

Postmemory, Homeland and Partition: A Reading of Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road* *

¹Farhana Khatun, Research Scholar, Department of English, Aliah University, Kolkata.
farhana125013@gmail.com

²Dr. Hasina Wahida, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Aliah University, Kolkata.
hasinawahida.eng@aliah.ac.in

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Abstract

This article deals with the workings of “postmemory” in the aftermath of partition as depicted in the novel Five Queen's Road (2009) Sorayya Khan, focusing on family histories entangled with the image of home and land. The long-lasting impacts of partition left an indelible mark on the human psyche in such a way that the generations after who were born and brought up outside the nation-state and who worked for various places are still suffering post-partition trauma. Even though they have no lived experiences of partition yet they continue with the traumatic memories of their first generation through the lens of postmemory. This article examines how Sorayya Khan, as a second-generation writer on partition, inherited memories of her parental generations through listening to stories and the image of the house “Five Queen Road”. Posing Dina Lal's emotional attachment to his homeland, this study stresses the collective remembrance of the people who did not choose to be displaced and their traumatic past that continues to “bleed” from the first generation to the subsequent generation. Finally, this article traces how the traumatic memory of past generations reverberates in post-partition generations and provides them with a new perspective for understanding partition across the globe.

Keywords: Postmemory, Familial memory, collective memory, Partition, Homeland, Communal Conflict, Harmony.

Introduction

The longing for homeland and a sense of connectivity to the past are ongoing impacts of partition that continue to affect lives and memories across generations. The lasting imprint of traumatic violence and painful memories of partition have been going on in subsequent generations who have no first-hand experience of partition, yet they witness and acknowledge the past with the aid of the memory of their older generations. Multiple spaces facilitate the transmission of memories, including family, storytelling narratives, images, visual representations, museums, monuments, testimonies, and archives. These serve as crucial mediums in engaging with the past and revisiting the memory of partition. The past traumatic memories haunt the minds of the second and third generations who carry the legacies of the past through different sorts of collective and cultural memory. These memories have been mediated through imagination and shaped by their own perception of the past in the present understanding of the world. The past inherited memories form what is termed as “postmemory”- a phenomenon that continues to reshape and remould the life and thought processes of later generations. This paper deals with both the personal and familial postmemory of partition, as well as the enduring sense of connectedness to the homeland that persisted in

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the minds of the subsequent generations through the novel *Five Queen's Road* by Sorayya Khan, a second-generation writer on partition.

Some research works already conducted on Sorayya Khan focus on themes such as community violence, political upheavals after 1947, the memory of land and place, and a sense of nationalism. Other scholars have examined the conflict and status of non-Muslim minorities in the new form of state, the historical facts of 1947 and subverted past issues by challenging the dominant structure of Pakistan. Researchers like Heena Khan (2022) seek to rewrite history and reinterpret official accounts by challenging existing historical facts. Cara Cilano, in his chapter titled "All these Angularities': Spatialising non-Muslim Pakistani identities"(2019), discusses the tension between Hindu and Muslim communities and the condition of minorities after partition. Scholars such as Urvashi Kaushal and Priyanka Tripathi (2003) attempt to revisit the official history of 1947 and 1971 to break the silence of the past that witnessed acts of violence. Although these research works provide valuable insights into *Five Queen's Road*, this novel has a limited focus on memory and has not yet been examined from the perspective of postmemory. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the traumatic memory of subsequent generations through the lens of postmemory in Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road* (2009).

Postmemory and Partition

Marianne Hirsch first used the term "postmemory" in the article on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991). She said in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*:

"postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before- to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation (Hirsch 5).

She introduced the concept of postmemory for Holocaust studies when she went through her own "autobiographical readings" that connected to the stories of her parents' daily hazards, the trauma of their survival during World War II and these past histories governed her postwar childhood. This term is equally relevant to the aftermath of the 1947 partition, particularly with the generations who were either very young or not born during the horrific and traumatic time of Partition (Roy 12- 14; Bhatia 255-68). The year 1947 witnessed communal violence, riots, millions of displacements, numerous bloodsheds, rape, and forced migration where several Hindus and Sikhs migrated to the newly truncated India and Muslims to the new state of Pakistan. The term postmemory was used to express the memories of the "postgeneration" of the victims of the Holocaust when the Nazis killed and destroyed a large number of Jews. However, in both the Holocaust and the partition, mediated forms of memory were passed down from the first generations to the subsequent generations, who had no firsthand experiences. In this regard, Hirsch says:

... that descendants of victim survivors as well as perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of memory, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event (Hirsch 3).

Whether the subsequent generations are members of survivors' families or not, but they internalised the memory and traumatic experiences of war of the ancestors in their lives and activities. This traumatic past is perfectly stated by Eva Hoffman in her autobiography *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2005): "[s]tory of the second generation is, above all, a strong example of an internalized past, of the way in which atrocity literally reverberates through the minds and lives of subsequent generations" (Hoffman 103). As a child of Holocaust survivors, she inherited the painful past and traumatic experiences

of her parents that provided her with an insight into the psyche of second generations and their responses to the aftermath of the holocaust. Children of the Indian subcontinent are similarly affected by this transgenerational transmission of trauma. Testimony of consequent generations is also found in a young researcher, Anam Zakaria, who focuses on oral history of collective interviews of subsequent generations from Pakistan and India and communications of school children of both countries. Her work *The Footprints of Partition: Narrative of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (2015), includes four generations of Pakistanis and Indians and how the memory of partition has evolved and rearranged generations after.

In the arena of partition studies, several prominent historians and scholars like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Anjali Gera Roy, Nandini Bhatia, Anam Zakaria and others who deal with transgenerational transmission of partition memory interlinked their family history, autobiography, interviews and the research on partition. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin expressed their transference of memory in the preface of their anthology *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998). During the partition Bhasin and Menon were in a very early stage of comprehending the trauma of partition but their anthology based on the oral history of women reminded them of their familial issues, personal memories of grandparents and their homes in Lahore as they had heard partition stories from the conversations of the adult members of their families. Butalia also chronicled the agony of displacement and the horror of the past as her Sikh family abandoned Lahore and relocated during the partition, allowing her to document the experiences of women, children, and migrants from both Hindu and Muslim communities. Dipesh Chakrabarty, like Butalia, belonged to the generation of post-partition migrants, and the past of his family also shaped his identity and boyhood in East Bengal, and their migration to Calcutta made him feel to visit his ancestral home, as he recounts in his *Habitations of Modernity* (2002). Though these scholars and writers of partition have no direct memory of partition, their works still retreat to the events of partition and its aftermath in a way that provides us with a glimpse of the trauma of partition that future generations will remember. These writings could be understood from the viewpoint of postmemory.

Sorayya Khan as a Bearer of Familial Memory: An Introspection

Sorayya Khan, lacking direct experience of partition, has been carrying the memory of her family and the legacy of the violence of 1947 in her novel *Five Queen's Road*. During the post-partition era, she was born in Vienna, Austria, but she spent her childhood in Pakistan, where her father's family was deeply rooted. Khan was only ten when her family moved to Lahore and was shipped to a lovely, dilapidated house that carried the legacy of the 1947 war. Her father's deep emotional attachment to Lahore and his insight into family legends sustained her materials on writings of the post-partition condition of Lahore. Her ancestral homeland evoked a profound sense of nostalgia that connected her to Pakistan.

The present paper focuses on the novel *Five Queen's Road* (2009), where the postmemory of partition and its unprecedented violence and trauma affected the lives of the later generations. In this novel, the homeland acts as a crucial medium of revisiting the memory of partition that revisualizes the traumatic experiences of 1947. It argues how communal conflict and religious division made boundaries among themselves and separated them from their family and loved ones. In this paper, special emphasis is given to the long-lasting effects of partition on Sorayya Khan, which she gained from her father, grandfather, and relatives. The image of the house she received is from the memory of her grandparents and her paternal aunt, who resided there. This house depicted the memory of her family's past and the traumatic events of 1947. Here, family is a space of transition of memory and remnants of the house, an integral part of the memory of 1947, which vivifies the past that captures the image of the house as a form of postmemory.

Khan's autobiographical essay "The Sound of Conversation" reflects the visual landscape of that house:

The picture was a corner of Five Queen's Road, my grandparents' dilapidated house in Lahore, a place where bird droppings fell from ceiling-high windows and paint and plaster fell in joined clumps to the floor. Although we'd never seen it as such, it was the once-upon-a-time, pre-Partition, astonishingly grand home of an Englishman whose terraced perennials I fantasized were famous throughout the city. The image came out whole, as if it had been germinating for years, and it was a place I could see, feel, hear, smell and touch in one paragraph. (Khan190).

The portrayal of "Five Queen's Road" carries the legacy of trauma that retains the past and recaptures horrific events that occurred due to the British Raj. The abandoned and demolished house thus generates spaces for witnessing past violence that Khan intricately links with the present experiences of partition in the concept of postmemory.

Memories of Homeland

Pakistan as Sorayya Khan's homeland, generated memories of the partition and induced her into the imagination of past traumas that she had not witnessed. Khan felt deep accounts of the past that shaped her understanding and behaviours through the transition of memories. Her novel reflects the afterimages of the partition, evoking the collective and cultural memories of those who refused to leave their homeland until death. Dina Lal is such a Hindu inhabitant in this novel who stayed in Lahore, his homeland, before and after the partition until the end of his life. He was born and brought up in Lahore and cherished all his childhood memories of the city, which he found impossible to part with. The politics and violence of 1947 and the creation of a new border did not impact his bond and love for his homeland. Dina Lal witnessed numerous bloodsheds, millions of migrations, and rape that could not stir him up from his overwhelming emotion for his homeland. His attachment to his ancestral place and sense of belonging were transmitted to him as an act of familial memory intermingled with his father's unending bond with the landscape of Pakistan. In a way, Dina Lal's attachment to Lahore reflected Sorayya Khan's emotional connection and longing for Pakistan: "Pakistan- the place, the people, the history, the politics, the culture-is endlessly absorbing... as a person and as a writer" (quoted in Tripathi 12). It commemorates Khan's family legends of Pakistan, the memory of her forefathers and their home named "Five Queen's Road" in Lahore.

Entwined Memories of Family and Home (land): Transmitting Communal Conflict and Harmony

The burning desire for an independent land created havoc in the lives of people of both nations because of communal violence and harrowing riots that resulted in the madness of forced migration and displacement. The partitioned border not only separated the geographical boundary of the land but also separated two major communities, Hindu and Muslim, who had coexisted happily side by side for centuries. The formation of a new Islamic State based on religion shattered Dina Lal, but he challenged political, social and psychological attacks by the majority religion in Pakistan. He was stubborn and undeterred to leave his land even when his wife was assaulted, "...two men sprang from behind and knocked her to the ground. Her purse was snatched, and the gold chain she was wearing was yanked from her neck...[t]hey cut off her bangles with wire cutters, and as added insult, the men took her sandals" (51). This shocking and painful incident did not move Dina Lal; rather, he decided to convert to Islam and partitioned his house into two sections: the front and the back. Dina Lal and his possessiveness for land echo the trauma of the people who were forced to be displaced from their households and were victims of hatred, violence, and communal attacks. He not only changed his religion but also adopted a new name from Dina Lal to Dina Lal Ahmed. He offered the front part of the house, bordered by a rope, to a Muslim tenant, Amir Shah, for his own safety and security. The house itself symbolised the land of both nations- India (Hindu) and

Pakistan (Muslim), separated by Radcliffe's line, where people lived in friendly and supportive ways during the initial stage of partition. People rescued each other and extended a helping hand, as also found in Anam Zakaria's testimony from the part of "Remembering 1947" where Sikhs or Hindus protected Muslims and Muslims also saved others (Zakaria 34). The same relationships have reoccurred in *Five Queen's Road*, defining the character Dina Lal, from the Hindu community and his tenant from the Muslim community. The house ultimately serves as a space which stands for the partition of 1947, and its impacts deeply affect the lives of common people. As a second-generation writer of partition, Khan bears the memory of the harmonious and conflicting relationship of these two communities that still exist in the minds of present generations. Khan locates the site of the transmission of partition memory through the windows of her familial connection and parental house in Lahore. Hirsch's assertion in this regard is:

The language of a family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms. It is perhaps the descriptions of this symptomatology that have made it appear as though the postgeneration wanted to assert its own victimhood, alongside that of the parents, and to exploit it (Hirsch 34). Hirsch mentions different symptoms of parental generations like languages, behaviours, and activities "bleed" to the next generations. Thus, postwar children defined and shaped their lives with the close proximity of their parents' painful memories and horrific past.

Familial memories of Khan are intricately entwined with her grandparents and a Hindu neighbour, Dina Nath (name has been changed to Dina Lal). This familial resurface came to her mind in what Eva Hoffman terms as "emanations" and "chaos of emotions" linked to Khan's postmemory. Khan visualises the traumatic condition of partition through her family's experiences. In *Five Queen's Road*, she represents how the memories of the harmonious and supportive relationship between Dina Lal and Amir Shah raged into dispute, hatred, jealousy and prejudices. Through the vehicle of inherited memory, she captured the post-partition condition of Lahore as well as the unexpected violence that afflicted the Indian subcontinent. Before partition, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs lived peacefully and fought unanimously against the British and made the slogan, "sab hain milkar bhai-bhai" (Kaul 8). But the creation of two separate nations turned communities into adversaries, unleashing looting, killing, murder and rape. This animosity and horrific riots upsurged day by day, which altered the scenario of the geographical and political fields across the nation. With the remnants of family memories, Sorayya Khan has cultivated the evolving concept of minorities with Dina Lal's catastrophe for not choosing to be displaced from his homeland. She explored how the political turmoil affected the psychology of the people and brought changes to the lives and relationships of succeeding generations. Despite mutual suspicion and anger, both communities had kind and humanitarian ties, which should not be overshadowed by the partition history.

The circumstances of 1947 were so traumatic and life-threatening that People either had to choose the land or religion for survival. Dina Lal is somewhat like the character of Lala Kanshi Ram in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), who favoured land and transformed into a Muslim for not leaving his home in Sialkot. Both characters have lost families and property and endured communal violence as religious minorities in Pakistan. His obsession with land is also reminiscent of Manto's important character Bishan Singh from the short story "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), who spent fifteen years in Lahore asylum and was unaware of the partition. Like Dina Lal, he refused to cross the border as he was concerned about his village and not the boundary line created by partition. Dina Lal's unyielding decision not to leave his place has been poignantly articulated in his assertion, "...he would never, ever leave Lahore for India. The city, goddamn it, belonged to him as much as it did to anyone. Not just the hotels, the buildings and the land he had inherited from his father years ago. Lahore was his home" (Khan 52). He wanted to survive, remembering the memories of past cheerful days. He carried the living memories of his forefathers attached to this land. Sorayya Khan recapped the memory

of the place, trauma, and madness of partition in the light of Dina Lal. Through this novel, Khan throws light on the collective remembrance of the traumatic past of the survivors of partition who shared long-lasting bonds with their homeland.

Conclusion

A postmemory reading of partition, as Sorayya Khan envisages, offers insight into the collective memory of the people who were displaced, uprooted from their ancestral homes, and forced to live as strangers. They lost everything, were parted from family and became victims of widespread communal riots. The effects of their past traumatic events have continued across the second and third generations, as they relate themselves to the experiences of previous generations. This enduring impact continues to affect people's psyche as "Partition is not a static event that one could simply move on from...partition continues to be an ongoing journey, leaving its imprints on the collective consciousness of the people of this region (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) while shaping state policies with far-reaching consequences" (Zakaria 39). These regions reconstitute memory and understanding of the past that have lasting traces on the minds of later generations. Khan brought with her familial memory of partition and the story of her forefathers' emotional connection to the house named "Five Queen's Road", and to the homeland, Lahore, that integrated her personal memory and imagination with the political violence of Partition. The legacy of violence and trauma of partition continues to resonate in the minds of the next generations through the canvas of postmemorial imagination.

...postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation. Family life, even in its most intimate moments, is enriched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance (Hirsch 35).

In this light, family serves as a conduit for transmitting the multiple traumatic symptoms of partition through the image of a home that has been grounded in Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road*. This novel intermingles diverse traumatic issues of partition through the characters of Dina Lal, his tenant Amir Shah and their relationship. In doing so, it unfolds the ongoing aftermath of the partition's traumatic condition, inviting new generations to revisit the memory of the past within the context of the present global phenomenon. Thus, revisiting the past would provide a new perspective for future generations, enabling them to move forward and overcome the lasting traumatic memory of partition.

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