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A STUDY OF THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST THROUGH MEMORY IN
SURENDRA PRAKASH'S DREAM IMAGES

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ABSTRACT

Great happenings to great writing. Partition casts its shadow over many aspects of state, society and literature. Partition history and the fiction related to it have been the focus of many studies in the past few decades. The reasons range from the need to go back to one's roots, the growing interest of India and Pakistan in each other's culture, to finding parallels, drawing upon common issues and a constant endeavor to reconcile with what happened in the past. Moreover, partition is not just something that happened in the past but a contemporary phenomenon that continues to affect the politics of the two nations. Post-partition works endeavor to cope with the intimate concerns of friendship and love against the backdrop of nationalism and religious fervor. Precisely speaking, Partition writings are not just about the sufferings of the people. A modern interpretation is to link the literature of this period to contemporary migration and what it is like to relocate to a completely different world.

key words: Partition, territory, nationalism, migration and memory

I. INTRODUCTION

Partition history led to the most poignantly written literature by writers who experienced this event at close quarters. Saadat Hasan Manto, Yash Pal, Amrita Pritam, Ismat Chugati, Joginder Paul and Surendra Prakash are some of the well-known names in partition literature. They wrote in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi and their works have been translated into English in the second half of the twentieth century. Their stories and novels depict the trauma of partition in a vivid palette of memories. They relate the suffering, plight and torture of the victims in their tales of horrifying and lived experiences. Their sole purpose is to establish the futility of an event which has scarred the nation's image of being a peaceful country.

Manto's works include his short stories like *Khol Do, Toba Tek Singh* and his short sketches from life in *Siyah Hashiye* (Black Margins). His bluntly satirical style effectively brings out the tragedy of partition. Yashpal's Hindi novel in two parts called *Jhootha Sach* is a long narrative involving several families who deal with the trauma of partition in different ways and who go through a journey of transforming not just their lives but their own characters. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* talks about the journey of a girl who is first abducted by a Muslim man and is forced to marry him. The novel narrates the protagonist Puro's story from a point of hatred to one of reconciliation culminating in her decision to stay on in Pakistan with her husband even after her family locates her and is ready to take her home. Ismat Chugati's Urdu novel *Tehri Lakeer* is the story of a young girl trying to deal with the changed world in the wake of partition. Joginder Paul's *Khwabrau (Sleepwalkers)* deals with a sense of *Home* and what it means to an individual. The people who moved to Pakistan created their haven in the forms of the Indian locales they have left behind—a sense of being an Indian is strangely comforting to their hearts of living within a dream.

The partition of India, and the trauma that followed, led to literateurs of the subcontinent to write poignantly of the horror and pain of this colossal uprooting of people in modern history. Partition writings explore the many human concerns— including the desire to find ways of living with the memories of the experience. Such literature lament the loss of a world, though not only in the form of romanticized nostalgia. Partition was irrevocably etched on the minds of the people as a watershed, which brutally severed them from their past. Partition literatures, therefore, are the stories of women, children, everyman; of the pain and trauma of being uprooted – an account of our holocaust. Most writers who have written about the partition either draws upon their personal memories of *those days* or use stories told to them by others about their experiences. Literature about the partition, therefore, tends to be autobiographical.

This raises some interesting questions: what kind of narrative does one use so that what one writes is not merely a record of the past days but an attempt to understand something about ourselves? How are memories used or manipulated? In other words, how are memories recast imaginatively in a fictional text? In the words of Kamleshwar,

It is important for people to think about the land to which they belong; to the civilization of which they are in a part. Only an imaginative writer can feel the sorrow of being uprooted from such a soil, and such a civilization (199).

As the present story is a reflection of the writer's personal experiences, hence a short introduction of the writer deserves a must mention. Surendra Prakash was born in 1930 at Lyllapur. He spent the most impressionable and formative period of his life here. The shared community life between the Hindus and the Muslims helped him imbibe the composite ethos of that time. Hence it became an inalienable part of his experimental world and literary consciousness. The partition, which overtook him, sounded the death knell for such a shared life; he had to migrate to India soon. However, the memories of his early life at Lyllapur, and his experiences during the days of partition and its aftermath, inform a significant part of his writings. "Dream Images" (*Khayal Surat*) deals with the author's past life and its historical moment. The present paper tries to reconstruct past events through memory- both voluntary and involuntary.

Strange are the ways of the world, as and when one undertakes a voyage in one's mental landscape, the strange, the wonderment appear more intense. Human perception and human memory work hand in hand in our conscious as well as unconscious mind and self. After all every action of human being is a mental act, observes Agam Ben. Human memory contains moments of truth that reveal significant dimensions of life and historical reality. The memory of a mutually Indo-Muslim culture, and an inherent deeply felt religiosity of the people form the texture of the story. Its opening lines,

That day, I burnt my fingers as I touched the newspaper ... an immediate war with Pakistan (54). remind the reader of the immediate historical past. It also takes us to the genesis of India's and Pakistan's enmity that costs sporadic violence and unrest in the lives of the common people in both the countries. This shows how the public media becomes the take up point and public discourses generate the memory. The line, "those of us who survived..." (54) implies that the story is set much after the partition which is a metaphor of journey. The rumbling of tanks on the roads outside the narrator's house can have just one, unmistakable message. And the narrator says,

I remember how the country was divided because of the conflict between two religions(54).

If there is something that divides the two countries, is nothing but religion and politics. The causes and legitimacy of the partition disturbs the narrator. Though "religious incompatibility" was one of the main reasons for the partition. To quote a versatile commentator on this story,

To sum, the partition of India is the most damning statement about the impossibility of a synthesis of the two ways of life, Hindu and Muslim, and of a shared meaningful and mutually enriching community life(123).

The narrator narrates an accurate description of such a community life in pre partition India that strongly belies the above premise. The line,

Those of us who survived, came to India. The only things which remained there were memories and shadows (54).

The questions of religion and politics are obvious in the story. Such question gives rise to the most important issue of identity and its formation. The story also deals with how identity becomes important and how the individual or the community interact. The individual is a product of the community and not the vice versa. The present story is centered upon an individual through the community. The identity of the individual and the community to which the individual owes allegiance is complementary to each other. This speaks of the whole idea of nation – the two nation theory. "The pain of truncated families must hunt them even today"(54). Families of both the countries divided between the two countries. Under the mute gaze of the state, millions of umbilical cords were severed. The Indian

leaders are instrumental for the partition in the sense that they were to think, while agreeing to the division, in terms of the land and geographical territory and moveable property. But they were not aware of the fact that they cannot divide peoples' heart and memory. *How could one divide the heart and the memory?* Can anybody think of escaping from memories? Some people cannot remember exactly owing to the suddenness of events which are still haunted by the lost places, abundant photographs and other recollections, 'torn images, fractured words'. And they try to recover some of the lost density of life through imaginative recreation. The theme of home and homelessness is clearly defined in terms of time. Literary narratives tell us of exiles who live entirely in the past, and even try to replicate the old world in its physical details. Joginder Paul's Urdu novella "Khwabrau" deals with a group of people in Lahore who tried to replicate the whole of Lucknow – its topography, the manners and customs, speech patterns and so on (124), according to a commentator.

India is the subconscious reference point of the partition generation, the embodiment of loss. A new life in India has been built up in the narrator's mind in "Dream Images". The narrator has built up exactly in the same fashion a new life in India on the ruins of his former life in Pakistan. He is fairly content with his domestic successes, "In my own I am contented with my life"(54). He gets his elder daughter married and "She is happy in her home with a little darling of son"(54). But the question arises why the narrator has thought of such a recreation. The reason, therefore, is that he has found his *lost friends and former place*, "...his own Nazir Talib, Aktar Bhai, Jalal painter, Mirza and Meraj Sheikh in Mehmood Jawed, Zubair, Anwar and Salam". Its a wonderful as well as a pleasurable experience when one meets an old friend. We, as human beings, are always bound by "invisible bonds" that binds us with our friends and places. Exactly the same has happened in the narrator's mind. We must not forget that "remembrance and memory, for that matter, is always a subjective experience" says Agam Ben. Here the writer of the story is aware of the aesthetic experience. It is, in this sense, the story is a meta-literature. It critiques the current aesthetic approach.

In dream we can relive in the past. But the real world is too hostile and calls for entails the compromising of passport, "visa", and "a different currency" ("Sikka Badal Gaya" ¹). The narrator suddenly finds that how money is not acceptable in other parts where he has gone. However, once the narrator is free from the shackles of realpolitik, he is transported into the world of dream, where things move at a faster pace. Events and scenes from his past life flit across like images on a screen. Scenes like the bridge they had to cross, Adh Marg, Regal Cinema, the clock tower, kites flying in the sky, the hand cart selling *mallai kulfī*, Saints and Sadhus taking deep puffs at their Chilliums, the grandfather and his shop and the shrine of Baba Kaudi Shah. Here we find an overall image of traveling and precise details from real anecdotes. These are all sensory experiences. These are not connected to the logical mind. Time, rather as a rational construct, is seen as a subconscious construct. The dream journey takes place as though it were a common occurrence of daily life. To quote a critic,

The interweaving of these visual details and the narrator's associative perception recreate the past in all its variety and complexity. Everyday reality and the world of imagination fuse, so as to become almost indistinguishable (125).

The author's use of real life characters like Intizar Husain, Anwar Sajjad, Kishwar Nahid, Mehmood Javed, Zubair, Anwar and Salam in an essentially imaginary recreation, underscores an element of continuity. The imagination of the narrator goes to the past and recreates the present. The past and present fuse together and merge into an uninterrupted continuum. Through the subtle use of symbols we find a description of a continuity of life. At times we also find a break in the continuity, "Take care, Begum Sahiba, your clothes may get bloodshed"(59). Here continuity gets disrupted as the narrator reminds of the horror and violence in the times of partition. However, the narrator – dreamer is unconsciously aware of the discontinuity- conflict and tension-when he goes back to the past and he "sees "the present. Persons and places remain the same but the *changes* through new structures (Time) have taken place the centre stage. What a process of change over time! The protagonist cannot make connections with the people though the places were familiar, "This currency is not in circulation here"(59). When his wife dials the telephone number, each telephone number gives the response, "wrong number" Hence there is a difficulty in establishing links which symbolically presents a lack of communication resulting in a lack of empathy.

It is significant that the narrator can get out of the quandary in which he has placed himself and his family only through a kind of messianic leap, observes a critic (125).

The past world is important for the protagonist. Past is the perfect time according to the narrator. The chanting by devotees of expressions such as “*Ali da mast qalandar*” in the sufi shrine and kulfi vendors sing-song cry,

Qulfi khoye – malai di, pisto badam di,
Keode gulab di, khatiar janab di...

to sell their wares, illuminate aspects of the shared socio-cultural life, and the tenure of that life at a particular historical moment, “I said, “The eyes are moist the heart is soothed.”

The narration shifts from the realistic level to that of the magical and the dream world,

Daddy, my son says, “Where we live, there are five-star hotels. There are neither Hindu dharamasalas, nor Muslim musafir khanas, where have you brought us (58)?”

In the above lines we find a sudden shift in the time frame. One can find the very presence of the idea of the free market instead of the traditional economy. We also find a big gap between two generations. The protagonist is represented through traditional dharmasala/musafir khanas whereas the children and his wife represent the “free market” of five-star hotels – the other generations. There is a conflict and tension between these two generations. What a sudden shift of timeframe in the currents of the protagonist’s unconscious mind. Memories run at a faster pace where time is lagging far behind. Here we find a clearly divided, delineated nuclear family and a different version of family. Like the narrator’s parents – his generation “In this world ...” and next generation. The three tier structure of family no longer exists in his dream voyage. There is absolute dissolving of the family. The symbol of “clock” reminds us of the fact that there was a continuity of life. But, now “the clock without hands” means a nightmare. The clock has become more than a statue. It is a clock without memory. Time stands still.

The children of the narrator are strangers, “My daughter said, why have we come here”(58), in the familiar world of their parents and express their mild resentment at the seemingly communal nomenclature of the boarding house, that is the Hindu dharamsala. But, as they find and *feel* a common way of shared and community life that thrived on communal sharing and interconnectedness, their hostility and strangeness gradually melt away. This is when they “visit” the shrine of the sufi saint Baba Kasaud Shah.

The abrupt separation of the children at the end of the story means the disappearance of the children from the dream passage,

That’s all right, my wife said, “But, where have we left our children? They must be waiting for us”(61).

The narrator finds the identification of his own son, “And then I was shocked to see that all the boys looked alike”(60). This is a sudden shift of dream into reality. Of course the description is a magical realism type,

Suddenly, I realized my mistake. We had forgotten the road which would take us back to our children (61).

Magic realism becomes more intense when the protagonist says,

Before us, there was a broad, transparent road on which bright new cars speed by (61).

The metaphor of partition (*How many Pakistans?*²) erupts again and again like a tear in the fabric of time, destabilizing the narrators hold on the present. Surendra Prakash’s story “Dream Images”, on the other hand, plumbs the psychic debris generated by the experience of migration. The dream like return to a homeland that has been transformed beyond recognition, where memory seems to play tricks upon oneself. The narrators longing to rejoin his friends and the places of his youth triggers this dream voyage. This dreams voyage runs consciously for some and unconsciously for others. Remembrance and retelling are important and crucial devices used by the author to

weave plot of the story. This narrative helps him to retrieve a significant segment of his past through memory and recollections.

The narrator is not concerned with the process of partition. He can't see the time. The narrator wants to go to the past, the past which is undivided, the past is a whole – the present is divided. When it comes to the crunch it becomes lost in memory. Partition cannot separate memory, nor hearts, nor old friends. The story starts with a dream, "that day, I burnt..." and ends with a nightmare (horror), "My wife burst in to tears.praise be to Allah that no one has come to hear of this sad story"(61). The role of the reconstruction of the past memory is significant in the sense that there might be discontinuity of rational time. But, it is continuity in memory. We also find in the story a clear cut distinction between being in a wakeful state and dream state. In a wakeful state there is rational world – there is India and Pakistan – but no boundary can be seen between these two countries in an unconscious mind. In this story, the narrative voice shifts in the unconscious world but the conscious world allows the possibility of dialogues. In partition literature we find the concept of remembering and forgetting is very much important. The narrator relives in the past but nostalgically. It is like tourism as far as the approach of the children and the wife is concerned. They are still rooted in a rational and materialistic world of "getting and spending we lay waste our powers". For the protagonist, it is not a tour – a voyage in the virtual time. The idea of nonorganized kind of religion exists for the narrator. For him the word Allah/Quran remains the same. The description, "eating up kulfi" is not a hunger but an emotional outburst of a long days gone by. In the line, "Why have we come here..."(58). The narrator is not able to give any answer as the unconscious self does away with the conscious world. In the conscious world "currency", "visa", and "passport" are the markers of identity instead of other non material cultures. For the wife 'the gendered other' the privilege of the past travel does not exist – the impossibility of going back. The protagonist can return to his roots, the children and wife do not have the urgency. In the protagonist's mind we always find continuity but in the physical world nothing of such sort exists. Had there been commonality of the past there would not have partition.

According to an authority in partition literature,

in "Dream Images" the author deftly fuses documentary reality and fictional material to evoke a slice of his past from his memory; to salvage, as it were, whatever he can of the culture before it is irretrievably lost. It is fervent plea against forgetting and for the preserving of a memory however fugive – of an epoch before time and history have placed in beyond our reach (126).

Thus, this is how the reconstruction of the past memory is shown in the present paper.

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4. *Partition: Cover Story*, Outlook News Magazine, May 28, 1997, 28-84.
5. Saint, K Tarun and Ravikant. (ed.). *Translating Partition*, New Delhi: Katha, 2001, 54-61.The story " Dream Images" is an extract from this book.
6. Bhalla, Alok. *Partition Dialogues*. New Delhi:OUP,2006.

Notes and Reference

1. 'Sikka Badal Gaya' is a story by Krishna Sobti
2. *How Many Pakistans? a novel by Kamleshwar*.