



Retelling Fragmented Histories: Partition in Short Stories

Arzuman Ara, PhD 

Department of ELT, EFL University, Shillong, India

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Corresponding Author: Arzuman Ara, Email: arzumanara@eflushc.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

Partition of India in 1947 has been one of the major events in the history of South Asia that has played a crucial role in shaping the three nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A number of narratives on the background of partition have given rise to the sub-genre of partition narratives in which the authors reflect and reconstruct the pain, suffering, loss and alternative histories of the events of partition. The authors, in their effort, give a voice to the victims and critique the political players. Partition in the Bengal and Assam border is represented in a number of writings. In this article, an attempt is made to give a glimpse of the partition narratives written in Bangla through three short stories from Debes Ray's *Raktamanir Haare [In the Garland of Blood Beads]* published by Sahitya Akademy. The stories are the poignant snapshots of the events of partition in the Bengal border. The stories show the life of suffering of people caused by partition and also upheld the resilient spirit of life.

KEYWORDS: Partition in India, partition narratives, alternative history, independence

INTRODUCTION

History, as we read, is always the fragmented one, which represents partial realities. However, the partial history of the state has a limited scope of reflection as it gives only an official version of the chronology of the events. But those who undergo the effects of the events—the human beings—their voice is often unheard in such histories. Therefore, we need to look at the alternative modes of representation of the events as this enables us to reflect more on the event and its impact on a society and human beings. To look for the alternative histories, one has to explore other narratives than the official history. Such narratives comprise newspaper and journal articles, memoirs, diaries, oral narratives, accounts of the eye-witnesses, fictions, and fictionalized accounts of the real events as well. The history of independence of India from the British rule in 1947 and the partition of the sub-continent is a historical event whose memory has been a deep scar on the 'collective psyche' of the people of the sub-continent.

There has seldom been any such event in history that turned one nation into two nations overnight by just one stroke on a map of the region. Such overnight changes during the partition of 1947 have always been a site of revisiting by the historians as well as literary writers. Das (2004) writes, “The Partition of India, with its multitude of riots and episodes of collective violence between Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand and Muslims on the other, and especially the sexual violation of women on both sides, provides an ample arena for reflection” (p. 56). Reflections on the historical events are important for three things: firstly, we should not forget our past and we need to preserve it; secondly, we need to analyse the relationship between the causes and the events of the past so that the negative impacts of the events can be eliminated; thirdly, we need to save our posterity from repeating the same errors that we make. Partition is such a site of reflection. Regarding the limitations of partition history, Pandey (2004) observes:

[H]ow can we write the moment of struggle back into history? I am arguing that even when history is written as a history of struggle, it tends to exclude the dimensions of force, uncertainty, domination and disdain, loss and confusion, by normalising the struggle, evacuating it of its messiness and making it part of a narrative of assured advance towards specified (or specifiable) resolutions. I wish to ask how one might write a history of an event involving genocidal violence, following all the rules and procedures of disciplinary, ‘objective’ history, and yet convey something of the impossibility of the enterprise. (p. 4)

Pandey’s observation is pertinent in our retelling of the partition. Literature, as a mimetic mode of representation, writes about the other side of the official history by giving a centrality to human stories.

During and after the partition, the moments and events of history-making give a scope for the rise of such narratives. Pandey (2004) again points out:

Partition, individuals, families and communities in the subcontinent re-made themselves in radically altered settings. They had to struggle to overcome new fears, to gradually rebuild faith and trust and hope and to conceive new histories – and new ‘memories’ that are, in some reckonings, ‘best forgotten’. ‘What is the point of telling today’s children about these things?’ Partition survivors sometimes say. ‘All that has nothing to do with their lives and their problems.’ . . .

And yet, while individuals and families recreate themselves in changed times and changed conditions, sometimes by forgetting, they – and the communities and nations in which they live – are not able to set aside the memory of the violence quite so easily. For there are numerous ways in which the life and conditions of India and Pakistan, and perhaps Bangladesh too, have been obviously re-made by that violence and the curious memory-history we have of it. (p. 16)

Literature represents how human beings resettled with a life with memories in a new and changed land where one has to live with a new identity and nationalism during and after the partition of 1947. This way of looking at the partition literature supports the view of Didur (2006) who argues:

The desire to be able to write an omniscient account of historical events is something most contemporary historiographers have openly abandoned. This shift in disciplinary practice is apparent in recent work on India’s partition. Here, historiographers have redirected their attention to exploring ‘the particular’ rather than ‘the general’ in an effort to disrupt the state’s universalizing and hegemonic historical narratives. (p. 42)

Literary writings represent those fragments of history and those nuances of memory that give us a look into the alternative histories. This article is an attempt to analyse descriptively some selected Bangla short stories on the partition. An attempt is made here to see how the narratives focus upon the human conditions with a mixture of “memory-history” that represent the human history.

PARTITION AND LITERATURE

There are a number of memoirs, novels, stories and films made on the background of the partition which reflects that even after seventy years of the event, it is still live in our collective memory. Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) accounts how people are re-living the memories of the partition of 1947 in their drastically changed circumstances. She asserts that the “generality” of partition “exists publicly in history book” (p. 4) and “[t]he particular is harder to discover, it exists privately in the stories told and retold inside so many households in India and Pakistan” (p. 4). Butalia (2015) also asserts,

. . . remembering Partition means recalling the dark side of Independence, a moment of loss, a moment of when the country was divided and that which was lost was immeasurable – for it was not only homelands, and families, and material things but much more that could not be articulated, sometimes not even named. (p. viii).

Our attempt is to discover those ‘human dimensions’ of history that has found a creative expression for a critical reflection and analysis. Literature as a form of art is a creative representation of human society in language. The creative writer depicts the history and culture of our society, either as a narrator, or through the characters, and the events and actions of the narratives. Such narratives, apart from displaying the author’s reaction, often portray and criticize what takes place in the society, how, and why. The creative representation in literature, thereby, becomes a criticism of the society. The same is true about the stories on the partition as it is described: “In the literature on Partition, the short story holds a position of prominence. . . the short story, by encapsulating individual fates, held its own against the unfolding of multiple histories in the novel. The short durative of the story carried as much punch as the epic sweep of novelistic time” (Hasan, 2008, p. xiii). The prominent themes of partition stories are based on the intertwined multiple issues related to —

1. Historical (e.g. Independence, Partition and “shifting cartography,” etc.)
2. Political (e.g. nationalism, two-nation theory, new borderlands, etc.)
3. Social (e.g. identities, otherisation, communal violence, migration, etc.)
4. Humanitarian (e.g. fear, trauma, humanity in the moment of crisis, etc.)
5. Individual (e.g. memory, mourning, etc.).

It is notable that the thematic centrality of partition, migration and violence have been knotted with all the other themes and issues in the partition narratives.

Partition narratives can be said to be a revision of history with its own poetics and politics as Beniwal (2005) notes:

The poetics of the partition fiction subsumes projects, appropriates and approximates the historical, the socio-cultural, the politico-ideological and economic ramification of the event. It is a creative/imaginative re-construction of the phenomenon – its processes and pains, problems and possibilities – which in the bulk of the earlier novels, manifests itself through an aesthetics that invariably locates itself within binary enclosures. These enclosures, often oppositional and hierarchical are functions of the authorial mediation, which in turn are products of tension between conscious, the felt and the thought; the

experiential and the ideological; memory and forgetting etc. The ways in which these binaries are conceived, made operative, built up and respond to (while here and there advancing their limits) within the creative space generated by the cataclysmic event of the partition of the Indian sub-continent not only articulate its literary, and hence, socio-political significance, but also become significant portals to approach, analyze and apprehend its literary manifestation. (pp. 2-3)

The famous short story writers on the partition include Sadat Hasan Manto, Intizar Hussain, Amrita Pritam, Neiyer Masud and Krishan, among others. The present article is based on the partition stories written by a set of select Bengali authors in Bangla, which are written at several points of time in the modern history of the continent. The Bengali partition writers are spread over Bangladesh, Pakistan, several states of India, (particularly, Assam, Tripura and West Bengal) and many other foreign countries. A polyphonic narrative style in these writers reflect on finding a significance of the partition. Migration, struggle for survival, life in the refugee camps, assimilation with and acceptance of the changed circumstances are represented along with a focus on the new border as a “shadow line” that is yet unable to divide humanity.

PARTITION IN BANGLA SHORT STORIES

A major focus that is found in the short stories written in Bangla is that they are often surrounded around the common life and household. A loss of that through multiple displacements and re-adopting life after the partition is more of the author’s concern. This shows the writer’s preoccupation with the memories of the lost home. The words like *desh*, *deshar bari* [homeland, house in the homeland] frequently become the metaphors of loss. Homeland is something that they never wish to forget along with the memories of hardship that many have faced as refugees. Therefore, migration, struggle in the refugee camps, survival in a new surrounding in India and a painful nostalgia of the past are the major themes that bring out the human crisis brought by the partition. In this article, some of the short stories are taken from Debes Ray’s *Raktamanir Haare* [*In the Garland of Blood Beads*] for analysis. They include the following:

“Swadhinota” [Independence] by Robi Sen

The story is a critique of the ideology that caused the partition. It focuses on how ‘Independence’ lost its meaning and signification due the human crisis ensued by it. The story depicts the failure of the promises of freedom. The main character Botuk, who very poignantly reminds Toba Tek Singh of Sadat Hasan Manto, fights for freedom and rebels against his (communist) comrades and tries to get provisions for the poor. Botuk becomes symbolically an overwhelming shadow of independence that surrounds the whole place signifying that the failure of the ideologies of freedom is everywhere and that it has become synonymous with insanity. Botuk’s gibberish talks suggest that the globe is becoming a cage, and his walking around the whole place makes his presence felt everywhere. The author comments, “The way the Bangla pronunciation of the foreign sahibs were twisted, there is a sign of more twists in his consciousness; the indications and expressions shown gradually is now a property of the whole town with all its carelessness. That is now a free entertainment” (Ray, 2009, p. 103). People laugh at him and tease him although as the author comments: “Before becoming insane, he was as glorious as the word independence. Love shined in his eyes like the phosphorous at the edge of the waves in the sea. The days of the fall of leaves and long sighs were not so engulfing” (Ray, 2009, p. 104). Botuk tries his hands on many jobs including newspaper vending but fails. Ironically the name of the newspaper is also “*Swadhinota*” [Independence] which he fails to sell. The newspaper symbolically underlines the failure

of achieving the goal/s of independence. Thus, the author parallels and equates the insane Botuk with independence.

Botuk, infuriated with the madness and naked hypocrisy of the political ideologies and practices, adopts his own ways of protesting and resisting as the leaders of the township voted for separation/partition. He snatches one Raybahadur's umbrella, pulls the *dhoti* [an Indian male dress] of one MLA and takes away the cap of one sentry on duty on the road. Gradually, Botuk turns from a "non-violent" protestor to a "violent" insane person just like the non-violent struggle for freedom gradually turned into the violent partition. Botuk then once breaks the glass of a sweetmeat shop and distributes the sweets among the homeless street children though he bleeds while breaking the glass of the shop and gets bitten up by the shopkeeper. Finally, Botuk, who believed in freedom, is chained by his party men while his elder brother becomes an MP (Member of Parliament) in the independent country. Being caught in the dualities and hypocrisies of the situation, Botuk ironically tries to find his liberty in the chains in the world that turns into a huge cage in his eyes. He starts telling everybody proudly as he says, "I am in chains, I am in chains" and "He becomes absorbed in the game of telling it to the extent that, it is only the chains that exist, not him" (Ray, 2009, p. 105). Thus, the spirit of independence is chained symbolically. However, Botuk manages to break the chain mysteriously and supposedly jumps in the river killing himself, yet as another mode of resistance. When Botuk becomes invisible, there are a lot of rumour and speculations about it:

Some say that he has vanished in the historical ruins of the old township. Eye-witnesses say that he jumped into the river in darkness, suddenly, just like the sun that jumps out of the sea.

This also is a hallucination.

But the town had accepted it. Those who elaborate on the description of jumping into the river, they said so – that they voted for the majority. Raybahadur, the colourful babu, and the majority in the party did not have any difference of opinion that the town wanted separation only. (Ray, 2009, p. 106)

In the story, another character Shyamoli does not tie her hair as a protest to the inhuman death of her fellow comrade that reminds us Draupadi's similar protest after she is dishonoured in the *Mahabharata*. Shyamoli's act of untying her hair and Botuk's chain—both are the symbols of resistance presented in a parallel mode in the story, as the author writes, "Someone or the other does not tie the hair, someone breaks the twin chords of independence and the chains—and gets indulged in the fidgety act of breaking one to watch two" (Ray, 2009, p. 107). The author, thus, offers a critique of the partition by showing that both Shyamoli and Botuk refuse to conform to the knots – as the spirit of freedom is never to be chained.

The story has a resonance of the slogan "*Yeh Azadi Jhuta hain,*" (This independence is fake); but more than political, the slogan appears to be voicing how the significance of the independence is lost due to separation and partition, and the loss of humanity caused by it. The author questions if it is "morbid" to have both independence and chains as Botuk got as his crown (Ray, 2009, p. 107). In his insanity, Botuk represents the better side of humanity in an ironical manner, and by turning insane, he underlines the political insanity. But those who know and understand him, they do want to keep up the spirit, like Udayan, who wants to name his unborn son after Botuk – "to remain glorious—just like the word independence" (Ray, 2009, p. 107). The writer comments: "In our life, the story of Botuk will never end. Because, like many of our other beliefs and disbeliefs, Botuk is ever-flowing. The stories of breaking the safety of

the river banks always keep us awake and alert. That is our independence” (Ray, 2009, p. 109).

“Pother Kanta” [Thorn on the Path] by Romeshchandra Sen

This story is another glimpse of displacement caused by the partition. The story is based on how a family undertakes a journey towards India from East Bengal/Pakistan. The author describes the journey of the refugees as:

Crowds of people are moving on – disabled, blind, invalid, healthy, young, children, old ones, men and women. From east to west – long miles of line of boxes and trunks, utensils, bedding – huge and split processions. Some groups have gone ahead, some are following. People have strange expressions of fear on their faces; a mild sound scares them. Sometimes they look behind. If they see anything even far, they say, ‘There, there’ . . .

Not only sick Jadab, all have the same question, ‘How much way is left? How far is West Bengal?’

Old and weak ones sometimes sit on the road. The companions scare them- ‘There comes the Ansars’.

The scared people start moving again.

For the last few days, it is the same sight every day. Crowds of people are moving from east to west and from west to east. (Ray, 2009, pp. 147-148)

The author, here, describes the mass migration with a few strokes of his pen.

People who are not the participants in the political decision-making, they try to make a sense of the events. Having a deep faith in the religious belief, Porashor thinks that it is his sin that has made this displacement and migration happen. His wife protests saying that after offering a feast to a Brahmin also this has happened, so there is nothing called *Paap-Punyo* [sin and virtue]. Porashor gets angry with his sick and weak son, Jadab, as because of him their pace becomes slow. He yells at his son blaming him for the disaster (displacement) as an innocent boy, he had followed the procession for independence with the elder babus. His wife, Mohini retorts him for being rude and irrational. Their conversation highlights that the Partition and displacement is an immature act:

Mohini says, ‘Have you become insane?’

‘Yes, the babus have made me insane. When the babus were fanatical about Partition, he ran behind them. Didn’t I tell not to do so?’

‘Did he shout the slogans knowing what it means, or did the babus understand it?’

‘Why didn’t they understand? A bunch of idiots! (Ray, 2009, p. 148)

The common men’s inability to understand the political events and frustration caused by the displacement is voiced through Porashor who equates the role of the babus in freedom struggle with a child’s irrational/immature act.

The story adds a class-dimension to the partition. Patitpaban says that though there are no communal issues in his village and both the Hindus and Muslims live harmoniously, still the rich babus have left the country. Nobody is there to safeguard the poor ones. Following the rich babus, the poor farmers and labourers are also leaving. Patitpaban also leaves his village as there is nobody in his village from his own caste. Patitpaban believes that it is the rich and influential people’s desertion that forced many poor ones to leave East Bengal.

The writer depicts the fear and suffering of the displaced people. The story gives glimpses of atrocities on women and shows how dehumanization was at its peak. As Mohini hid in the forest for three days with Jadab to save their life, she could hear

people's cry for help and see glimpses of fire in the sky. She hears Rupi Naptani's painful moans who loses her honour at the hands of the "animal-men" while others hide in the forest and live like the wild animals running here and there. Communal otherisation had turned the loving neighbors into wild enemies. The story shows the inhuman treatment meted out by the volunteers, called Ansars, as

On the bank of the rivers, the Ansars- the volunteers stopped them and asked questions like —

‘Where are you taking the ornaments?’

‘Do you think you can steal the gold from Pakistan?’

‘You cannot take more than 10 rupees per head. Leave the excess amount.’

(Ray, 2009, p. 149).

The Ansars take away whatever they can. Some have to leave everything except what they are wearing. Porashor's equipments and instruments of carpentry are all taken away which were his only means to earn for his family. He could not take enough money with him even to board a train. Like Porashor, many others are also forced to leave everything behind. Without proper food and water, cholera breaks out and many die.

The story has a poignant moment when a migrating group of Hindus shouting the slogan "*Bande Mataram*" [I worship, Motherland] meets a migrating group of Muslims coming from the opposite direction shouting "Allahu Akbar" [God is great]. The fear that both the parties had for each other disappears once they realize that they are the victims of the same catastrophic political game. The author writes:

One group arrives in front of the other and stares silently. The sight of the people in both the groups is quiet and calm; there's no contempt, no hatred. They have only one question in their eyes- 'Who did this to you, brother? Who did it? Who?'

They have sympathy with the question—the human empathy for each other. The same sympathy can be seen even from the silent eyes behind the burka.

Both the groups start moving again—in the opposite direction. Now nobody cries out "Allahu Akbar" or "Bande Mataram". Their sympathy has crossed the line beyond any sound. (Ray, 2009, p. 152)

The story offers a critique of the partition. The act of the babu's to divide the country is shown to be childish and meaningless. Freedom loses its significance as people lose life and their roots. The author mocks at the powerful ones through the innocent voice of the child. As everybody becomes afraid of the Ansars, Hambir, the young son of Patitpaban laughs at them with his baby-talk mispronunciation as 'Anthal'. His innocence appears to be mocking at the fear generated by the cruelty of the Ansars who looted the migrating people. As people starved and died, Porashor feels that the migration is useless, "To avoid death, people have made *samshan*/burial grounds everywhere that they have to pass through" (Ray, 2009, p. 157).

But the glory to the greater side of humanity is also depicted in the story. The difference of caste and community melts at certain points due to the people's need for survival and human empathy. It is a Muslim man, Serajul Hoq, who goes around and brings back Mohini and the other Hindus of the village hiding in the jungles to safety by bringing police and arranging conveyance to send them to safe places. Despite the scarcity of food, Kumudini shares food with Mohini and distributes her own food with the hungry children; she herself does not eat. People try to help each other with their limited resources despite difficulties, and Porashor who is bound by his religious belief of casteism picks up an orphan toddler without knowing his caste whom he finds sucking his dead mother's nipples for milk. Porashor, who considered his own sick son as "*Pother Kanta*", who could be a possible reason for being caught and killed, adopts

another responsibility to protect another “*Pother Kanta*,” the orphaned boy, despite his wife’s disapproval and fear and risking the life of him and his family.

“Apod” [Trouble] by Manik Bandopadhyay

This story focuses on the changing dynamics of relationships in the post-partition time and the hardship of people caused by the refugees. The story depicts one couple, Konad and Nalini, who face hardship for accommodating their refugee relatives. Through a glimpse of their life, the author opens up those dynamics of partition that is often hidden. The story opens with the information that — “*Chaal nei*” [No more rice]:

No rice? Wow, no nice!

What great news it is in the morning! It is like the same stale rotten news of getting independence. It brings shivering fever to the already diseased body. (Ray, 2009, p. 173)

Having guests in the house amounts to “having additional stomachs” (Ray, 2009, p. 173) to be fed in the changed circumstances; Bengalis who have the rich culture of hospitality become afraid of having any guest in the house that would incur additional expenses. As the independence has failed to bring any development and improvement to their life, Nalini expresses her frustration very frequently. She adds a gendered dimension to her situation when she retorts her husband: “What should I do?” Nalini says with a sly smile, ‘You people have got independence, not us. We are still busy handling utensils in the corner of the house. It is you people who have given up the practice of putting utensils on the stove, what shall we do?’ (Ray, 2009, p. 173). The changes in Nalini are remarkable as she becomes rude and sarcastic. She starts taunting her husband about independence as it is narrated in the book: “She starts with ‘I’ but soon turns it into “we people and you people” (Ray, 2009, p. 175). Nalini constantly makes it a point to remind Konad that the independence is a failure. The marital love between Konad and Nalini resorts to the politics of survival as Konad comes to realize that Nalini’s survival is dependent on him, so she lets him sleep and eat, and pretends to love him and gives him comfort. The story depicts how the partition impacted the life of people from every sphere of life, including their love-relationship.

“Porichitaa” [The Known] Satinath Bhaduri

Satinath Bhaduri’s “*Porichitaa*” displays a glimpse of another snippet of a needy household of Proshanto and Shailo. Bhaduri describes that the household life of Proshanto is full of calculating the expenses as if meeting the regular expenses is like “catching fish with a torn net” (Ray, 2009, p. 177). The husband counts his money once on the day of his salary, but the wife has to count the amount for all the 30 days of the month. Shailo also becomes possessive of her husband as the sole bread winner of the family. So Shailo keeps a vigilant eye on her husband. The story surrounds around how Shailo adjusts with the house maids while struggling between saving money and keeping her husband under her possession because of her fear and suspicion. Proshanto’s teacher Dwarikbabu visits him for a donation to get his daughter married. Proshanto and Shailo give rupees 15 after a long calculation which is like a disastrous storm on the family’s expenses. To adjust the amount, Shailo keeps a cheaper house-maid, Champa, who is a refugee from East Bengal. But the old maid, Gultan’s mother takes offence and picks up a fight with Champa. Here we can see a struggle between the people of the lowered classes for survival.

Both Champa and Gultan’s mother work as house-maids for their survival. Champa is seen to be a threat to Gultan’s mother who is from India. Since Champa is a refugee, she agrees to work for six rupees whereas Gultan’s mother’s monthly payment

is of eight rupees. Shailo agrees to keep Champa thinking that, “This will save two rupees each month. This one will take six rupees per month. It will take eight months to adjust the fifteen rupees. The refugee camp should still be nearby till then....it is heard that the camp will be dismantled. That will be good. It is not proper to keep a woman like Champa for long....” (Ray, 2009, p. 180). But Gultan’s mother thinks otherwise. After getting discharged from the house, she shouts, “. . .that naughty Pakistani woman, coming from nowhere, without any address.... She makes high claims that she had 300 bighas of land. Nonsense. They are cheating the government. They are taking allowance from the government in one way, and trying to kill us by snatching our jobs from the babus for extra earning and depriving us to starve” (Ray, 2009, p. 181). Gultan’s mother even finds a connection between Shailo and Champa as both of them are Bengalis from East Bengal. She blames Shailo to be blind about Champa because Champa is from her own place.

As Gulatan’s mother was deadly against Champa’s engagement as the housemaid and taking away her means of survival, so was Shailo, fearing that her husband should not get attracted to Champa and should not lose her husband or his money, which is also a means of survival for her. Shailo and Gultan’s mother conspire together to get rid of Champa and feed her fish dipped in sindoor (vermillion) which is believed to cause leprosy. When Champa discovers the truth and realizes that she is a victim of suspicion for being a Pakistani, she raises an alarm and appeals to Proshanto. To save all the sides, Proshanto is forced to give another two rupees and one old sari to Champa to pacify her. Along with a class-dimension, the story shows how the refugees are trying to struggle and survive. This story also focuses how the working-class people of India too suffered due to migration of the refugees. The story shows the impact of poverty upon a family and how the issue of the refugees creates a drift between the husband and wife making the whole situation an immature child’s game.

“*Posharini*” [The Female Hawker] by Samaresh Basu

Samaresh Basu’s “*Posharini*” [The Female Hawker] depicts the struggle for survival of the refugees. The characters are a group of hawkers who sell small things in the trains. They do so without the vending license, which they cannot get being the refugees. Many of them were highly educated and had dreams of a better life before the partition. Partition destroys both their life and dreams and mere survival becomes the sole objective of life. When they sit together discussing their plight, they look like one single bundle of bodies signifying the losses that they faced:

Suddenly from the bundle of the bodies, a collective whimper started to buzz full of their complaints of poverty, pain, failure, frustration.... as if it is a continuous black smoke of the train’s engine. Some of them have lost their parents, wife, and lands. Some have to feed dozens of their dependents; they have to provide provisions, otherwise, just cinema or intoxicants, Goddamn! (Ray, 2009, p. 193)

The young boys are named according to the things that they sell such as Bairon water, Vicks, Morton, Chaanachur, Paanbiri, Fountain pen, etc. These names are symbolic of how the refugees are disrobed of their basic human identity and how they themselves become objectified in their struggle for survival.

Pushpa, who is the daughter of a school headmaster in Dhaka tries to find a means of survival among them by selling her hand-made dolls after they become refugees. Her fear and hesitations do not allow her to perform well, and her distress is doubled by the suspicious eyes of different people. Being a female, she receives taunting remarks and prejudiced suspicion. She becomes doubly marginalized for being a female and a refugee. Initially, even the other hawkers do not allow her to sell her goods in the

trains fearing competition. But once all the hawkers are jailed along with Pushpa for not having the license, they realize that her struggle is similar to theirs and then they accept her as one of them. The name that they once give to taunt her, “*Putuler Maa*” [Doll’s mother] becomes an endearing address for them to call her signifying Pushpa’s objectification like the other hawkers. This is an act of disrobing her from her identity as a ‘daughter of a respectable family’. This also shows an acceptance of her among the other refugee hawkers that displays a bond of solidarity among the dispossessed.

CONCLUSION

Reading the partition stories is a unique experience in itself. A wide range of themes are the subject matter in the stories. As they offer a description of the historical aspects of partition and independence, they also offer a critique of the political events, such as the two-nation theory and shifting cartography that forced the mass migration. As a critique of the political events and ideologies, they offer an insight into the human psyche. A range of the stories stress that the partition is an unforgettable moment in the history of the subcontinent. The stories repeatedly stress that common human beings were just helpless puppets in the hands of the leaders — the political game-payers. The stories also give glimpses into our socio-cultural milieu. Gender, caste, food-habits, belief system, etc. also find a place in the narratives that display how every single aspect of life was dismantled by the partition, and that the partition had affected the life of all. The emotional appeal of the stories is undeniable. Through short snippets, the stories reveal larger realities about human life. They force us to look at the partition from the humanitarian angle. As the narratives of suffering melt our hearts showing a deep humanitarian crisis on one hand, the stories restore our faith in humanity by depicting cooperation, faith, empathy and understanding on the other. When we read about how people have risked their lives to save people from the other communities, we see that it is upon us to keep up the spirit of humanity.

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