**PAMSA: Pakistan And Modern South Asia Laiba Fatima Khan (lk04067)**

**Third Reflection Paper**

**Indian Independence 1947; A Partition Too Deep**

The year 1947 holds tremendous importance in the lives of the people of the subcontinent. The repercussions of the ‘Partition’ spread far and wide across this region, with reactions of the populace ranging from indignation and fury to joy and happiness. Partition, the division of British India into the two separate states of India and Pakistan, on August 14-15, 1947, was the last-minute mechanism by which the British were able to secure agreement over [how the independence of the subcontinent, from the British colonial rule, would take place](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00maplinks/modern/maps1947/maps1947.html). At the time, very few people understood what the partition would entail or what its results would be, and the migration on the enormous scale that followed the partition, took the vast majority of contemporaries [by surprise](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/asia/india/indianindependence/chronology/index.html). Hindus and Sikhs fled Pakistan, a country that would be Muslim-controlled. Muslims in modern-day India fled in the opposite direction. About 14 million people are thought to have abandoned their homes in the summer and fall of 1947, when colonial British administrators began dismantling the empire in Southeast Asia. Bungalows and mansions were burned and looted, women were raped, children were killed in front of their siblings.  Estimates of the death toll post-partition range from 200,000 to two million. Many were killed by the members of other communities and sometimes by their own families, as well as by the contagious diseases which swept through [refugee camps](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/communal-disturbances/). Trains carrying refugees between the two new states arrived full of corpses; their passengers had been killed by mobs on the way. Those were called “blood trains”: All too often they crossed the border in funereal silence, blood seeping from under their carriage doors. The horrors of partition were faced by all, regardless of the religion they followed, or the community they belonged to. Seven decades on, over a billion people, belonging to this region, formerly known as the subcontinent, still live in the shadow of partition. The hatred for each other is growing, the sufferings are still on going. (Doshi & Nisar, 2017)

Interestingly, this is not what you get to read in official texts about Partition, whether in India and Pakistan, or in Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan, which became a separate state in 1971, despite belonging to the same ‘Muslim’ nation. The mandatory history coursebooks in Pakistan, that all the citizens have access to, are entirely focused on how Hindus betrayed Muslims after the war of independence 1857 and joined hands with the British, and how this situation made the Muslims (read Muslim Leaders) realize that Hindus and Muslims were different nations and that they needed a separate piece of land for themselves because they couldn’t live freely in the subcontinent with Hindus, while they already were living together, for centuries, , in fact after conquering the land that actually belonged to those Hindus and never had any trace of Muslims before the 12th century.

Other than the stories of Hindu betrayal and the realization of Muslims being a nation rather than a religious community, the official history book authors are obsessed with Allama Iqbal’s philosophical dreams, Syed Ahmed Khan’s Aligarh Movement, for spreading modern education of English and Science among the Muslims of India, which later resulted into the establishment of the All India Muslims League, and furthermore, the conflicts between political leaders like Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhi. You can also find several reasons justifying the partition, the details of how the demarcation of boundaries of the two new states, by the British, was unfair and biased, but complete ignorance towards the fact that this partition ruined millions of lives, which should be more important than any conflicts and political interests. There is no official documentation about how the lives of the ordinary people of the subcontinent were affected, the actual victims and survivors of the partition. The history books contain the one-sided story that everyone has to accept, in order to become ‘patriotic’ citizens of the state. As said by Ms. Pippa Virdee, “This curriculum of hatred continues to feed religious bigotry on both sides of the border, placing Hindus and Muslims against each other.” (Virdee, 2013). However, this is not what the partition was all about. So much more happened after the partition in 1947, and the wounds it gave are still fresh.

But was this partition really inevitable? Did Muslims really need a separate state to become independent and to practice their religion freely? And even if it was necessary, did partition really achieve these goals for them? What is the other side of this story apart from the official texts and history books we study in schools, or is this really just it? In today’s modern world, when people are much freer to ask questions and express their opinions about everything, as a youth of this era, sometimes, we also feel the need to question our history, our knowledge about the Indian independence and partition of 1947 followed by massive destruction and bloodshed, and the lessons of patriotism for own state and hatred for the other we have always been taught, by the school or by the society.

To get the answers to some of these questions, let us try to go beyond the dominant official and political narratives to justify partition, and look into the perspectives of the common people who actually experienced the partition and its aftereffects. Let us dig into the stories of the thousands of people who were forced to migrate and leave everything behind, who were kicked out of their own hometowns, not even given time to collect their belongings and leave respectfully. The partition was not only a physical, but also a mental torture for those people.

The creation of India and [Pakistan](https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/country/pakistan.html) prompted the biggest mass migration in human history, as Muslims who were scattered across India and Hindus and Sikhs who were in Pakistan desperately tried to make it to the other side of the border. As people fled their homes, a wave of violence was unleashed with even close friends and neighbors turning on each other.

"People who a year before would've attended each other's wedding parties … are murdering each other, raping each other's daughters, roasting each other's babies on spits," says historian William Dalrymple. He describes how train stations in cities like Lahore, in the new state of Pakistan, morphed into scenes of mass death. (Dalrymple, 2017)

"The platforms are literally awash with blood because a load of Hindus waiting on the platform to travel to India have been massacred, and another platform was covered with blood because a train had just arrived from India full of dead Muslims. Total chaos." (Dalrymple, 2017)

One of the victims of partition was Ms. Nasim Fatima Zubairi, belonging to a Muslim family, living in Delhi in 1947. She shared her painful experience of losing her entire family because of the hatred caused by partition, being the only survivor,

**“**My last memory before seven members of my immediate family were killed is looking through a keyhole in our house and seeing my father praying, with my two-year-old brother crying in the background. I was hit over the head and I still have a scar from the attack. My father, mother, grandmother and four brothers and sisters were all killed. I was the only one of my family to survive.” (Zubairi, 2017)

Before the partition Ms. Nasim had a very happy childhood in Karol Bagh, Delhi. It was a Hindu area, so as Muslims they could not leave the house. Their neighbors were Sikh and they had said they would protect her family, but that did not happen. In fact, it was the Sikh neighbours who attacked and killed them all mercilessly.

But Ms. Nasim actually counted herself fortunate. She had heard stories of children being killed in horrific ways and girls being raped. Even though she had migraines for most of her life as a result of the attack on her head, she was not injured to a degree that she could not get on with life. Also, she got the chance to extend her family who looked after her, unlike countless others who did not get to live or have a family ever again. (Zubairi, 2017)

All thanks to the chaos and hatred, spread throughout the divided subcontinent, Rami Ranger and several other children, born at the time of partition, lost their fathers even before their birth.

“This is not a shop that can be divided between brothers,” his father used to say in his speeches before partition. “This is a motherland and no one will ever be happy dividing their mother.” But he was a marked man as he was not liked by the fundamentalists. Rami was born two months after his assassination in 1947. (Ranger, 2017)

According to Rami, the British were ruling with divide-and-rule policies. “At that time, they offered Sikhs – I’m a Sikh – a separate country also, but I’m glad the Sikhs didn’t fall for it, otherwise there would have been even more chaos.” Rami’s remaining family became refugees in India. “Sometimes we didn’t have enough food on the table. Sometimes we didn’t have enough money to pay for exam fees; we would say ‘OK, I’ll skip this year, you go this year’. People should know that real families are affected when you break up countries.” (Ranger, 2017)

The uncovering of such stories and narratives teaches us that the partition wasn’t as organized and orderly as it has been taught to us. Partition was not an event for celebration for many, rather an event which impacted their lives negatively.

The great poet in Pakistan, Faiz Ahmed, also talks about the partition in one of his poetry, *Subh-e-Azadi.* Faiz begins his poem with a verse which translates to:

This stained, pitted first-light,

this day-break, battered by night,

this dawn that we all ached for,

this is not that one. (Faiz, 1947)

Faiz is referring to the partition which was considered by many as a ‘dawn’ for the Muslims, but he does not seem to agree with this idea. He calls this dawn ‘stained and pitted’, and although it is a dawn, it is not what they had set out for, hoping that one day they would reach a favorable destination.

If the narratives of people who have suffered from both sides, whether that be a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh, come to the forefront and people get to hear them, then it will make them realize the horrors of partition, and the wars followed. It would make them understand that hating and killing one another does not solve anything. Today's generation needs to learn from Pakistan's history. We can use it as a tool to make us better people, or we can just run away ignoring it, never look back and pretend as if it never happened, but then we will just be foolish.

Learning the perspectives of ordinary citizens who lived through partition is vital. Even now, more than seven decades later, memories of the horrors that unfolded as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs turned on each other, remain raw in the minds of those who survived. The families divided with the division of land, many are still unaware of each other’s whereabouts, and those who know, it is still hard for them to visit their loved ones, living on the other side of the border, due to the difficult requirements and so much time-taking Visa issuance. My grandparents’ siblings living in India were the only relatives, not being able to attend their funerals. The political differences and deep hatred between the people of the two states are still the same, a hatred too much that in a mere cricket match, between the two countries, winning of one becomes a threat to many lives of the other side, taken responsible for the results.

As I think of the partition that happened 71 years ago, it feels like a memory. Though I do not possess any personal narratives of it, yet it feels like I do have one – so personal that it invokes emotions. This owes to the partition of 1947 being a national memory in both India and Pakistan to this day. A memory that continues to influence how the peoples and states of postcolonial South Asia think of their past, present and future.

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