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Review of *Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics*

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***Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics*. Ed. Amritjit Singh and Nalini Iyer, Et al. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.**

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 has indeed been addressed in several works of fiction and nonfiction. With the passage of time, academicians have played a significant role in digging deeper into history and comparing and contrasting shades of fiction that strive to explore the occurrence that forever changed the trajectory of South Asian history and continues to form and affect its geopolitics. *Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics* is a collection of nineteen scholarly essays by academicians from around the world on the subject of a nation that divides it into two. Edited and compiled by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer, and Rahul K. Gairola, this book discusses Partition as a historical phenomenon, but more importantly, through the essays, this scholarly and neatly structured volume discusses how daily decisions and politics tend to be shaped by the "long shadow of Partition" even seventy years after the largest exodus in modern history.

The book is important mainly because it helps us to understand the nuances of the grand event that lurk in human memory, society, culture, and geopolitics. On the very surface, these four are ever-changing, adaptable to the land it belongs to and the people it serves. Memory, history, and politics all serve human interests by assisting in decision-making, and with its numerous layers of communal, gendered, and regional tensions, those continue to impinge on its narrative in the present. We, especially the peoples of these three subcontinents (including the formation of Bangladesh), remain affected by this ostensibly distant event, even as we live and work in an era of globalization. We continue to read it simultaneously with events that have marred the present era that continues to have seismic effects such as 9/11, London blasts of 2003, 26/11, War on Terror, and ISIS. The Partition has continued to provoke new series of violence till today pitching one community against another and one nation against another. We live and relive the trauma through silence, memory, words, and films, and especially through what we choose to forget. The book's objective, as mentioned in the introduction titled "The Long Partition and Beyond" is to sideline the sweeping assumptions related to the event and to "underscore the ongoing impact of the 1947 Partition in a variety of domains".

The book's nineteen essays are organised into five sections, each of which concentrates on a different aspect of the Partition. The first essay under the first section "Approaches to Partition" is by Radhika Mohanram who through Derrida's notion of hauntology and his work *The Specters of Marx* connects the outlines of how cultural memory remains embedded in democracy. Even as she explores the idea of trauma through Derrida's lens, her essay outlines how individual memories differ from collective and shared memories and how each of these plays its role for creating nation-state in a decolonized Asia. She discusses this as she lists out three central events of South Asia that we in our common assumptions tend to compile it under one single heading, as history books teach us so. Each of these three events: Independence, Partition, and formation of two democratic states have been treated as a separate incident

and each has been given space and linked with one another in this essay. The second essay by Jasbir Jain retrospects on the idea of home and space. The essay as the writer puts it “seeks to work with home and homelessness in the context of cultural memories.” From the letters of Saadat Hassan Manto to the works of Sara Suler and Attia Hosain, this essay very subtly questions our assumptions about belongingness which gradually blends into the complex idea of homecoming in a divided land. The third essay in this first segment, written by Parvinder Mehta, examines the problem of strategic and systematic female silence and how most narratives have always overlooked the women who suffered during the partition. At the same time, this essay does not confine itself to a discussion of female silence. By exploring texts such as Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti*, Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* and Sabiha Suma's *Silent Waters*, the author explicates Barrett Watten's definition of “non-fiction” and how during the bloodshed and violence, women, as well as men, are compelled to be voiceless as politics of honour, shame and violence are played upon their bodies. The fourth essay by Rahul K. Gairola explores the manipulation of Partition trauma in the digital space by citing major players in the fields such as #DHPoco and companies like Google. Each essay in the first section sheds light on erroneous and twisted facts and attempts to weave the threads of commonality that connect the divided countries.

The second section, “Nation and Narrations”, begins with an essay by Tarun K. Saint on Partition memoirs. By selecting books from Maulana Azad to Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, the essay explores political ideologies that clashed and spanned during one of the longest and bloodiest migrations in human history and compares it with the practical politics that played a role in the Partition of the continent. What distinguishes it is the moral quandary generated by this current translations and their availability to the partition afterwards, which was previously inaccessible. The second essay in this section by Debali Mookerjee-Leonard discusses displaced middle-class Bengali women who began looking for salaried work following the partition. Women protagonists in Bengali fictions such as Bina Guhathakurta and Kamala Mukherjee in Mitra's *Durabhashini (Lady Telephone Operator, 1952)*, Neeta in Shaktipada Rajguru's *Meghe Dhaka Tara (The Cloud-Capped Star, 1962)*, Sutara Datta in Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga (The River Churning, 1968)* not only give the readers critical insight to the psychological workings of the women's mind during a time of turmoil, but they also unfold the socio-cultural fabric that was changing. By explicating the displaced women's participation in the labour market to their journey to become free women and the process each pays for it, the essay delves into the psychological and socio-cultural politics of a society in a newly formed nation. The final essay in this section by Amrita Ghosh discusses how the marginalized Dalit refugees are displaced and silenced after the siege of Morichjhapi in 1979 through Agamben's lens of *Homo Sacer* and the idea of heterotopic space of Sundarbans. The essays in this section discuss the displaced, magnetized, and gendered memories, all of which are always found beyond the vantage point of the collective societal memory. They contribute to a distinct collective memory by preserving narratives that fiction and essays such as these examine and yet these are frequently absent from history.

The third section of the book, titled “Borders and Borderlands”, begins with an essay by Nandita Bhavnani that discusses a frequently overlooked aspect of Partition, namely the absence of communal tension and violence in the Sind region, as well as the role of landed property in the Partition and the plight of *muhajirs*. The second essay in this section by Ilyas Chattha discusses the Partition violence within Jammu and Kashmir from the perspective of the human victims, rather than the politics. The report examines not just the physical and political dimensions of violence, but also the administrative dimension of strategic violence. Additionally, the essay sheds light on historical displacement and migration both prior to and following Partition, as well as how the territory continues to bear the burden of the Long Partition. Babyrani Yumnam's subsequent article in the section explores the consequences of Partition in North-East India. The essay delves into history and attempts to disentangle it from contemporary modernization by examining alternative responses to the questions of identity, belonging, and marginality. The essay digs into the convoluted historical, political, and commercial conjectures that surround a region by tracing the history related to the drawing of lines and boundaries around a specific region. Amit R. Baishya's essay that concludes this section sheds light on the long-forgotten march of Burmese Indians to British India, which Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* resurfaced. The essay takes an ecocritical approach to Debendranath Acharya's classic Assamese novel *Jangam*, which remains the “only

fictional treatment of the long march”. This section focuses on a lesser-known incident that largely went unaddressed in the academic writings on Partition.

The fourth section, titled “From Pakistan to Bangladesh”, begins with an essay by Amber Fatima Riaz addressing the ambiguity and conflict that linger at the heart of Pakistan’s newly acquired independence as a nation-state. Tracing the history and fragmentation of Pakistani identity, the essay talks about how it continues to create turmoil and lack of peace under changing leadership since the time of its inception. This essay is followed by Kaiser Haq’s essay that explores the partition, formation, and clashes in Bangladesh as shown in various literary texts ranging from Taseema Nasreen to Amitav Ghosh. Formerly East Pakistan and later named as Bangladesh has been fighting against issues that directly hark back to the Great Divide in 1947 such as immigration, migration, militancy, and cultural imperialism. Their struggle for liberty was meticulously outlined alongside the zigzag terrain. The essay continues to address how, in comparison to Bengali writers, Bangladeshi writers have moved away from nostalgia while bringing to light the national and societal fears prominent during each conflict and how this has resulted in fragmented identities for individuals who suffered. The third essay in the section by Masood A. Raja discusses Shakeel Adil Zada’s *Baazigar* in detail. By mainly focusing on the theme of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, the essay contextualizes ideas of Timothy Brennan and Benedict Anderson. The essay dismantles what defines the “official narratives” of forming a new nation, in this case Pakistan, by methodically presenting the numerous complications that have always existed parallelly, such as ideological and sociopolitical disparities between individuals. The following essay by Md. Rezaul Haque discusses the voids generated by the omission of Bengali Muslims from Partition literature. The essayist delves into the precarious displacement and its aftereffect for one particular community through writer’s i.e. Hasan Azizul Huq’s short stories. Individual uncertainties that collectively make up the identity of a nation such as focalization, migration, anxiety, and what Ian Watt calls “delayed decoding” have been dealt with via characters in stories such as “Khancha” and “Atmoja”. Tasneem Shahnaaz and Amritjit Singh’s concluding essay in the fourth section discusses storytelling, quoting Walter Benjamin and expanding on Intizar Husain’s idea of survival through storytelling during partition. The writers in this section have explored the history, culture, and exile from homeland, as well as the ways in which all of this is remembered as the lines and border continue to divide people belonging to neighbouring and far-flung lands.

The final section of the book, titled “Partition Within”, comprises three essays. The first one, written by Jeremy A. Rinker, examines the collective trauma of Partition in the contemporary cityscape. This essay chronicles the cultural and structural violence emanating from the outskirts of cities that are still reeling from communal turmoil decades after independence. The second essay by Nazia Akhtar examines Nizam’s Hyderabad and the impact of Partition on this distant land through the lens of a Telugu short story titled “Durga”. Additionally, the essay explores the emergence of Hindutva and how states previously deemed immune to communal violence have been influenced by creeping violence in recent years. Nalini Iyer’s final essay similarly debunks the misconception that individuals from the South are unaffected by the country’s Partition. She addresses secularism and people’s notions of a secular nation, and how the Great Divide has given each of these terms particular importance in the eyes of people, even those who witnessed the division from a distance.

The essays in this book are exceptional in that they delve into banal matters that are sometimes relegated to the footnotes of history and official narratives, and bring these topics into foreground through rigorous research and fact-based data. This shifts the reader’s focus away from the partition and toward accessing loss. The book can be read as a detailed investigation of Partition history, focusing on the omissions that outline the majority of what remains unreported in history. Most crucially, each essay demonstrates how the Indian subcontinent’s Partition is not a one-time event but a continuous, growing process that persists to impose its misery, pain, trauma and horror in society, culture, memory as well as commemoration till this date.