Violence, Theory and the Subject of International Politics: A Derridian Analysis of the Partition of India

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to conduct a Derridian analysis of the Indian Partition. Using Jacques Derrida’s concepts of ‘undecidability’, the justice of a decision, responsibility, and forgiveness the author analyses the Partition. It is argued here, firstly, that the decision to divide India was an ‘undecidable’ one. Secondly, it was neither a fully just decision nor was it just at any particular moment. Thirdly, it is argued that the various decision-makers had to sacrifice certain responsibilities in order to fulfil others. And lastly, that the hostile relations between India and Pakistan that emerged in the aftermath of the bloody Partition may not be permanent since forgiveness by the victims of the Partition is possible. The aim is to demonstrate that Derrida’s ideas may be usefully applied to conduct an analysis of the Partition that is fresh in its approach.

Author Profile

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Introduction

This essay purports to analyse, in Derridian terms, the Partition of India in 1947 into India and Pakistan. The research questions being addressed are: (1) was the decision to partition India a just decision, (2) did the decision-makers act in a responsible manner, and (3) is forgiveness a possibility for the victims of the Partition riots?

The questions of the justice of the Partition of India and the responsibility of the decision-makers arise because, according to Alavi, Indians consistently pose the question of whether the Partition could have been avoided.1 The Partition is seen by many ‘nationalist Indian historians’ as unfortunate and tragic.2 On the other hand, according to Page, most Pakistanis view the creation of Pakistan as a religious or ideological phenomenon.3 The establishment of a separate Muslim state is celebrated by many Pakistani historians,4 although ‘the actual partition of the subcontinent often has about it an air of betrayal’.5 It should not however be supposed that all Indians fall into the first category or that all Pakistanis fall into the second. There do exist exceptions, such as the Pakistani Khan, who envisages a reunification of the Indian subcontinent.6 Pandey describes the divide as one between two schools of Partition academics—one which sees the Partition as avoidable and undesirable and the other which views it as inevitable.7 The questions of justice and responsibility posed by this essay are relevant in the context of this debate, since they deal with the ethics of the decision to partition.

The third question of forgiveness arises because, as Ahmed points out, the terrible violence caused by the Partition has resulted in a profound trauma which has prevented the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan, even after more than five decades.8 According to Ahmed, ‘Perhaps a process of forgiveness for the crimes committed during Partition initiated by intellectuals from both sides can miraculously lead to reconciliation and mutual acceptance.’9 This essay explores Derrida’s concept of forgiveness and attempts to apply it to the Indo-Pakistani situation.

Furthermore, as Page points out, understanding the Partition of India is important to international relations not only for providing a better understanding of relations between India

5 Ibid, 1069.
9 Ibid, 28.
and Pakistan but also for understanding communal problems in other parts of the world, such as Northern Ireland, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Cyprus. Understanding the Indian Partition could also prove useful for evaluating suggestions such as Hilmyy’s for a ‘re-partition’ of Israel.

The arguments being put forth in this essay are, firstly, that the decision to partition India was an ‘undecidable’ decision and by virtue of being such an ‘undecidable’ decision its justice cannot be assessed. Although it involved the reinvention of a rule and in this sense was just, it was not just at any point of time and was not completely just. Secondly, all the main players in the decision to partition India—the British rulers, the leaders of the Indian National Congress, and the leaders of the All India Muslim League—sacrificed certain responsibilities in order to fulfill others. And thirdly, it is possible for victims of the Partition violence to forgive the perpetrators of violence and thereby for relations between present-day India and Pakistan to improve. These arguments shall be presented by employing Derrida’s concepts of ‘undecidability’, justice, responsibility, and forgiveness.

The essay begins with a brief discussion on the causes of the Partition. It then goes on to analyse the various aspects of the Partition using a Derridian analytical framework. This analysis leads it to its conclusions.

**Background to the Partition**

The main areas being analysed in this essay are the causes that led up to the Partition, the actual event of the Partition, and the consequent riots and migrations.

Several causes have been attributed to the Partition of India—the divide and rule policy of the British government, the Arya Samaj which encouraged Hindu communalism in Punjab, the partition of Bengal on communal lines which caused dissatisfaction among Hindus and increased Muslim separatism, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s introduction of Muslim separatism into Indian politics, Mahatma Gandhi’s introduction of communalism into Indian politics, the Hindu perception of British favouritism towards Muslims and of the Muslim League as anti-Hindu which resulted in the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha to represent Hindu interests, and the interests of the Muslim landlords in Punjab, Sindh, and the United Provinces (UP) who were wary of the Congress’s plans for land reform. This essay, however, focuses on the more immediate events that caused Mohammad Ali Jinnah to part ways with the Indian National Congress and lead the Muslim League’s movement for a separate Muslim nation.

Jinnah was a member of stature in the Indian National Congress and was persuaded in 1913 by members of the Muslim League to join the League since the new radical generation of League members was keen to co-operate with the Congress. Jinnah joined the League on the condition that his...
loyalty to the Congress would remain. For the next few years he worked to bring about unity between the Congress and the League.  

In March 1927, at a conference of Muslims in Delhi, Jinnah convinced the Muslim leaders to give up their demand for separate electorates for Muslims and accept joint electorates in the interests of unity with the Congress. This was to be on the condition that four proposals of the Muslims were accepted by the Congress: (1) Sindh, which had a Muslim majority, should be separated from Bombay and form a separate province; (2) there should be reforms in the Muslim-majority provinces of Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) so that they were on equal footing with other provinces; (3) there should be representation according to population in Punjab and Bengal which had Muslim majorities; and (4) thirty-three percent of the seats in the central legislature should be reserved for Muslims. The Nehru Committee, which was appointed by the Delhi All Parties Committee in February 1928 to draft a constitution for India, rejected the Muslim League’s demands for reservation of seats for majorities in Punjab and Bengal and for a reservation of thirty-three percent of the seats at the central legislature for Muslims. However, what it did recommend was ‘joint electorates with adult franchise’, which would allow Muslims to be elected in Punjab and Bengal because of the removal of franchise based on property ownership. It allowed for reservations for minorities as well. It also accepted the Muslim League’s demands for the separation of Sindh from Bombay and for the granting of equal status to the NWFP and Baluchistan. 

At the All-Parties Conference which was held in Lucknow in August 1928 to review the report of the Nehru Committee, Jinnah and the Muslim League were not represented. It was agreed that Sindh should be separated from Bombay but only if this was found to be financially feasible or alternatively if a majority of the population of Sindh voted for this, that there should be joint electorates with universal adult suffrage without any reservations for minorities, and that Baluchistan should be treated on equal footing with the NWFP. Thus the Nehru Committee’s original recommendations of reservation of seats for minorities, of unconditionally separating Sindh from Bombay, and of treating the NWFP and Baluchistan as equal to the other provinces were rejected at the Lucknow Conference, which was dominated by members of the Hindu Mahasabha. 

At the subsequent All-Parties Conference in Calcutta that December, although the Muslim League was present, its demands were shot down by the Hindu Mahasabha members. The Congress members did not intervene and thus did not honour the commitments made in Nehru report. 

The Calcutta Conference left Jinnah disillusioned. He found himself ‘faced with a situation in which the Hindu Mahasabha could wield a veto over the Congress decisions’. According to

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14 Alavi, “Misreading Partition Road Signs,” 4522.
16 Alavi, “Misreading Partition Road Signs,” 4522; Page, op. cit., 175-76.
17 Alavi, loc.cit.
18 Alavi, loc. cit.; Pandey, op. cit., 126.
19 Alavi, loc. cit.
Alavi, Jinnah saw the events of the Calcutta convention as a betrayal by the Congress.\textsuperscript{20} He parted ways with the Congress after the Calcutta convention. In 1932, he left politics and went to London. When he returned to India and Indian politics in 1935, it was no longer as a national politician but as a Muslim politician. He brought about a revival of the Muslim League. In 1940, the Muslim League passed the ‘Pakistan Resolution’ which demanded the establishment of ‘independent states’ for the Muslims of British India.\textsuperscript{21}

Following several negotiations over many years, the Menon-Mountbatten Plan for Indian independence was accepted by the Congress, the Sikh leader Baldev Singh, and the Muslim League on 2 June 1947. The plan was based on the principle of allowing the people of the Muslim-majority provinces—Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, NWFP, Bengal, and Sylhet—to decide whether the country ought to be partitioned. In Sindh and Baluchistan, the elected members of the provincial legislative assemblies were to vote on whether to join India or Pakistan. In the NWFP, there was to be a referendum. In Punjab and Bengal, the elected members of the legislative assemblies who represented Muslim-majority districts were to vote separately from the rest of the elected members. Each part of the assemblies was to vote on whether they wished to join India or Pakistan and also on whether or not they wished their province to be partitioned so that the Hindu-majority areas joined India and the Muslim-majority areas Pakistan. In Sylhet, which was a Muslim-majority district, the people could vote for whether they wished to join East Bengal (a Muslim-majority area which was likely to join Pakistan) or remain part of Assam. The Indian princely states were free to remain independent or join either India or Pakistan.\textsuperscript{22}

The verdict which was secured in July 1947 was that both Punjab and Bengal decided to be partitioned and West Punjab, East Bengal, Sylhet, NWFP, Baluchistan, and Sindh elected to join Pakistan whereas East Punjab and West Bengal chose to remain with India.\textsuperscript{23}

The Indian Partition, according to Ahmed, ‘was followed by one of the cruellest and bloodiest migrations and ethnic cleansings in history.’\textsuperscript{24} Around two million people were killed, approximately twelve to fifteen million people were forced to migrate, and an estimated eighty-eight thousand women were abducted in the violence caused by the Partition.\textsuperscript{25}

A Derridian Analysis

\textit{‘Undecidability’ and the Justice of the Decision}

For a decision to be either just or unjust, according to Derrida, it must follow a rule.\textsuperscript{26} In the case of the decision to divide India into two states, it may be said that the rule of democracy was followed when it was decided to allow the majority of the people (or, in the cases of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Bengal, their elected representatives) in the ‘Pakistan provinces’ to
decide on whether or not the country ought to be partitioned. Derrida further states that for a decision to be a just decision, it must involve the reinvention of a rule. In the case of the Indian Partition, the rule of democracy was applied in a ‘fresh judgement’. It was not simply followed, since there did not already exist a rule that stated that the method for partitioning a country is through democratic means. The rule of democracy was applied in the specific context of British India where representatives to the central and provincial legislatures were already being democratically elected. Thus the rule of democracy was reinvented and the decision to partition India was in this sense a just decision.

For Derrida, an ‘undecidable’ decision involves not only choosing between two options but also a duty towards each. The decision of the Partition was an ‘undecidable’ decision—if India was partitioned, the duty of the decision-makers towards a secular, united Indian nation would be sacrificed; if it was not partitioned, their duty towards the Muslim League’s dream of a separate Muslim homeland which was not dominated by a Hindu majority would not be fulfilled.

In the Derridian sense, no decision can ever ‘be presently and fully just’, for a decision has either ‘not yet been made according to a rule . . . or it has already followed a rule’. So, the decision of the Partition was not just at any particular moment. Before the rule of democracy was applied, the decision to partition India could not have been just since it did not follow a rule. After the rule of democracy was applied in the Menon-Mountbatten Plan, ‘the test and ordeal of the undecidable’ had passed, and the decision had simply followed a rule which was not an absolute guarantee of justice.

Derrida describes the moment of decision as a moment of madness. According to him, a just decision is always a decision of urgency since it needs to be taken immediately and hence it is not possible for full knowledge of the consequences of the decision to be available. ‘Even if time and prudence, the patience of knowledge and the mastery of conditions were hypothetically unlimited,’ Derrida says, ‘the decision would be structurally finite, no matter how late it came.’ Although great deliberation on the question of Partition took place in Indian politics from 1940 when the Pakistan Resolution was passed by the Muslim League to 1947 when the Menon-Mountbatten Plan was accepted, in February 1947 the British government announced that it was to withdraw from India no later than June 1948. Hence the decision of whether India should be partitioned had to be taken before this date and it became a decision of urgency which was taken in a moment of madness. It could not be justified by any definite knowledge of the consequences of the Partition.

The moment of decision is a moment of madness because the decision-maker is affected by the decision ‘as if it came to him from the other’. Jinnah’s sense of the Partition decision having been made by another is apparent in his speech to Pakistan’s constituent assembly in 1947,
wherein he stated, ‘You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State. . . [I]n course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims.’ Here, despite having argued for a separate Muslim homeland before Partition, he rejects the notion of religion as a basis for national identity.

Responsibility

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida analyses the story of Abraham who sacrifices his responsibility towards his family in order to fulfil his absolute duty towards God, who asks him to kill his son Isaac. Derrida describes Abraham’s ‘gift of death’ to God and notes that Abraham is forced to keep his decision to sacrifice his son a secret from his family in order to maintain his ‘right to decide’.

When Jinnah decided to part ways with the Congress and lead the Muslim League in a struggle for a separate Muslim nation, he sacrificed his responsibility towards the Congress, to which he had earlier been committed, in order to fulfil his absolute duty towards the Muslim League, which he felt to have been let down by the Congress at the Calcutta Convention. Jinnah’s decision to lead the Pakistan movement remained a secret while he was in London from 1932 to 1935 and was thought to have left politics. In fulfilling his duty to the Muslim League, Jinnah gave it the ‘gift of death’ — the ‘direct action day’ that he called for on 16 August 1946 with the realisation of the Pakistan ideal as its objective caused severe communal riots and resulted in around half a million deaths. The actual Partition of the country was bought at the cost of some two million lives.

On the other hand, the Congress’s betrayal of Jinnah and the League at the 1928 Calcutta Convention also involved the sacrifice of its responsibility to the League in fulfilling its absolute duty to the Hindu Mahasabha. The Congress members allowed the Hindu Mahasabha members who were present to veto the League’s demands for residuary powers to remain with the provinces under the new constitution (although Congress members Sapru and Chintamani were willing to reconsider the distribution of subjects), for thirty-three percent reservation of seats for Muslims at the Centre (which was supported by the Congress’s Gandhi and Sapru but shot down by the Mahasabha and the Sikh representatives), for population-based reservation in Punjab and Bengal in the eventuality that adult suffrage did not come into effect, and for the unconditional separation of Sindh from Bombay. Thus the Congress went back on its commitment in the Nehru report to separate Sindh. It also allowed the Mahasabha to overrule the opinions of Congress members. This sacrifice of responsibility by the Congress has remained a secret till today as the textbooks read by young Indians keep it as such. According to one

38 Ibid, 60.
39 Alavi, “Misreading Partition Road Signs”, 4522.
40 Pandey, op. cit., 143-44, 183-84.
42 Alavi, loc. cit.
43 Alavi, “Misreading Partition Road Signs,” 4522; Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 190.
state-board-prescribed textbook, “Barrister Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, had demanded reserved seats for Muslims in those provinces where the Muslims were in majority. As the Nehru Report did not concede these demands, the Muslim League opposed the Nehru Report.”

Another reads:

In order to oppose the Government a section of the Muslim League even accepted the principle of joint electorates on condition that seats were reserved for Muslims. In 1928, the All-Party Conference met and appointed a Sub-Committee with Pandit Motilal Nehru as its chairman to draw up a scheme of government in response to the challenge by Lord Birkenhead. The Nehru Report laid down Dominion Status as India’s political objective. The All Parties Convention held at Calcutta in December 1928, however, failed to pass the Report. Jawaharlal Nehru and his friends disagreed with it. M. A. Jinnah presented his Fourteen Points. The Muslim League demanded separate electorates and a federal constitution. The politics of the Communalists impaired the prospects of national unity.

The standard ten history textbook of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations gives no reason for the League’s rejection of the Nehru report:

The All-Party Convention held again at Calcutta in December, 1928 considered the Nehru Report. Jinnah opposed some of its provisions on behalf of the Muslim League. However, the League provisionally approved the Nehru Report, after certain safeguards for minorities, as proposed by Jinnah, were incorporated in it. In March, 1929, the League totally rejected the report.

According to Kumar, A Textbook of History and Civics, which is the only Indian textbook to describe the Nehru report in detail, makes it seem as though all the issues that Jinnah raised were communal issues and had no national significance.

Thus, the Congress, which has been in power in India for most of the fifty-nine years since the Partition, has kept its sacrifice of its responsibility to the Muslim League at the Calcutta convention a secret through its selective narration of history. This has been done so as to avoid any questioning of its right to decide which duty ought to have been fulfilled and which one ought to have been sacrificed.

The parties to the Menon-Mountbatten Plan, which was presented by Viceroy Mountbatten on behalf of the British government and accepted by Nehru, Patel, and Kripalani on behalf of the

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Congress, Baldev Singh on behalf of the Sikhs, and Jinnah on behalf of the League on 3 June 1947, sacrificed their responsibility towards the minorities in the ‘Pakistan provinces’ by agreeing to allow the question of Partition be decided by voting in these provinces. In this way the majority of voters could decide on whether they wished their province to join India or Pakistan, but the minorities were denied this right. The parties to the Menon-Mountbatten Plan sacrificed their responsibility to the minorities in order to fulfil their absolute duty to the majorities in these provinces.

The Menon-Mountbatten Plan also sacrificed its responsibility to the followers of Khan Abdul Ghaffer Khan in the NWFP who boycotted the referendum because they were not given the third option of voting for an independent state. Only fifty percent of the people of the NWFP voted. The Menon-Mountbatten Plan sacrificed its responsibility towards Khan Abdul Ghaffer Khan’s followers in order to fulfil its duty towards Jawaharlal Nehru of the Congress who feared a ‘Balkanisation of India’. Hence it did not give the provinces the option of becoming independent.

Forgiveness

For Derrida, only the unforgivable crime warrants forgiveness. According to Kamra, narratives of the Partition of India are filled with ‘[i]mages of raped women, orphaned children, refugee camps, blood-thirsty mobs of men, women throwing themselves into wells, miles and miles of refugee columns—the kafilas—and burning villages’. She describes the genital mutilation of men and the rape and breast-sla\slash ing of women. According to Derrida, forgiveness does not require repentance on the part of the perpetrator of the crime, for in that case the perpetrator is no longer the same person who committed the crime and the one being forgiven is not in fact the perpetrator of the crime. Forgiveness which is not conditional upon repentance is unconditional forgiveness. Furthermore, for forgiveness to take place, it is necessary that both sides understand who is guilty of what, but that each side be unable to understand the other; that they speak metaphorically different languages.

Derrida draws a distinction between pure forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness must be by the victim of the crime. If it is initiated by a third party, it is not forgiveness but reconciliation, amnesty, or reparation. Furthermore, when the victim and the perpetrator are able to understand one another, pure forgiveness has ended and reconciliation has begun.

Derrida considers a situation wherein people share proximity, familiarity, language, neighbourhood, and family and between whom an ‘absolute hatred’ emerges at the moment of

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49 Pandey, The Break-up of British India, 202.
50 Pandey, op. cit., 199-200, 204.
53 Ibid, 2.
55 Ibid, 41-42, 49.
maximum intimacy.56 This is an apt description of what happened in the Indian subcontinent. As Hasan explains, prior to the Hindu and Muslim revivalism that occurred during the course of the Indian freedom struggle, Hindus and Muslims shared symbols of a joint culture. According to him, ‘[t]here had . . . been, common traditions and common reference points in the pre-colonial past. . . . [P]rior to 1860 there was perhaps no identifiable “Muslim”, “Sikh” or “Hindu” identity that could be abstracted from the particular circumstances of the individual events or specific societies’.57 In South India, there existed between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians ‘a borrowing of symbols and ideas, a frequently shared vocabulary, and an interweaving of motifs within a common sacred landscape’.58 Derrida wonders whether, in such a situation, the wound inflicted by the crime may be healed by forgiveness or reconciliation. While he does not object to reconciliation, he thinks it unjust to use the word ‘forgiveness’ to describe a process of reconciliation initiated by the state. For Derrida, ‘no head of state has the right to forgive in place of the victims of atrocious crimes’.59 For this reason, in exploring the possibilities for forgiveness for the crimes of the Partition, this essay considers the testimonies of five victims of forced migration.

The reason behind choosing to interview victims of forced migration and not of murder or rape is a practical one. It is impossible to interview a dead person and it is only the dead person and not his or her family who have the right to consider forgiveness.60 As for the question of interviewing rape victims, it is imperative to keep in mind ‘the absolute place of pride/shame in Indian society, which makes women’s virginity a priceless commodity’, and the perception of a raped woman as impure.61 It is therefore unlikely that many raped women would be willing to admit to or recount their experiences.

The first refugee interviewed is Rita Shahani, a present-day Sindhi novelist and poet who was thirteen years old when her family moved from Hyderabad, Sindh to Lucknow, UP. Her family went to Lucknow before the Partition, on 23 July 1947, because her father was unwell and needed to undergo treatment in Lucknow. She and her family did not realise that they would never return home. They had simply locked their house and left for Lucknow, taking with them only one month’s clothes. When the Partition took place, they received news of the riots and her brother Hiru, who was still in Sindh, was told to come to India. They thought that the Partition was temporary and once the riots stopped, they would be able to go home. All of their ‘material goods’ were left behind.62

Shahani says that she loves Pakistanis and that she feels no bitterness and does not blame them. In Derrida’s terms, her forgiveness may not be of the unconditional, pure variety, because she mentions that her Pakistani writer friends have told her that they want Sindhi Hindus to go back to Sindh. So, in a Derridian sense, they have repented. However, it does not seem that she needed to be asked for forgiveness in order to forgive. She claims that her ‘weakness’ for

56 Ibid, 49.
57 Hasan, Inventing Boundaries, 9.
58 Ibid, 9.
59 Derrida, op. cit., 50.
60 Ibid, 44.
61 Kamra, Bearing Witness, 14.
62 Interview with Rita Shahani, Coventry and Pune, February 17, 2006.
Muslims is due to the fact that she went to a Muslim college in Lucknow.\(^{63}\) Thus she does not seem to have been angry with Muslims even in the years immediately following the Partition when she was in Lucknow. Furthermore, the fact that she made friends with Pakistani writers without being asked for forgiveness shows her forgiveness to have been unconditional. Nevertheless, now that she has developed an understanding with her Pakistani friends, she has begun a process of reconciliation and her forgiveness is no longer pure forgiveness.

Geeta Dembla is Shahani’s sister and was sixteen years old when the Partition took place. While her family was in Lucknow, Dembla was staying with her uncle in Karachi, Sindh. She says that there were ‘too many riots’ and she wanted to come to India with her brother who was in Hyderabad, but she could not go to Hyderabad because Hindus were being murdered. She remembers crying the whole time. She flew to Bombay with her uncle. Her family lost their ice candy shop, their house, and all of their belongings. In Lucknow they had to start from scratch. Their father was sick and they had no income with a family of six children. At seventeen Dembla was studying and working to support the family.\(^{64}\)

Dembla does not blame Muslims; she says ‘there is no question of blaming’. Her family had many Muslim friends in Lucknow and in Sindh. For her the Partition was politics and ‘everyone lost’.\(^{65}\) Thus she too has forgiven the other without ever being asked for forgiveness and without understanding the other’s reasons for forcing her family to migrate.

Arshad Aziz was six years old in 1947 and remembers the train ride that his family took from Delhi to Sialkot in western Punjab. His was a family of *nawabs* and landlords and they suffered an immense loss of property as a result of the Partition. His paternal grandfather was ‘mentally affected by the shock’. His maternal grandfather was on a bus from India to Pakistan which was entered by Sikhs who massacred everyone on the bus. His grandfather was murdered as well. His four children were left fatherless.\(^{66}\)

Aziz has ‘mixed feelings’ about Indians but is aware that tragedies occurred on both sides and ‘Hindus and Sikhs also suffered’. He thinks the Partition riots were ‘very tragic’.\(^{67}\) Thus Aziz has reconciled himself with the other rather than forgiven, since he understands that the other suffered as well.

Zulaikha Agha’s family moved from Bombay to Dhaka in East Bengal in 1950, when she was one and a half years old, leaving behind their house and toy shop. She says, ‘We had a lot of problems; we had nothing.’\(^{68}\)

Agha is ‘not at all angry’. She is ‘very comfortable with Indians’ and has ‘a lot of Hindu friends’. According to her, there is no problem between Hindus and Muslims—‘only governments have

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\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Interview with Geeta Dembla, Coventry and London, February 17, 2006.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.


\(^{67}\) Ibid.

\(^{68}\) Interview with Zulaikha Agha, Coventry and Karachi, February 23, 2006.
problems’. Thus, like Dembla, Agha has forgiven the other without understanding why her family was forced to leave Bombay and without any sort of repentance on the part of the other.

Rajinder Mohini Malhotra was fifteen and a half years old when, in the prelude to the Partition, riots erupted in Punjab, and her mother sent her sister Shanti and her to stay with their uncle in Delhi for fear that they would be abducted if they remained in Punjab. On 15 August, the day of Indian independence (and one day after the Partition), communal riots began in Delhi as well. Malhotra and her sister did not know if their family would survive the riots and reach Delhi safely from their home in Rawalpindi in western Punjab. Their family ultimately did reach Delhi but had to leave behind their confectionery business.

Malhotra says that she used to feel angry in the beginning, but does not anymore because her family has been much more prosperous in India than they were in Rawalpindi. Of the five interviewees, Malhotra is the only one to have felt anger and then gotten past it through an unconditional forgiveness.

For Derrida, pure unconditional forgiveness is for now only a dream, but the above analysis shows that at least Dembla, Agha, and Malhotra seem to have unconditionally forgiven and that all five interviewees have achieved something in between the two poles of unconditional and conditional forgiveness, which Derrida views as the practical expression of forgiveness.

On the other hand, reconciliation, which requires understanding one another’s reasons, is difficult as long as Indian and Pakistani history textbooks present differing narratives of the freedom struggle and the Partition which are meant to forward certain agendas, as reported by Kumar.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the justice of the decision of Partition and the responsibility of the decision-makers conducted above, it is clear that judging the justice of the decision is impossible, since it was an ‘undecidable’ decision and any choice that was made would come with its consequences, foreseeable and unforeseeable. In trying to fulfil their responsibilities to one group, the decision-makers were bound to sacrifice their responsibilities to the other. The problem with this conclusion is, as Derrida points out, that ‘incalculable justice commands calculation’. Hence, to hazard a calculation, the decision of Partition, despite not being just at any particular instant, was nevertheless just because it involved the reinvention of the rule of democracy. However, it was not a fully just decision since it was taken in an instant of madness and because it forced the decision-makers to sacrifice their responsibilities to one in order to fulfil their duties to another.

It is again difficult to calculate unconditional forgiveness. The analysis of the interviews of five Partition victims conducted above is not an attempt to prove that all Partition victims have or have not forgiven the perpetrators of violence against them. These five victims cannot by any

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69 Ibid.
70 Interview with Rajinder Mohini Malhotra, Pune, March 14, 2006.
71 Ibid.
72 Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 44-45, 59-60.
73 Kumar, Prejudice and Pride, 86.
means be representative of the twelve to fifteen million people that were displaced, let alone all the victims of the Partition violence. This essay has attempted rather to explore whether forgiveness is a possible alternative to the hostility created between India and Pakistan which is fuelled by memories of the Partition riots.\textsuperscript{75} The five refugees interviewed prove that forgiveness is possible for victims of the unforgivable crimes of the Partition.

There are other aspects of the Partition that could be subjected to a Derridian analysis but which have not been considered in this essay. Derrida’s concept of hospitality could be applied to the reception of Partition refugees in India and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{76} His ideas about democracy and identity may be applied to the democratic process that led to the Partition and to the emergence of religious identity as a basis for nationality,\textsuperscript{77} respectively. Furthermore, his idea of the ‘mystical foundation of authority’\textsuperscript{78}—that ‘[a]ll Nation-States are born and found themselves in violence’\textsuperscript{79}— may be used to understand the foundation of Pakistan.


\textsuperscript{77} Hasan, \textit{Inventing Boundaries}, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{78} Derrida, \textit{Acts of Religion}, 239.

\textsuperscript{79} Derrida, \textit{On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness}, 57.
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