

Torn Maps and Fragmented Identities: A Comparative Study of Select Partition Narratives

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Abstract

Partitions became a major topic in South Asian cultural and revisionist history in the 1990s. Partition narratives are stories and accounts of British India's partition in 1947, which resulted in the formation of the independent countries of India and Pakistan. These stories represent a variety of perspectives and experiences, including refugees, victims of community violence, and political leaders. The partition of India was a traumatic event that led to widespread violence, displacement, and loss of life. Sectoral narratives often highlight the human cost of the event and the experiences of those directly affected. It sheds light on the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India. The narratives of the partition generally serve as a reminder of the human cost of political decisions and the importance of understanding the historical context in which they were made. The paper aims to critically analyze the socio-political consequences, sufferings, and trauma faced by the people during the different partitions of India through Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* and Shuvashree Chowdhury's *Across Borders*. It focuses on the comparison of the partition narratives of Pakistan and Bangladesh with those of India and Pakistan. This paper will further try to understand the social, cultural, and political changes that these nations underwent because of the partition. The study has undertaken a close textual analysis of the novels *Ice Candy Man* and *Across Borders* which are yet to receive critical attention as partition narratives.

Keywords: India-Pakistan partition, Formation of Bangladesh, refugee, trauma, fear, horror.

Introduction

The separation of a state into two or more parts, with at least one successor state assuming continuity with the pre-divided whole, is known as partition. The most famous partition cases in modern history formed part of British devolvement or decolonization—in Ireland (1919), India (1947), and Palestine (1948)—and arose the consequence of Cold War superpower rivalries (which divided Germany in 1945, Korea in 1953, and Vietnam in 1954). Partitions became a major topic in South Asian cultural and revisionist history in the 1990s. The fringe story and the previously hidden story found an expression in early Marxist and feminist literature. Partitions have been used to investigate apartheid in Germany, the Balkans, South Korea, Cyprus, Vietnam, and South Africa, but the focus of this investigation will be on India, Pakistan, and the formation of Bangladesh.

The paper's subdivisions have a similar structure, with a focus on the roots of partition

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studies, a comparison of India-Pakistan partition narratives with Pakistan-Bangladesh narratives, and an emphasis on interdisciplinary techniques and discussions.

The Partition of India was the division of British India in 1947 which led to the creation of the sovereign states of India and Pakistan. The partition was a result of religious and political tensions between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority communities in India and was accompanied by communal violence and mass migration of people across the newly drawn borders. The partition was formalized by the Indian Independence Act of 1947, passed by the British Parliament, which divided British India into two independent Dominion states, India and Pakistan, and ended British rule in India. The partition was accompanied by violence and mass migration, as Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities were forced to flee their homes and cross the newly-drawn border between the two countries. The narratives surrounding the partition differ between India and Pakistan, reflecting the differing perspectives and historical experiences of the two nations. In India, the partition is often remembered as a traumatic event, marked by violence and suffering, while in Pakistan, it is viewed as a necessary step in the creation of a Muslim-majority nation. Both countries have used the memory of the partition to shape their national identities and political agendas.

On the other hand, East Pakistan was one of the two regions of Pakistan and in 1971, East Pakistan declared independence from Pakistan and formed Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Liberation War and the subsequent formation of Bangladesh have become a significant part of the country's history and national identity, and the events of that time have been documented and retold through various narratives, including personal stories, historical accounts, and cultural expressions.

Literature Review

In the study “Of fear and fantasy, fact and fiction: interrogating Canonical Indian Literary historical towards comprehending partition of Bengal in post-independence Indian (English) fictional space (2020)”, A. Gupta discovered the significance of the loss of the natural language of expression that the refugee had to undergo in the pre/ post-partition of Eastern India/ undivided Bengal time frame due to the subtle politics of linguistic and cultural violence inflicted.

“Recalling the feminine and juvenile voice from India-Pakistan: concerning the other side of silence (2019)” by S. Lavanya, P. Krishna, and K. Devi, after the partition of India, the country took a new direction. War memories are gruesome and painful, and Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* brings to light the voice of the silenced. Butalia also evokes the memories of victims of an uncertain and dangerous period in Indian history. As depicted in Butalia's work, the article focuses on the experiences of women and children who are the main victims and survivors of Partition. The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 is one such grotesque episode in Indian history.

In “The transformation of Ice-Candy Man: Account of partition trauma in *Cracking India* (2020)” A. Katariya and P. Chaudhary, aim to reveal the erratic transformation of the key character, Ice-Candy-Man (named Dilnawaz), and the riotous traumatic impact of India's Partition on his personality in *Cracking India*. The most arousing, poignant, and effective figure in Bapsi Sidhwa's magnum opus *Cracking India* is Ice-Candy-Man. Sidhwa, the original mark, and a victim of the 1947 Partition had sensed the brutal incidents that impaled her heart with pathos and compelled her to write it down by presenting vivacious, colourful characters with autobiographical touches.

Paromita Deb's "Religion, partition, identity, and diaspora: A study of *Ice-Candy Man* (2019)", aims to explore the history of Partition through the eyes of a young Parsi diaspora girl narrator in colonial Lahore, Pakistan in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man*. The study approaches the immense experience of Partition with immediacy and sensitivity by proposing a holistic approach to Partition that includes multi-level analysis and integration of official history books, excerpts from survivor testimonies, and critical evaluation of Partition novels such as Sidhwa's text. It discusses how diasporas pose problems for traditional nation-states as well as those caught between the battle lines. The article examines how the text portrays the role of Partition not only in the destruction of communal life in the subcontinent but also in the reconstruction of diverse identities.

Sadan Jha's "Watching the trauma: Witnessing the partition (2018)", seeks to explore how the academic discourse on the mass violence that occurred during the partition of India/independence has matured over the years. The body of literature produced was insightful and ground-breaking. Within the context of this scholarship, this article attempts to engage with the experiences of witnesses and highlights the transformative potential of such encounters. This study explores the landscape of Partition on celluloid, where the screen converges with history and where the memory of trauma generates guilt, using several Hindi films based on Partition.

Research gap

One of the novels chosen for study has not received sufficient critical attention and the two novels have not been studied together. Shuvashree Chowdhury's *Across Borders* is one of the few works to explore the trauma caused during the Pakistan-Bangladesh partition and the formation of Bangladesh. The study will discuss in brief the background of the two partition narratives in the eyes of the protagonist. Beforehand a lot of work has been done based on the collective trauma of the people caused by the partitions in a collective way on the other hand this paper tries to explore the individual trauma and personal sufferings of the people caused during the partitions. The paper will be the first to examine all aspects of India's partition in depth.

Research objectives

1. The paper aims to study the selected novels alongside the events of the partition.
2. It will focus on the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi refugees during the time of the partition.
3. Partition literature is significant for understanding the social, cultural, and political histories of the country.
4. Narratives based on Bangladesh Liberation War have not been studied deeply.
5. Comparing narratives based on the experiences of the Pakistan-Bangladesh partition with narratives based on the experiences of the India-Pakistan partition will provide a better understanding of the social, cultural, and political changes that these nations go through.

Research methodology

The project will undertake a close textual analysis with a descriptive study of the novels *Ice-Candy Man* and *Across Borders* and perform a comparative study of the novels to better understand the consequences of the partition.

Understanding india-pakistan partition through sidhwa's ice candy man

On the Indian subcontinent, a lot of novels have been published about India's partition. Authors have depicted this terrible historical event as terrifying in their works. Another aspect is given by Nadia Butt who asserts that Sidhwa “offers a fine combination of fact and fiction to express the emotional impact” of partition by “recalling the pain of old wounds so that they may finally be healed.” Furthermore, by writing most of the novel in the present tense, the author “repeatedly situates violence right here, right now,” thereby underlining “the ubiquity of violence.” The objective of the paper is to analyze the India-Pakistan partition through Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*.

In Pakistan's literary scene, Sidhwa is a well-known name. Sidhwa, a Parsee, utilizes her novels to draw attention to the fast-changing situation in her Parsee polity and culture. Sidhwa's most significant novel, *Ice Candy Man*, is about India's division. She addresses the partition crisis, the Parsee milieu, Asian women's issues, and the concept of marriage in her novel. Among contemporary feminist writers, Sidhwa remains a powerful voice. She is the only Parsee lady who has written on a partition. Bapsi Sidhwa reveals her fictionalized autobiography through the young narrator Lenny.

The novel is set against the sensitive backdrop of the India-Pakistan partition. The work chronicles Lenny's views on the world around her, as well as how a political event disintegrates and fragments her universe. Lenny, a young Parsee girl who is lame, is the central character of the imaginary world of *Ice Candy Man*. The narrator-lameness protagonist is symptomatic of the handicap that a female creative writer faces, yet when she chose to wield the pen because writing is an intellectual exercise, it is seen as a male bastion, outside of women's routine; servile domesticity. In *Ice Candy Man*, the writer uses first-person narration to tell the heartbreaking story of the partition. It is the book in which Lenny, a polio-affected Parsee child living in Lahore, recounts the partition battle. Because she is the son of a Parsee family, Lenny is allowed to move through Lahore's Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Parsee communities. She was always present at practically all places, witnessing every action and reporting it to the readers because she was a lame who received private schools.

Partition is associated by Sidhwa with evil and devastation. She uses an image of a Hindu banya being partitioned alive by Muslims in *Ice Candy Man*, resulting in the Hindu banya's horrible death, and the partitioning of a Punjabi Sikh in *The Bride*, resulting in the Sikh's unnatural, violent division and death. In *Ice Candy Man*, Sidhwa recounts a Muslim crowd tearing up a Hindu banya while yelling Allah-o-Akbar. This is more than just a representation of Muslim brutality against Hindus.

Ayah, Lenny's babysitter, suffered horribly during the partition. She was viciously gang-raped by local Muslims who were involved in the partition riots caused during the India-Pakistan partition. Lenny explained the horrifying scene,

“They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet – that want to move backwards – are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm.

The men drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces.

The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her dishevelled hair flying into her kidnappers' faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes." (Sidhwa, 183 and 184).

The Godmother of Lenny accused the Ice Candy Man of causing all of Ayah's suffering. In the novel, the Godmother says, "“No harm?” Godmother asks in a deceptively cool voice — and arching her back like a scorpion its tail, she closes in for the kill. ‘You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm?’” (Sidhwa, 262).

In the rebellion of the authority Pakistani point of view on Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa has shown the certainty of Partition through an assortment of analogies and images, bringing up issues about the reasoning and philosophy of Partition, particularly by featuring the expense of Partition. Sidhwa demonstrates her scholarly trustworthiness and respectability by fostering her autonomous point of view on a few parts of Partition, which contrasts fundamentally with the authority Pakistani position. As per the discoveries, Sidhwa does not buy into Pakistan's public philosophy while answering different pieces of the Partition, as claimed by Zaman, Shashi Tharoor, and Crane. The overview likewise uncovered that Sidhwa, as a postcolonial essayist, centers around the British's disagreeable job and conduct during Partition. She dismisses the colonialist prevalence idea and depicts the British according to an Indian viewpoint. In general, Ice Candy Man depicts the distresses of conventional individuals brought about by the segment in distinctive detail.

Chowdhury's across borders, the partition of pakistan, and the bangladesh liberation war

Shuvashree Chowdhury's debut novel, *Across Borders*, was released in November 2013. The story is about the partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the riots caused during the Bangladesh Liberation War as well as Asian women's issues, and the concept of marriage. People are bonded across borders by religion and history, and the study of languages across cultures is an example of crossing borders from one side to the other. *Across Borders* is the narrative of Maya, a little girl born in a small Assamese town in pre-independence India, and her trials and tribulations, which begin with her father's second marriage. It depicts Maya's anguish at her mother and two sisters abandoning her, followed by her being raised by an uncle who is a well-known industrialist and philanthropist. She completes her education at his boarding school outside Dacca. Maya's departure from Dacca following the 1964 riots is chronicled in the novel, with detailed descriptions of her being evacuated by army forces from the college hostel, then seeking safety in a Muslim home for three months before returning to India in search of a life she can finally call her own. *Across Borders* depicts the circumstances surrounding Bangladesh's liberation struggle and a little girl's memories of the pain of the communal riots leading up to it through the story of a girl stuck between a patriarchal society and political turmoil.

The novel begins in the childhood of Maya, the protagonist of the novel who is talking about the day in 1948, Kalpana and Maya had left to cross over to another life with Ronjit uncle across the Pakistan border. There was no Bangladesh yet and was not going to be for a long time. Mihirpur is a small town near the city of Dacca, in erstwhile East Pakistan, currently Bangladesh. Where Maya was about to transcend the border of her childhood. After the age of eight, she was sucked into adulthood like quicksand. It would only be fifteen years hence that she would again cross the border, back into India. After her graduation in 1964, she would return to work, marry, raise a family, and live the rest of her life on the Indian side. A few years later, in 1971, the home that she grew up in was to become a part of Bangladesh, no longer of East Pakistan, as when she would have to leave it. As the country was re-contoured into

Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India ensuing much turmoil, so did her life across its border in developing three distinct identities – childhood, adolescence, and adulthood – get chiseled by the rough hands of time and experiences.

Ironically, in the massive communal violence against Hindus, the then government arrested Hindu leaders, along with the Bengali Muslims, who were fighting the mutinous mob to protect the Hindus. In Dacca, Vishnuganj and other affected places, loot, arson, rape, and killings were going on unabated. It was a dry run of the 1971 riots and in many ways the beginning, of the partition of Bengal. The non-Bengali and Muslim League ruffians did not spare anyone in the so-called holy war, not even an American national Father Novak, was spared. He was brutally murdered for going to rescue a Hindu family in distress. After four days, Father Novak's dead body was found on the riverbank and his personal belongings, including a wristwatch and a bicycle, were recovered from those who killed him.

During the time of the Bangladesh Liberation War, Maya's uncle Ronjit and his younger son Romit were murdered by the Pakistani army with the help of the local collaborators and they were officially declared missing. As Maya said in the novel "After the night of their leaving home, no one ever saw Ronjit uncle or his son Romit again. They were officially declared missing, though presumably murdered shortly after their abduction. However, there is no evidence to date of their murder, as the bodies were never found" (Chowdhury, 165). This incident has broken Maya deeply.

It can be said that one can find the horror of partition in the eyes of Maya who separated from her family. Maya's real suffering began after the riots; she was unable to sleep properly, had many nightmares about the riots during the Bangladesh Liberation War, and at the end of the novel it was found that Maya was diagnosed with depression. (Chowdhury, 136) As it is known that riots are always a horrible thing but still, we can find something good out of it that is while people were killing each other in the name of religion and ethnicity, Muslim girls helped the Hindu girls to reach the Hindu refugee camps that show humanity. Another example of humanity can be the riots spearheaded by Non-Bengali Muslims, in which the Bengalis are fighting them to defend their Hindu brothers and sisters. But the negative part of it is women were suffered and killed in large quantities than men.

Comparing ice candy man and across borders

In Ice Candy Man, the protagonist was an 8-year-old girl named Lenny, who was far too young to deal with the violence and chaos caused by the India-Pakistan partition, whereas, in Across Borders, the partition of Pakistan and riots caused during the Bangladesh Liberation War had less impact on Maya, the protagonist, unlike Lenny, because she is a 20-year-old college-going girl who is far more mature than Lenny. In both stories, there was an identity issue. Shanta was the female protagonist in Lenny's story. Because of the cause of the India-Pakistan partition, Lenny's babysitter Shanta lost her identity and became a prostitute towards the end of the story, and in Across Borders, the college-going girl Maya becomes a Hindu refugee due to the division of Pakistan. People, particularly women, and children, suffered both physical and psychological anguish in Ice Candy Man, but people in Across Borders suffered only mentally. During the partition of India and Pakistan, around 2 million people perished and 10 to 20 million people were displaced; however, the partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh Liberation War killed and displaced nearly 1 million people.

The mental condition of Shanta is much more different than the mental condition of Maya. In the novel Ice Candy Man, Shanta's mental suffering started after her gang-raped and

when she was forced to become a prostitute. Her pain and suffering ended when he successfully went to India. Lenny said at the end of the novel, “Until, one morning, when I sniff the air and miss the fragrance, and run in consternation to the kitchen, I am told that Ayah, at last, has gone to her family in Amritsar. And Ice-candy-man, too, disappears across the Wagah border into India.” (Sidhwa, 277).

And the end of the novel *Across Borders*, it is found that Maya is suffering from depression by remembering the horrors and the trauma caused to her during the partition. Her mental condition gets worse after the death of Nayan, Maya’s husband. The last paragraph of the novel says about her bad mental condition. “But in spite of all but me gone, our house doesn’t seem empty. Often in the past, I would come home from work and Nayan and the girls would be out. I’d call and they wouldn’t answer. Then the house seemed empty. But now the house never seems empty like that. Since Nayan is always away, he’s never really away, never anywhere else but home with me. I can vividly see him walking about the house as before. We talk all the time, more than we ever did. I take his advice on everything, keeping him abreast of all the latest developments in our daughter’s lives. Through living alone now, I’m never lonely. I live with Nayan’s everlasting presence.” (Chowdhury, 202)

Conclusion

In the study, it is found that both Bapsi Sidhwa and Shuvashree Chowdhury identify the Partition with evil and destruction, based on an extensive analysis of the two authors' texts considering postcolonial critical theories and numerous references to other texts for comparison. The researcher has taken two texts for a comparative study of two partitions of India. There are also other texts based on the India-Pakistan partition and the Pakistan-Bangladesh partition which can be compared and researched for future study. The main aim of the study is to aware society of the partitions of India and mainly it will help the literature students to get to know more about partition literature. Many scholars have done a lot of work based on the partition of India but this is almost the first attempt to compare the partition of India-Pakistan with the partition of Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh. They both emphasize the peaceful coexistence that occurred between Muslims and Hindus, particularly Bengalis, before Partition. Both authors, however, acknowledge that the Hindu-Muslim synthesis was not without its problem. Shuvashree, conforms to the official Bengali perspective on Partition, through the eyes of Maya, the protagonist of the novel *Across Borders* whereas, Sidhwa, in violation of the official Pakistani perspective on Partition through the eyes of Lenny, has been shown the undesirability of the Partition of India, through several themes, symbols, and metaphors and raises questions about the rationale and the ideology of Partition.

Both novels take a female perspective on two different regional division stories. In both books, the protagonists' pains are depicted in the novel's theme. Though the atmosphere of the India-Pakistan partition was more politically heated and has been treated more frequently in literature, the climate of the Pakistan-Bangladesh partition, Bangladesh Liberation, and the formation of Bangladesh and narratives based on it should be given equal weight.

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