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The Tear That Does Not Mend: A Review of 'Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence'

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Anarchy: The Punjab, examining in detail the planning and occurrence in trains. The trains carrying to point out the high degree of the sequence of killings in both sides of the newly demarcated opposing communities, and Aiyar, sufferers 'occupied' in such a war-like situation. the rivalry and mutual mistrust of the resettled were often hindered by the perception of the women themselves to be officially rehabilitated for fear of migration on both sides of the border caught in a maelstrom of unpreceded massacres. essays that deal with the sub-theme of follow are recurrent features in the concluded in the partition of the Bengal, which were most directly traumatic experience of the communal affected by killings and the mass migrations which posed a with various aspcts of the Partition of 1947, apart from the title suggests, to document the "trauma" and find the "continuities" following "freedom". The introductory article by D.A. Low provides a window as well as the context to the succeeding essays. It gives an evocative overview of the events of the 1940s, from the Quit India Movement in 1942 to the riots in Bengal and Bihar in 1946, ultimately culminating in the partition of the country. The subsequent essays are more specific in nature though they fall under the overarching theme of 'Partition.' The introductory article by D.A. Low provides a window as well as the context to the succeeding essays. It gives an evocative overview of the events of the 1940s, from the Quit India Movement in 1942 to the riots in Bengal and Bihar in 1946, ultimately culminating in the partition of the country. The subsequent essays are more specific in nature though they fall under the overarching theme of 'Partition.'

The two regions, Punjab and Bengal, which were most directly affected by Partition are naturally the main areas of study in the book. The traumatic experience of the communal killings and the mass migrations which followed are recurrent features in the essays that deal with the sub-theme of massacres. Punjab in August 1947 was caught in a maelstrom of unprecedented violence which largely were brutal and widespread, posed a challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the state. Swarna Aiyar in her essay 'August Anarchy: The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947' has tried to document the sequence of killings in Punjab by examining in detail the planning and the execution of the massacres which occurred in trains. The trains carrying the refugees were the targets of wholesale slaughter by groups of the opposing communities, and Aiyar, here, focuses on similar incidents on both sides of the newly demarcated border. While charting out the nature of these attacks, the author attempts to point out the high degree of organization and planning which she attributes to the military traditions of Punjabi society and the presence of ex-army men recently demobilized after World War II. Continuing on a similar vein, Andrew J. Mayer in his essay looks at the abduction of women in Punjab, whom he believes to be the "chief sufferers" because of the perception of women as a "territory" to be 'occupied' in such a war-like situation. The efforts made by the Indian and Pakistan governments to recover and rese'lt others were often hindered by the rivalry and mutual mistrust of the two communities, as well as the refusal of the women themselves to be officially rehabilitated for fear of rejection by their families. Partition was accompanied by mass migration on both sides of the border which involved large-scale dislocation of property and created a new category of the homeless—the refugee. This put tremendous pressure on both the governments to rehabilitate and resettle these refugees with adequate compensation. Gyan Prakash in his essay this volume have detailed the different approaches to the rehabilitation programme adopted by the Punjab and the West Bengal governments. In his essay, 'Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities', he notes that the national government and the local administration were both 'rebellious and obstructive' and that of the Punjabi refugee as having "qualities of enterprise, resilience and self-esteem", as a possible reason for the failure of the resettlement programme in Bengal in contrast to Punjab. Aprobably unintended consequence of the redistribution of land to the refugees was effective land reforms in the Punjab countryside, which Kudaisya argues in his other essay, 'From Displacement to Development', in the long run, allowed Punjab to make optimum use of the government's efforts to usher in the Green Revolution.

On the other hand, the West Bengal government's failure to resettle the refugees from East Bengal, in the nearly uninhabited region of Dandakaranya, reflected the failure of the state in understanding the needs of the refugees. However Kudaisya's conclusions about the ineffectiveness of the Bengali refugee rehabilitation programme may not be so unequivocal since his period of reference extends till the late 1970's which witnessed a renewed refugee influx in the wake of the liberation war in East Bengal. Still within this sub-theme of migration and rehabilitation of refugees, Sara Ansari's essay provides a glimpse into the issues involved in and arising out of the Muslim refugee migration from India into Pakistan and in particular to Sindh. In the post Partition days, the term 'muhajir' came to denote solely Urdu-speaking Pakistanis, to the exclusion of other ethnic groups who were also affected during 1947, thus distinguishing the refugees from East Punjab and those whose come from other parts of India in the later years. Provocative and ethnic issues were brought to the forefront with the dominance of the 'Punjabi' refugee in Pakistan politics and the consequent political marginalization of Sindhi, an outcome, which in Ansari's view, is still very much in evidence in the present-day politics of the nation.

Among the major failours of the horrific brutality perpetrated by both the communities on each other and the traumatic upheavals which occurred have been the unnatural silence and the denied refusal on the part of the victims to speak about their experiences. In the absence of oral histories on this subject (which is only now being attempted—'The Other Side of Silence: Victims From the Partition of India', by Urvashi Butalia, Viking Penguin, 1998) Ian Talbot in his essay, 'Literature and the Human Drama in the 1947 Partition', looks at the literature on Partition as a source to document the physical and psychological impact of violence, abduction, migration, and resettlement. The fictionalized narrative, he finds, was often a vicious medium through which personal memories were represented.

Dinesh Chakrabarty's essay 'Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition' is an attempt of a similar kind. His article uses a collection of essays by writers reminiscing about the homeland they left behind, later compiled into the book, Chhbara Asha Gram (The Abandoned Village), to demonstrate the dichotomy between history and memory. The inexplicability of Partition in the minds of these authors remains, Chakrabarty says, because their 'traumatized memory' has a narrative structure which works on a principle opposite to that of any historical narrative. Their narrative structure was designed to create sympathy for the refugee in a new and hostile milieu and not for the success of the Partition which, for the success of their venture, had to remain unexplainable. It created a structure of Bengali nationality that was recognizably Hindu, and in which the memory of a past of Hindu-Muslim amity did not always square up to actual events.

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