

Portrayal of Indian Partition in Urdu Novels: The Case of *Khaak Aur Khoon* (1950) by Nasim Hijazi

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Biographical Sketch and Literary Contributions of Nasim Hijazi

Nasim Hijazi's real name was Sharif Hussain but he used pseudonym as Nasim Hijazi. He was born in an Arain family on 19 May, 1914 in the village of Sujaanpur that was located near Dhariwal town in Gurdaspur in the East Punjab during the colonial period. After the partition of India and creation of Pakistan, like majority of other Muslims in the east Punjab, he chose to migrate the newly created country of Pakistan. He started writing novels and rose to become one of the most read Pakistani novelist and he chose Islamic history as his inspiration for this purpose. He lived in Pakistan throughout his life and died on 2 March, 1996. He was a prolific writer and produced a large number of novels. *Muhammad Bin Qasim*, *Aakhri Maraka*, *Qaisar-o-Kisra* and *Kafla-i-Hijaz* were written to portray era of Muslim rise to political, economic, militaristic and educational power. He wrote *Yusuf Bin Tashfin*, *Shaheen*, *Kaleesa aur Aag* and *Andheri Raat kay Mussafir* to depict the period of Muslim Reconquista of Spain. His novel *Aakhri Chatan* is also very famous and it depicts the conquest spree of Genghis Khan in central Asia. The novel *Khaak aur Khoon* details the violence and massacre resulting from the development of religious

nationalism and concomitant tensions between the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs around the time of withdrawal of British Empire and creation of Pakistan.

Portrayal of Partition of India in the Novel *Khaak aur Khoon*

The novel *Khaak aur Khoon* written by Nasim Hijazi, a leading and very popular novelist of Pakistan, covers the events of partition of India of 1947. The ambience in this novel is of a village located in Gurdaspur, a village of East Punjab. The village is inhabited by four religious communities including the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians. The intercommunal relations among these communities, according to Hijazi, had never been congenial. However, with the rising educational levels and concomitant conscience of the people of this village, the enmities had decreased considerably. The religious prejudice was prevailed in the environment so much that it could be ignited with little effort. Hijazi says that although Muslims were accommodational but Hindus and Sikhs needed little things to be exaggerated into intercommunal rivalries.

The thing which baffles readers of this novel is that Saleem, the central character in this novel, is actually Nasim Hijazi himself or not. He belonged to Gurdaspur and experienced dislocation and migration along with his family and friends. However, at the time of partition of India in 1947, he was living in Quetta and focused his efforts for the accession of Baluchistan with Pakistan. However, after the events of 1947, he left Quetta. To expand his discussion regarding the partition of India, he used such methods through which various religious communities and their behavior in this traumatic time could be depicted with the help of characters and he seems to be successful in doing this. He has depicted Hindu culture and civilization and idol worshipping in such a manner that their antipathy towards Islam could be highlighted. He has also pointed out the Sikhs inability to reach to any decision regarding their position in the partition process. Moreover, Hijazi says that there seemed to be an alliance between all non-Muslim communities and the British Raj against the Muslims of India and the significant question was

regarding who would be ruling India once the British has gone back.

The Hindu animosity to Muslims was pushing India for partition, according to Naseem Hijazi, and then there was a long series of events which prepared the Muslims for this mission. There were events, during the twentieth century, which promoted the rapprochement among the communities: the partition of Bengal, the Lucknow Pact, Khilafat movement were the few to be mentioned. However, the Nehru report and the Jinnah's fourteen points written in reaction to this report smashed the possibility of a united India. Then, the Roundtable conferences and Allahabad address made the Muslims think that India's partition was inevitable. If Congress had cooperated with the Muslims after the elections, the circumstances could have been reverted back from becoming out of control and the ideal of unity could be achieved. Unfortunately, after the elections of 1937 Congress adopted a policy of discrimination towards minorities. For Hijazi, if the congress had adopted a conciliatory approach towards their dealings with Indian Muslims after these elections, the unity of India could have been perpetuated. He writes,

The elections of 1937 imposed Congress government in India for the first time. The Hindu politicians had planned to subdue Indian Muslims with so much impatience, the same impatience was exhibited by them to implement their plan. The Mahatma's Wardha venom had exposed itself. The blessings of Ram Raj started showering in the shape of Wardha Vidhya mandar Schemes. The sons of the followers of One God were forced to show reverence Gandhi's statue. The reciter of naat of Holy Prophet was being taught Bande Matram. In the syllabus of daughters of followers of Oneness of God was being included dance of devadasis.¹

The writer has tried to convey with his characteristic emotional tinge what he considered as threats to Muslim conception of their community as being rulers of last many centuries but caught in the quagmire of these unique colonial circumstances in which numerical majority had its importance and Muslims were

relegated in the background as a minority community. The Muslims had been claiming since the establishment of All India Muslim League that they should be dealt as, not minority, but with reference to their historical importance as rulers of India.

The foregoing passage from the novel depicts the circumstances in which the Muslim community increasingly considered for itself importance to rally behind the banner of Muslim League because the limited autonomy and transfer of power in the shape of Congress ministries in eight provinces of India after the elections of 1935-36 manifested sufficiently the mentality of majoritarian Hindu community. The Muslims were forced to think that what would be their level of plight in case full power is transferred in coming future when the British would withdraw themselves and hand over power on the electoral principles of majority rule. The Muslims feared that such a process would relegate them to a permanently insignificant entity in the body politic of India. The novelist, with the help of depiction of political scenario, has painted a picture through which it is not difficult for readers to understand the social and political dynamics of the time. Since history is defined as “the study of an event in a particular time and place,” the novel *Khaak aur Khoon* provides an historical understanding of the events leading to ultimate partition of India in 1947.² Moreover, the novelist had graphically depicted the ways and manners through which the Muslims were persuaded by the British government to accept some settlement through negotiations to preserve their trumpeted achievement of the unity of India but this could not work and ultimately the Muslims charted their course of independence out of the Indian union and demanded that they should be granted a separate state in the shape of Pakistan, in the north-east and north-west of India, in line with Allama Iqbal famous Allahabad address of 1930.

The novelist has highlighted the role of Urdu language for the sharpening of Muslim identity in India and he is of the opinion that the Hindu possessed an attitude of discrimination to this language which, for its development during the Muslim rule in India, was considered as a Muslim language and hence permanently associated with Muslims. Then the novelist turns to the Muslim League’s historic annual session of March 1940 in

which the Pakistan resolution was passed. He as highlighted the importance of this resolution and the ensuing struggle for Pakistan after the Hindu press popularized this resolution as “Pakistan resolution” rather than its original name as Lahore resolution of 1940. He writes, “While the Hindus had united themselves since last many decades, they had sown seeds of differences among the Muslims. They were ready that if the composite nationalism and non-violence could not work properly to persuade the Muslims, then they would be controlled through their own spiritual leaders wearing big turbans and self-styled guides of paradise. The congress had prepared a class of such people who showed Muslims Quran in their hands but actually they wanted Muslims to become slaves of the Hindus.”³

Regarding the Cabinet Mission Plan which was an important milestone in the long and arduous process of negotiations among all the concerned parties in the future of India and what kind of shape it would take once the paramount authority of the British rule would wane in the wake of their withdrawal of Empire from India as it became more and more clear with passing days because the end of World War II and British urgencies at home rather than keeping cling to their Empire. Keep in view the post-war European and international circumstances, the British wanted to bring their house in order. The main thrust of the Cabinet Mission plan was to offer India “a three-tiered constitutional structure in which provinces were grouped to form ‘sections’ which, in turn, would determine themselves what subjects would be under the jurisdiction of their respective sectional government.”⁴ In the proposed scheme that was finalized with the consensus of all parties privy to it was that “section A comprised Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, and Orissa. Section B included the Punjab, The North-West Frontier Province, and Sindh (with the addition of a representative of British Baluchistan). Section C consisted of Bengal and Assam.”⁵ Moreover, it were all three sections of “the Constituent Assembly had to come together along with representatives of the Indian States, to settle the Union Constitution after the provincial constitutions had been formed.”⁶ It was also included in the scheme that once the Union Constitution was implemented, the provinces would have option

to 'opt out' of their assigned groups. This option of 'opt out' was a catch for the Muslim League and, hence, Jinnah accepted this plan, to which novelist has given his attention. Hijazi opines that Muslim League had accepted this scheme considering to have succeeded in its objective but the Congress was fearful of seeing Pakistan in this plan. It was due to this factor that the Congress rejected it even having accepted it earlier. The Muslim League also ashamed of its earlier decision and hence it had become steadfast now to cling to the partition of Indian and creation of Pakistan idea only. Since "Lord Wavell wanted to ignore the Muslim League in the formation of interim government of India, the Muslim League resorted to Direct Action Day."⁷

Nasim Hijazi, while delineating in detail about the results of Direct Day, writes that "Bombay, Ahmadabad, Allahabad and other parts of India where Muslims were in minority, the Hindus carried out loot and plunder and murder in large scale. As far as Calcutta was concerned, on the Direct Action Day, the Hindus showered bricks, bullets and hand grenades on the Muslim League."⁸ Calcutta became the prime center of hooliganism and orgy of violence on the Direct Action Day resulting into more than five thousand death on a single day and the wounded were in a large number. Then the Army had to be called to restore order but the damage had already been done as all the roads of Calcutta were littered with corpses. It was first massive violence the scale of which would be eclipsed during the coming days of partition of Punjab and Bengal. The novelist seems to be accurate regarding the portrayal of circumstances surrounding the post-election increasing violence and the approaching shameful flight of the British Empire in India.⁹

The novelist has discussed the electoral politics before the elections of 1945-46 and the events happening around the same time. The elections had been fought by the Muslim League on the agenda of achieving a separate state of Pakistan although negotiations were going along on the same time among the major parties i.e. the British government, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. Regarding the elections of 1945-46, according to the novelist, "except the province of North Western Frontier Province the Muslim League won with majority seats. The boat of Unionists had sunk in the Punjab.

They had met with crushing defeat by the Muslim League. Where the Muslim League had won eighty seats, the opportunists got only nine.”¹⁰

Hijazi interpreted the situation of elections with his prejudice against all other regional parties who had dared to counter the politics of religious nationalism championed by the Muslim League. Moreover, the words used by the novelist clearly indicate that he was in favour of the Muslim League and its spearheading of a cause of creating separate state of Pakistan on the basis of religious nationalism.

If we compare the novelist’s understanding about the election results in Punjab, Ian Talbot writes that Muslim League’s success was its ability to link “Pakistan idea with popular aspirations and secondly in its growing influence elsewhere in India which created a bandwagon effect.”¹¹ The result was that “the Unionist Party was reduced to a rump of 18 members in the 175 strong Assembly.”¹² Moreover, “the Unionist Party’s power had also disintegrated in the rural Muslim seats. The Muslim League captured all but 11 seats of these. It had made a clean sweep in the Ambala and Jullundur divisions which following partition would go to India.”¹³ The Muslim League had captured more seats in the western parts of the Punjab and the result was that “in the Multan and Lahore divisions, it had won twenty one and twenty two respectively of the twenty four seats. Only in the Rawalpindi division had it received a slight check. But even here, it bagged fourteen out of the twenty-one seats. The Muslim League added two more seats after the elections, when Sir Jamal Khan Leghari and Major Ashiq Hussain crossed the floor from the Unionist Party.”¹⁴ The situation as depicted in the *Khaak aur Khoon* and the historical books has many similarities although the language used in novel is more dramatized what is a characteristic of majority of novels.

The novelist, then, sets for describing the rationale behind the partition of the Punjab and Bengal and writes that,

...the Congress that considered the partition of India to be vivisection of cow into two parts started demanding for partition of the Punjab. Not only this, they also

demanded partition of Bengal and Assam. They presented their argument that since the Muslims of the Punjab and Bengal do not like to be governed by rule of the Hindus in united India, the Hindus of west Punjab and west Bengal also reject to be under the rule of Muslim majority. Therefore, for the protection of life, property and civilization of Hindus and other minorities, the partition of these provinces is inevitable. The logic of Congress was accepted by the newly appointed last viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten and he announced on 3 June that these provinces will also be partitioned along with partition of India. However, referendum was announced for Silhet, North-Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan.¹⁵

The British government had now decided to partition British India. However, according to the 3 June Plan, the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal had also to be partitioned. The Muslim majority provinces were given opportunity to decide whether they would like to accede to Pakistan or not. The West Punjab, the East Bengal and Sindh were given this right to be exercised through Assemblies. Baluchistan was to exercise this right through royal Jirga and the NWFP and Silhet were to exercise this right through the mechanism of referendum on the basis of adulthood suffrage.

The responsibility of the partition of provinces of the Punjab and Bengal fell on the shoulders of a British Judge Sir Cyril Radcliffe along with a team of Congress and Muslim League nominated Judges. According to Ishtiaq Ahmad, "The Punjab Boundary Commission comprised of Chairman, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, and four members: two, Justice Din Muhammad and Justice Muhammad Munir nominated by the Muslim League and Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan and Justice Teja Singh, nominated by Congress."¹⁶ However, the ironical situation was the Radcliffe did not attend any of the ten days meetings of Commission that met in Lahore between 21 July and 31 July 1947. All sessions were conducted without chairman of the Commission. The arrangements were made to have "the records of the proceedings flown to his office in Delhi for his perusal."¹⁷ One of major factor for the selection of Radcliffe to be the

Chairman of Punjab Boundary Commission was that he had never been to India during his life time before this assignment and he was, thus, expected to be neutral and objective in his deliberations since he had no friendships or enmities the kind of which officers serving in India could possibly have developed. His decisions were meant to be reached at on the basis of perusal of facts and records provided to him in his office in Delhi.

According to the Hijazi's assessment of the decisions of this Award,

The Radcliffe Award, instead of ceasing at Sutlej and Bias reached to the bank of river Ravi. Certainly its logic was that of Mahasabha. The areas between Sutlej-Beas and Ravi which were of Muslim majority were considered to be disrupting for canals and railways system if given to Pakistan while on the basis of two Hindu and Sikh majority two tehsils of Amritsar, whole Amritsar was made part of India. The Muslim majority tehsils across Beas were also given to India. The Muslim majority Gurdaspur which was to fall in Pakistan according to 3 June plan was given to India so that canals starting from Madhupur should be handed over to Hindustan. The Muslim population in Ajnala was two times more than Hindus and Sikhs but its being part of district Amritsar, it was given to India.¹⁸

It is not astonishing to know that the novelist is not satisfied with the partitioning of India as per the Radcliffe Award. Actually, all of the parties in this process were not satisfied with the allocation of areas. The Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were so much wedded to various places across India that it was near to impossible to get all communities satisfied. The partition had necessarily to be arbitrary.

Radcliffe had already given this impression of likelihood of dissatisfaction of parties when he announced that "an agreed solution of the boundary problem" was not possible due to the wide "divergence of opinion" between the Judges.¹⁹ Therefore in such circumstances, three judges agreed that Cyril Radcliffe himself would present his own solution to this predicament. This

irony was expressed by Radcliffe himself on the evening of 14 August in a letter written to his stepson. Radcliffe wrote:

I thought you would like to get a letter from India with a crown on the envelope. After tomorrow evening nobody will ever again be allowed to use such stationery and after 150 years British rule will be over in India—Down comes the Union Jack on Friday morning and up goes—for the moment I rather forget what, but it has a spinning wheel or a spider’s web in the middle. I am going to see Mountbatten sworn in as the first Governor-General of the Indian Union at the Viceroy’s House in the morning and then I station myself firmly on the Delhi airport until an aeroplane from England comes along. Nobody in India will love me for the award about the Punjab and Bengal and there will be roughly 80 million people with a grievance and will begin looking for me. I do not want them to find me. I have worked and travelled and sweated—oh I have sweated the whole time (New Delhi, 15 August 1947).²⁰

It is evident from the foregoing letter written by Radcliffe in which he expresses his apprehension that nearly 80 million population will be having grievances resulting from displacement and inundation associated with partition. He was also terrified by the scale of disturbances due to which he had to get first plane going from Delhi to Britain soon after the transfer of power lest someone might try to attack or harm Radcliffe. He writes that the disturbed people will be soon looking for me and he wanted to escape back his home country.

The novelist has portrayed the British government to be partisan in nearly all affairs associated with partition of India generally and partition the Punjab and Bengal particularly. This theme is observable through the novel *Khaak aur Khoon*. For example, he writes that the spillover effect of the events taking place in Punjab and Bengal spread over to whole India and the Muslims living in Delhi, the seat of capital for the British Indian Empire and before than this, could not save their lives and properties from loot and plunder going on. Hijazi writes that, “The government, instead of capturing Stein Guns and Rifles of

Hindus and Sikhs, was busy in snatching knives and sticks for burning purpose.”²¹ Hijazi has painted a highly partisan picture on the part of the British government which cannot be corroborated by the primary and secondary historical sources available on the subject. He is of the opinion that in the novel that despite various pledges of neutrality and claims of governmental control, “the walls of Red Fort in Delhi and the surrounding bazars were full of corpses and dead bodies of Muslims. The hands of brutality were crushing the humanity all across the city. The first chapter of Delhi’s history of rule by Gandhi’s disciples was being written with the blood of Muslims. No doubt, Lord Mountbatten was viceroy and Nehru was prime minister of India but the hooligans were ruling in Delhi.”²²

The partition of Indian is a theme and an important event in the history of modern South Asia that has attracted the attention of a large number of historians. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that partition is a series of events on which the largest number of books have been produced in India and Pakistan, both the countries which were created as a result of the partition. However, critics of modern South Asian historiography assert that the historians, by and large, in both the states have clung to nationalist perspective of history in which ‘the other’ has been demonized as ‘the enemy’ and perpetrator of all the mayhem, loot and plunder, murder, rape, putting properties on fire and dislocation of millions of people associated with partition of India. In Mohammad Waseem’s words, the “master narrative of Pakistan has drawn massively on construction of the Hindu demon, personified as India after partition.”²³ He opines that the construction of the Hindu demon was taken up early on during the active pursuit of Muslim nationalist struggle for the creation of a separate country. Jinnah called Gandhi as ‘the dictator of Congress’ and he viewed Hindu Mahasabha and Congress as two sides of the same coin. The Muslim League championed the narrative of Muslim nationalism that covered history, art, literature, language, icons, business activity, jobs and dress code of Muslims distinctive from the Hindus. Waseem argues that ‘history fast became a handmaiden of nationalism’.²⁴ Thus Pakistan was conceived as a country without historical consciousness because the state

formation took place in ideological terms disassociated from its territorial boundaries. For decades, “adherence to the Ottoman empire as a Symbol of Muslim ascendancy along with Pan-Islamism as an ideology made the Muslim elite look towards the classical lands of Islam” and the literary works including Hali’s *Musaddas*, Shibli Nomani’s history books about the Prophet of Islam and his companions, Iqbal’s poetry, Hafiz Jalandhari’s *Shahnama-i-Islam* and Nasim Hijazi’s historical novels.²⁵

Since partition was conceived by religion, delivered through unprecedented violence and commemorated in historiography by sacrifice, the people who had actually suffered partition did not get mention in history books. Their sufferings, agonies and individual as well as collective experience was given voice by the novels of the time and decades after. Thus, the gap of historiography was filled by various genre of literature particularly Urdu novel. Nasim Hijazi wrote multiple of novels but *Khaak aur Khoon* is very significant regarding the portrayal of partition of India.

Conclusion

The novel *Khaak aur Khoon* written by Nasim Hijazi is an important part of fiction literature and it focusses on the events which led to partition of India in 1947. Throughout the historical narrative that runs through this novel, the novelist has provided Muslim nationalist perspective in which the Muslims have been shown as being on the receiving end while other communities and the British government doing injustice to the Muslim community. The novel has brought to light various crimes committed by miscreants during the partition time because the authority of the British government had crumbled and nobody was filling the gap. The British were busy in winding up their Empire while the Congress was busy in securing more and more areas in India and acceding princely states. The common people, as a result, were thrown on the mercy of the circumstances. Nasim Hijazi, being a popular fiction writer, has fully exhibited his masterly control over the story. Since he was himself a migrant from East Punjab, he fully understood what had transpired, having seen all the scenes of loot and plunder, atrocities and violence. Thus, the novel provides common man’s perspective, a subaltern understanding of events of history during the eventful time of partition of India.

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