

Displacement: Trauma of Partition in Intizar Husain's *Basti*

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Abstract

This paper examines the heartrending narrative of displacement in Intizar Husain's Basti (1979) through the concept of trauma of partition. Husain's novel appears as a souvenir of the partition in front of readers. In the novel, Muslim narrator Zakir observes Pakistan's birth as a new nation in 1947. His migration to Pakistan from India after this political change represents the memory of the victims. Bangladesh emerged as a new nation in 1971 during his stay in Pakistan. These strange political upheavals create fear, disillusionment, and suspicion in the narrator's mind. Therefore, this paper scrutinizes the reverberation of trauma in partition literature through Zakir's narrative of displacement in Husain's novel. As a qualitative applied research, the paper draws on ideas of trauma from Cathy Caruth and Jeffrey C. Alexander to analyze Zakir's story of displacement from India. Horrendous events and the period of their reverberation depend upon the intensity of the traumatic experience. The scene of Rupnagar represents Zakir's memory of pre-partition but it triggers much when he experiences violence and war in Pakistan. The narrator's dreadful experience survives in his diary, letters, and memoirs. By the way, this study aims to keep the memory of the victims alive to convey a message to the world. Partition is not only the division of geography, it is also the division of beautiful hearts. The division of a nation in the name of any banner obstructs political stability and the prosperity of humanity.

Keywords: *Displacement, horrendous, irreversible, trauma of partition, violence*

Introduction

Intizar Husain's (b.1925) popular novel *Basti* (1979), originally written in Urdu, captures the moment of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. This is one of the great moments of upheaval in the history of South Asia. Husain's novel graphically portrays the horror of partition by explicating its dreadfulness psychologically as well as physically through the narrative of Zakir. The protagonist migrates to a new land while struggling with an internal dilemma, revealing his fragmentation. Urvashi Butalia acknowledges this fact in the opening chapter of her book *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. She writes, "The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history. Never before or since have so many people exchanged their homes

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and countries so quickly. . .” (3). The division of India and Pakistan is an unforgettable event in the history of South Asia. Religion forced millions of people to migrate either to India or to Pakistan to fulfill the political interests of their leader. Alok Bhalla also appears with an astounding experience of the 1947 partition. He writes, “MEMORIES of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 have haunted me all my life and have marked fear many of my personal, ethical, and political decision. . .” (3119). Bhalla comes up with the long-lasting effect of the partition in the form of memories. The mass migration of Indian Muslims to Pakistan and their sufferings and disillusionments lies at the heart of the novel. Zakir, a Muslim narrator, has suffered from separation, displacement, and nostalgia ever since he migrated to Pakistan. The memory of Rupnagar remains alive in his narrative which records the trauma of partition. He feels alienated and empty in a new country in the absence of his childhood companion Sabirah. As a result, the trauma of partition reverberates in his imagination, diary, and letters. The communal conflict of 1971 separated Bangladesh from Pakistan and triggered Zakir more than ever. His feeling of dislocation intensifies the trauma of partition. The politics of partition is intertwined with language, religion, politics, and military power. Zakir manifests the trauma of partition through the narrative of his displacement from India. In essence, this novel demands a fresh revisiting from the standpoint of the trauma of partition that exposes how the aspects of the partition underlie throughout the novel.

Review of Literature

Partition literature has emerged as a new area of study in the world since 1947. Husain’s novel has drawn the attention of readers worldwide ever since the translation of the novel into English by Frances W. Pritchett in 2007 and its introduction by Asif Farrukhi in 2013. Raza Rumi finds the parallel biography of the protagonist Zakir and the author Intizar Husain. Like Zakir, “Intizar Sahib spent his early youth in Bulandshahr, a town in Uttar Pradesh, and migrated to Pakistan after 1947” (Rumi 2). Both Zakir and Husain are migrants in Pakistan and suffer from the pangs of separation. Nishat Zaidi acknowledges, “Zakir, the protagonist, is a history teacher caught in the midst of a national crisis (the 1971 partition of Pakistan) that led to unprecedented violence in Lahore” (180). Zakir's experience of partition focuses on the calamity at the premise of Lahore. But, Deepak C. Nanaware arrives with a psychological interpretation of the novel. “The novel *Basti* explores the recapture of past through the reminiscence of a pluralistic culture of the community before Partition” (427). Pre-partition imagery explains the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims. They have profound respect for each other’s culture and religion. Unfortunately, religious beliefs contribute a lot to the partition of India and Pakistan. This research study, therefore, explores the reverberation of trauma in the narrative of displacement. In the meantime, Zakir's longing for his homeland recurs through the repeated imagery of Rupnagar as the result of his displacement from India. So this paper represents the traumatic experience of displaced people, mainly Zakir, living in Pakistan due to partition and fulfills the gaps of the study.

Statement of Problem

Husain's novel captures the moment of the partition of 1947. At this time, the end of the one regime follows the birth of two nations. India became the land of Hindus and Pakistan became the land of Muslims on the same day. Zakir, the narrator, finds himself displaced in Pakistan. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 characterizes communal violence. Thus, this article seeks to address these issues by formulating the following research questions: What makes the narrator so impatient? Why does Zakir feel dislocated? Why does Zakir frequently dream of Rupnagar?

Delimitation

This article aims to explore how trauma survives in the narrative of Zakir in Husain's novel. Thus, the study is limited to Husain's single text, and the researcher does not discuss the other aspects of the novel.

Objectives

This paper aims to keep the victims' memory alive through the narrative of the narrator. It also aims to convey a message to the world that the division of a nation under any banner is not logical for the prosperity of humanity.

Methodology

This study has applied the qualitative approach to research with the interpretive design. Zakir's narrative of displacement has been interpreted through the lens of the trauma of partition. The researcher has used the ideas of trauma from Cathy Caruth and Jeffrey C. Alexander to analyze the narrative of displacement. In addition, the ideas and opinions of other scholars have also been added to substantiate the argument of the research. The novel has been considered as the source of primary concepts. Related reviews and commentaries have become the source of secondary concepts to substantiate the arguments.

The Ideations of Trauma

An event itself is the primary source of trauma. Trauma is a spontaneous reaction to dreadful events like natural disasters, an accident, or massacres. It recurs as a psychological injury that damages the layers of the human mind. Human beings suffer from unprecedented events in their lives and they remain deeply inside them. The dreadful events are so powerful to shatter the human psyche both at the individual and collective level. Caruth defines that "...trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (181). Traumatic events, according to Caruth, often delay their reverberation. In addition, Caruth says that the period between the accident and the appearance of the first symptom is

called the “incubation period(186). The incubation period may differ from person to person according to the intensity of the traumatic experience. Similarly, Alexander admits that a “horrendous event” always marks the memories for a long interval of time (6). The marks of the dreadful event last for a long time. It recurs in the life of an individual or group until and unless we overcome trauma. Gyanendra Pandey asserts that “violence and community constitute one another” while remembering partition (3). Pandey believes that violence exists in a community and keeps on traumatizing the victims of the partition. The more we remember it, the less dangerous it becomes. The more we repress it, the more dangerous it becomes. So these ideas are useful to examine the narrative of the displaced narrator who is traumatized by the partition of 1947 and 1971.

Analysis and Interpretations

Narrative is an ancient form of storytelling in literature. Museums, memoirs, and monuments reflect the narrative of horrific events. Husain’s *Basti* captures the painful story of the displacement of Zakir from his birthplace. Zakir, a Muslim narrator, suffers from placelessness after migrating to Pakistan. In profound insecurity and ferocity, he reveals the dark side of the partition of India and Pakistan. The following section scrutinizes the trauma of partition through the narrative of Zakir’s displacement from India.

Narrative of Displacement

Zakir, the narrator, suffers from the pangs of separation in Pakistan. The memory of Rupnagar recurs in his mind and body. Its beautiful landscape shimmers in his mind despite his ruptured identity in Pakistan. In addition, his mind and body reside in the two nations. Farrukhi rightly observes that the protagonist is “. . . cast into a world of violence and uncertainty and regret and longing: the world of modern Pakistan” (Introduction VII). Zakir becomes the victim of trauma in the new nation, Pakistan. The fear of insecurity and yearning for the past threaten him. In the words of Zakir, “. . . The more the turmoil increases outside, the more I sink into myself. Memories of so many times come to me. . . . Memories one after another, entangled in each other like a forest to walk through. . . . Then moved on to explore what he remembered as the first event in Rupnagar” (Husain 8). Zakir’s trauma accelerates like an electric current. The memory of Rupnagar reminds him of how the pre-partition harmony comes to an end. Partition must be examined by analyzing the memory of the victims rather than from the perspective of culture and geography. The rallies and slogans outside the house terrify the protagonist who is cast into the powerful memories of the first event of Rupnagar. This is the way the memory of Rupnagar remains as an archive. At the same time, the sound of “*Ram nam satya*” (Husain 10) terrifies him as it conjoins the displacement by exposing the fear of alienation of the character that lurks in the psyche throughout the incidents of the novel. In this way, Zakir's turbulences are the result of undesirable displacement from his birthplace.

The narrative of displacement begins after his family shifts to Vyaspur with the death of his old mother. He still memorizes the wet face of Sabirah, his childhood companion, at the moment of their departure. They experience rallies, processions, and sounds of gunshots while they make a plan to shift Vyaspur. The terrifying scenes and sounds stimulate “horrendous events” (Alexander 6) that emerge out of his fear. Traumatic feelings and perceptions, then, come not only from the originating event but also from the anxiety of keeping it repressed” (Alexander 10). In reality, the anxiety of keeping things secret is more traumatic than the event itself. Nobody can escape from the memories of the past. Zakir acknowledges, “When he could see nothing ahead of him, he set off backwards. Again the same long journeys through the thicket of memories. When I was in Rupnagar—the remote, mythic era of my life. And when I came to Vyaspur—Vyaspur— (Husain 32). Zakir’s trauma is evoked somewhere between the journey of Rupnagar and Vyaspur because he is away from his childhood friend Sabirah. His journey toward Vyaspur appears as the result of partition violence and the ideal image of Rupnagar before pre-partition exists as a myth. Neither Zakir nor Vyaspur is free from partition violence. Without a doubt, Zakir’s first migration to Vyaspur reflects his state of extreme delirium.

Similarly, Zakir's second migration depicts the horrendous events of Lahore, Pakistan. The terrifying scene of the streets triggers him badly at the time when he struggles to cope with the new environment of Lahore. Then, his dreams and memories mix up to form anxiety. The fears and terrors remain as the incubation of trauma. Thus, “This collection of memories, individual and collective, familial and historical, are what make up the reality of Partition” (Butalia 10). The real picture of partition appears in the collection of memories. Zakir's experience of partition memories is heartrending. “Joy, disgust, hatred, rage—every emotion was expressed in whispers. He began to feel suffocated. He wanted to escape from this stifling atmosphere” (Husain 65). Undesirable emotions encircle the life of Zakir. What can be more agonizing than suppressing those unwanted emotions? Zakir’s suffocation and his expression of human emotions in silence reflect his traumatic experience in Pakistan. He wants to avoid that horrible atmosphere, but cannot do so. It creates only the dilemma in the mind of Zakir. But, this is what he cannot undo it. In this way, the trauma of partition takes away peace and serenity from his life in Pakistan.

Then, Zakir memorizes the accounts of refugees to condense his feelings of dislocation. Memories of refugees are a powerful tool to comprehend partition narratives as a trauma. Refugees are living in distress and are sad to lose their homeland. Their anxiety and uprooting echo the condition of the protagonist Zakir. The novel captures the suffering of refugees in fiction and claims that “...novels and stories finds the separation and the massacres so completely without historical or social reason that all they can sometimes do is to record that the place they called ‘home’ or ‘basti’ was reduced to rubble...” (Bhalla 3121). The violence of mass killing turns human shelters into desolate land separating the dearest ones. The story of refugees reads like this:

The refugees told whole long epics about how much suffering they had endured on the journey, and how many difficulties they had overcome in order to reach the city. They told about those whom they had left behind. Then the refuge-givers and the refugees together remembered those who had clung to the earth, refusing to leave their homes and their ancestors' graves... (Husain 71-2)

Zakir articulates the importance of ancestral land by memorizing the narratives of refugees. Their sorrow and suffering reflect the trauma of partition whereas their anguish resonates with his self. In this way, Zakir's experience of rootlessness in Pakistan reaches its climax—his attempt to integrate into his ancestor's grave signals how he tries to release trauma. Unknowingly, the massive migratory movement of the people triggers him both consciously and unconsciously. Consciously Zakir has to be dethroned in his homeland and unconsciously, he has to suffer from this alienation as he longs for his country and bygone days throughout the rest of his life.

Millions of people were displaced from their native land due to the partition of 1947. Like Butala and Bhalla, Zakir observes unimaginable human convulsion from India to Pakistan. This makes him nostalgic and he attempts to integrate the cultural memory of the past into the present. “The objects or events that trigger trauma are perceived clearly by actors, their responses are lucid, and the effects of their responses are problem-solving and progressive” (Alexander 8). The nature of the triggering objects depends upon the intensity of the events. Sometimes triggering objects or events becomes constructive rather than destructive. Zakir frequently dives into the ocean of memories to construct a new history. “Memories surged along like waves, and I swam among them” (Husain 76). He is so impatient. He longs for the native land because he has been fractured both in mind and body. It was a crucial situation for him that he could not adjust himself wherever he went. It sacrifices his peace of mind and body as he remains restless. The imagery of memories moving like waves indicates the protagonist's struggle to settle the traumatic events. Zakir retrieves the knowledge of the past through memories to redeem himself from the painful future; however, he cannot cope with the forthcoming situation of his life. In this way, he represents the entirety of the traumatic effects of mass migration when a country faces political instability and upheaval. This is a common situation for all the people who suffer from the partition

“What do you think, will there be war?” (Husain 97) is the most traumatic question that Zakir approaches during his stay in Pakistan. The question is so powerful that threatens him both inside and outside the house. Zakir is afraid of the prospective division of the nation because his fear rises with the intensity of confusion that grows in East Pakistan. Tarek Fatah also admits that Muslims were separated and cut off from each other in the name of Islam in three different countries (26). The division of Muslims in the name of religion shatters the dream of a unified Islamic state. Violence in East Pakistan increases confusion, suspicion, and disillusionment in the narrator. “I'm walking along here, and the

sound of my footsteps is coming from over there—from where—? Or perhaps I'm here, and I'm walking somewhere else—? Where—? Where I am walking? On what earth are my footsteps falling?" (Husain 106). Zakir finds himself absent in Pakistan despite his presence. As a result, he cannot declare where he is or where he is moving. It is the impact of perpetual trauma residing in his mind. Zakir's ambivalence signals the dark clouds hovering in Pakistan. This is when Pakistan became a hinterland for him. This is another pathetic situation that the novel desires to expound.

In addition, Zakir's reaction to the 1971 war appears in the diary from December 5 to December 18. It captures the moment of disillusionment, terror, and fear in Pakistan. At the same time, Zakir's continuing prayer for Rupnagar and its people's fate shows how much he is traumatized by the war. The social suffering fuels his trauma. "Religion, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class—each of these dimensions can be a medium for inflicting social pain" (Alexander 1). Social disturbances have a broader spectrum in society ranging from diverse issues including nationality, religion, culture, and history. But, Zakir's social concern rises simply as a response to the war. "The war threw the life of the city into confusion. Inside me, times and places are topsy-turvy. Sometimes I have absolutely no idea where I am, in what place" (Husain 133). Zakir experiences ups and downs in his life in Pakistan. He feels that his steps are fleeting away from him, and realizes himself as a person of nowhere. The 1971 war resembles the picture of the 1947 partition. Zakir suffers from the contradiction of placeless, and he is quite uncertain about his existence. This only makes him helpless in front of the partition's evergreen wound.

Zakir's feeling of displacement grows stronger when he overhears the ideas of a pious religious thinker Hazrat Ali from his father, Abba Jan. Hazrat Ali exists as an ideal figure in the life of Muslims. The action of handing down the bunch of keys to the son reflects the way Muslims follow the principles of Islam. This idea exists in the official report of the Supreme Court-appointed commission in Pakistan: "The sublime faith called Islam will live even if our leaders are not there to enforce it. It lives in the individual, in his soul and outlook, in all his relations with God and men, from the cradle to the grave..." (Fatah 36). Muslims' faith in Islam can be seen in the rituals that begin from the womb and end in the tomb. Religious faith lies deep in their heart no matter where they are in what condition. "The world, as Hazrat Ali has said, is a guesthouse. We and our desires are guests in it. Guests have no rights. Whatever the earth designs to bestow on us guests, it's a favor, and the earth has shown us great kindness indeed" (Husain 179). Hazrat Ali's metaphor of a guest sounds like a highly religious philosophy. It explains the bitter reality of human existence on Earth. As soon as Zakir receives the bunch of keys from his father, he is again displaced from his birthplace, Rupanagar. Thus, every event brings pain and tribulations for him. No incidents bring solace in his life because he has been shaken inwardly with fear and confusion.

Abba Jan's death again shakes Zakir's identity in the new country. As things are falling apart, he wanders like a tramp after losing his fatherly figure. The pain of losing the ideal figure in a new land increases his fear. The partition of 1947 has similar painful narratives on memory. Bhalla claims that "...we record stories about events and people which are instinct with pity and thoughtfulness" (3119). Partition stories are recorded despite their seriousness. The analysis of sufferers' stories exhibits the trauma of partition. Zakir's story of finding his father's cemetery is no less striking:

. . . . He sat down beside the grave, thinking that when he came to himself he would say the Fatihah. He was still unable to catch his breath, and his body was trembling. The sound of firing could be heard. The sound of slogans too, but they were hardly slogans anymore. . . . Everything around me is in pieces. Time too. In the womb of that one time there were so many times. I'm wandering, broken up—through what times? (Husain 195-96)

Zakir's agony combines with his past and present trauma. When he is helpless and terrified by the sound of guns, the Quran comes into his memory. Even the memory of religious scripture could not connect him to the whole. That is the reason why he perceives everything in fragments, and his future is uncertain because he is unable to locate himself in the totality of Pakistan. For how long? It is under the womb of time.

At last, Zakir's trauma of displacement finds a way in the words of Lord Buddha. A beautiful line from the Quran follows Buddha's philosophy. Ultimately, the superb combination of two religious ideologies relieves the aching heart of the narrator Zakir. Butalia comprehends partition in the words of survivors as a "division of hearts" more than a political dissection of a nation (8). The separation of the soul is more heartrending than the geographical division of a nation. Religion has the power to overcome the agony of splitting hearts. Husain juxtaposes Buddhism and Islam in this way: "Monks, just imagine a house which is burning on all sides. Inside it some children are stumbling around, trembling with fear. Oh monks, men and women are children, stumbling around in a fiercely blazing house." "I swear by Time, man is surely in loss" (199-200). The imagery of a burning house and the condition of the children inside it is the climax of human destruction. The fellow citizens including women and children are abounded by fear. All they need is love and care according to Buddhist philosophy. But, they are losing humanity after the bloody partition of 1947. By the way, the loss is irreversible which is explained also in the Quran. The irreversible loss of life and property remains as a souvenir of partition threatening human civilization for ages. Neither he enlarges himself as a cosmopolitan nor can he identify within the periphery of his homeland. This is the inward traumatic effect that he feels in every aspect of his life. His body is in Pakistan, but his mind longs for the bygone memories that he experienced in India.

Conclusion

Irreversibility characterizes the partition of India and Pakistan. Communal violence is the root cause of Indian Muslims' migration to Pakistan. The partition appears as a great threat to human civilization in the history of the Asian continent. Zakir's narrative exposes that displacement is the most pertinent effect of partition in a newly-born Pakistan which still traumatizes the people. In a state of confusion and uprooting, the narrator loses physical, spiritual, and psychological power. The trauma of the 1947 partition appears in a diary, memoirs, and letters. All these records represent the traumatic experiences of millions of voiceless people. In addition, the war of 1971 intensified his trauma. They are again afraid, confused, and disillusioned in a new country. The geographical and spiritual division of loving hearts becomes a powerful threat to humanity. By the way, the core human values disappear as in the narratives of refugees. The devastating war has a terrifying imprint on the lives of ordinary Pakistani citizens. Most importantly, the shadow of partition follows Zakir wherever he goes. He cannot forget the mesmerizing view of Rupnagar because this is where violence breaks the harmony before pre-partition. The interplay of partition and pre-partition memory is what forms the basis of the narrative. Thus, the division of a nation either in the name of religion or language is a shameful business. The politics of dividing a nation is an unforgivable act. Nobody can justify the urgency of partition. Let us spread the universal idea of humanism to maintain peace, fraternity, and religious freedom. Humanity flourishes with good governance and political stability in the world. Otherwise, the world will not be a better place to live in. I recommend young researchers study more about the novel from the perspective of female characters to find their perceptions of the trauma of partition because it represents their unheard voices.

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