

## **Graphic Pains, Persecuted Memories- Dismantling the Narrative Spaces Within Selected Texts from *This Side, That Side***

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a critical inquiry into selected narratives from the partition anthology *This Side, That Side* edited by Vishwajyoti Ghosh - namely 'Border' by Kaiser Haq and Hemant Puri, 'Which Side?' by Ravish Kumar, Shveta Sarda and Ikroop Sandhu, 'A Letter from India' by Mahmood Farooqui and Fariha Rahman, and 'Know Directions Home?' By Nina Sabnani- probing into the trauma, the memory of pain, and the loss incurred from partition. Brendan O'Leary in his essay *Analyzing partition: Definition, classification and explanation* defines partition as 'the division of an entity into parts.' For a nation like India, which is a conglomeration of cultures, confluences, identities, and existences, the period of partition was an incursion of its very soul, its existence- 'entity' as O'Leary calls it. Partition has perhaps been the most tragic saga in the recorded annals of history of the nation that is India and her neighbors as the tragedy that this period ushered in, infected millions of lives across the landscape- physically and psychologically. Partition literature is a testimony to those times, those appalling moments and memories that has forever tarnished the spatial historiography of the sub-continent. *This Side, That Side* is an exemplary addition to the already rich collection of partition literature. An anthology of graphic narratives 'restoring partition', the collection opens new dimensions and questionnaire on studying and analysing partition literature. For one, the anthology chronicles the trauma of partition in a graphic format- a form very novel and recent in Indian literature and its corresponding academic intrigues. The visual narrative space coalesces the tragedy and its associated parameters in a format, which owing to its presentation heightens the reader experience. The paper looks to deconstruct the semantic and semiotic spaces within the narratives, perceive the silences within the texts and dismantle the memorial spaces within the narrative constructs thereby analysing the atypical format which re-creates partition.

**Keywords:** Partition, graphic, trauma, memory, history, identity

Trauma has been intricately related to human history, memory, and civilization. It is a kind of symbiotic kinship which can never be negated. Documented annals of human historiography are essentially tragic in its disposition and trauma and suffering inhabits a significant position in this entire paraphernalia. Trauma narratives are literary records of

that very tragic human experience and therefore a substantial portion of literary forms consist of narratives that essentialise the pain, the tragic memories and the unspoken silences of wounds that are entwined with human existence. Each nation adorning the global geographical space have their own share of trauma and pain, expressed in their literature in one form or the other. When it sieves down to a vast and geo-politically significant land mass like that of the Indian sub-continent the entire trauma narrative becomes much more complicated owing to the intricate politico- historiography of the region. Tryst with a past riddled with invasions, wars and comprising of a diverse socio-economic and cultural demography the regions recorded annals emerge to be complex and varied. But perhaps the colonial invasion from major European nations and the subsequent de-colonisation after almost two hundred years of extraneous regulation, seems to have caused an entire paradigm shift in the narration of the region that is the Indian sub-continent. The infamous partition of the geographical landmass was the dreariest end possible to this two-hundred years of subjugation endured by the populace. A cartographical dissection in its wake brought about countless memories of loss, pain, torture, and miseries. “Even while receding into a past of over half a century, partition remains a reality, more so as it becomes a concentrated metaphor for violence, fear, domination, difference, separation, and the unsatisfactory resolution of problems; a metaphor, in one word, for the past. one that goes on making the present inadequate” (Samaddar 22). Partition narratives are testimonials of those traumatic spaces. Indian Literature has a rich trove of texts affecting partition and its associated parameters. “The plethora of scholarly studies and anthologies focused on Partition have tried to analyse the innumerable aspects of this historic moment from various perspectives in the attempt to either evoke the event, rememorate and better understand it, or to assess its social, political, historical, national, and emotional implications. However, the ethical issues Partition continues to generate, the intricate problems and disturbing questions raised by its multifaceted violence, and the myriad untold stories still waiting to be revealed are reason enough to keep looking into the matter for further answers” (Ragobete and Marino 1). Partition literature, therefore, continues to venture into novel directions, to newer avenues, in order to dis-entangle it further, to continue questioning the spaces within, and the lingering effect that they generate even in contemporary times. This rupture in the historiography of the nations concerned, thus finds numerous vents of expression essentialising the tragedy of the incident. Vishwajyoti Ghosh’s anthology *This Side, That Side* is a unique and comparatively recent addition to this corpus which ‘restories’ the saga of partition in the creative graphic format.

Graphic narratives are inimitable texts which function on the basic premise of combining writings with artwork. Hence, the picture within the textual space perhaps heightens the reader experience as the artwork can reflect the moods and emotions of the participants in the text vividly. Also, the symbolic space within a narrative increases manifold as the artwork also encompasses within its manifold the subtle symbolic and semantic suggestions. Ghosh’s anthology traverses in this very route. For quite a significant amount of time, graphic narratives are working in the direction of poignant representation of humanity itself conceivably to free itself from the usual discourse of juvenility associated with the form. Graphic narratives emerge to be archives of humanity itself, paving the way for a larger critical and academic insight into the trajectory of civilization. Brister and Walzer observe, “From *Maus* to *Persepolis* to *The Burma Chronicles* to Joe Sacco’s multiple work the graphic narrative is increasingly

utilized as a genre in the representation of human rights atrocities in complex and productive ways. Recent scholarship notably Hillary Chute's groundbreaking work on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Wendy Kozol's analysis of ethical spectatorship in Sacco's *Palestine*, has focused primarily on issues of historical representation in graphic narratives, especial when considering archival work and the depiction of traumatic histories" (138). *This Side, That Side* is a wonderful addition to this already celebrated and heritage collection of graphic narratives portraying crucial junctures in the history of humanity. Vishwajyoti Ghosh aptly sub-tiles his collection 'restorying partition'. As the anthology proclaims, these tales have been 'curated' by Ghosh. He is like an antique collector who accumulates stories depicting this traumatic phase. Partition is a long-drawn process for the Indian-subcontinent. Though the initial cartographic division took place in 1947, the socio-political tension and the subsequent influx and outflow of population and the associated tragic interface continued till 1972- the birth of present-day Bangladesh. The narratives selected for discussion in this paper- 'Border' by Kaiser Haq and Hemant Puri, 'Which Side?' by Ravish Kumar, Shveta Sarda and Ikroop Sandhu, 'A Letter from India' by Mahmood Farooqui and Fariha Rahman and 'Know Directions Home?' By Nina Sabnani- attempts to chronicle this entire episode bringing forth the problematic spaces that lie embedded within the textual spaces and the subsequent memories of the characters who become a part of these discourses. The texts essentialize the inherent trauma that partition ushered in. 'Border' by Kaiser Haq and Hemant Puri has the physicality of cartography and the associated division (both physical and spiritual) as the focal point of the text. The artwork of the story amplifies the central of idea of dissection and the socio-political construct that surrounds it. The story has a curious image of a girl playing hop-scotch on a map- single drawing which is loaded with a plethora of meanings summing up the entire political nuances and ideas behind the partition. The metaphorical dimension heightens the tragic impact as the entire moment is reduced to a mere game of political aficionados- the victims emerge to be mere pawns in a greater political structure. The text opens with a complete deconstruction of the concept of border and the other side- it is this unfathomable space where dreams are realized. "Let us say you dream of a woman, and because she isn't anywhere around, imagine her across the border" (Haq and Puri, 44). At the same time the other side is also manifestation of the unattainable space which can never be realized- the border, thus, functions on this curious dichotomy of opposites existing at the same moment. It is interesting to note the analogy of the nation to a woman, a lady-love, rather than the accepted imagery of a mother signifies a marked departure from texts usually having nation as the focal point. The creators seem to be talking to any unknown reader in a 'frontier town', one who sees the border and imagines his woman to be on the other side. What seems to be a very poignant and romantic opening act, suddenly plunges into a grim and bleak schema-

But instead of crossing over you lie dreaming of the woman, and the border: perfect knife that slices through the earth without the earth's knowing, severs and joint at the same instant, runs inconspicuously through modest households, creating wry humour- whole families eat under one flag, shit under another, humming a different national tune. (Haq and Puri 46-48)

Borders act like sharp blades reaping through the souls of the nations- nations which were one the previous night. Borders become synonymous to bureaucratic disjointed landmasses which in essence is one, fractured locations and dissociated identities- and

everything that is present, becomes past, becomes a convoluted memory with a single drawing of a line. The imaginary lines of borders, the existence of which is validated only in paperwork becomes more tangible and physical than any human-constructed obstruction as it creates disjointed spaces alongside constructing the other- the one who lives on either side of the border. The text seems to infuse the entire discourse on borders, a papered cartographical existence with life and vibrancy that disrupts the entire existential procedure. Creation and definition of spaces, particularly ones that are charted out on paper through cartography and imaginary lines like borders by the system according to its convenient needs, is the focal point of the text. The entire notion of space becomes political, more controlled rather than a free-flowing idea that transcends the dogmatic notions. According to Sabina Hussain-

The creation of borders gives an imaginary authentication to an In- and Outside and defines their specific spaces. Space thus has to be understood as a multidimensional entity comprising notions of territorial dimensions as well as social and cultural characteristics. It is a zone filled with concepts of political, historical, and cultural representations. (104)

The idea of an area comprising of us and them, the in and out, ours and theirs emerge thereby constructing the idea of liminal spaces within the text. The dry sarcasm which pervades the text is haunting as the writers enforce the idea of a single household being partitioned owing to an imaginary line with national anthems being transformed overnight. The entire idea of a national identity, of citizenship, of belonging deviates in the singularity of a moment, under the probing of an imaginary line. The entirety of nothingness that manifests with partition is perhaps infused with a vague romanticization of death by the end of the text, the only state of human life which perhaps erases all forms of identifying markers, all the trauma, all the borders- “You lie down on the fateful line under a livid moon. You and your desire and the border are now one. You raise the universal flag of flaglessness” (Haq and Puri 49). Death perhaps emerges as the sole unifying factor within all partition narratives that primarily deal with pain, loss, and separation. Ghosh’s anthology reinforces the idea.

The idea of national identity and its simultaneous deconstruction and re-attribution is central to partition narratives. Tri Windari observes, “There is still an unclear definition of national identity, due to its complicated nature. However, despite this imprecision, national identity has proven to have substantial impacts on human lives and on nations throughout history” (81). She goes on to state that national identity is a variation of social identity. It is dynamic in its very basic nature and in a state of continuous flux and is predisposed by various socio-economic and linguistic factors, but at its very core national identity is something that is undetermined and the entire discourse seems to take place in an ‘imaginary realm’ (81). When it comes to partition narratives, a singular moment, an imaginary political line becomes the central determinant of identity and its associated parameters. The texts taken up for scrutinization reinforces this point time and again- through the characters, the speech-texts, and the artwork. All the participants within the realm of the narrative structure are in constant search of that identity- identity which have changed instantaneously, political markers which do not allow to associate with long-lost relatives, state-decisions which comes in the way of two entwined souls, or makes a community move places in frantic search of a settled identity. Rituparna Roy writes, “The Partition is a historical legacy handed down unwanted to the children of the

three nations India, Pakistan and later Bangladesh” (31). Her observation is astute and problematic as these children might not have had the contemporary identity but rather owes it to that singular moment of fracture in sub-continental historiography. ‘A Letter from India’, originally a short story in Urdu titled ‘Hindustan se Ek Khat’ by Intizar Hussain and translated into English by Mahmood Farooqui, has this jeopardization of identity at its very core. The writer of the eponymous letter, a man who was a resident in India and wrote letters to his nephew in Karachi, was engulfed in a complex identity crisis. His national identity gets intermingled with his religious identity and what emerges out of the entanglement is a persona without any tangible self. He writes to his nephew, “... then one day shaikh siddiq hasan came running to tell me that in Pakistan everybody has become a socialist... I was shocked, but then I remembered that shaikh siddiq hasan is an old congresswala<sup>1</sup> and will always bring bad news about Pakistan...” (Farooqui and Rehman, 76) The man wants to be a part of Pakistan, his soul resides there, yet he has to stay back in India- putting him in a place where he is divided and torn about his nationhood. His national identity is at qualms with his religious affiliation as he cannot identify himself with his own brethren, his own community. The national identity has distanced him from his religious adherence as well-

...there were reports that ahmadis<sup>2</sup> had been declared non-muslims in Pakistan and they are being apprehended in large numbers. I was so relieved to hear that. My son, we live here amidst kaffirs<sup>3</sup>! Right opposite our house the radicals have built a new one-minaret mosque where they loudly say aameen<sup>4</sup> and we are not able to do anything. (Farooqui and Rehman 77)

Partition inevitably brings into question this complex plethora of the sense of belonging, where one finds oneself at a complete loss and in search of an identifiable location which the self can adhere to and establish itself. Along with the trauma, the horror, the deaths and the loss, the entire episode of partition in the context of the Indian sub-continent is a juncture which vilifies the spaces of memory as the individual affected by the occurrence is set on a constant quest of belonging. The writer of the letter very elegantly puts forth this point comparing disintegrated families to fallen straws from a nest. Just as the fallen straws never unite to be a part of the next again, families fragmented rarely become one (Farooqui and Rehman 79). The haunting imagery encompasses the breakage which partition brought in its wake. Families which were together, became distant, unknown entities overnight occupying spaces only within the memory. Memory, recollection, and the in juxtaposition with identity forms the core of the narrative as the central artefact of the text discussed above is a letter discovered. The writer of the letter, though a relative, kin, is now a foreigner governed by a different regime. The letter, the fragment of a memory, intricately relates the entire episode of sub-continental independence and its aftermath with the cognitive spaces of human mind, with the memorial voids that are shaped owing to the trauma.

Trauma and memory create a unique entanglement within a narrative structure to form a semiotic location within which the text operates. Traumatic events affect human pattern of understanding and retention, thereby vilifying the spaces of memory ranging from the individual to the society. Vigdis Broch-Due observes, “‘Trauma’ is clearly a hungry concept consuming some aspects of almost everybody’s experience in its wake, whether in the capacity of sufferers, witnesses, or spectators. ‘Trauma’ spans many trajectories and biographies; it crosses generations and filters into the social memory and

historiography of communities and nations” (23). And when it concerns a historically altering event like that of the partition, it leaves in its wake many raptures, cracks and fragments which completely alter the memorial spaces of those who happen to be a part of the moment. Like a stream of consciousness novel, the spaces of memory within Ghosh’s anthology flow- but the flow is turbulent, disruptive as it carries within itself a lifetime of horror, pain, and sufferings. The texts considered for discussion here have traumatic locations embedded within the memory as a focal trope owing to their narrative locale being a particular moment of sub-continental historiography. The entire narrative episode of ‘Border’ is imaginative- the romantic memory slowly makes way for the political division and finally conjures up a memorial locale of ultimate statelessness. ‘A Letter from India’ as mentioned earlier works with a reminiscing artefact. ‘Which Side?’ and ‘Know Directions Home?’ bring in similar spaces into question as they create the semiotic and symbolic locales within the narrative structure. Characters within the locales of these texts are in a state of constant shift searching for a tangibility in being as they look for a land to call their own. Letters, homes, flags, lands all emerge to be those symbolic extensions and fragments of memory as the people vagrantly tries to establish their entity within a defined locale of a nation. The protagonists of these texts except in ‘Know Directions Home?’ are mostly nameless, faceless entities- microcosmic representatives of the millions affected by the partition. They do not require a name; they are anyone and everyone who was a part of that period of history. Memory in these texts emerges from being romantic, to reminiscing, to downright haunting and tragic. And all these memories transpose to create an annal of human history that continued till 1972 and the liberation of modern-day Bangladesh. This repository emerges to be a document chronicling humanity itself. However, at times these memories are voluntarily shut down or ignored as even memories too seem to cross borders and change national identities in the aftermath of the partition. The original narrator in ‘A Letter from India’ wishes to connect to his long-lost relatives across the borders after seeing the letters. He tries, but falters-

I read this letter and decided to get in touch with my relatives whose names we have forgotten...so I traced the number and made a call. I did not get through after calling many times but I did get a message from my phone company:

‘you called a number with the code 0092<sup>5</sup>.....you must be careful when calling any number with this code. Are you sure you want to call this code?’

I never called again (Farooqui and Rehman 81)

Both relations and emotions must proceed through a state-approved apparatus once the country code gets changed. Even a simple telephone call ignites suspicion, requires sanction of the system, a simple number becomes the enemy, the other, the outsider in a fragile moment of history. Loss of familial ties, of fond recollections were one of the major impacts on human lives during the period. The writers deftly capture the nuances within the text. In keeping tandem with the graphic format, the entire section mentioned above becomes a more poignant read for the readers owing to the associated artwork. The section shows two faceless silhouettes sitting across each other in praying positions with a barbed-wire crossing between them. This imagery is contrasted with that of pigeons sitting on the barb-wire and flowers blooming across the wire. The art intensifies the argument of how every singular aspect of human lives is entangled in a greater political process and the romantic idea of nature being free from every form of human

control. A similar haunting image is found at the end of 'Border' as well with a man lying spread-eagled on a supposed map, underneath the moon with the fencing absent between two poles and birds perched on them who completely defy the divisive nature of the border. 'Which Side' also reiterates the similar idea of how natural creations are beyond this state induced apparatus – "Will they portion away Ganga? Will they portion away Sutlej?" (Kumar and Sindhu 54) Once again the associated artwork heightens the impact of the words- water flowing from a vessel and from the mouth of an animal congregates to create a cracked wall symbolizing the division. The memory of the border and the fence, the barb-wire, the division of states haunts the inhabitants of the texts. They live under this constant haunting of separation and loss. Therefore, their memory conjures up a comfort zone of absence- the absence of the border, the maps and the fence as symbolically highlighted in the artworks like that of the tree with two umbrellas as its roots signifying shade, rootedness, and a dreamscape like romantic ending to the events.

The entire orchestration of separation and the ensuing discourse is primal to all forms of partition narratives. This fear of separation, of displacement always accompanied the questions raised over the political decisions. As already discussed earlier, the common people craved for borderlessness. The division of the landmass, the ongoing turmoil and the affective tragedy that inevitably followed left a nationwide bewilderment. 'Which Side?' have two lovers as protagonists in the troubled times who question the fallacy of the entire process while negotiating the entire question of separation. Written as a 'Laprek'<sup>6</sup> and translated from Hindi by Shveta Sarda, the story has a romantic premise much like 'Border'. The protagonist lovers, in all possibility, are of diverse faiths, and hence the apprehension of getting separated looms large. In midst of their own anxiety, they question the political development that slowly takes shape- "That can't be how nations are made...It isn't some ancestor's land Jinnah and Jawahar are deliberating over." (Kumar and Sandhu 55) Power and political gameplay essentially characterize control. The partition of Indian sub-continent was no different. Much has been deliberated and debated over the power-structure that was functional, but in essentiality the entire process triggered a nationwide exodus and human displacement. This separation at its core aimed to establish a difference- a difference of culture, of religion and language. In its essence, the partition can be categorized under the metaphorical locale of division of property. Kumar and Sindhu are astute in observing this nuance- "who's to know in whose share you will fall, and whose share I'm going to end up in...they will divide us." (57) Division and displacement are two crucial factors that dominate partition narratives. For the characters of the story, the entire process of division of nation comes forth as ludicrous as they are taken aback by the sheer thought of it- they cannot fathom the idea of a nation being divided like an ancestral property. It's not a mere political division but rather a division of culture, of society of practices which had almost taken the place of habits for so long. Suranjana Choudhury writes-

The traumatic process of displacement contains within it the destruction of lived space, cultural practice, and social ties. The question of survival struggles and the concomitant violence with respect to refugee conditions raise some important issues pertaining to politicised state policies and strategic rehabilitation programmes. The construction of the sharp borders that was/is inviolable for the partitioned communities in both emotional and material dimensions heightens the gravity of displacement and resettlement. Clearly these spatial divisions

carried with them the violence of human separation and the shocking emergence of an extremely struggling life for the displaced. (2)

Out of the entire context emerges human lives which are devoid of any values, emotions which are disintegrated and scattered across fences and stories which are left unfinished. Perhaps that is the reason behind the search for a constant space bereft of the trauma, the pain, and the dividing lines- a note of optimism with which these narratives conclude. The people, the characters wish to forget, yet they are reminded of it at every instance. The phenomenon can be aptly summed up in the words of Anderson and Levy-

To most people, forgetting is a human frailty to be overcome. More than we realize, however, forgetting is what we want and need to do. Sometimes we confront reminders of experiences that sadden us—as when, after a death or a broken relationship, objects and places evoke memories of the lost person. Other times, reminders trigger memories that make us angry, anxious, ashamed, or afraid. (189)

Memories and their associated parameters govern trauma narratives. Trauma narratives bring into question the power struggle, violence, pain, and identity construction which becomes central to the human-question within these narrative spaces. Dale Pattinson opines that trauma narratives are always positions of political discords. On one side, it becomes important for the survivor to preserve the memory of the event that causes the trauma, but at the same time when it comes to confronting the event, at some point, it becomes crucial that one works through trauma (2). The construction of trauma in any form is always political. Throughout the texts, the characters battle the trauma of partition- they remember it, they are traumatized by it and yet they confront the event nonetheless in their effort to live through it. And for a politically and culturally significant landmass like that of the Indian sub-continent, the impact of a historic event like partition has been tremendous as the aftermath continue to linger for years and even generations, thereby creating a repository of memories which occupies and re-constructs the collective unconscious of the nations involved in the post-partition. One must also remember that the de-colonisation of the country was happening at the same point of time. Moving out of a foreign regime and being thrust into a completely nascent governance, with a catastrophic milieu engulfing the entire situation, the nation found itself at a curious juncture of germinating and re-building itself at the same time. Partition narratives are annals of those struggles as well. As already mentioned earlier the partition, in reality, was a long-drawn process which was not over with the independence in 1947 and the creation of India and East and West Pakistan. The human displacement and migration continued till 1972 until the liberation of East Pakistan and the formation of modern-day Bangladesh. Once again, the exodus, the trauma and the identity crisis which had reared its head almost twenty-eight years ago, came back to haunt the population as the Bangladesh Liberation war began. The partition of 1947 was primarily centered upon religious affiliation. The Bangladesh Liberation war had language as the core marker of identity as the people of the then East Pakistan who were primarily Bengali speaking population, did not wish to be under the governance of the Urdu speaking mother nation in the West. Dorothy Deb aptly records this conundrum-

Pakistan was a geographical oddity as the two provinces of the nation remained separated by almost 2,000 kilometers of the Indian landmass. The two provinces were topographically varied, culturally unfamiliar, and linguistically different

from each other. The only linking factors between these provinces were Islam and the memory of British colonialism. Soon after attaining independence, the difference between the two provinces began to cloud the strength of the common linking factors. West Pakistan was the administrative seat of the nation and all major bureaucratic and military institutions were based out of it. Also, most of the administrative and military positions in Pakistan were held by the West Pakistani elites (mostly Punjabis and Sindhis). As a result, there was a greater concentration of effort and energy into the issues of the western province; and the eastern province was treated like a satellite unit. (59-60)

Nina Sabnani's 'Know Directions Home?' is located inside these circumstances. The title of the story itself is suggestive- it's a quest for settlement, for a place one can call one's home which becomes a prominent marker in the construction of an identity. Her text is a testimony to community culture, to acquiring a national identity and above everything else an account of human resistance. Her narrator Raniben Ratilal Bhanani once again stands out as a common pawn in a bigger political game- "I don't know why they were fighting but India took the land we were on. They were there for 12 months and that is when the shifting about happened" (Sabnani 100). The text is a memoir of the artisan who recounts her experience of moving from Adigaam in Pakistan and settling down in the Kutch region of India. She recalls how they had to move owing to the war, and how they were not allowed to enter India, and how they "sat down and refused to move." The memoir raises uncomfortable questions on the constitution of national identity and what constitutes a citizen. The narrator and her people were not allowed to enter India, they were denied any sort of identification although the land they lived in were seized by the Indian soldiers. The politics of citizenship, the reduction of human lives to almost the same category as that of beasts brings to the to surface the trauma and crisis that being devoid of an identity, a homeland brings in. The narrator was in a state of eternal displacement as the military trucks carried them from one place to the next with more than hundred people being packed inside three trucks. The people were nothing but mere spectators of a greater systematic edifice at deploy. The narrator recalls- "Since we were a refugee camp, many people came to see us: politicians, social workers, government officials" (Sabnani 108) -humanity reduced to a mere spectacle, much like a carnivalesque oddity in the gaze of the system. She recalls their first day at the government allocated barren land where they had nothing to survive on but the government provisions. The barren lands they were allowed to inhabit emerge as metaphorical extension of the sterile lives that were thrust upon them. Devoid of proper habitation, shelter and above all identity, they had to remain like mere existences in an unknown land. One can draw a parallel with the conditions of the Palestinians as illustrated in Joe Sacco's<sup>7</sup> *Footnotes In Gaza*, where Sacco describes the arrival of the Palestinians in Gaza in 1956 and their ensuing skirmish for survival. Literature finds a universal dimension in the description of the refugees whose condition remain the same at any corner of the earth. But surpassing all the pain and humiliation, what emerges triumphant within the context of the story is the indomitable spirit of human defiance and the co-existence of human lives. The narrator and her community were generously helped by the people of the villages near the border with rations and provisions. They sat at the border defiant and unmovable for days before they were taken to Kutch. And it was another eight years wait before the identity was conferred upon them with just a mere announcement. The idea of identity of a human life being intricately connected to a

piece of land is explicit here as the country becomes synonymous with human life and vice versa. Human lives are weighed in terms of socio-political markers and any other existences are conveniently denied. The sarcasm in the tone of the narrator is unmistakable- “Was it that easy for them, I wondered. Who cared? After eight long years the wait was finally over” (Sabnani 109). The status of a refugee has the probability of getting dissolved in an instant, as a new identity takes its place at the very moment. This constant paradigm shifts of identities- from a Pakistani, to a refugee, to an Indian, to an artisan at present in case of Raniben Ratilal Bhanani- forms the pivotal thematic aspect of partition narratives, as the characters remain in a state of constant flux, shifting from trauma to security, from tragedy to different beginnings, with separation at the core of their beings.

Partition literatures emerge to be testimonios of sub-continental historiography and the trauma humanity endures in its struggle for existence. Ghosh’s anthology raises questions at various levels foregrounding the trauma associated with partition. The idea of a nation, the determinant of nationality and citizenship, the construction of a space defined as ‘home’ are several probes that the narratives within the anthology attempts to make, thereby raising relevant and uncomfortable questions in this regard. The narrative spaces are overlaid with the trauma and horror that perpetrates through the characters, the symbolic overtones, the pictures, and the speech-texts thereby creating fictional yet historiographical account of a distressing moment. As a result, a dimension is curated where fiction and history overlaps, muddling the fictionality, riddled with genuine humane reactions. The texts considered for discussion arise to be chronicles of the identity crisis, of politically curated displacements and differences, and a power structure in which the common people emerge to be mere pawns. Nina Sabnani’s characters remain in a state of incessant mutability as they are driven everywhere until their defiance secures a land and an identity for themselves. Pain and sarcasm ladens Haq and Puri’s text when they talk of change of national anthem almost overnight. These symbolic spaces enhance the pathos of the entire episode as human entities lose their meaning, their credibility and emerge as faceless ragdolls in a larger political construct. The texts serve as documents, as memoirs of a tragedy of epic proportion, the after-effects of which lingers even in contemporary times, their specters haunting the memories of three nations. When presented in graphic format, the reader experience increases manifold as the associated artwork voices to the reader and instigates response. The texts considered in this paper caters to this very effect. It is curious to note that the entire anthology comprises of texts presented in the duality of black and white colour. The art panels act like metaphorical extensions of the times which they represent- one which had siphoned off the colours from the lives of the people who were a part of and affected by the trauma of the entire happenings. Hillary Chute observes that how the graphic format can spatially juxtapose past, present, and future in the representation of a historic moment. She is also concerned with how comics, by being in the popular realm, widen possibilities of historical and personal expression transcending the realm of fictionality (452-453). The format of the anthology too, uses a rather unconventional medium, that of the popular graphic arrangement to increase the visible space within partition narratives. The texts under scrutiny talks of this dark historiography of the Indian sub-continent with the visual rendering of the pain through the associated artwork. The texts re-live the horrors of partition with the semiotic spaces riddled with the trauma and the pain of those involved. The symbols and the metaphors- ranging from

the hop-scotching girl on the map, to the trees having umbrella as its roots depict uprooting and a sense of a nation and national identity in a single graphical rendering, all speak of the loss, the horror and the insurmountable amount of tragedy encompasses in the entire period. The sufferers express not through mere words, but through pictures depicting them caught in an identity less void. In tandem with Chute's comments, Vishwajyoti Ghosh's anthology adds a haunting graphical realism and provides a new direction to the study of an already rich collection of partition literature. A unique effort in the genre, *This Side, That Side* is an inimitable assemblage of multi-dimensional texts and the first of its kind which documents an imperative historical period in the history of Indian sub-continent, records human trauma and fortitude presented in a format that re-structures the canonical format of writings, partition narratives and contemporary sub-continental literature.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>a member of the Indian National Congress

<sup>2</sup>a sectorial division among Muslims who believe that the promised Messiah of the end of days have arrived. It is a revivalist movement to which other Muslims do not adhere.

<sup>3</sup>someone who according to Islamic tradition is a non-believer of God, denies His authority and does not follow the tenets of Islam.

<sup>4</sup>a word used in Islam, Judaism and Christianity to end a prayer or a hymn. It confirms the worshipper's belief in God's words or what is being preached.

<sup>5</sup>the country code for Pakistan

<sup>6</sup>an acronym for Laghu Prem Katha or a very short love story, an experimental format of story writing which can fit in someone's social media status. Initiated by famous journalist and news anchor, Ravish Kumar.

<sup>7</sup>Maltese-American journalist and cartoonist. He is best known for his comics journalism and books like *Palestine* (1996), *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009) based on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000) and *The Fixer* (2003) based on the Bosnian war.

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