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The Nostalgia of Leaving Home, Exploring the Narratives of the 1947 Partition

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Abstract:

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was a pivotal moment in history, leading to the creation of the independent nations of India and Pakistan. The event was accompanied by massive displacement, violence and exodus of millions of people. This research paper delves into the complex emotional landscapes of the individual and communities who were forced to leave their homes behind. Citing examples from literary works, stories, novels and real-life incidences.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Partition, Perilous journey, Displacement, Anguish, Trauma, Testimony, and Sentiments.

Introduction:

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was a pivotal movement in history, leading to the creation of the independent nations of India and Pakistan. The event was

accompanied by massive displacement, violence and upheaval, as millions of people were forced to leave their ancestral homes and undertake perilous journeys to the newly formed nations. The trauma and anguish of this experience have been extensively documented in various literary and historical works, often focusing on the intense nostalgia and longing felt by those who were uprooted from their homes and communities.

This research paper aims to explore the narratives of nostalgia that emerge from the stories and accounts of those who lived through the 1947 Partition. By analysing the representation of nostalgia in novels, short stories and real life testimonies, this paper will delve into the complex emotional landscapes of individual and communities who were forced to leave their homes behind.

The concept of place displacement is often discussed within the framework of environmental psychology and human geography. One prominent theory that addresses this is the theory of "place attachment" and its disruption. Place Attachment Theory--Place attachment refers to the emotional bond between individuals and specific locations. This bond can develop through personal experiences, social interactions, and the cultural significance of the place. When people are displaced from these places, it can lead to a variety of psychological and emotional effects.

Impacts of Place Displacement

- 1. Loss of Identity:** People often derive a sense of identity from their environment. Displacement can lead to a loss of this identity, resulting in feelings of rootlessness and disorientation.
- 2. Stress and Anxiety:** The uncertainty and instability associated with displacement can cause significant stress and anxiety. This is particularly true if the displacement is sudden or forced.
- 3. Grief and Mourning:** Similar to losing a loved one, people may grieve the loss of their familiar environment. This can manifest as sadness, longing, and a sense of mourning.

4. Community Disruption: Social ties and community networks are often tied to specific places. Displacement can sever these ties, leading to social isolation and a loss of social support.

5. Cultural Loss: Places often hold cultural significance and are linked to collective memories and traditions. Displacement can result in the loss of cultural heritage and a sense of historical continuity.

6. Resilience and Adaptation: On the positive side, some individuals may develop resilience and adapt to their new environment. This can lead to personal growth and the development of new social networks.

Theoretical Foundations

Several theoretical frameworks within environmental psychology can help understand these effects:

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping: This model suggests that the way individuals appraise and cope with displacement stressors affects their psychological outcomes. Effective coping strategies can mitigate negative impacts.

Ecological Theory: Proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, this theory emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments. Displacement disrupts these interactions, leading to stress and requiring adaptation.

Conservation of Resources Theory: This theory posits that people strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources. Displacement threatens these resources, leading to stress and efforts to regain them.

Understanding the psychological effects of place displacement can inform interventions and policies to support displaced individuals, helping them rebuild their sense of place and community.

Nostalgia and the Partition Experience:

Nostalgia, defined as a sentimental longing or affection for the past, is a powerful emotion that pervades the narratives of the Partition. For those who were uprooted from their homes, the memories of a life before the Partition often become a source of solace and comfort, a way to cope with the trauma and upheaval of the present. Nostalgia is a sentimentality for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. It involves a longing for a time perceived as better or simpler than the present. In the context of the 1947 partition, nostalgia often intertwines with themes of loss, memory, and identity. For many, especially those who experienced the events first hand or grew up hearing stories of the time, the pre-partition era represents a lost world of harmony and coexistence that was irrevocably shattered by the division.

In her novel, "Cracking India", Bapsi Sidhwa presents the story of Lenny, a young Parsi girl who witnesses the horrors of the Partition. Throughout the novel, Lenny's nostalgia for her childhood in Lahore is palpable, as she recalls the vibrant sights, sounds and smell of her beloved city. The narrator reflects on the "lost innocence" of a time before the Partition, when "the city's life flowed evenly, with no portent of the coming storm." (Sidhwa 1988 p. 23) This nostalgia serves as a centre point to the violence and chaos that unfolds around Lenny, a way for her to hold onto a sense of stability and familiarity in the face of overwhelming change.

Similarly, in Khushwant Singh's short story "Train to Pakistan" the protagonist, Jugga Singh is haunted by his memories of his village, Mano Majra, before the Partition. As he is faced to flee his home, Jugga's thoughts are consumed by the idyllic life he once knew, where "The sun rose and set, the moon waned and waned, the snow came and melted on the mountains, and the villages remained untouched by the big world beyond the river." (Khushwant Singh "Train to Pakistan", 1956, p. 25). This nostalgia for a simpler, more peaceful time serves as a stark contrast to the violence and upheaval that ultimately engulf Mano Majra and its inhabitants.

Nostalgia, in the context of the Partition, not only represents a longing for a lost physical space but also a longing for a lost way of life, a sense of Community and belonging that was irrevocably shattered by the events of 1947. In her memoir "Midnight's Children" Salman Rushdie's narrator, Saleem Sinai, reflects on the "lost country" of Pre-Partition India, a place where "people lived in harmony, where there was no hatred or division, where

everyone was free to be who they were (Rushdie, 1981, p. 112). This nostalgia for a mythical, idealized past serves as a counterpart to the harsh realities of the Partition, where communities were torn apart and the social fabric of the subcontinent was irreparably damaged.

The Role of Memory in Nostalgia:

The nostalgia experienced by those who were forced to leave their homes during the Partition is intrinsically linked to the role of memory. In the absence of their physical homes and communities, survivors often clung to their memories as a means of preserving a sense of identity and belonging.

In Amitav Ghosh's novel "The Shadow Lines" the narrator's grandmother, is Thamma haunted by her memories of her childhood home in Dhaka, which she was forced to leave during the Partition. As she reflects on her past, Thamma's nostalgia is palpable, as she describes the sights and sounds of her beloved city in vivid details.

"I can see it all so clearly, you know.....the house, the garden, the orchard, the way the light used to fall on the grass in the morning. And the smell of basil leaves, and the sound of the pump in the courtyard, and the voices of my sisters calling to each other across the house" (Amitav Ghosh, 1988, p. 91)

For Tha'mma, these memories serve as a lifeline to a past that she can no longer physically access, a way to hold onto a sense of self and belonging in the face of the upheaval caused by the Partition.

Similarly, in Bapsi Sidhwa's "Cracking India" the protagonist, Lenny is haunted by her memories of her childhood home in Lahore. As she is forced to flee the city, Lenny's nostalgia is manifested in her vivid recollections of the sights, sounds and sensations that defined her Pre-partition life.

"I can smell the freshly baked bread from the neighbourhood bakery, and hear the distant muezzin's call to prayer echoing through the streets. I can see my ayah walking ahead of me, her loose cotton sari swaying, and hear the clop-clop of our house's hooves on the cobbles tones" (Bapsi Sidhwa, 1988, p. 67)

These memories, preserved and cherished in the face of the Partition's upheaval, became a means of maintaining a connection to a lost world a way for the characters to hold onto a sense of identity and belonging.

The Nostalgia of shared spaces:

The nostalgia experienced by those who are forced to leave their homes during the Partition is not limited to the individual level but also extends to the collective memory of shared spaces and communities.

In Saadat Hasan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh", the protagonist, Bhishan Singh is a mental patient who is caught in the crossline of the Partition. As he struggles to make sense of the upheaval around him, Bhishan Singh's nostalgia is centred on his hometown of Toba Tek Singh, a place that represents the shared cultural and social identity. The story's haunting final line, "khuda hafiz, coming and going, one by one, O, bhai (brother), "captures the collective grief and longing experienced by those who were forced to leave their homes and communities behind (Saadat Manto, 1956, p. 28)

Similarly, in Aamer Hussain's short story "The Cloud Messenger", the narrator reflects on the nostalgia felt by his grandfather, who had to leave to his childhood home in Lucknow during the Partition. The narrator poignantly described his grandfather's memories of the shared spaces and rituals that defined his life before the upheaval: "He would talk of the narrow allies, the neighbourhood bakeries, the gardens where the children played, the women came to the communal well, the men who gathered at the tea stalls. He would describe the festivals, the weddings, the funerals, the rhythms of life that had been shattered. (Aamer Hussain, 2001, p. 89)

These shared spaces, once the foundation of individual and communal identity, become the focus of intense nostalgia as the partition force the displacement of entire communities. The loss of these shared spaces and the disruption of communal life and another layer of grief and longing to the Partition experience.

"Basti" a urdu novel by Intizar Hussain captures the emotional and psychological displacement experienced by the characters. It reflects on the personal and collective trauma faced by those who were forced to leave their homes and migrate to the newly formed Pakistan. The novel's title indicates the meaning and significance of having a permanent

abode, a neighbourhood and a dwelling place. Hussain the protagonist explores the relevance of term basti through his exilic condition. The shreds of hope and desire mingle with the calamity within and the chaos outside. It explores the theme of trauma and memory ,particularly focusing on the partition of India. . Basti is a saga of lost memories and their intertwining role in the life of an individual. Based on the events following Partition, the tale is all about suffering and disillusionment in the life of those who witnessed the terrible communal massacre at the the time. It is the tale of a reminiscing Zakir, the novel's protagonist who is a professor of history and a migrant to his new homeland from across the border. The novel primarily relates the various stages of his life. Zakir lives in a dynamic, conflictual and contradictory world. The detail study of the narrative eventually underscores the fate of those migrants who willingly left their home in search of a new homeland and in hope of a bright future. The imaginary landscape of cities like Rupnagar and Vyaspur symbolizes the beauty, charm and untainted spirit of bygone days is in a sharp contrast with the city of Shyamnagar symbolizing rupture and havoc wrought by the division. The novelist equates the experience of migration to the holy hizarat to Medina. Unfortunately, in the course of the action Zakir and his friends were torn apart by the failure of dream of religious accord and peace in the pristine land. The Bangladesh Liberation war wreaked havoc in the lives of Zakir, his family and his friends, and the nation witnessed the madness and trauma again. The division of hearts and lands is always painful, as evident in the writings of numerous authors on the event of Partition. However, to start from scratch and resettling lives after the painful event creates a vacuum and is further deepened by its memories. Zakir remembers his childhood during pre-partition days and relives them quite often in the present. It could be remarked that in order to survive and accept the present, he finds solace and shelter in the past. The idyll city of Rupnagar, its communal harmony and serenity and Zakir's beloved Sabirah are constantly addressed and remembered. The novel's title indicates the meaning and significance of having a permanent abode, a neighbourhood and a dwelling place. Husain explores the relevance of the term basti through his exilic condition. The shreds of hope and desire mingle with the calamity within and the chaos outside. Zakir's constant dwelling on past memories rekindles the spirit of acceptance and adaptation. Thus, the novel basti largely speaks of lost home and its memories.

‘The Shadow Lines’ by Amitav Ghosh is a novel which is not solely focused on the Partition, it weaves a narrative that spans several generations and geographies, touching upon

the impacts of partition and fluidity of national and personal boundaries. It delves into the psychological displacement experienced by its characters.

Real- life testimonies and nostalgia of leaving home:

The nostalgia of leaving home during The 1947 Partition is not limited to literary representations; It is also a prominent theme in the real-life testimonies of those who experienced the upheaval firsthand.

In the book “Partition Voices’ untold stories from 1947”, Kavita Puri collects the stories of individuals who were forced to leave their homes and communities during the Partition. One such testimony is that Naseem Akhtar, who recount her memories of leaving her beloved Lahore.

“I can still smell the scent of the jasmine flowers in the courtyard, and hear the sound of the water pump in the garden. I remember the taste of the lemonade my mother used to make, and the way the sunlight in the morning. I miss all that so much, even after all these years. (Kavita puri, 2019, p.34)

Naseem’s vivid recollection of sights, sounds and sensations of her childhood home in Lahore serve as a poignant reminder the of the deep-rooted nostalgia experienced by those who were forced to leave their homes during the Partition.

Another testimony, that of Saraswati Sinha, who was forced to flee her home in Dhaka, echoes similar sentiments of nostalgia longing: “I can still see the courtyard of our house with the mango tree and the well. I can hear the sound of birds in the morning, and laughter of the children playing. I can smell the incense burning in the puja room, and feel the cool breeze on my face. That home, that life is forever etched in my memory”. (Kavita Puri, 2019 p.72)

These real-life accounts, rich in sensory details emotional resonance, underscore the profound impact of the Partition on the lives of individual and communities, and the enduring power of nostalgia in the face of such upheaval.

Conclusion:

The nostalgia of leaving home during the 1947 Partition is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon, as evidenced by the narratives and testimonies explored in this this research paper. The intense longing for a lost physical space, a lost way and a lost sense of community and belonging are central themes that permeate the stories and accounts of those who were forced to uproot themselves from their ancestral home.

The role of memory in preserving and cherishing these lost worlds is crucial, as individuals and communities clung to their memories as a means of maintaining a connection to their past and sense of identity in the face of overwhelming change. The nostalgia of shared spaces and the collective grief over the disruption of communal life further underscore the profound impact of the Partition on the social and cultural fabric of the Indian Subcontinent.

Through the analysis of literary works and real life testimonies, this research paper has aimed to shed light on the emotional landscape of those who experience the trauma of the Partition, and the enduring power of nostalgia to both comfort and haunt those who were forced to leave their homes behind. The narratives presented here serve as a poignant reminder of the human cost of the Partition and the ongoing resilience and the resilience of those who grappled with profound upheaval of that pivotal moment in history.

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