

LITCRIT

An Indian Response to Literature

Issue 86 • Volume 44 • Number 2 • December 2018

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National Identities in the Context of Spatiality: A Study on the Film *Paradesi*

Abstract

Though recent years have shown a serious resurgence of nationalism, ironically this has also triggered retrospection on the trauma created by the 1947 Partition. A renewed focus on the voices of Partition seems to reverberate as we celebrate our 70th year of Independence. An outpouring of narratives - real stories of real people caught between the borders, meeting unexpected journeys, ending up migrating again and again - have tried to humanize history. It must be a sense of guilt and shame which provoked many creative minds to focus on human suffering caused by national politics. The unprecedented levels of trauma caused by the denial of an option to stick to one's roots resulting in forced displacement has been shown poignantly in the movie *Paradesi* (Foreigner) (2007) by P.T. Kunju Muhammed. The movie is a lament for those who lost their place of birth and identity being tossed about by changing power equations. Partition based on race, caste or religion along with victorious perpetrators and the suffering millions has created a situation where citizenship, nationality, identity and region have become questionable. What, and who, decides these attributes for mankind, and the revulsion caused by these questions become the core of *Paradesi*. The paper discusses these aspects in detail along with the effects and impacts of the trauma created by the Partition and how the victims' own cultural and geographical spaces are questioned in a nation which steadfastly denies them.

Key words: Partition, Identity, Trauma, Space

When we immerse ourselves in the festivities of independence, we often forget that Partition is the flip side of our independence, which in fact should be part of our collective memory. But recent years, which have shown a serious resurgence of nationalism, have ironically opened a window to relook more on the trauma created by the 1947 Partition. The 1947 Partition - the division of the subcontinent into two nations in response to the supposedly irreconcilable differences between the two major

religious communities - which resulted in the dislocation of millions can never be limited to a physical dimension. As Jasbir Jain says

it created a feeling of helplessness and desolation and challenged the definitions of nation and homeland. Memories and histories of the past continue to haunt the children and grandchildren of those who experienced dislocation and violence during the Partition, and the social fabrics of the two (now three) countries have been deeply affected. (21)

The 1947 Partition of India into two nation-states had both a chaotic and a cathartic impact on the country's population. The violence that followed shook the whole subcontinent causing thousands of people to be killed or uprooted from their homeland. Many crossed borders in fear of their lives and spent years in refugee camps. For them, memories of the past became the only solution to overcome the frozen present. The agony of these victims and struggle to grapple with the extreme hostile geopolitical scenario has been represented truthfully in our narratives and visual representations. An outpouring of narratives - probably due to the guilt and shame of our national politics - representing real stories of real people caught between borders, having to undertake unexpected journeys, ending up migrating again and again, have tried to humanize history. Partition literature became a genre aimed at representing the psychological trauma, individual experiences, memories, problems of identity and the sexual assaults of real life resulting from this man-made tragedy.

Partition movies have created a lasting impression on the popular mind by conveying poignantly those harrowing days which only offered trauma, alienation, nostalgia, the sense of being hunted, etc. to the people. As a result, such movies represented people as victims of split citizenship and nationality. The violence, refugees and their memories endowed with nostalgia, seen in the films of Ritwik Ghatak, Gurinder Chadha and the like showcase the irony of a country possessing at once a jubilant crew and a suffering community in its midst. The most pertinent question, in a situation where one's nation is divided, is on 'Citizenship' and 'Nationality'. What does these two entities mean and who decides these for a person? Who can mark a space for them and where? The neglected victims of Partition still struggle with these questions and their irritation and anger have been captured in the powerful movie *Paradesi* (2007) by P.T. Kunju Muhammed.

The devastating impact of Partition has induced severe psychological problems in its victims. Unable and unwilling to erase their roots, the realization that they had lost their home (a place of belonging) as well as their identity continues to haunt them. The movie *Paradesi* ('Foreigner'), showcases people who are destined to become 'foreigners' in their own land. The film handles the situation of Indian citizens who left India before independence in their search for jobs, or, to be more precise, it deals with