

To be on the "Right" Side of the Lines: Partition as Portrayed in Shashi Tharoor's *India from Midnight to Millennium and Beyond*

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Abstract

India gained its independence after 200 years of slavery under the uncouth colonizers, the once giant in trade and commerce, art and architecture, politics and philosophy, civilization and the art of living, was reduced to one of the world's poorest economies.

The partition of the land into the two nations of India and Pakistan further added to the burdens of an already impoverished country. Lines meant lives. Families were ruined, friends became enemies. Human feelings were missing. 'Divide et impera' (divide and rule) was the strategy and order of the day. Dividing Hindus and Muslims on religion was a well planned strategy

Key Words: Partition, divide et impera, Independence. remnants of separation

India was bequeathed with a shattered economy, widespread illiteracy and shocking poverty at the time of independence. India was unable to benefit from the many opportunities that opened up in the changing world order. The country remained economically backward, shackled by poverty, fettered by illiteracy and epidemics that killed millions. The partition of the land into the two nations of India and Pakistan further added to the burdens of an already impoverished country. When India finally gained its independence after 200 years of slavery under the uncouth colonizers, the once giant in trade and commerce, art and architecture, politics and philosophy, civilization and the art of living, was reduced to one of the world's poorest economies.

What we inherited in 1947 was a plundered nation stripped of all its glory and power and greatness, reduced to almost half its size and stripped of all its precious resources. However, India did not regret the past, a past of thousands of years of shame and ignominy, a past that would haunt the national conscience for thousands of years to come, a past that was like a scar in the memory of the history of India. The entire politico-economic structure had to be reconstructed for genuine development of the country.

However, the one relief was that all the looters have been chased away and the nation was rededicated to the people of India – for once in the entire history of India there were no aggrandizing colonizers or subjugating rulers and the nation was handed back to the common people to be

ruled by themselves, for themselves and of themselves. Democracy was one great gift the nation finally inherited and embraced from the influence of the European example.

That sad story of partition of India is a bloody legend in itself perpetrated by the British, who divided India on their departure into three pieces leaving a permanent scar on two separate, hostile and perpetually warring countries, India and Pakistan thus condemning the entire subcontinent to years of bitter hostility and economic backwardness which continues to this day.

The tragic comedy of the partition and the careless haste with which it was executed on the Indian subcontinent can be understood very clearly when we consider the fact that the physical partition of India was done in just seven weeks by a complete stranger, a barrister by profession with barely any statistical data at his disposal.

Radcliffe arrived and remained on the soil of India for just six weeks with the single mission of dividing and quitting the country who shamelessly did it with unceremonious hurry. The fatalistic line of partition that he so recklessly drew known as the Radcliffe Line which inevitably ended in massive violence that killed at least one million people and permanently displaced more than 12 million. Radcliffe himself was actually so pained by his deed that he refused to accept his fee of 3000 pounds.

While drawing the border, Radcliffe was faced with unyielding demands on sides, communal tensions, doubtful census numbers, tough economic, administrative and defence considerations and some say even interference from Viceroy

Mountbatten. When he wanted to draw the line, he couldn't get any district line. He drew the line on a normal India map. It was only when his assistant pointed out that Pakistan did not have a major city that Lahore was allotted to the country. This was and remains the most shameful expedient that the British embarked on, in their unseemly haste to leave India. People were out of control, lost all reason and self discipline but the reason they were uprooted is appalling and a constant sore to this day.

This incredible incident attracted the attention of the famous poet W H Auden that he wrote this poem titled *Partition* in 1966.

Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,

Having never set eyes on this land he was called to partition

Between two peoples fanatically at odds,
With their different diets and incompatible gods.

'Time,' they had briefed him in London, 'is short. It's too late

For mutual reconciliation or rational debate:
The only solution now lies in separation.
The Viceroy thinks, as you will see from his letter,

That the less you are seen in his company the better,

So we've arranged to provide you with other accommodation.

We can give you four judges, two Moslem and two Hindu,

To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you.'

Shut up in a lonely mansion, with police night and day

Patrolling the gardens to keep assassins away,
He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,
But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.
The next day he sailed for England, where he quickly forgot
The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,
Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.

Remnants of a Separation is a unique attempt to revisit the Partition through objects that refugees carried with them across the border. These belongings absorbed the memory of a time and place, remaining latent and undisturbed for generations. They now speak of their owner's pasts as they emerge as testaments to the struggle, sacrifice, pain and belonging at an unparalleled moment in history. A string of pearls gifted by a maharaja, carried from Dalhousie to Lahore, reveals the grandeur of a life that once was. A notebook of poems, brought from Lahore to Kalyan, shows one woman's determination to pursue the written word despite the turmoil around her. A refugee certificate created in Calcutta

evokes in a daughter the feelings of displacement her father had experienced upon leaving Mymensingh zila, now in Bangladesh. Written as a crossover between history and anthropology, Remnants of a Separation is the product of years of passionate research. It is an alternative history of the Partition - the first and only one told through material memory that makes the event tangible even seven decades later.

Shashi Tharoor says in 'The Partition: the British game of divide and rule.' 'Seventy years later, it is hard to look back without horror at the savagery of the country's vivisection, when rioting, rape and murder scarred the land, millions were uprooted from their homes, and billions of rupees worth of property were damaged and destroyed.'

Families were ruined, friends became enemies. Human feelings were missing. 'Divide et impera' (divide and rule) was the strategy and order of the day. Dividing Hindus and Muslims on religion was a well planned strategy

Lines meant lives:

Muhammad Muslehuddin Malik and his family left Delhi, narrowly escaping the slaughter on trains bound for Pakistan. He says that he was 14 years old in September 1947 and had just finished high school when one day his maternal uncle brought a horse-drawn carriage to his house and told that they had to leave immediately as there was risk of attacks by Hindu mobs. He was aware that a new country called Pakistan had been created for the Muslims of India, but he never imagined that they would have

to leave their ancestral home and neighborhood because of the religion they believe in.

All the Muslim villages on the outskirts of Delhi were destroyed and the attackers had moved on to residential estates within the capital. They lived in Sabzi Mandi, which was one of the three main Muslim majority areas in addition to Karol Bagh and Pahar Ganj to be targeted by Hindu mobs. They were not prepared or armed to deal with such attacks, so moving out was the only option.

The only safe place left for Muslims was Jama Masjid, they didn't have time to pack or reconsider, and left in a haste in the state they were in. The women of the family observed the purdah and would never step out of the house without covering their faces, but such was the haste that some of them weren't even able to wear a scarf over their head before leaving. The idea of packing jewellery and other prized possessions didn't even cross their minds. It was a matter of life and death, the only thought was safety first.

The military took over the following day and evicted all Muslim households from different parts of the city, including Jama Masjid. Muslims were all moved to Lal Qila, from where they would leave for Pakistan.

No one had ever imagined that they would be uprooted from their hometown in such a manner. Muhammad Muslehuddin Malik says 'I loved St Stephen's College, my alma mater, and my friends whom I never saw again, the train journey from Delhi to Lahore, is 'deeply etched in my memory'.

They boarded an overcrowded train and set off for Lahore at sunset having heard reports of brutal attacks on trains carrying Muslims to Pakistan, so the 12-hour journey began with great trepidation but also with excitement for the new homeland.

Inside the train, it was a scene of great horror. People were crying, screaming and chanting Quranic verses. People lost hope of reaching Pakistan safely, there was absolutely no help from anywhere and feared to get butchered like the thousands who undertook that journey. Every train was attacked, looted, ransacked and humans were brutally killed. He said luckily 'The train picked up speed again just as it reached the platform, making it difficult for the attackers to keep holding on to the doors. They either hurriedly climbed off or were thrown off by the speeding train. It was a miracle. We couldn't believe our luck. How our fate changed within minutes remained a mystery. However, some people believed that a British man was guarding the train's engine and that there were some British soldiers aboard the train, so the driver was urged to keep going.'

In the dozens of trains transporting thousands of Muslims at a time migrating to Pakistan, everyone was killed. Slain. Slaughtered. Muslims were also killing non-Muslims who were leaving Pakistan to reach India. It was a grave attack on all of humanity.

For all that time, his family members who had arrived in Karachi a few weeks earlier had no clue where they were or if everyone had made it out alive amid the train riots.

Two weeks later, he was united, his uncle arrived at the camp searching for them and was finally able to locate.

We were all very passionate about making this new country work. India was lucky as the British left it with a running system of governance, whereas, in Pakistan, Everything had to start from the scratch. There were no official records, many important records were lost in transit. Files and records were dumped into small wagons to be transferred from India .On the way due to attacks the record were burnt and destroyed.

Even before the riots of 1947, it was obvious that Hindus had the upper hand over Muslims, but there was no sense of intense enmity. However, once partition was announced they turned into worst enemies. Even friends ruthlessly killed each other and never bothered to harm the women folk for whom they had tremendous honour and respect.

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He says, 'What happened in 1947, especially during the train journey, is deeply etched in my memory. The bloodthirsty faces of the Sikh mobs formed the most haunting moment of my life. Migrating to Pakistan seemed like the only option for Muslims. From being second-class citizens in India we suddenly had a homeland of our own.'

Conclusion: The tragic comedy of the partition and the careless haste with which it was executed on the Indian subcontinent can be understood very clearly when we consider the fact that the physical partition of India was done in just seven weeks. The communities who were living together peacefully and lovingly transformed into bitter enemies, killing each other and determined to destroy each other, millions were uprooted from their homes, and billions of rupees worth of property was damaged and destroyed. There's a permanent scar in the history of both the nations