



History from the Margins: Literary Representation of Leaders in Partition Narratives

Dr. Radha S. Gautam

S. B. Garda College, Navsari, Gujarat, India
gautam.radha2009@gmail.com

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Abstract— *The Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947, which resulted in the creation of two separate dominions, remains one of the most tragic and complex events of the twentieth century. Even after the lapse of more than seven decades, the memory of partition trauma not only throbs in the veins of the victimized people but also torments the collective psyche of India and Pakistan. Each country has its own thesis and theory to prove that it was only the 'other' who was responsible for the catastrophic division. The macro narratives of both the countries prioritize the accounts of their policy makers extolling their leaders as heroes. The viewpoints and opinions of those who were affected are often ostracized and elided from the dominant discourses of partition history. The present paper explores the portrayal of political leaders in fictional narratives as perceived by ordinary men and women. It aims to amplify the often-overlooked voices of Partition history. The study examines how these narratives construct the reality of political leaders—whether they critique, condemn, or idealize them. Ultimately, the paper offers a broader perspective on the roles of key political figures in the history of Partition.*



Keywords— *Partition, political, leaders, marginalized people, chief actors, small, history.*

INTRODUCTION

The story of independence and nation-building in the Indian Subcontinent is inextricably associated with the tragedy of Partition. This momentous event is often portrayed as a grand drama, with key figures like Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Mountbatten, Sardar Patel considered its principal actors. The role of these leaders has been a focal point of debate in the historiographies of India and Pakistan. In both countries, the dominant national narratives prioritize the accounts of policymakers and elevate their leaders to heroic status. However, the historical records of each country offer limited perspectives on the leaders of the other side. For example, Pakistan's history books provide scant coverage of Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress leadership, while Indian textbooks downplay Jinnah and the Muslim League leaders. A clear consensus on why Partition occurred and who was responsible—whether it was Jinnah, Nehru, Gandhi, or the British—remains elusive. In each nation's history, their own leaders are often eulogized, while the

voices of those who were directly affected by the event are marginalized and overlooked.

There has long been a need to critically examine and reassess the history of the Partition. Many writers have challenged long-established images of political leaders and have tried to understand the roles of the key figures who played central roles in the Partition process. Works such as Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan* (1984), Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1985), and M. A. K. Azad's *India Wins Freedom* have provided fresh perspectives, offering a more nuanced understanding of the leaders' roles during this pivotal moment in history.

Unlike traditional historical accounts, literary narratives have not only represented the sufferings of the general masses, they have tried to assess the role of the Indian national leaders and have positioned them as opposite to the common people. They have evaluated, blamed, critiqued, defended and revisited the chief actors

of the partition drama and have brought in forefront their nature and intentions.

This paper investigates the portrayal of political leaders as presented in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. It seeks to amplify the often-muted voices of ordinary men and women who lived through the trauma of Partition. The study examines how these narratives construct the reality of political leaders—whether they critique, condemn, or idealize them. Ultimately, the paper offers a broader perspective on the roles of key political figures in the history of Partition.

Representation of political Leaders in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*:

Cracking India stands as one of the most significant contributions to Partition literature. Through the child narrator Lenny and other marginalized characters, Bapsi Sidhwa gives voice to those whose experiences are often absent from the pages of history.

The *Cracking India* is a politically motivated novel as Sidhwa admits this in a conversation with David Montenegro:

The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the partition of India and Pakistan.... What has been written has been written by the British and the Indians, Naturally, they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I would do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I don't think I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what that facts were. (Sidhwa 4)

In *Cracking India* Sidhwa argues how British favoured India over Pakistan. She interrogates the British and pro-Hindu Indian versions of history and claims that great injustice was done to Pakistan: Sidhwa clearly mentions that during division Muslims and Pakistan have suffered.

"Within three months seven million Muslims and five million Hindus and Sikhs are uprooted in the largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history. The Punjab has been divided by the icy cards- sharks dealing out the land village by village, city by city, wheeling and dealing and doling out favors.....For now the tide is turned- and the Hindus are being favored over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favor Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir.....they grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured." (CI 130)

While historical narratives often glorify leaders like Jinnah, Nehru, and Patel as champions of freedom and national identity, Sidhwa presents a counter-narrative through common people showcasing that the concerns of the elite rarely aligned with the suffering of these marginalized people. The novel *Cracking India* offers insights into both local and national politics, depicting key political figures such as Gandhi, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, the Mountbatten, Tara Singh and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, presenting them in a distinctive and thought-provoking way.

Jinnah has remained a central figure in discussions surrounding Partition. As a Pakistani writer, Sidhwa challenges the biased portrayals of Jinnah by Indian historians and others, who often blame him for the division of the subcontinent.

In many of her interviews Sidhwa has grieved over the way Indian and British writers represent Jinnah. In an interview with David Montenegro, Bapsi Sidhwa asserts that she was deeply hurt to the portrayal of Jinnah in novels written by Indian and western writers. She wanted a redressal of this mistake by presenting Jinnah as an intelligent leader of his community. Sidhwa retorts:

'.....I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistan by many Indian and British writers. They've dehumanized him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the Partition of India ---- whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn't sway crowds by rhetoric. (Sidhwa, Point of Departure, 50)

Jinnah is caricatured as: "Jinnah was brilliant, elegantly handsome." (CI 131) Jinnah considers Jinnah as a man of knowledge:

"His training at the Old Bailey and practice in English courtrooms has given him faith in constitutional means, and he puts his misplaced hopes into tall standards of upright justice." (CI 130)

Sidhwa saw the film of M. K. Gandhi in which Gandhi was presented as a saint, a Mahatma and a great leader whereas Jinnah's portrayal had been negative; Gandhi was adored whereas Jinnah was caricatured as villain responsible for partition in Indian films and the biased accounts of the British and Indian historians.. The author critiques the way Jinnah has been treated in films and in books by British and Indian scholars:

And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi's and Mountbatten's lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as "Ambassador of Hindu- Muslim Unity" is caricatured and portrayed as a monster." (CI 131)

Sidhwa's praise of Jinnah is typical of a Pakistani, as if a national duty to defend him. Sidhwa tries to undercut the sublime image of Gandhi constructed by British and Indian historian and tries to redefine the role Jinnah. She stresses the role of Jinnah and takes side of him. When her mother tells her that Jinnah's wife, a Parsi, died heart broken, Lenny avers: But didn't Jinnah too die of a broken heart? (CI 131)

Taking a passage from Sarojini Naidu's tribute to Jinnah, Sidhwa admires the mental and moral qualities of Jinnah much misappropriated by the critics, historians and writers:

.....the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naïve and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman's a humour gay and winning as a child's – pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man (CI 131).

The writer defends Jinnah and quotes Jinnah's speech announcing Pakistan as a secular country:

You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of state....etc..etc. Pakistan Zindabad!" (CI 154)

The writer draws a comparison between Nehru and Jinnah, portraying Jinnah in a more favourable light while being critical of Nehru. Jinnah is not one for flattery:

"Jinnah is incapable of compliments. Austere, driven, pukka-sahib accented, deathly ill: incapable of cheek-kissing. Instead of carnations he wears a karakuli cap, somber with tight, gray lamb's-wool curls: and instead of pale jackets, black *achkan* coats. He is past the prime of his elegant manhood. Sallow, whip-thin, sharp-tongued, uncompromising. (CI 130)

Sidhwa even mentions Lady Jinnah with striking admiration: Lady Jinnah is portrayed as a strikingly beautiful and courageous woman. Through the narrator's vivid description, she emerges as a symbol of grace, intelligence, and quiet defiance. Her large, expressive eyes and confident demeanor hint at both her inner strength and compassionate nature. The photograph of Lady Jinnah captures not only her physical charm but also her bold spirit.

The woman in the photograph is astonishingly beautiful. Large eyes, liquid-brown, radiating youth, promising intelligence, declaring innocence, shining from an oval

marble-firm face. Full lipped, delighting in the knowledge of her own loveliness: confident in the knowledge of her generous impulses. Giving ---like Ayah. Daring ---like Mother. "Plucky!" Mother says. (CI 131)

Her qualities are further illuminated:

For the lady in the photograph is daring: an Indian woman baring her handsome shoulders in a strapless gown in an era when such unclothing was considered reprehensible. Defying her wealthy knighted father, braving the disapproval of their rigid community, excommunicated, she marries a Muslim lawyer twenty two years older than her. (CI 131)

In contrast to Jinnah's portrayal, Sidhwa presents Gandhi with certain feminine characteristics, and this representation sometimes seems to mock his personality and undermines his political role.

When Lenny first meets Gandhi, she describes him as:

"Gandhiji visits Lahore. I am surprised he exists. I almost thought he was a mythic figure. Someone we'd only hear about and never see" (CI 75).

When Gandhi visits Lahore, Lenny and her mother find him knitting, surrounded by women. Gandhi politely puts aside his knitting when they approach and casually recommends a medical enema to Lenny. Gandhi is presented satirically as a politician consumed by continuous dieting programs, obsessed with bowel movements and enemas:

"Flush your system with an enema, daughter," says Gandhijee...'Look at these girl'', says Gandhijee, indicating the lean women flanking him. I give them enemas myself-- there is no shame in it- I am like their mother you can see how smooth and moist their skin is look at their shining eyes!"(CI 75)

Sidhwa's depiction of Gandhi overshadows his importance as a great national leader.

My brain, heart and stomach melt. The pure shaft of humour, compassion, tolerance and understanding he directs at me fuses me to everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving. He is a man who loves women. (CI 76)

Sidhwa manipulates the story of Gandhi's visit to Lahore to cast him in an unflattering light, comparing him to the gardener Hari:

"He is small, dark, shriveled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, and no one'd dare pull off his dhoti! He wears only the loincloth and his black and thin torso is naked." (CI 75)

Gandhi is portrayed as a cunning figure who bears responsibility for the Partition violence. Sidhwa also uses

the phrase “ice lurking” (CI 76) to describe the volatile nature of Gandhi’s politics. Lenny reflects:

It wasn’t until some year later – when I realized the full scope and dimension of the massacres – that I comprehended the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi’s non-violent exterior (CI 76).

Jawaharlal Nehru is caricatured in an unfavourable manner. The writer shows Nehru as Lady Mountbatten’s lover.

“Nehru, he’s a sly one... He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other what-not... He’s the one to watch!” (CI 109)

Nehru is shown as a shrewd politician who in spite of all the efforts of Jinnah will take his share:

Jinnah or no Jinnah! Sikh or no Sikh! Right law, wrong law, Nehru will walk off with the lion’s share... And what’s more, come out of it smelling like the Queen- of-the-! Ice- candy-man speaks with an assurance that is prophetic (CI 109)

However, Sidhwa is not too hard with Nehru like she is with Gandhi. She suggests that Nehru’s charm and sophistication played a key role in his success with the British and in the consistent praise he received as a statesman:

Nehru wears red carnations in the buttonholes of his ivory jackets..... He is charming, too, to Lord Mountbatten. Suave, Cambridge-polished, he carries about him an aura of power and a presence that flatters anyone he compliments tenfold. He doles out promises, smiles, kisses-on-cheeks. He is in the prime of his Brahmin manhood. He is handsome: his cheeks glow pink. (130)

In *Cracking India*, Sidhwa has given enough space to even working class people to present their viewpoints on politicians involved in partition. The discussion of politics among these people in Queen’s Park and later at the Wrestler’s restaurant voices their feelings and impressions towards politicians. They curse the politicians in whose hands their destiny lies. The butcher’s comments on Gandhi are crucial to understand the mindset of Muslims in the pre-Partition context:

That non-violent violence monger -- your precious Gandhijee -- first declares the Sikhs fanatics! Now suddenly he says: “Oh, dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan!” What does he think we are - some kind of beast? Aren’t they living with us now? (CI 79).

The Masseur’s reply is equally sarcastic: “He’s a politician, yaar. It’s his business to suit his tongue to the moment (CI 79).

Ice-candy-man talks about Germans and tells they, “have developed a deadly weapon called the V-bomb that will turn the British into powdered ash.” (CI 34) He also quotes Subas Chandra Bose and informs “Bose says the Japanese will help us liberate India from the *Angrez*,” Ice-candy-man says. “If we want India back we must take pride in our customs, our clothes, our languages ... And not go mouthing the got-pit sot-pit of the English!” (CI 34)

As a child, Lenny, the protagonist, destabilizes the importance of powerful politicians by saying, “..... I’m fed up with hearing about them. Mother, Father and their friends are always saying: Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this, Jinnah did that. What’s the point of talking so much about people we don’t know?” (CI 34)

Ayah’s remark reflects the sense of disconnection and helplessness ordinary people might have felt from their political leaders: “What’s it to us if Jinnah, Nehru and Patel fight? They are not fighting our fight,” (CI 67)

The impact of the struggle for power between the Congress and the Muslim League on the common man rightly visualized by Sharbat Khan when he cautions Ayah: “These are bad Allah knows what’s in store. There is big trouble in Calcutta and Muslim trouble. The Congress-wallahs are after Jinnah’s blood. . .” (CI 75). When Ayah remarks casually that Jinnah, Nehru and Patel are not fighting their fight, Sharbat Khan says, “That may be true but they are stirring up trouble for us all” (CI 75- 76) and reports to her some stray incidents of violence and arson taking place in parts of the old city.

The friendly discussion in the Queen’s Park takes on a communal colour. When the Government House gardener reveals that Lord Wavell has been sacked at the instance of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel:

“Gandhi, Nehru, Patel... they have much influence even in London,” says the gardener mysteriously, as if acknowledging the arbitrary and mischievous nature of antic gods. “They didn’t like the Muslim League’s victory in the Punjab elections.” (CI 78)

Masseur, who is a Muslim calls them “The bastards” (CI 78) and says bitterly:

“The bastards!” says Masseur with histrionic fury that conceals a genuine bitterness. “So they sack Wavell Sahib, a fair man! And send for a new Lat Sahib who will favor the Hindus!” (CI 78)

Ice-Candy-Man remarks that this is not something unexpected and in a contemptuous tone asks the gardener, “but aren’t you Hindus expert at just this kind of thing?

Twisting tails behind the scene ... and getting someone else to slaughter your goats?" (CI 78)

The butcher, who has been listening to them in silence, suddenly snorts and says: "That non-violent violence-monger— your precious Gandhijee—first declares the Sikh fanatics! Now suddenly he says: "Oh dear, the poor Sikhs cannot live with the Muslims if there is a Pakistan!" What does he think we are—some kind of beast? Aren't they living with us now?" (CI 79)

The Government House gardener tries to assuage their bitterness by holding the English responsible for the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims: "It is the English's mischief ... They are past masters at intrigue. It suits them to have us all fight" (CI 79). Not subscribing to the gardener's views, the butcher remarks:

Haven't the Hindus connived with the Angrez to ignore the Muslim League, and support a party that didn't win a single seat in the Punjab? It's just the kind of thing we fear. They manipulate one or two Muslims against the interests of the larger is times – Delhi: Hindu- community. And now they have manipulated Master Tara Singh and his bleating herds of Sikhs! (CI 79)

The Sikh zoo attendant, Sher Singh, shifts uncomfortably and, looking as completely innocent of Master Tara Singh's doing as he can, frowns at the grass. Ayah stands up and says that she'll stop coming to the park if they all talk of nothing but Hindu-Muslim business. To placate here Ice-Candy-Man says: "Such talk helps clear the air ... but for your sake, we won't bring it up again" (CI 80).

The vivid description of Sikhs' attack on Muslim villages in Punjab is also part of Sidhwa's authorial intentions. She believes that the Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality -- they wanted Punjab to be divided:

In fifteen minutes the village was swamped by the Sikhs— tall men with streaming hair and thick biceps and thighs, waving full –sized swords and sen-guns, roaring, " Bolay so Nihal! Sat Siri Akal!"...(CI 111)

The image of Master Tara Singh is also depicted with in a biased way. She represents Sikh as a militant and troublesome persona in white kurta with kirpan. Sidhwa gives importance to the words of Akali leader expressing his determination of frustrating the Muslim dream for a homeland:

Master Tara Singh, in a white kurta, his silken beard flowing creamily down his face, appears on the top steps of the Assembly Chambers. I see him clearly. His chest is diagonally swathed in a blue band from which dangles a decoratively sheathed kirpan. The folds of his loose white pajamas fall about his ankles: a leather band round his

waist holds a long religious dagger. He gets down to business right away. Holding a long sword in each hand, the curved steel reflecting the sun's glare as he clashes the swords above his head, the Sikh soldier-saint shouts: " We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan!" (CI 111)

Sidhwa goes on to mention how the speech of Sikh leader invokes violent protests from the Muslims, conscious of the butchering of their Muslim predecessors in Punjab from Ambala to Amritsar, century ago, they decide to make the Sikhs and Hindu festivals of Holi as a festival of blood. In this way, Sidhwa exemplifies the Parsee perspective which affixes Sikh leaders responsible for initiating the communal trouble.

One of the chief concerns of Sidhwa in *Cracking India* seems to be to justify Jinnah's role in the history of the subcontinent. Her account is revisionist in its depiction of Jinnah and she clearly manifests her grief at the biased work of the British and Indian scholars. Though as a novelist Sidhwa represents Partition horrors unbiased, as being Pakistani she caricatures Jinnah above other politicians.

Sidhwa's novel is significant for its revisionist approach, especially in re-examining the roles of key political figures. Her perspective challenges macro historical narratives, and suggest an alternative version to understand the roles of the leaders in a more critical and reflective manner.

Representation of political leaders in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*:

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is one of the most significant novels on Partition. The novel not only portrays the devastating consequences of Partition but also captures the reactions of ordinary people towards their leaders.

Nahal offers a balanced portrayal of the key political figures involved in the Partition. He critiques the policies of the Congress Party and holds Nehru and Gandhi responsible for fuelling Jinnah's desire for Pakistan. The idea of allocating a separate section for Muslims in both the East and West of India, Nahal suggests, was what made Jinnah fully realize his vision. As he writes, "Until then, Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not quite know what he meant by it. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too" (*Azadi* 27).

The confusion and inner turmoil of Lal Kanshiram, the protagonist of the novel, not only reveal the dilemmas faced by innocent people during Partition but also reflect the common people's bafflement over the leadership of that time. Like Lala, many were trapped in a

web of uncertainty, filled with doubts and conflicting ideas about the political figures guiding the nation.

Mountbatten Sahib had so far said he would hold by the cabinet mission plan, and that did not suggest a division. What had passed in the meetings the Viceroy had been having last month in Delhi with the Indian Leaders? Those leaders too were speaking this evening over the radio, weren't they? What formula had they cooked up between themselves?" (Azadi 28)

Nahal powerfully portrays the anger of the people when they feel betrayed by their leaders. The common people had hoped that their leaders would take action to protect them, but instead, they were left to face the consequences of Partition alone. Nahal conveys this anger through the voices of the people, who feel their leaders "had neither the power nor the intention of maintaining in their homes" and should have devised means of mass migration to being with, before rushing to partition." (Azadi 211)

The people were so overwhelmed with confusion and grief over the idea of Partition that they longed to confront their leaders, to question them. As Lala puts it, they wanted to catch their leaders and interrogate them:

What had happened to his Akal, his mind?... And why the partition in the first place? What of your promises to us, You Pandit Nehru?"

Nahal depicts the inner turmoil of people entangled in the vortex of confusion at the time of partition :

Jinnah and Liakat Ali Khan were coming into estate; as was Nehru. Why else would they rush into Azadi which would ruin the land and destroy the unity? For the creation of Pakistan solved nothing. (Nahal 96).

However, he critiques their indifference and lack of foresightedness:

"Had neither the power nor the intention of maintaining in their homes and should have devised means of mass migration to being with, before rushing to partition." (Nahal 211)

He also accuses the Britishers who had "the biggest hand in butchery." (Nahal 148) He does not accuse Gandhi for the partition in the initial part of the novel:

For the last thirty years since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene it had taken the stand that India was a single nation not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician he was a saint. He had an inner voice to satisfy too And Gandhi was shrewd surely he saw it all He wouldn't give into such butchery. If nothing else worked his fasts unto death always did,"

Through a number of events and situations of the life in the Ashram, Nahal has projected Gandhiji's single mindedness, honesty, sincerity, his transparent thinking, his ability to persuade people, instil confidence in them and his freeness of mind to consider all religions similar.

For some characters in the novel, Gandhiji was a man who, in just ten years, had transformed the spirit of the nation. To others, he was a Mahatma. People did not come merely to listen to his speeches; they came to pay homage to him. They bowed their heads to him with folded hands and then quietly left.

Chaman Nahal provides a balanced portrayal of Gandhiji, refraining from blaming him for the Partition. Unlike *Cracking India*, Nahal contrasts Gandhi with other national leaders, presenting him in a different light. Through the character of Lala Kanshi Ram, Nahal reflects the confidence and faith that ordinary people had in Gandhi. Kanshi Ram is convinced that Gandhi would never allow Partition to occur. He expresses his belief with these words:

The Congress had a promise to keep with the people. For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it had taken the stand that India was a single nation, not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician, he was a saint. He had his inner voice to satisfy, too. Would that nagging voice of his let him accept the slaughter of so many? That's what it would mean, if Pakistan did come into existence. And Gandhi was shrewd-surely he saw it all. He wouldn't give in to such butchery. If nothing else worked, his fasts unto death always did (Azadi 35).

In a meeting of merchants at Lala Kanshi Ram's store, both Hindu and Muslim merchants express their faith in Gandhi. Alongside others like Lala Radhey Shyam, Lala Banarsi Das, and Lala Shamsheer Bahadur, Lala Kanshi Ram have strong faith that Gandhiji will save them with his 'Shakti.' Some, however, hold trust in the British and believe that British kept India united for a long period: He remembers how these leaders promised:

.. No, ji, Mahatmaji would never let that happen.....And the English are afraid of him!. ... Bapu has a shakti, an inner power, which no one else can dream of. ...

However, Lala Kanshi Ram is critical of the Congress party and accuses Congress Party of planting the idea of Pakistan in Jinnah's mind. The discussion of allocating a separate region for Muslims in both the East and West of India made Jinnah more determined to realize his dream. Although this plan spoke of a common defence and foreign policy, it ultimately gave Jinnah a clearer vision for a separate state: "Until then, Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not quite know what he meant by it.

Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too.” (Azadi 27)

He recalls how leaders like Gandhi had promised:

Gandhi had... asserted he would never accept *that*. Over our dead bodies alone, the congress leaders said. We would shed the last drop of our blood, but we would not allow India to be partitioned” (Azadi 28)

Like Lala Kanshi Ram, Chaudhari Barkat Ali is another character profoundly influenced by Gandhiji and deeply impressed by his thoughts. He has been filled with a sense of nationalism ever since he first encountered Gandhi. Barkat Ali is captivated by Gandhi’s personality. Nahal writes about Mahatma Gandhi:

After the Champaran agitation of 1917, there was not a city in India where Gandhi’s name was not known. And he talked of peace in place of war and he talked of non-violence in place of violence, and yet he also talked of fights with the British on his own special terms” (Azadi 84)

Though Chaudhary Barkat Ali was a rebel at heart—a strong, tall man with broad shoulders and powerful arms—Gandhiji’s philosophy of non-violence transformed him into a lamb.

Gandhi never distinguished between Hindus and Muslims, believing in the unity of all. Similarly, Barkat Ali and Kanshi Ram do not see themselves as belonging to different castes. They embody Gandhi’s ideology of brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims.

The dilemma of ordinary men and women comes to the forefront when Lala, who holds Gandhi in the highest regard and believes that through his fast, Gandhi will save the country from Partition, is devastated to witness the partition. He is perturbed by the thought that why Gandhi did not observe a fast to prevent Partition:

“how could it happen? For the last thirty years, since that wizard Gandhi came on the scene, it [Congress] had taken the stand that India was a single nation not two. And Gandhi was not only a politician, he was a saint.... He wouldn’t give in to such butchery. If nothing else worked, his fasts unto death always did.... that’s what Gandhi would do.” (Nahal 48-49)

In Indian-nationalist accounts, Jinnah appears as the villain of the story; for Pakistanis, he is the Father of the Nation. Unlike Sidhwa who portrays Jinnah as “Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity,” Nahal depicts him as a communally minded leader who brought about much harm to India and its people.

Nahal not only blames Jinnah for Partition, but also questions Gandhi’s role through the character of Amar Vati who feels relief over the news of Gandhi’s murder:

“It’s good he is. He ruined us. . . . He brought nothing but misery to us” (Azadi 362, 366).

“The novel also incorporates the women’s perspective. Nahal clearly mentions that women showed little interest in politics or political figures, instead preferred to focus on their homes and children.”:

Before Gandhi could say a word, before he was even properly introduced, half the gathering at Ramtalai got up to leave. It was the women who were leaving. They had started collecting here since six in the morning and many of them had made special arrangements for the care of their children... For the women it was particularly hard, used as many of them were to the sheltered life of their homes. When Gandhiji showed up and they had seen him, they felt no need to stay there longer. They were not interested in Politics, nor in Gandhi’s speeches. For them Gandhi was a mahatma, a religious figure, and they had come only to pay homage to a saint. (Azadi 85)

Azadi ends with the unfortunate death of the great Mahatma. The news came on the All India Radio:

Gandhiji that evening died at the hands of an assassin. He was walking to the prayer meeting from his room in Birla House, when a man approached him and fired three shots. Gandhiji’s last words were Hey Ram before he fell. The assassin, the announcement said, was a Hindu. To remove any misgivings, it was repeated the assassin was not a member of a minority committee” (Azadi 320)

Nehruji declared after his assassination that a light has gone out of their lives:

“...he spoke of a light going out of their lives. It was no ordinary light, he said, it was a most extraordinary flame. It was now gone and India was plunged into darkness”(Azadi 320)

Through his novel, Nahal seeks to expose the conspiracy behind the Partition, revealing the intentions of Indian politicians. While he holds Jinnah accountable for the ensuing violence, he is equally critical of the Indian national leaders for their role in the tragedy.

Concluding Remarks:

The selected texts shed light on the mindsets of ordinary men and women who directly experienced the trauma of Partition. These narratives, in fact, create a space for unheard voices, offering alternative versions of the mainstream historiography surrounding the tragic event of Partition.

In most nationalist accounts of Indian history, the Muslim League and Jinnah are often blamed for the Partition. Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* intervenes in the nationalist historiography of Partition. The novel offers a

platform to present the perspectives of those who were the true victims of the tragedy. In contrast to Nahal, Bapsi Sidhwa's portrayal of Jinnah is markedly different and more nuanced. Her post-modern, revisionist approach to history is evident throughout *Cracking India*. The novel provides an alternative image of Jinnah, attempting to humanize and de-vilify a figure traditionally accused of causing the rift. This revisionist approach, especially regarding Jinnah's role, is echoed in the works of scholars like Ayesha Jalal and Jaswant Singh, who also challenge the demonization of Jinnah.

On the other hand, Chaman Nahal objectively presents all the leaders. The image not only of Jinnah but of Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and other depicted by Nahal are faithful to the history of Indian freedom movement. They are not only appreciated but also critiqued for their roles. Nahal also has tried to expose the conspiracy of the Indian politicians and their intentions behind the partition. He not only holds Jinnah responsible for the tragedy and the violence occurred but he is equally critical of the Indian national leaders as well.

These literary texts emphasize that Partition was primarily a human tragedy rather than a purely political one—a perspective often overlooked in historical discourses. By unraveling the varied, individualized experiences of different people and regions, these texts offer an alternative reading of the dominant narratives surrounding the traumatic event of Partition. Literary responses such as these can be treated as significant archives for understanding the roles of political leaders during Partition.

In conclusion, it can be said that the historiography of Partition remains an unfinished agenda, one that holds immense potential for further exploration. While we cannot undo the past, the complexity of the Partition event demands that it be examined from multiple perspectives. The division of the country was a shared responsibility, with all major political leaders contributing to the decision. Partition historiography needs an unbiased, impartial approach—one that offers a balanced view, so as future generations can access a more truthful understanding of history.

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