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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND THE MYTH OF NATION-BUILDING

# Relationship between Violence and the Myth of Nation-Building

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**Abstract** – *The partition of the India is a trauma in which India was arbitrarily and forcefully divided. Modern writers of Indian descent are constantly looking backward at this traumatic experience to explore the relationship between violence and the myth of nation-building. The dialectics of violence, particularly characterizing the partition of the sub-continent, indeed exercised many a creative soul to articulate an artistic response to the life event. The contours of this creative endeavour, in fact, parallel the multiple manifestations of this phenomenon in actuality that constantly and with an ever increasing intensity explodes through the fluid and yet uncrystallised socio-cultural and political matrix of India. Writing narratives of partition, in a sense, have almost become an obsession with the writers of south-Asian descent. It also becomes inevitable to rememorize the past which either they have personally experienced or heard about it through family lore and legends. The present paper has focus on exploring the connection between violence and the construction of a nation, and the ways in which the intrusion of public violence into private homes and neighborhoods became constitutive of the partition, with a special emphasis on the artistic reconstruction of the experience dealt with the partition in Indian writing in English.*

## INTRODUCTION

The reflective representation and the creative comprehension of partition within the literary construct presupposes an organizing poetics--structuration of the processes of meaning to understand and foreground the epistemological and ontological potentials/implications of the socio-cultural reality embedded in the narrative contestations of partition. This, at best, in the bulk of partition fiction in English, is provided by structuring of the discourse through binary aesthetics. It implies the construction of meaning by making a difference, a distinction within a system of opposites and contrasts. This aesthetic principle is the common denominator of almost all major partition novels and impinges alike on their delineation of the themes. For example, in most of the novels, the delineation and discussion of the communal issue invariably involves a pre-conceived 'othering' and privileging of the secular by the communal, despite the palpable presence of one as imposed or thought of and the other as felt or experienced. In more competent writers, however, the binaries--though palpably present--lead to a tension that seems to pull the narrative in two different directions, each pull cancelling the impact of the other. **Train to Pakistan**, perhaps, illustrates it better than other novels. In it the writer sees communal breakdown as sin and a breakdown of the 'composite' reality of the Indian social past and establishes humanistic/secular ideal as a futuristic alternative to this aberration but the pain that he had undergone as the partition victim is so real that it seeps into the narrative and threatens to negate his secular credentials.

The incorporation of this 'slant' within binary aesthetics can be partially understood if we take into consideration the moment and milieu in which most of these literary creations were ultimately produced. Most of these writers belonged to the middle or upper-middle English educated elite which consciously imbibed and sided with euphoric agenda of nation building. This agenda in the aftermath of independence and till early seventies was entrenched in secular tradition. This tradition, in turn, drew its sustenance from and manifested itself in such slogans as unity in diversity and compositeness of Indian cultural traditions that were harnessed and nurtured by various strands within INC, the umbrella movement in the vanguard of 'national' struggle for freedom. Apparently, partition was seen as a 'blot' in the triumphant march of anti-colonial struggle and consequent birth and consolidation of a modern and secular India. In such a situation, though the bloodshed of partition rankled in the consciousness of these authors, it was 'revisited' either with a sense of guilt or only to 'draw a moral lesson'. Consequently, most of these writers are unable to squarely face the breakdown of significance inherent in the partition chaos. The tendency in them to apportion the blame justly can be linked with this uneasiness.

This failure of the literary imagination to rise to the occasion shunts the presentation of partition within two distinct but ideologically converging modes. It is either viewed as an event, a one historical--episode, static--monolithic and homogenous, one item set that happened to Hindus (Sikhs)/Muslims of the Indian sub-continent on the eve of independence, or as an extreme case of or an item of a wide and familiar categories of the social phenomenon--class or caste

feuds, colonially created communal riots--within the subcontinent.

The first way of presenting it makes partition a unique event, but comfortably uncharacteristic and socio-culturally inconsequential. The adherents of 'one-item-set' approach, and they are in majority, usually portray partition as a unique happening "with nothing to compare it within the large and dense inventory of ethnic and religious prejudices and aggressions."<sup>1</sup> The Hindu/Muslim antagonism is merely seen as an 'aberration' or a madness that was the result of unique processes of colonialism and subsequent decolonization, i.e., the divide and rule policy of the British and its attendant construction of communalism. This madness, however, does not fit into the 'routine' or everyday societal essence of Indian civilization. But as Bauman says, "this may perhaps shed some light on the pathology of the society in which it occurred, but hardly adds anything to our understanding of the society's normal state."<sup>2</sup> This shortcoming, apparently a function of a secular humanistic inclination of the authors glosses over complexities inherent both in the pre and post contours of the partition holocaust.

## CONCLUSION

Many of these are long-standing and violent, destroying material, social and personal well-being and creating conditions of personal and collective trauma. Their impact extends into the future and spreads beyond individuals to the social and political life of the community, when India gained independence from Britain. This was accompanied by massive displacement and horrific violence. These partitions frame significant aspects of the political culture and international relations of these countries. Memories of the Partition are selectively owned, disowned or reconfigured and survive in private and shared fantasies silently influencing the public life of the region (Nandy, 1999).

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