontinent. Humanity was slaughtered on both the sides at the time of partition. Ashraf tells about the painful condition of Muslim refugees that a lot of refugees were killed on the way and those who were not killed, their ear or leg was cut. After facing a lot of hardships when they reached Pakistan even then their women and girls did not get protection. What was left by the enemies was done by friends. Some native took the illegal advantages of the helplessness, of the refugees. Many people raped the homeless and helpless women or made fake promises to marry them and took them out of the camps, used them and then forced them to work as prostitutes and earned money. In this way the purity of the pure land was destroyed even with the formation of Pakistan.²¹

In one of his book *Sotay log Jagta shehr*” (Sleeping people, Wakened city) Agha Ashraf says about the problems of Pakistan that although British Government had announced it would leave India in 1948, the government was not really happy to leave India, rather it was their compulsion. In revenge, they announced Partition and left it in 1947. British did not think of Indians as Hindu or Muslims but for the British, Indians were only Indians. As a result of this great blood was shed in India. Especially, the Muslims were cut into pieces like vegetables. This was not only done in India, but even in many cities in Pakistan. The author further says that ‘the non-Muslims were treated inhumanly.’²² Now in Pakistan and India men did not have to go to the prostitutes. The women that were hired for money could now be gotten by the sword and no one needed their children, brothers and fathers. They had slept for ever after the injuries of swords, spears and knives. All this was happening in Pakistan.

In the land of Jinnah..... In the land of Data Ganj

Baksh Hujveri in the land of Sultan Bahu
..... in the land of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Religious
books were desecrated in temples and mosques also.²³

Gopal Das Khosla described the violence of January 1948 as it occurred in Karachi as well the rest of Sindh as a planned conspiracy and called it an open attack on Jinnah and religious minorities. According to Khosla with the arrival of Muslim migrants from India. Moulvis and peers instigated them to kill the Hindus to strengthen Islam. Khosla calls it the height of tyranny that Hindus were forced to sell their movable and immovable properties for a pittance. Khosla writes that government functionaries were openly complicit. A magistrate in Sindh prescribed a prison term of six months for any Hindu attempting to sell his land. A magistrate in Nawabshah set the limit of the money that a departing Hindu could take with him at 10 rupees only. The Chief Minister M. Ayub Khuhro publicly supported this measure. Such vindictiveness was suffered by Sikhs also

Even in Balochistan, though the Hindus had celebrated Independence along with the Muslims on August 14, but on August 20 Hindus men were killed their women raped and their shops were burnt. In Karachi too, when 600 Sikhs arrived on 6 January 1948 they were supposed to be housed in a Gurdwara. They were conveyed there in horse carriages, which exposed their presence, many Sikhs being killed on the road before reaching their sanctuary. Those who reached the Gurdwara were burnt alive. The survivors were put on trucks but the hoodlums broke the police cordon and slaughtered many on the road. The women folk were of course raped.

This was the condition of whole city, the asylum seekers in the refugee camps and railway stations were not left. Police soldiers and other government officers tried to harm the non-Muslims as much as they could. According to the author the government officials who were supposed to protect in India and Muslims thought that Hindus and Sikhs should be forced to leave and their property should be given to Muslims. When violence came to an end and the process of search started, a lot of Hindu and Sikhs looted material was recovered from government officials.

This looting was not at its peak only in Pakistan but also in India. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his grief on the communal violence before and after independence and called these riots inhuman and declared the Hindu Muslim participants of these riot sinners. He said that only a just

person could ask for justice, who is just himself. Gandhi requested the Hindus and Sikhs to call the Muslims back who were forced to leave their house. Those who were supposed to protect them were actually monitoring these riots. One of the main reasons was to get the wealth of those non-Muslims whereas another reason was to get their homes vacated because Muslim refugees were coming to Sindh, especially Karachi, from India. They had left their property there.²⁴

The above samples of Riot literature are sufficient to show that that History and fiction reinforce each other. History provides the perspective, fiction provides the tangibility. Despite the fact that History and Fiction are separate genres, as far as the 1946/1947 riots are concerned, for once, historical reality and popular perception are not at odds. One reason, sometimes advanced is that the leading writers of all denominations were writing impartially. Literary critics accused them, as seen above, of following a formula of equal condemnation. They could not be accused of partiality. This has been a rare quality.

A comparison of the Partition riots shall show how estimable they were. The ethnic riots of 1971 in East Bengal/ Bangladesh have not been able to enter the mainstream of Urdu literature, because one party continues, after the passage of Fifty years, to deny its culpability.

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