

A Chronicle of Violence, Terror, Displacement and Suffering: Reviewing “Chitra Nadir Pare” and “Meghe Dhaka Tara” through The Lens of Partition

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Abstract

India's 1947 partition precipitated the world's biggest human movement, undermining ideas of country, citizenship, and identity and subjecting migrants to terrible brutality and exploitation as refugees within their formerly unified state. The protracted refugee issue and the prolonged period of migration had significant social consequences over several decades, subverting how people defined themselves in regards to the nation and state, their race and ethnicity, their faith, their family and neighbors, and finally themselves. Partition politicized identity by generating labels that imposed rigid limits on individuals, therefore limiting and suppressing individual character and obliterating conventional assimilation mechanisms. This essay examines the migrant people's sense of belonging and national identity during the partition era through the lens of two films: Tanvir Mokammel's “Chitra Nadir Pare” and Kamaleshwar Mukherjee's “Meghe Dhaka Tara”. The paper will also examine the people's lives during partition and their physical and emotional battle to survive. Additionally, it seeks to critically analyze the formation of identity and how this motivates their life choice.

Key Words: Partition, Displacement, Suffering, Struggle, Root

Introduction

When the British eventually left India in August 1947, the subcontinent was partitioned into two separate nation states: India, where the majority population was Hindu, and Pakistan, where the majority population was Muslim. Immediately, one of the largest migrations in human history began, as millions of Muslims travelled to West and East Pakistan (the latter of which is now known as Bangladesh), while millions of Hindus and Sikhs followed suit. Hundreds of thousands of people never made it.

Across the Indian subcontinent, civilizations that had coexisted peacefully for over a millennium launched a horrifying outburst of communal warfare, including one side occupied by Hindus and Sikhs and the other side occupied by Muslims—a communal genocide that was as unforeseen as it was unparalleled. Punjab and Bengal — provinces on India's western and eastern borders, respectively — experienced particularly tremendous carnage, with killings, fires, forced conversions, widespread kidnappings, and horrific sexual violence. Almost a hundred thousand women were violated, and many were deformed or dismembered as a result.

These partitioning incidents have been documented in countless news reports, books, documentaries, films, and television shows. Among these, two films, "Chitra Nadir Pare" and "Meghe Dhaka Tara," stand out above the rest due to their expertise at portraying incidents as these two films are quite astounding and deeply thought provoking.

History of Partition

Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, declared the first division of Bengal in 1905. Although the magnitude of the kingdom was presented as a reason for partition, the true motivation was the British goal of dividing Hindus and Muslims. While Muslims were largely satisfied with the outcome, Hindus were incensed, seeing it as England's renowned divide and rule policy. Lord Curzon, on the other hand, argued that state partition was designed to allow the administration to administer the country more efficiently.

Due to the fact that the partition created a substantial Hindu minority in East Bengal and a significant Muslim minority in West Bengal, conflicting opinions on the partition developed, culminating in a number of rallies and agitations. As a result, in 1911, the two provinces were combined.

Bengal's second partition happened in 1947, concomitant with India's partition. The 'Bengal National Assembly' voted on June 20 to hold three separate votes to decide Bengal's fate. Bengal would almost certainly be partitioned after the conclusion of three separate elections. According to the 'Mountbatten Plan,' Hindu-majority West Bengal became a part of India, while Muslim-majority West Bengal became a part of Pakistan. Following partition, the boundaries of the two newly formed provinces were decided by the following 'Boundary Commission,' chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe.

The Refugee Crisis

Along with the movement between East and West Bengal, a massive population shift occurred in Punjab. Due to extensive sectarian violence in Punjab right before the partition in 1947, Punjab experienced a massive population shift. In Bengal, human exchange occurred gradually. After the 1947 split, the Bengal migrant flow lasted another 30 years. Concerns over Hindus' and

Muslims' safety in Pakistan fueled the flight. So East Bengal's wealthy and higher-caste Hindus went first. They were followed easily by educated and upper-and middle-class families. Poorer people and Hindus from lower castes found it difficult to relocate. Many of them were farmers with no other skills beyond farming, so their sole assets were immobile land holdings. For that, many hindus returned to Bangladesh, the former East Bengal.

However, religious strife in East Pakistan forced Hindus to evacuate Pakistan in 1950. By 1951, over 2.5 million people had fled East Bengal to India. During the next two decades, many Bengali Hindus left Pakistan due to religious conflicts. They had to escape Pakistan if the two countries disagreed on a political issue. Worse, in 1971, the Pakistani army launched "Campaign Searchlight," a targeted military offensive against ethnic Bengalis. By 1973, almost six million East Bengali refugees had entered India.

Portrayal of Partition in “Chitra Nadir Pare”

“Chitra Nadir Pare” depicts nationalism and a sense of belongingness via the characters' pain and rejection of reality during the partition period. The film begins with children playing together on the banks of the Chitra river, regardless of their nationality, religion, or any other distinctions or stages of life. Nonetheless, the sense of belonging imprinted by their forefathers is expressed in the following phrase spoken by one of the children and the film's central character, Minu. She states that wild ducks have no home and spend their winters in many fens. Her friend responds that it must be enjoyable, but Minu then quotes her father, who states that those who do not own a home are the most wretched people in the world. The characters' portrayal of the feeling of leaving one's ancestral home casts a pall over their lives.

According to the character Shashikant, the advocate who spent his entire life by the river Chitra and deposited his ancestors' ashes in the river, one must walk firmly on the land of one's forefathers. The migrants' life expectancy is contingent upon their acceptance and treatment by the local populace. They are the victims of nation-state conflicts. Despite the fact that the majority and privileged classes were aware of the effects of partition and its effect on migrants, they were cornered and regarded as the 'other'. When the mentally unstable character inquires every passing if they are coming or departing, and also remarks that either way is the same, this comment displays a sense of indifference to the conditions as well as a sense of similarity to the suffering of all migrants. It is obvious that the characters' depiction of a sense of belongingness reflects the overall conceptual idea of the people who suffered the heinous effect of partition.

They were also mocked through words due to their minority status. While Hindus used to pronounce 'kaichi' rather than 'kechi,' they were labeled as being distinct in terms of language. Even minor characters, such as the barber Bijoy, make reference to terms such as "requisite (requisition)" and "refugee" and claim to have picked up a slew of new words since the partition.

This might seem insignificant in the grand scheme of life, but it is a reflection of how the use of selective words can impact the use of language and turn it into an instrument of dominance.

The multiplicity imposed on the Hindu indigenous peoples made life so unbearable that they were compelled to flee their original homeland. Although Shashi Kant was a Hindu native, he mocked those who fled the region, claiming that they were "sons of Lakkhan Sen, cowards only know how to leave." However, his subsequent sense of displacement prompted him to make several conflicting statements, such as: "What is the point of planting new saplings now?" "Who will consume the fruits?" They contradicted their morality as a result of living in constant conflict. They were fearful of the future, desired to live in the motherland, believing they belonged there, but the impact of partition instilled in them an ingrained fear of losing ethnic identity. This is never going to allow them to settle down quietly.

Religious differences played a significant role in the novel, illustrating how individuals suffer as a result of their beliefs and ignorance. There was a subtle contradiction between their method of speaking and their true thoughts about each partition-related subject. The key Hindu characters depicted the caste system of Hinduism, their own ceremonies, and the representation of life among Muslims, which let the viewers understand the distinctions and hardships. Shashikant says on this point,

"You don't mind eating rice farmed by Muslims, but a single touch by them and all hell breaks loose?"

The economic situation of the inhabitants also plays a significant role, as the wealthy or solvent, such as Shashikant, didn't suffer much from the division, whilst those who had nothing fled the area without hesitation, as they had little choice and nothing to lose in terms of possessions. The remarks made by the barber, Bijoy, "Here or there, same for us", reflect the situation perfectly.

A single decision by a higher authority altered the course of the lives of people who had spent their entire lives in the nation. Shashi Kanta's comment exemplifies the decision's peculiarity:

"One Englishman, Mr. Radcliffe, drew a pencil line, and our country became strange to us!"

The suffering people's consciousness also had a significant influence on their sense of belongingness, as Comrade Jatin explains, building a secular consciousness does not happen overnight. He also takes an optimistic stance on the subject, stating that the situation will undoubtedly deteriorate within one or two future generations. They were made to forget their origins and who they were by one particular person. Nipen responds that history has drawn the line. While history may have made the decisions, history did not bear responsibility for their belongingness or true identity.

The film chronicles a series of sad occurrences brought about by partition. Among the most remarkable is a scene in which we watch as the protagonist, Badol, dies during a movement.

However, the film's portrayal of women is more tragic than this occurrence, in which Basasnti, a significant character, becomes a victim of rape and, as a woman and a minority, takes her own life to escape terrible shame.

The film concludes on a melancholy note, with Minati accidentally losing her father. For her, this felt like the end of the world. Because her father was the anchor that kept her in that location. Once the root is removed, her ironclad determination to cling to her birthplace is also lost. Everything seems to be pointless to her.

Minati bids farewell to her ancestral land at the film's conclusion, singing a Rabindranath Thakur song:

“Where does the road end? Where is end? What is there in the end?

So much desires, so many endeavors, where it all blends?
Waves of weeps rise and fall, dense darkness befall.
Shore is there for sure, where it is can't apprehend?

I ponder on my own while chasing illusions alone.
Guess, this yearns has no ends, fears these I apprehend.
Torn sails, broken helm, yet sorrow rows with no intends”

This rounds up the perfect theme of identity crisis and the helplessness of the migrants, which is prominent throughout the film.

Portrayal of Partition in “Meghe Dhaka Tara”

In the film "Meghe Dhaka Tara," the sense of belonging is reflected throughout the film through the portrayal of the main character, Nilkanta Bagchi, 's proclivity for profound immersion in his subconscious. The film begins with two youngsters playing separately in a maze, becoming disoriented and eventually coming face to face and asking each other, "Where is our path back home?" This specific initiation establishes the protagonists as two nations that have been divided and are fighting to find their way back to their true home. This befitting concept is blatant when Nilkanta exclaims, "What do you mean? Can there be two Bengals? East and west! " Even the chorus expresses a sense of disconnection, chanting: "We have no destination... There is no homeland..... "

Nilkanta Bagchi, the protagonist, is a director concerned with the state's larger issues. He is gravely concerned about the partition and truly sympathizes with the traveler. The plight of migrants and the atrocities perpetrated against indigenous people are depicted in the film directed by Nilkanta through a staged play. He attempts to demonstrate in his dramas how the suppression of the truth is manufactured through deceptive representations. In a drama, Nilkanta revolves

around a sick migrant woman. She is displayed lying sick, and a reporter urges her to smile in order to get a photograph of her expressing her happiness at becoming an emigrant, but she is too ill to do so. Later in the story, a local attempts to make her laugh by poking her in order to convey the expected image of her well-being. " By doing so, Nilkanta and the film allude to the immigrants' plight. Even though they were in pain, they were supposed to simulate happiness in order to maintain the native's moral compass's integrity.

These dramas are the representation of Nilkanta's subconscious. As people are not comfortable with coming face to face with these issues, they do not achieve remarkable commercial success. This drives him towards depression and, as a result, hallucinations start to occur continuously. With these hallucinations, Nilkanta comes face to face with his subconscious and squabbles about a plethora of unresolved issues.

In one of these psychotic episodes, Nilkanta confronts one of his stage actors who claims all of Nilkanta's actors live in "No Man's Land". He also says that they neither have any home nor any address. Nilkanta responds that he, too, is a refugee. He is without a country, a group, friends, or family. He has the same sensations as a nomad or a vagabond. This exacerbates the identity issue.

"Our soil belongs to our soiled hands."- The echo formed by the chorus of drama and the moments in which innocent victims of migration give their lives for the sake of freedom to live in their mother land intensifies the sensation of belongingness to a whole new level. Neelkant's subconscious continues to reflect on the themes he wished to depict through his tragedies. He desired the liberty of his own people. He sought freedom to live in a country where he would not be a victim of oppression and would not have to witness his people struggling and being treated unfairly due to their minority status.

The misery also reflects when individuals begin to assert that the century is nearing an end and that they must take action. Because sitting idly will not assist them in living a life of liberty. It's not as if they're unaware that they must struggle for their independence and the associated implications. To this, Neelkant responds that if there is a state, there must be conspirators, and in order to obtain their own independence by conquering all the obstacles to belonging to their roots, they must be fearless.

The theme of oppression is shed light on by both the scenarios and dialogs of the film. For instance, in response to Neelkant's query, one of the activists living in asylum stated that while raping an activist in police custody is justified under the rules of the people's republic, smuggling even a small amount of alcohol is illegal! Additionally, he stated that the Bengali people have tolerated this type of abuse since 1905. The frequent use of sarcasm heightens the ridicule of the social order that permits brutality towards activists who have suffered as a result of partition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both of the films begin similarly but diverge in their conclusion. "Chitra Nodir Pare," starts with children discussing wild ducks that have no permanent home, and in "Meghe Dhaka Tara," two youngsters who are wandering and searching for their way home. These two express a similar sense of homelessness as the refugees had because of partition. The ending parts are a bit differently represented as the song by Rabindranath Tagore at the end of "Chitra Nodir Pare" sung by Minati gives the feeling of departure, whereas the song at the end of "Meghe Dhaka Tara" gives the sense of a new journey. With these dissimilarities, both of the films resonate with similarities too. Despite these distinctions, both films share certain parallels. Shashikant and NilKanta, the two central protagonists, both have a stubborn streak when it comes to idealism. They are similarly similar in their portrayal of migrants' suffering, and through their brilliant depiction of the anguish, brutality, terror, and displacement faced by partition victims, they have become timeless masterpieces.

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