

Survivors Turn Artists – Hope From 1947 Partition

Ayushi Khera (Research Scholar, Amity University)

Dr. Tanu Kashyap (Asst. Professor, Amity University)

Dr. R.K. Verma (Associate Professor, Delhi University)

ABSTRACT: -

Partition 1947 has been the most traumatic events in the history of Indian sub-continent; people underwent a lot of sufferings and agonies during the time. The bloodbath that took place was totally incomparable and unimaginable. There was mass migration and flurry of rapes and abduction of women and children, besides hatred and scare hovering all around petrifying not only the human beings but also the air, and hence the degree of sufferings that the people underwent was astonishingly unbearable. Apart from the trauma that the people at large underwent, there were many who came out successful and unwavering, who tried their level best in re-building and reshaping their lives despite all the odds besides the toxic pains and agonies that they went through. The primary focus of the present paper is to put focus on the survivors who rebuilt their lives from the ashes/ruins and made themselves successful despite the hardships that they faced.

Keywords: - Partition, survivors, struggle, artists, trauma, hope.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot that is written and researched over Partition Literature, but the main focus has only been pointed towards the sufferings, trauma and agonies of the victims and also the survivors. The researches, earlier, have been addressing towards the negative side of the Partition; i.e., what bad the Partition 1947 did to the country and its people, but the present research will be focusing on the people who have successfully struggled through the period and came out as winners and thus, wrote down their triumph stories. The research will be important as it will be focusing on the other side of the Partition, by giving credit to the vast majority of people who under enormous pressure and pain, retained their dignity, worked hard, stabilized their family situations and overcame their grief to emerge stronger.

There are a lot of people who after having been impacted strongly by the Partition violence, came out much stronger and successful, and hence through the collection of different stories representing a diversity of experiences, the paper will analyze the success stories of such victims. A vast amount of Partition Literature comes out from the real-life stories of the people who went through those hard times and hence, the paper, apart from focusing on the fictional accounts will also be highlighting the success and triumph of real human spirit.

Divided by Partition United by Resilience

One of the very unique texts that came fore, depicting about the triumph of human spirit is *“Divided by Partition United by Resilience”* by Mallika Ahluwalia, which was written to give a tribute to the survivors of the Partition and is based upon the stories of the public and the Partition Museum built in Amritsar, again to give homage to the victims and survivors. The text is first of its kind discussing about the positive side of the Partition and reiterating the notion through every story that yes, the people did suffer but at least they survived.

People wonder whether the real-life incidents can be merged into Literature. But the reality is that the existence of literature without life is nothing. All the literature that comes out is from life itself or in some or the other way reflects life. Real life stories turn into and hence become literature. The present text upon which the whole analyses is made, is from the real-life stories of the survivors who in the end came out as the winners of life. Many of such personalities are: - Former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, renowned writer and journalist Late Khushwant Singh, Famous poet and lyricist Gulzar, Famous athlete Milkha Singh, journalist Kuldip Nayyar, to name a few.

Each of the above personalities and many more, and every one's name cannot be mentioned for the sake of brevity but their roles and contributions can never be negated, tried their level best in coming to terms with the life and its struggles. Each person went through their his/her own share of struggles and even the worst of what which cannot even be imagined. These victims went through the struggling nightmares, because of which they couldn't even have a sound sleep. For years these people could not reconcile with their fate till the time they thought of purging it out from themselves, through their own special ways of purifying themselves from the atrocities that each one of them went through. While Gulzar purged himself through his poems and songs based on the Partition theme, the journalist Kuldip Nayyar purified himself by taking interviews of the victims and the oppressors too, Milkha Singh by running and hence becoming a famous athlete by breaking all the major world records and keeping him onto his name.

These people who were divided by the partition, were later united by their resilience, courage and the determination to live a better life which would be worth living all the trauma that they suffered during the oppression. Having gone through all the mayhem during these tough times, few courageous one's found the strength to look towards the future and focused on rebuilding their lives and the country they had migrated to. Each of them played a heroic role and set an example for the others to follow by demonstrating that, to rebuild the lives from the scratch, one only needs to be guided by one's own strength and urge to live and be useful to the society and self. The message set has been loud and clear that even the pain and anguish of violence cannot deter those who know how to reorganize the life through striking a difference from the trauma and snubbing the fear which the violence filled their heart. Therefore, the odds became opportunities for them and they learnt and successfully executed the unique art of

transforming themselves into an artist and triggered the fresh start of their life, to purify themselves, people turned into artist – pure artist; as art is the best and easiest way for purging oneself from the agonies; and their courage resulted in our country earning the accolade of many renowned painters, poets, lyricists, athletes, etc.

While the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, lived in Gah, in the Jhelum District of the Undivided Punjab, which is now known as Punjab in Pakistan, closely saw the riots and the refugee crisis that erupted during the 1947 Partition time. He underwent his share of struggle and tried his level best in doing something unique and fruitful for himself and his family. For a boy from a small village in undivided India, Singh rose to the greatest heights both within the country and internationally. Repeatedly highlighted on the lists of the 100 Most Influential People in the World, Singh found his feet through a quite dedication and perseverance towards excellence. (6-9)

Another successful politician, who came up through this Partition struggle, was Lal Krishna Advani, who lived in Karachi, Sindh, which is now in Pakistan, saw that the uncertainty of Partition that was looming large in Sindh, where Advani had been born and raised, as the province was to go entirely to Pakistan. He often says that the Sindh now and then had a great difference. The Sindh in which he had grown up in was one where Jhule Lal Krishna (a Hindu Spiritual Leader) and Shahbaz Qalandar (a Sufi Saint) were equally worshipped by both the communities. Religious fanaticism was foreign to both Muslims or Hindus in Sindh. When Advani tells his story of how he saw partition and what he underwent during the period, the only thing that he reiterates is that success did not come easy or overnight. It involved many trials, like being jailed for 19 months during the Emergency. It also put in decades of hard work and also contributed to dedicated political activism. It is a testament to his dedication, when he became the deputy Prime Minister after a six decade long journey of volunteering in RSS, a testament that a young refugee boy from Sindh worked his way up through the party ranks to scale these heights; since Partition was a double tragedy for the Sindhi Hindus – they had no land of their own, or rather, the whole of divided India became our land. (15-17)

The book also talks about a very successful businessman, Mr. Dharampal Gulati, who had been the efficacious entrepreneur of a very famous brand MDH masalas. He had been a fifth-class dropout but gradually outwitted the CEOs of other consumer good companies to create a spice empire valued at around Rs. 1,000 crores. Born in Sialkot, undivided Punjab, now in Pakistan, Dharampal Gulati, expanded the business to Lahore; to Sheikhpura and after that to Nankana Sahib, to Lyallpur and till Multan. The shop's sale grew rapidly, and Dharampal recalls that sales in those days reached between Rs. 500 – 800 per day. The family had no idea that they would have to leave their own land and home to go to a new city with which they had no ties, where they knew no one, and even where the way of speaking, the culture and the customs would all be totally different. It was very difficult for a family of ordinary means to think of leaving their homeland and the business. But the escalating riots in Sialkot in 1947 made it impossible to stay there peacefully. Mr. Gulati, remembers the trauma and conflict saying:

‘People were sitting on the roofs of the trains because there was no space inside, but none of them knew that there were so many tunnels – a lot of them fell off when the train would go through the tunnels. They died. The train was moving very slowly and we reached Sabzi Mandi station at Delhi at 4a.m. the next morning. The family went through a lot of struggle during the times to meet the ends meet. In a new city, with no business relationships, or known suppliers for the spice business that he intended to start up as, Mahashian Di Hatti, he had to struggle a lot to find the right partners. By 1954, after a lot of struggle, the business grew enough that the family was able to buy their own house, which was just a start of the long journey that would see Dharampal establish his own factory in the 1960’s and go on to achieve a milestone after milestone in business growth. From a child who dropped out of the school at an early age. Dharampal Gulati went on to compete with and outmaneuver the highly educated CEOs of many consumer goods multinational companies.

Dharampal Gulati believes that ultimately man makes his own fate. In his autobiography, he writes, ‘We ourselves are responsible for our victory or defeat, so rather than blaming our fate, we should focus on cultivating our strengths and reducing our weaknesses so that this God-given mind and body can be put to full use, so that we can know that all our talents and energies are doing some good in the world.’ (42-44)

Faqir Chand Kohli, who lived in Peshawar, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, is often credited to as the ‘Father of the Indian Software Industry’. He was one of the earliest pioneers in the country to bring the use of computers across many industries, including power generation, was also the founding General Manager of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). During Partition, Faqir Chand was out to San Francisco for his higher studies, but by the time he came back in 1951 he saw a very distressing condition of his family and thought of never going back, just to give support both financial and mental to the family. Partition was very painful for the Kohli family, and he did not want them to recall that painful time. He believed that though he cannot change the past that his family suffered but at least he can put efforts in changing their future. He felt a weight of responsibility in helping the family to find the economic security again and therefore, he focused on building a solid career. For his great and unwavering efforts, Kohli has received numerous awards and recognitions. Now life has come to a full circle with all the honorary doctorates that he had received. Even though his family had lost everything during Partition, Kohli determined to never look back or even question as to what actually happened; he only looked forward and charted a new course, not just for his family; but for the country as well. (47-51)

Manoranjan Byapari, born in Barisal, East Pakistan, learnt how to read in his twenties while in jail in West Bengal. Today, he is the published author of over 100 short stories and 10 books. He is perhaps the only former convict-turned-rickshaw-puller-turned-cook to have reached such great literary heights, as he has been published by Oxford University Press. Byapari himself says that he was born in East Pakistan’s Barisal district, in a family that some might refer to as “impure” or “untouchables”. Because of which they had no option other than working hard

and surviving. They could not accept or imagine being displaced from our land and livelihoods, which is the reason why they came later to this side of Bengal. Manoranjan's family moved in 1953, as part of the large Namasudra migration of the early 1950s when over a million Dalits moved from East Pakistan to India.

Life was very tough for Manoranjan and the countless other families like his who had no support or means of sustaining themselves. They often sustained themselves on just a thin broth made by boiling cheap chicken feed – the only thing they could afford. He went through a lot of struggle because of the Dalit caste with which he belonged to. Gradually with the passage of time he started developing his interest into reading books and which helped in writing down his own experiences of discrimination as well. His writings gradually came into notice of the public and also some of the eminent authors like Mahasweta Devi, who gave him an opportunity as a writer in her magazine called 'Bartika'. Manoranjan slowly thus built a strong space in the Bengali literary world, because his works were steeped deep in his own experiences as a Dalit and looked at the hardships and injustices faced by the marginalized populations, he came to be known as the pioneer of Dalit Bengali Literature. He came to the national prominence with the publication of an essay called 'Is there Dalit writing in Bangla?' (59)

His writings did give him fame and brought him into limelight but his financial condition never changed. He still is dependent as a cook in a school to himself financially. In his life, Manoranjan has worked at a tea stall, in a crematorium, as a cook, as a sweeper, as a manual labour, as a guard, a rickshaw-puller, a cowherd, amongst the other things. But for a young boy who never really had a childhood, his writings have allowed him to find his place in the world.

Satish Gujral, Anjolie Ela Menon, Krishen Khanna are some of the eminent artists, who to do away with the fear and trauma of the Partition, painted the paintings depicting the trauma and ordeal of the killings and sufferings of the traumatic times. They do realize that very less paintings have come out into the public forum for the audience to view at. The agony seems to swirl off the canvases onto reality in the paintings of all the three artists. It was realized by the three that when they were painting, it never crossed their minds that what they were painting was actually Partition, but at the end what came out was partition. Gujral says, 'if an artist thinks first and paints later, there will be no truth.'(163) The paintings by these artists reflected the anguish of what they saw during the horrific times. Gujral's Partition series received a lot of critical acclaim. Anjolie too painted paintings based on the theme of Partition, and which helped her in going beyond the pain to create new lives.

For Krishen Khanna, the shock of Partition didn't leave him easily and also it didn't leave time for him to think and to paint. In his words, 'any kind of traumatic situation is bound to leave a scar, and sometimes it opens up. But to think that it will immediately result in a creativity is a fallacy. We would like to think its so, but it is never like that. In the beginning it is just about the survival.' When Khanna moved to Mumbai, it was not with the idea of painting, it was instead to stand on his own feet again and make an income after Partition wiped away so much. However,

it was in the spare time that he started painting more. The turmoil and trauma of Partition never fully left Khanna despite his later successes. The memories stayed with him and have come out in his paintings at various points in his career. “What happens is you carry images within you. If you are an artist, or even if you are not, you tend to carry images within you. It is those images which ultimately fructify. They materialize into work and this is what happened with me” he says. (91-94)

Gulzar, Ajeet Cour, both eminent poets are the survivors of Partition and hence saw and experienced Partition from very close and therefore, their poems reflect the agony of Partition. Both the poets in their own fields and talents received many accolades, and even literary honors for their work. While Ajeet Cour was 9 years old during Partition, Gulzar was 11 years old. For Cour and her family the riots in 1946 and 1947 were a disruptive shock. The atmosphere was one of friendship and discrimination, one could not eat food cooked by the Muslims, not could drink water offered by the Muslims. She recalls that at the stations, there were large drums kept separately with water meant for the Hindus and for the Muslims. These differences did exist but these were not the kind that would make the people to start killing each other. Things rapidly changed in 1947, large groups of people were fleeing the riots came to Lahore from Rawalpindi. Cour and her mother would go to the camps to donate people blankets, quilts and other items that they may need. The trouble in Lahore kept on increasing and so were the arrival of the trains full of corpses. The violence kept on increasing and with time it reached to such a level that people were stuck wherever they were, they couldn't go back. Cour's family struggled for a few months to find their feet. They moved to Jalandhar, and then to Delhi. She got her chance of becoming a writer when one day she, during an inter-college seminar, was reading one of her self-written stories, which was heard by an editor of the magazine, Naviyan Keemtan, which gave her a push and she started writing more and more. Her writing continued. In her stories, the pain of all her experiences – a disruptive childhood, a fearful youth, an unhappy marriage, trying to raise two children as a single mother, the misery of losing a child – found a voice. In Cour's writings, she has tried to uncover the sounds of the past. ‘Unsettle people cannot settle’, she reflects. ‘They only look for a place where they can feel safe.’ It took Cour a long time to find her sanctuary; she built it herself. (111-114)

For Gulzar things were different, for 20-25 years after Partition, he would keep having nightmares of the riots. Those bad dreams would come regularly at night. He would wake up tensed and then couldn't go back to sleep. Gulzar as his name suggests is so much intertwined with our idea of him, with the beautiful shayari of his, which poignantly touches the heart of our emotions that we cannot imagine him being called by any other name, but Gulzar actually grew up as Sampooran Singh Kalra, born in the Sikh family. During Partition he was old enough that the agonizing images of the corpses lining the streets seared deep into his memory. The images of Partition and its experiences shaped and scarred Gulzar immensely. The nightmares that haunted him stayed with him. It was only decades later that his writing helped him overcome the fears.

“Learning how to write had this one advantage, that I could purge it out. It was a way I could cope with the nightmares. Something that had become solid inside me, had been so firmly imprinted in me, began to loosen and I could purge it out.” (64) Many of his short stories and poems have come out of this process of purging. Gradually with his writing skills he was able to gain fame and name and even won many awards for the out of the box verses that he wrote. While Gulzar’s family was keen that he should enter a conventional profession, but the idea of becoming an author and poet had taken a seed in his mind. And thus with his talent he, who viewed himself only as author and poet, found himself suddenly into writing lyrics for the Bollywood films, which gave him a kickstart into Film-making.

Gulzar now, after having written so much, only hopes that the Partition that divided the land, does not continue to divide the people. Countries can be divided, land can be divided, roads can be divided, but you were dividing the people, you were dividing cultures; these cannot be cut. How will you Partition the air? The trees that were divided will grow again, and their shadows will fall on one side of the border in the morning, and the other side in the afternoon. There is no use in cutting shadows.” (69-70)

Gulzar even in his interviews also says that Partition is now a past and in order to move ahead we should stop mourning for the trauma that we felt during those times. People should start celebrating it as the Independence Day rather than remembering it as the Partition Day. He, through his stories and poems is showing us where the possibilities of healing and redemption that might lie somewhere, with the ordinary people themselves. While giving an interview to Sukrita Paul Kumar, he says that he agrees that the process of coming together has been slow, and it may seem that there has been no progress, but he has experienced the progress. He feels confident that we are moving forward because today’s man is far wiser. His faith and hope clearly shows that things can become better if we try, it is just for us to put efforts.

Milkha Singh, born in Gobindpura, undivided Punjab, also known as the Flying Sikh, is one of India’s most decorated athletes, having broken numerous world records in the 1950s and 1960s. Very bad things had happened with them. Most of the corpses were in decay and had been attacked by dogs and vultures, so very few corpses could be identified or assembled. The whole village was stinking. Today people have only heard stories, they don’t know how many people died in the Partition. It was a terrible condition, Milkha remembers. The hunger was overwhelming, with nothing to eat. Milkha had no one with him while he stayed at the Delhi Railway Station, he used to cry a lot during those days. But then he thought how many days would you cry, one day, two days, three days, how many? He decided to come out of the railway station near the Kashmere Gate in the hope of getting a job somewhere. With his brother’s support he was able to enroll himself in the army, which came out as the turning point in Milkha’s life. After that the next decade and a half of Milkha’s life is the story of determination and the power of human spirit. From then on, he did a lot of hard work, which helped him in becoming this successful. He remembers those days and says, ‘I used to run for 6-7 hours in the

strong summer heat. People used to say, “He will die.”, “This person is mad, he is mad.” Milkha’s hunger for success was great. (144-145)

“We have to resist our problems,” emphasizes Milkha. “Only I know that I didn’t have food to eat, didn’t have clothes to wear, didn’t have house to live in and didn’t have water to drink, I had nothing. But how long will you keep sleeping hungry? If you won’t move forward in life, then you will die of hunger. I feel if there is anything in my life it is that I suffered many problems, but I overcame each one of them. When you have a problem, God also gives you a solution.” (145)

Milkha says that his story is not one of overnight or easy success. ‘After watching the film, Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, all of India wanted to become Milkha Singh. All of them are coming to me – doctors, engineers – all of them saying, “We want to become Milkha Singh.” But becoming Milkha Singh is not an easy job, I did 15 years of hard work to achieve what I did.’ Today, looking back, he notes, it is easy just to see the highlights and the successes, without realizing the daily determination and the sacrifices. No one can make their name in one day, and most are deterred just by the first time they vomit blood, few are willing to take the hardships required for success.

‘Without hardship, without discipline, without willpower, without hard work, no person can move ahead, no person can be successful. I kept striving for 15years. Be it day or night, Milkha Singh kept running.’ (147)

Kuldip Nayyar, is an eminent journalist, a former Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha and a former High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom, who lived in Sialkot, in undivided Punjab. Of the tremors of Partition that he remembers, he says, he never expected the devastation he saw. ‘When we reached the main road – Grand Trunk Road – I saw thousands and thousands of people. It was like all of humanity had come out on the streets. They looked devastated, their clothes were tattered, so many were injured...it was harrowing.’ All along the way while travelling from Pakistan to India, they saw village after village which had been annihilated. Fires could be seen burning in the distance and corpses and empty suitcases along the road. Nayyar could speak both Persian and Urdu, and it was because of this talent that he was able to find his first job. One day by coincidence when a man was searching for writers for his newspaper, he came across Nayyar and suggested him to work for the newspaper named, ANJAM. So, it was because of this newspaper that Nayyar would always joke that, ‘Sahafat ka agaz maine anjam se shuru kiya.’ (I started journalism from the end)

Gradually with his struggle and hard work, Kuldip managed to get a job at the Press Information Bureau, and a few years later, became information officer for two successive Home Ministers, Govind Ballabh Pant and then Lal Bahadur Shastri. There was no looking back after that. Later, he became the High Commissioner of India to United Kingdom, and eventually, a Member of Parliament. Decades later, career led him back to the Partition, and he got an

opportunity to interview Cyril Radcliffe, who drew a line on the map – the border between India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Thus, such accounts of successful personalities only denote that it is upto us how we make our lives worth living. These accounts of strength and determination tell us that hope can also be seen for from the most horrendous of the events. The resilience that these people portrayed in rising and re-building their lives is worth celebrating and appreciating.

Through the struggles of the aforesaid and many others who came out successfully into their lives from the trauma of the Partition, clearly shows that life is precious, which we have got and to make it meaningful we all need to be determined and courageous, and thus find out a suitable purpose worth living.

“Hindustan mei do do Hindustan dikhaye dete hain,
Ek hai jiska sir daswe baadal mei hai,
Ek hai jiska paanv abhi dal dal mei hai,
Ek hai jo satrangi tham ke uthta hai,
Dusra paer uthata hai to rota hai,
Firqua parasti, vahem parasti aur gareebi ki rekhaaiye,
Ek hai daud lagane ko tayar khada hai,
Agni par rakh kar paun ud jaane ko khada hai,
Hindustan umeed se hai,
Aadhi sadi tak uth uth kar humne akash ko ponchha hai,
Suraj se girti dard ko chhaan kar dhoop chuni hai,
Saath baras azaadi ke,
Hindustan apne itihias ke mod par hai,
Agla mod aur mars pe paun rakha hoga,
Hindustan umeed se hai,
Chalo chale,
Jo tum chalo to Hindustan chale...” (Gulzar)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ahluwalia, Mallika. 2018. *Divided by Partition United by Resilience*. New Delhi, India: Rupa Publications.
2. Gulzar. *Footprints on Zero Line*. 2017 Trans. Rakhshanda Jalil. India: Harper Perennial.
3. 'Hindustan Umeed se hai' by Gulzar. <https://www.facebook.com/83332960200/posts/10162068270445201/?sfnsn=mo>
4. Schwartzman, R. "Rehumanizing The Alien "Invaders": How Testimony Can Counteract Xenophobia." *International Journal Of Communication And Media Studies* 10.6 (2020): 5-12.
5. Idris, Mohamed, Et Al. "Effect Of Temperature On Partition Behaviour And Thermodynamic Characteristics Of Bioactive Phenolics Transfer In Aqueous Two-Phase Extraction System And Evaluation Of Antimicrobial Activity." *International Journal Of Chemical & Petrochemical Technology* 5: 1-8.
6. Viswanathan, V., And I. Sasireka. "Use Of Library Electronic Resources Among Selected Arts And Science Colleges In Tamil Nadu." *International Journal Of Library Science And Research (Ijlsr)* 6.4 (2016): 17-22.