

Memories of a Lost Home: Intizar Husain's *Basti*

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Abstract- *In this paper, Intizar Husain's novel on Partition, Basti is examined which depicts the human denouement that followed Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The novel looks back at the aftermath of Partition after more than two decades, talks about the turmoil caused by the socio-political situation in Pakistan and the realization that the Partition was an ever going on event. The process of separate homeland for Muslims, the chief motive that resulted in Partition, was reversed with the secession of Bangladesh. Partition and migration have failed to provide stability to the migrants. Intizar Husain has recaptured the agony of Partition after a lapse of two decades. The novel, dealing with the Muslim perspective of Partition, depicts the plight of the members of the community who crossed over to Pakistan with the euphoria of the creation of a separate homeland, fail to realise their hopes. Feeling of alienation has been delineated in a highly subtle manner.*

General Terms- *Partition of India.*

Keywords- *Partition; hijrat; vivisection; separate homeland; communal strife; nostalgia; religious fanaticism; internecine; rupture; rehabilitation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 1947 Partition of the South-Asian subcontinent into India and Pakistan remains the most traumatic happening of the twentieth century. It was an explosive break which has left behind a permanent feeling of dislocation among the uprooted population who were forced to flee from their natal places, leaving behind their childhood and carrying along the memories for the rest of their lives.

The story of Partition remains the story of the tragedy which could be seen but not prevented. It caused a deep rupture not only in the civilization of the sub-continent but also in the psyche of the four plus generations who inherited its legacy. As partition seemed inevitable, people were living in a make-believe world that after all, the division of the nation was a matter of politics and had little to do with the division of old and settled communities. They had hoped that even if the country was divided, communities would not be made to move from their homes.

They were caught unaware, and had not imagined that Partition would lead to the largest migration in the history of the world.

Relocation and rehabilitation of victims of Partition at new places was a challenge which involved not only physical but also psychological and emotional struggle. The governments of India and Pakistan were not fully equipped to grapple with the flux of refugees.

Intizar Husain's *Basti*, originally written in Urdu, is based on the writers own experience of migration as a result of Partition. Zakir, the protagonist, migrates to Pakistan not because he is forced to do so for fear of violence, but

because as a Shia Muslim he finds in it an opportunity to undertake hijrat to the new holy land. However, he is filled with disillusionment as he reaches Pakistan. Consequently, he finds himself gripped by the memories of the past life lived in India and realizes that he has become homeless. He oscillates between the past and the present and tries to find meaning in the present out of the disrupted past which always remains fresh in this memory.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The writers who wrote in the 1960s and 70s, delineate the legacy of Partition evolving new techniques. They try to come to terms with the aftermath of Partition in the two nation-states, which in 1971 became three with the formation of Bangladesh. The residue of the trauma continued to circulate and the possibility of repetition of the traumatic experience of the fractured past kept haunting the imagination of these writers. Alok Bhalla [1] points at the difference between the early writing that sought to bear witness to the tragic event and the later writing that was concerned with the fate of the survivors. Writers of this phase recollect with nostalgia the life lived in small communities sharing the secret bond, even as political leaders and religious priests waged battles on their behalf. These writers had to reinvent the witness sensibility when they faced the challenge of engaging with silences and taboos-especially in the context of cases where the honour of women and families was sullied.

One of the major novels of the period is Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974 trans.2001) which depicts instances of violence through its episodic style and psychological realism. Intizar Husain's *Basti* (1979 trans. 1999) is an

allegorical meditation on separation, loss and exile, as the writer becomes a witness to the devastation of Pakistani society during 1971. Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* (1966 tran. *Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* 1999) articulates the predicament of Muslims in rural India who were not convinced by the propaganda of the Pakistan movement. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) delineates the adverse effects of the communal and sectarian ideologies. As a result of the failure of nationalist histories to address the ambivalent legacy of Partition, literary writers tried to explore the root cause which resulted in the deterioration of the communal situation. The effects of violence were inscribed in the bodies and memories of those who lived through the shattering event.

The recurrence of episodes of communal violence in India and ethnic strife in Pakistan turned many writers to the memory of Partition which indicated that such happenings were not isolated occurrences left behind in time. Many among the second generation writers were children at the time of Partition and had inherited the bitter legacy via family history or collective memory. Among the novels written in the 80s and 90s are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1982), Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Guzra Hua Zamana* (1981 trans. *The Broken Mirror* 1994) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. Joginder Paul's *Khwabrau* (1990 trans. *Sleepwalkers* 1998) which sensitively depicts the situation of mohajirs from Lucknow who hold on to their way of life, as if living in frozen time. Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1998), a third generation account, where the writer draws on family history to narrate the story of Partition from a Sikh woman's point of view. Partition also appears in stories written in different languages. Some of the finest stories in Urdu are Manto's "Toba Tek Singh", "Open it" and "Cold Meat". Rajinder Singh Bedi's "Lajwanti", Jamila Hashmi's "Exile", Bhisham Sahni's "We Have Arrived in Amritsar" and Gulzar's "Raavi Paar" are some of the other stories dealing with the agony of the victims of Partition.

3. DISCUSSION

Intizar Husain's *Basti*, a novel on Partition, depicts the human denouement that followed Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947. The writer looks at Partition as a cataclysmic event that caused a violent rupture not only geographically but also shattered the psyche of the people. He recaptures the cultural and political life of the country prior to the divide, through the prison of the 1971 war for liberation of Bangladesh. In delineation of the situation before and after the Partition, there is a clear reflection of the volatility of feeling about the trauma of vivisection. Husain nostalgically remembers the culture and the life - world that the migrants were forced to leave behind, besides highlighting their acute sense of alienation in the new location.

Basti, which Husain started, writing when the Bangladesh war was going on, looks back at the aftermath of Partition

after more than two decades. He felt deeply affected by the turmoil caused by the socio-political situation in Pakistan and realized that the Partition was an ever going on event. He laments the fact that the history of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent began in Dhaka after 1857 as he shares with Asif Farrukhi that "the first founding session of the Muslim league in 1906 was held in Dhaka, and the conclusion of this whole history too took place in the same city" ("Talking about *Basti*") in 1971. Thus, the process of separate homeland for Muslims, the chief motive that resulted in Partition, was reversed. With the secession of Bangladesh, the Muslims who had been considering themselves as one nation- one quom - fell apart and it was a betrayal of the Pakistan idea.

Looking back at Partition after a lapse of more than two decades time, Husain foregrounds the psychic responses of his characters. Although, by the time he says that he "had overgrown that [nostalgic] past" ("Talking about *Basti*"), but as a result of the turmoil, referred memories of Partition invade his consciousness, giving rise to a clear mood of nostalgia. There is a wish to recall and value a lost connectedness that transcends the communal strife, hence, a desire to relapse into the past as an escape from the present chaos. He looks back at Partition as a rupture that could never heal and is followed by reenactments. Memories of the past give rise to a sense of bewilderment, disorientation, silence and helplessness. He is reminded of the contradictory situation when the euphoria of freedom was lost in the profound emotional psychic and moral confusion that ensued with the breaking of the country.

The narrative of *Basti* spans the last two months of the 1971 war, preceding and leading to the disintegration of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh. Action is located at more than one places - Rupnagar and Vyaspur- where Zakir, the protagonist spent his early life, before his migration to Pakistan. These two are fictive places, while others - Dasspur, Shamnagar, Ravanban, Brindaban, Jehanabad, Karbala and Shravasthi - are fabled places and form the allegoric map of Indian civilization, presenting a rich amalgam of the wisdom lore of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. As Alok Bhalla notes, "the fictional map of the novel defines the common cultural ground on which an encyclopaedic range of things achieve form...." (*Partition Dialogues* 20). But, Partition has torn apart and transformed these mythic habitations into places of decay, humiliation and betrayals. These places are transformed into cities of sorrow and their inhabitants can find neither an escape from the ruins nor a remedy for their bewilderment.

Zakir is a professor of history in Lahore - but the city has not been identified by its name and remains 'this city' in the novel. In order to find escape from the pain of the present, he withdraws and clings to memories of the past. He migrated to the promised land of Pakistan along with his family. Husain uses the word '*hijrat*' to denote the massive displacement of populations in 1947. Zakir, a Shiite, knows that the term '*hijrat*' evokes the '*Hijrat*' of Prophet Muhammad who fled persecution in Mecca in 622

C.E. and laid the foundation of the first all –Muslim community in Medina. In that crucial moment of the Muslim history, hardship was converted into victory. But, the emigration of Muslims to the newly found Pakistan turned out to be a tragic event at more than one levels. Husain points at the sense of disillusionment at this failure when he remarks:

"It was then my feeling that in the process of the partition, we had suddenly, almost by accident, regained a lost great experience - namely the experience of migration, hijrat, which has a place all its own in the history of Muslims – and that it will give us a lot. But today, after our political ups and downs..... I feel the great expectation that we had of making something out of it, at a creative level and of exploiting it in developing a new consciousness and sensibility – that bright expectation has now faded and gone."

(Partition Literature: "A Study of Intizar Husain")

Thus, it is evident that Partition which was looked upon as a celebratory event by the Indian Muslims, failed to fulfill their dreams and they find themselves pushed towards a moral dead-end. The feeling of remorse at the failure is clearly reflected by Husain and as Alok Bhalla observes, "his opacity of vision is a sign of the reality of Partition" (PD 18).

The adult Zakir, recaptures the happy days spent in Rupnagar and is still suffering from the pangs of 'houselessness' and 'homelessness' (Basti 10). Rupnagar a small town in eastern UP is home for him and he has a long and cherished relationship with the place. He recapitulates the beauty of the place which is permanently etched in his psyche. Husain describes the untarnished and pristine glory of the place which haunts Zakir:

"When the world was still all new, when the sky was fresh and the earth not yet soiled, when the trees breathed through the centuries and ages spoke in the voice of birds, how astonished he was, looking all around, that everything was so new, and yet looked so old. Blujags, woodpeckers, peacocks, doves, squirrels, parakeets – it seemed that they were as young as he, yet they carried the secrets of age....." (Basti8).

Here in Pakistan, he looks at the world around him through the eyes of a *muhajir*, who is uprooted from his native soil and is caught in an alien reality. Zakir and his poet friend Afzal feel deeply alienated in Lahore and are nostalgic about the past left behind the border. Such common place objects as the neem tree or the voice of the Koel are symbols of the lost time for them. The landscape and the seasons of the land of their adoption fail to confer the "bliss of Nirvana" (Basti97), as they could experience

in Rupnagar. There, every object had radiated with meaning and could be enjoyed without any self- conscious effort. The chance hearing of the Koel's voice or a glimpse of the neem tree make Zakir deeply nostalgic, as the writer observes:

"Where is my friend's voice coming from? And when Ammi heard the koel's voice, 'Ai Hai! the koel is calling'. Then she fell absolutely silent, with her eyes and ears alert for the Koel's voice. And there I saw that her eyes were wet". (Basti 97-8)

The failure to realize their dreams disillusioned the migrants and made them look back at the pre-Partition life of harmony and co-existence. In Zakir's life events operate simultaneously at two levels. The outward events take place during his adult life when he is living in Lahore and the inward events push him back to his early days spent in Rupnagar. The past appears more real to him than the present and the process of assimilation of the past within the present, passes through, as Sukrita Paul Kumar says, "through a twilight zone" (*Interpreting Homes* 36).

He remains withdrawn from the present reality and moves in the time and places of his personal and cultural history. Twelve days of the 1971 war - recorded in diary form in chapter seven of the novel - evoke in Zakir overwhelmingly psychic thoughts and feelings. There are frequent rallies and demonstrations in the war – torn city which hold no meaning for him and he treads into memories of the past:

"Memories, one after another entangled in each other, like a forest to walk through. So where does the forest begin? No, where do I begin? And again he was in the forest." (Basti 8-9).

He clings to the memories of the pre-Partition life which was ruptured with Partition and the memory of the rupture connects him with his present. The frequent blackouts and the dim lantern light fill him with nostalgia about the lantern era before electricity came to Rupnagar when he says:

"How longingly I remember the lantern era, when electricity hadn't yet come to our Rupnagar and inside the house and outside in the lane there was only lantern light. I passed through all the stages of my education by lantern light alone." (Basti 164)

The past is dear to him because its memories provide him with succour to escape the painful present which denotes the failure of the creation of Pakistan. Shamnagar, the 'twilight city' where he along with his family took shelter in Pakistan, or Lahore where he is presently living, are close to his heart not for their own sake but for the sake of the memories he has cherished of Rupnagar. On hearing the sound of a bomb explosion, he makes a prayer for Shamnagar, "No, the bomb should not have fallen on that

neighbourhood. The house ought to stay safe, the whole house and the room that hold in trust the tears of my first night in Pakistan” (*Basti* 162-3). Similarly, when he hears the repeated wailing of the air raid siren, he is filled with fear for the city of Lahore, where he says, “I had endured as many sorrows, where I had sat and remembered Rupnagar so vividly. Where I kept it alive even now in my imagination” (*Basti* 167). Thus, the pain of separation from the roots is still there and there is no feeling of resettlement in the new location despite a lapse of time.

The Muslim who crossed over to Pakistan, have realized the bitter fact that Partition, has realized the bitter fact that Partition has created a “spiritual and social desert” and therefore, they look back to the harmony of pre-Partition days. Zakir and his friend Irfan happen to meet Maulvi Matchbox in a lane in Lahore, soon after a long night of violence. They find the Maulvi sitting in agonized silence, with empty matchboxes spread before him. They are curious to know his mind but he gives only a few cryptic answers to their questions, as illustrated through their conversation:

“Maulvi Matchbox, what are these boxes?” “Sir, these are towns.”

“Maulvi Matchbox, they don’t even have matches in them, they are empty.” “Sir, the towns are empty now.” (Basti 128)

Here the prevailing state of bewilderment has been reflected in which the Maulvi finds himself. He is utterly disgusted and helpless; unlike he used to be in the past, as Alok Bhalla remarks:

“Once the priest of incendiary politics who could ignite rage and passion in the hearts of men, he realizes, albeit too late, that the fires in the hearts of men can also burn cities down.” (PD 19)

Thus, people like Maulvi, who represent religious fanaticism, have been instrumental in fanning religious hatred and thus responsible for the chaos caused by Partition.

Partition was not only a division of land and religious communities; it also divided the Indo-Islamic culture. Zakir remembers that members of the two communities, who perpetrated violence on each other during Partition, had lived in peaceful coexistence and participated in each others’ religious and cultural celebrations. They would neither claim priority over each other nor claimed to be more ancient, and thus were the rightful inheritors of Rupnagar. Whenever, Zakir is extremely despondent, the past flashes across his mind reminding him how every gesture of the inhabitants of Rupnagar was consecrated with songs and every story they told was, as Alok Bhalla notes “a reconsecration of the basti and its people” (PD 22). Zakir’s father Abba Jan is disillusioned to see that even during political rallies, unlike here in Pakistan, not a single word was uttered which would be below the standard of civilized speech. When Zakir feels distraught by the hallucinatory world of strikes, slogans and riots in Lahore, memories of the life lived in Rupnagar come

surging from some deeply abiding core of his self as a form of thanks giving. Rupnagar, for him is, as Alok Bhalla puts, “a vision of a civilization of pre-Partition India, a repudiation of all forms of identity politics and a prophecy of the culture we must aspire towards for our sanity and salvation” (PD 23).

The post-Partition life of dereliction and decay is exactly opposite to the model of creativity and enlightenment of the pre-Partition days. As a child growing up in Rupnagar, Zakir’s personal selfhood was shaped by myths, tales and parables from the Hindu epics, the Koran and the Jatakas. Besides, he also listened to love songs of Laila –Majnu, the ras-lila and songs welcoming the arrival of monsoon. On the whole, the life lived in Rupnagar is held as a trust and Zakir Laments that the trust will never be fulfilled.

Members of the older generation who have migrated to Pakistan continue to believe that the only moral trust they have is to nurture the memories of the spaces they once called home. Instead of trying to assimilate in the changed reality, they remain rooted in their past. The writer highlights the fact how firmly they cling to their past when he remarks:

“They had left their cities, but they carried their cities with them, as a trust, on their shoulders... Even when cities are felt behind, they don’t stay behind. They seize you, even more. When the earth slips out from under your feet that is when it really surrounds you.” (Basti 128)

In Pakistan when they have failed to find stability and settlement, they remain stuck to their inherent faith. Abba Jan, when he migrated from his home in India, carried with him a few things which he thought were precious to his sense of selfhood. Lying on his death- bed, he tells Zakir that he has neither any memory nor any property in Pakistan. But, he would bestow on his son certain things as his inheritance which includes a few yellow pages from a prayer book, a tablet of the healing earth of Najaf and some prayer beads made of the clay from Karbala. These things have kept him aware of the fact that even the best of men have suffered betrayal and it was the moral duty of a true Muslim to share the agony they must have experienced. Besides, these objects, though of little value, now, have been held precious by Abba Jan as the last emblems of the Shia world view.

Partition and migration have failed to provide stability to the migrants, who had hoped to seek fulfillment of their aspirations in the new land, find themselves in a condition beyond their control. Abba Jan’s faith has taught him that after the Karbala, loss and betrayal have been the fate of all good human beings. He remembers that he had never indulged in lamentation in Rupnagar, whereas in Pakistan he has wept not duly on the elegies of Imam Husain, but moreover, the ruins of the loss of civilizational rhythm which life provided before Partition. Thus, Partition has resulted in an identity crisis. Those displaced by Partition carried their old bastis to the new locations and also their

past to the present, and in doing so, as Sukrita Paul Kumar notes, "They gradually went through the process of translation, assimilation and change, to eventually evolve new stabilities and Identities" (*Interpreting Homes* 34). However, they are shocked to find that the new identities could not be evolved and their lives continue to be unstable.

Zakir's mother also remains rooted in the past and she feels obsessed by the family heirlooms left locked in the store room of their family mansion in Rupnagar. She cherishes the hope to go and get these before the termites destroy them. Zakir is mused at her possessiveness and his sense of wonder is conveyed by the writers, "Is time a termite, or is termite time" (*Basti* 119). Thus the members of older generation, having failed to re-root themselves in the land of their adoption are prisoners of their past. They have realized that some mistakes cannot be rectified and some journeys cannot be reversed. Abba Jan was forced to migrate because of his concern for the security of his family and not by any social, religious or historical reason. He had refused to leave home even during the outbreak of plague in Rupnagar, and would allay the fears of Ammi Jan saying, "Death is everywhere. Where can a man go to flee from it? It is a saying of the prophet's that those who run from death run towards death, instead" (*Basti* 118).

Now, Abba Jan is aware of having made a wrong choice. He knows that he had his Karbala in Rupnagar, his mosque was there and so was the site of his grave. Shamnagar, where he first took shelter in Pakistan, has neither a sanctified place of worship nor a consecrated ground for burial. This movement to the holy land has turned out to be a journey in futility. The members of older generation fail to assimilate in their location, as Sukrita Paul Kumar comments on their plight that they constantly look back and in their consciousness remain, "rooted, attached and static despite their migration" (*Interpreting Homes* 36). Past for them holds more value and appears more real than the present.

In *Basti*, three major phases in the whole process of rehabilitation have been illustrated. There are creation of the Muslim homeland and the migration of the faithful to Pakistan. During the initial days of their arrival there is a feeling of joy and exuberance. Thereafter, a process of destruction and deterioration sets in owing to the immortality of human conduct and consequent disillusionment with the new environment. There is an attempt to seek some inner source of strength and a withdrawal from the world of reality. Members of the younger generation, despite their relocation, have failed to assimilate in the new environment. Zakir and many others like him, gather at 'Shiraz' which is like a home for these homeless wanderers. They come there on different pretexts; while some come to 'Shiraz' to breathe free from the stifling air of the small crowded room, others fearful of the expanses of a big house and still others, living comfortably in their ancestral homes, feel the suffocation of the new air of homelessness and houselessness. It is an essential part of their daily ritual, as the writer reveals Zakir's state

of mind when he says that he felt, "as if we had been sitting in the Shiraz through many births....and would sit there for many births to come" (*Basti* 102).

These visitors to Shiraz share with each other the loss suffered by them in Partition. The white-haired man, who comes to Shiraz regularly, recalls, as Husain remarks:

"When I set out from my home, my hair was all black. And I wasn't any age at all, I was only twenty or twenty one. When I reached Pakistan and washed and looked in the mirror my hair had turned extremely white.....I left home with black hair and my family, when I reached Pakistan, my hair was white and I was alone." (*Basti* 82)

In the present turmoil which is going on in Pakistan, Zakir is constantly seen mediating and modifying his past which is an integral part of his being. According to Sukrita Paul Kumar, "The Stream of consciousness oscillates between the so-called past and present blurring all divisions of time". (*Interpreting Homes* 35). As a child in Rupnagar he had listened to the stories of how the world came into being from his father and his Hindu neighbour Bhagatji. He was also acquainted with the archetypal story of fratricide Cain's killing his own brother Abel. The tragic motif of fratricide appears a central metaphor in the Partition of India and again in the separation of the eastern wing of Pakistan in 1971. If 1947 divided the country on the basis of religion, the 1971 debacle proved that even religion failed to keep people united. As a matter of fact, creation of Pakistan, instead of regenerating the society had only weakened the moral and national sensibility. Muhammad Umar Memon has aptly observed that:

"The loss of memory, the loss of collective identity, spelled disaster and even death - a death which didn't come soft, footed or unannounced, but was preceded by a state of moral turpitude in which a nation's conscience darkened and lost all power of distinction between right and wrong, good and evil." (*Introduction Basti* xix)

One of the tragic impacts in the aftermath of Partition is the agony of broken Muslim families. While the younger members of the community migrated to Pakistan looking for new avenues, those who were left behind are doomed to live a life of desertion and isolation. Many of the older generation decided to stay back not so much for the sake of property but they would not go leaving the graves of their forefathers. Hakimji, whose whole family has gone to Pakistan, did not leave Vyaspur. Zakir's friend Surender wonders how much significance graves have in Muslim culture, as it is highlighted by the writer in the following conversation:

"Young man! You ask for the reason? Have you seen our graveyard? "No" "Just go some time and take a look. Each tree is leafier than the next. How

*could my grave have such a shade in
Pakistan?" (Basti 139)*

Similarly, for Zakir, Rupnagar is an ideal basti, a source of sustenance in the face of turmoil in Pakistan. He keeps looking back to seek relief from the pain of homelessness. But, his childhood beloved Sabirah, who did not migrate even after her immediate family migrated to Bangladesh. She continuous living in India, has not married and works with the All India Radio. She, however, does not visit Rupnagar, even on the occasion of Id and the place has lost all meaning for her. Surender shares his dilemma when he writes to Zakir:

*"Yar, how strange it is that the same
town becomes more meaningful than
before for one of its inhabitants, who has
left the country, so that he drams about
it, while for another inhabitant all its
meaning disappears and even though he
is in the same country, he never feels any
desire to see the town again." (Basti 142-
3)*

Besides, friendships social relations have also been ruptured as a result of Partition. Zakir's migration has created a vacuum in the life of his friend Surender. While at college in Meerut, they both would eagerly await the vacation to visit Vyaspur. But, now for Surender, the town does not seem to be inviting. Even if, he goes there, the dusty roads and lanes seem to be asking him "Where is the other" (Basti 143). They look angry with him. His sense of despair is highlighted when the writer says, "If the lanes, birds and trees don't recognise you, you're so sad, and if they recognise you, you feel melancholy" (Basti 144). Similarly, Sabirah, whose name means 'enduring' is living a lonely life in India and thus paying a heavy price for not having joined the band wagon of Pakistan.

Similarly, life has been turned topsy - turvy as a result of Partition. Those who enjoyed a privileged life in pre-Partition India have fallen on bad days while some of those who lived moderate lives are enjoying privileges. Some among the migrants have succeeded in getting attractive compensations by entering false claims and those who lived respectable life have been reduced to poverty. Zakir's family servant Sharifan who comes to Pakistan to meet Ammi Jan, is shocked to see them living in a rented house. She laments that their mansion in Rupnagar is deserted, and the writer comments on the situation:

*"There was a time when families
were expanding, and even big
houses began to seem small. Now
this time has come, when all the
families have scattered. Now even
small houses seem big." (Basti 100)*

Member of Muslim society in India have to pay a price as they find it difficult to find suitable match for their daughters with the eligible bachelors having crossed over to Pakistan. Zakir and Sabirah love each other but their love remains unrealized. They both do not marry as the

drawing of borders has permanently separated them. Zakir does not make any effort to fetch Sabirah to Pakistan, perhaps because he does not hope love to blossom in the morally imperfect wood, as M.U. Memon notes that "Zakir and Sabirah love each other with an intransitive love" (Introduction *Basti* xiii).

Husain explores the flow of history of the Indian Muslims in the subcontinent and regrets that Partition has sundered the glory of their past. Zakir, who teaches history at a college in Lahore, knows that he is also living his own history. His problem, as the writer foregrounds, is:

*"Other people's history can be read
comfortably, in a way a novel can be
read. But my own history? I'm on the
run from my own history and catching
my breath in the present. Escapist. But,
the merciless present pushes me back
again towards our history." (Basti 83-4)*

He fails to understand what happened to the history which had produced the apostle of peace in the Buddha. The history which caused partition is a negation of history, as Husain observes:

*"mankind is such a creature who can
build a movement over centuries, can
construct diverse philosophies, but when
the crisis comes, when some critical
moment occurs, his animal emerges from
within to overwhelm him." (Journal of
South Asian Literature 161)*

Intizar Husain has recaptured the agony of Partition after a lapse of two decades. Shiv.K. Kumar, also a Partition migrant from Pakistan, wrote a Partition novel *A River With Three Banks* in 1998, has shared with Sachidananda Mohanty in an interview that he had "to stand fifty years back from 1947 before writing the novel, in order to better understand his experience" (*The Hindu* 15 November 1998). Thus, fifty years or twenty years, the agony of rootlessness continues to haunt those whom Partition had displaced. In *Basti*, even if the protagonist tries to accept the present reality, the shattering events of the present connect him with his past. As he is a witness to the disintegration of Pakistan when the city of Lahore is burning in flames, he withdraws from the "Doomsday Chaos" (Basti 253) and escapes into the cemetery among the graves of the dead. The scene of devastation, as Alok Bhalla describes:

*"When fragments from the Ecclesiastes,
images of Lanka burnt to ash by
Hanuman, lamentations of those who
were betrayed at Karbala, and echoes of
Gandhi's assassination surge through
his memory in a strange frenzy. He
finally admits that the Partition has not
brought him to a more trustworthy
country, but to a place of conflagrations
prophesied in the inherited religious
traditions of Islam, Hinduism and
Buddhism." (PD 19-20).*

Afzal joins Zakir and matches the devastating scene with a sense of resignation, as he is left with neither the strength nor courage to seek a solution. These young men do not act to save the country through the harrowing time. Instead, they leave home and seek refuge among the graves and lapse into a state of inconsolable grief. Zakir's failure to act at the crucial time, as Tarun. K. Saint notes, indicates "the long reaching effects of paralysis of will in both the personal and geo-political realms" (*Witnessing Partition* 171). M.U. Memon opines that this inaction on the part of the protagonist is not because of some inherent flaw in his moral fibre. But the more the world crumbles around him, the more he tries to seek a very private kind of salvation through the Shiite principle of "the interiorization of suffering" ('Introduction' *Basti* xiii). But, Husain holds the view that in Shia history there are two reactions, - that of Imam Husain and of Hazrat Zain ul - Abidin - which are two extremes of reaction. The kind of reaction comprising of great reaction seems absurd as he says that "Shia culture is composed of a synthesis of these two reactions" (Taking about *Basti*). Besides, Zakir holds a particular view of history - one shaped in the crucible of Karbala and thus his inaction is not indicative of his failure. He symbolizes a personality which survives in a morally corrupt universe by drawing on its inner resources. However, Zakir returns home from the graveyard and now he decides to write a letter to Sabirah, before it is too late, "before the parting of hair fills with silver, and before the keys rust..." (*Basti* 263). Here he experiences a moment of liberation. He makes an effort to move forward, connect and rebuild rather than continue with the existential angst of the rootless. He tries to seek stability even though a continued Partition is being carried through time.

4. CONCLUSION

In *Basti* Intizar Husain tries to open the wraps of time and looks back at the 1947 Partition in the face of the cataclysm of 1971. This retrospection is done not with a desire to glorify the idyllic past but to connect it with the turbulent present. The novel, dealing with the Muslim perspective of Partition, depicts the plight of the members of the community who crossed over to Pakistan with the euphoria of the creation of a separate homeland, fail to realize their hopes. They are overcome by a deep sense of nostalgia over the lost past, the basti full of harmony which had vanished behind them. Their feeling of alienation has been delineated in a highly subtle manner. The past has been regenerated not with the purpose of glorifying it but it has been done to connect the past and the present. A deep insight into the muhajir psyche suggests that the true Pakistani ethos will emerge only after a reassessment of the Muslim cultural tradition of the Indian subcontinent.

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