

Affirmation of Humanity amidst Violence: A Study of Select Partition Stories

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ABSTRACT

This article examines some Partition stories--K. A. Abbas's "A Debt to Pay," S. H. Vatsayan's "The Refuge," R. C. Sen's "The White Horse," A. N. Qasmi's "Parmeshwar Singh," Vishnu Prabhakar's "I Shall Live," K. S. Duggal's "He Abducted Her" and Krishna Sobti's "Where's My Mother?" -- written about the tragic aftermath of the division of South Asia into two nations—India and Pakistan in 1947. The stories convincingly tell the heart-breaking tales of the victims of Partition who lost almost everything—home, land, property, relatives--became refugees, and suffered from untold poverty and inexplicable loneliness, pain, and trauma. The paper argues that although the stories depict catastrophic violence and its widespread psychological impact on the victims of Partition, they also provide space for human values such as care and concern, love, and compassion, and support Amitav Ghosh's idea of "affirmation of humanity" that goodness manifests even amid evil. The altruistic work of courageous and benevolent people who risk their own life to protect the victims help restore faith in humanity.

KEYWORDS: *partition, violence, bloodshed, compassion, kindness, affirmation of humanity*

In his essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi,"¹ Amitav Ghosh recounts his personal experience of sectarian violence in the aftermath of the assassination of Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. Recapitulating the tragic events on the fateful day in New Delhi, Ghosh describes that the majority Hindus wildly attacked the minority Sikhs--in buses and streets--and looted their property, set fire to their houses and shops, and burnt people alive. The essayist also depicts the brave works of resistance such as protest rallies organized by the ordinary Hindus to counter the persecution of the Sikhs, and the philanthropic work they performed to help the victims. The altruism of the citizens of Delhi amid the surrounding chaos inspires the author to conclude that he saw firsthand "not the horror of violence but the affirmation of humanity" (Ghosh 61). Ghosh provides several instances of heroism where people take to the frontline risking their lives and engage in compassionate acts that demonstrate "affirmation" or confirmation of humanity. Similar cases of benevolence find space in the fictional works of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh writers who have documented the tragic cataclysm of the South Asian Partition of 1947.² K. A. Abbas's "A Debt to Pay," S.

H. Vatsayan's "The Refuge," R. C. Sen's "The White Horse," A. N. Qasmi's "Parmeshwar Singh," Vishnu Prabhakar's "I Shall Live," K. S. Duggal's "He Abducted Her" and Krishna Sobti's "Where's My Mother?" juxtapose atrocious activities with charitable ones and show that goodness manifests even amid evil and helps restore faith in humanity.

In "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi," Ghosh describes scenes of physical violence, theorizes about its nature and consequence, suggests how writers must holistically document both the good and the evil aspects of violence, highlighting the enduring quality of human values. Illustrating the heroic deeds of ordinary members of the majority Hindus of Delhi in protecting the victimized Sikhs at different locations such as in a bus, in the house of a Bengali family, and in the streets, Ghosh applauds their courage and sacrifice. He clarifies that these people know about the potential danger that their property will be looted, their houses burnt, and they themselves branded treacherous and punished by death³ for going against their ethnic or religious group to help the opponent community, especially by providing shelter. Yet, they take the risk of helping the members of the minority community, and thus "affirm" their humanity.

According to Ghosh, while documenting a dreadful conflict, writers of violence should faithfully present its holistic picture by accommodating both its dark and bright side, "violence and the civilized willed response to it" (62). While most writers tend to concentrate on the dramatic rendition of its ugly aspect--the graphic violence, Ghosh focuses on the less attractive aspect--the enlightened response of resistance manifested in the form of the sacrifice people make to diminish, if not annihilate, the effects of the catastrophic event. "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" endorses the belief that the light of humanity shines through the ostensible darkness of savagery and vehemence as do the texts selected for discussion in this paper.

The texts deal with one of the gloomiest phases of the Subcontinent's history--its absurd division into

two countries--India and Pakistan. During the tragic Partition, millions became the victims of forced migration, and hundreds of thousands were killed on the streets, and in towns, villages, shops, houses, buses, and trucks. Train loads of dead bodies became a familiar sight on both sides of the border.⁴ The stories under examination try to realistically portray the picture of the terrible times by artistically accommodating anecdotes of inhuman cruelty and skillfully integrating with them moving accounts of love and kindness. Inclusion of the voice of reason and resistance and the benevolent work of help and protection the characters perform suggest that the momentary flash of the power of evil pales before the bright light of virtue which ultimately becomes triumphant. "A Debt to Pay" by Khwaza Ahmad Abbas⁵ juxtaposes kind-heartedness, concern and sacrifice with genocidal violence unleashed during the massive riots of 1947 and illustrates Ghosh's idea of

² In August 1947, British India was partitioned into two nations--India and Pakistan--leading to massive violence in which millions lost their lives and millions became refugees.

³ Gyanendra Pandey, in *Remembering Partition*, writes about an incident in which although some families in a Muslim village could give shelter to Hindus and Sikhs, communal minded others warned that they would kill every Sikh woman and child seeking protection, and added that "the body giving shelter will be similarly dealt with" (75).

⁴ Various scholars have furnished different statistics about the loss and death during Partition. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, note that Partition exodus was "the largest peace-time mass migration in history" in which "about eight to ten million people had crossed over from Punjab and Bengal" and "about 500,000-1,000,000 had perished" (35). Tarun K. Saint and Ravikant, in their "Introduction" to *Translating Partition*, maintain that the "scale of the calamity was so large that at least one million died and more than ten million refugees were displaced" (xiii). Ayesha Jalal, in *The Pity of Partition*, observes that Partition caused "the forced migration of an estimated fourteen and a half million people, and the murder of perhaps two million innocent men, women, and children" (3-4).

⁵ Born in 1914, in Panipat, Haryana Khwaza Ahmad Abbas (1914-1987) began his career as a free-lance writer for several papers and magazines in Bombay. A leading member of the Progressive Writers Group, he wrote novels, short stories, film- scripts, and biographies. Best remembered for short stories, the biographies of Khrushchev, Nehru and Indira are among his notable works. Other important works include his novella *Blood and Stones*, his political novel *Inqilab* and his moving autobiography *I am Not an Island*.

"affirmation of humanity." Told from the perspective of a young Muslim Burhanuddin, "A Debt to Pay" focuses on the changing relationship between the narrator and his sixty-year-old Sikh neighbor in Delhi. Indoctrinated since childhood, the narrator has internalized the stereotypical image of the Sikhs as "stupid and idiotic" (Abbas 4), "incredibly filthy" (4), "ill-bred" (5), "uncouth and uncultured" (8), "savages" (3), and characterizes them to be "cowards incapable of protecting their women" as opposed to the civilized, smart, and brave Muslims (2). Suffering from "Sikh-phobia" (2), Burhanuddin suspects that the Sardar (Sikh) could anytime "thrust his *kirpan* (knife) into my [his] belly" (1). Sensing the doubts of the youth, the Sikh promises to protect him from the opposing community: "*Sheikhji*, do not worry! As long as I am alive no one will raise a hand against you" (9). However, the pledge of the Sardar becomes a case of further disbelief to Burhanuddin who misinterprets every sympathetic word the Sikh utters and considers the genuine assurance to be fraudulent. In his opinion, the Sardar speaks deceptively to hide his pleasure at the massacre of the Muslims elsewhere or "to win [his] confidence" or "to taunt him" (9).

However, despite the sickening suspicion of the narrator, the old Sikh takes great risk to shelter and protect Burhanuddin's life and property. First, he shields the communal-minded narrator from the attacks of the menacing non-Muslim mobs. Next, he stops the rioters from raiding the Muslim's house by reasoning with them that his family members have "prior claims" over the neighbor's belongings, and that they must get their "share of the loot" (Abbas 11). Pretending to rob the Muslim, the Sikh family collects some items from his house and later hands them over, saying: "Here you are, take your things" (12). The narrator is "dumbfounded" when the Sikh's wife adds, "Son, I'm sorry we were not able to save more" as he realizes how wrong he had been to malign the Sikh community (12). When the wild crowd comes back to the Sardarji's house to hunt the narrator, he locks the youth safely inside a room and dares to confront the rioters who shoot him to death.

The Sikh's sacrificial act proffers a powerful revelation of humanity: it shatters the Muslim youth's false beliefs about the Sikhs and demolishes his petty segregationist "world of hate" (Abbas 13). The compassionate manners of the elderly man promise the narrator a new life with the notion and vision of a society free of suspicion and hatred and show how the loving bond of humanity can change one's perception of life and attitude toward another. Near the end of the story, the young narrator comments that the Sikh "reminded me of my grandfather with his twelve-inch beard. How closely the two resembled each other!" (13). Recognition of the neighbor's humanity enables Burhanuddin to see the similarity between the beards of the Sikh and his

grandfather, which he misses in his earlier biased statement: "My grandfather also had a very long beard which he combed. . . but then my grandfather was my grandfather, and a Sikh is just a Sikh (3).

By giving up his life to save the "honor of [the Sikh's] family" in Rawalpindi, Pakistan from where he had been displaced, Ghulam Rasul sets another glaring example of sacrifice (Abbas 13). Later, the elderly Sikh risks his life to save the narrator to pay a debt to his savior, who ironically happens to be the narrator's college friend and who once shared his passionate hatred for the Sikhs. Ghulam Rasul not only inspires the Sikh to forfeit his own life for others [here, the narrator] but also smashes the lingering remnant of the narrator's prejudice.⁶ Through their transformative sacrificial performances,⁷ the characters in "A Debt to Pay" remind the readers about the need to live in harmony additionally driving home Ghosh's idea

⁶ Shashi Joshi, in "The World of Saadat Hasan Manto," observes that "the *dénouement* in the story comes with the physical death of Burhanuddin's Sikh neighbor and with the metaphysical death of the Sheikh's fixed notions of good and evil communities as the Sardar cuts across communal, cultural, and political boundaries by sacrificing his own life for the Sheikh's" (148).

⁷ Niranjana Murthy, in "The Nation's Partition: A Study of Partition Stories," rightly remarks that the story at the end leaves Sheikh Burhanuddin "shaken and silent at the humanitarian sacrifice of both the Sikh and Ghulam Rasul" (222).

that human goodness exists even in the most menacing place.

S. H. Vatsayan's⁸ "The Refuge" also incorporates scenes of human love and goodwill to counter the inhuman cruelty manifested during the monstrous outbreak of communal strife in Lahore during Partition. Although the story describes painful situations of destruction, displacement, and death when erstwhile neighbors turn into mortal enemies,⁹ it also shows two Muslim souls helping a Hindu by breaking their communal and cultural boundaries. Having come under the vicious grip of suspicion and threat to his life, when Hindu Devenderlal suffers from fatal fear, his Muslim friend Rafiquddin and his friend's daughter Zaibunnisa, raise the voice of reason and "universal justice"¹⁰ and extend their helping hands to protect him thereby affirming the ideals of friendship and trust.

When most of the Hindus have fled to India to avoid persecution at the hands of the hostile Muslim mobs, Rafiquddin, a respected lawyer asks Devenderlal to stay back in his native place. As a member of the majority community, Rafiquddin considers it to be his duty to protect the minority and to ensure that "they don't abandon their homes and run away" (Vatsayan 364). Rightly arguing that if the majority cannot protect their neighbors, they cannot possibly protect their country, Rafiquddin says to Devenderlal: "We will not let you go-- we will force you to stay" (364). He does not allow the Hindu to seek refuge outside by reasoning: "How can you leave your own home and become a refugee in your own city?" (364). Offering shelter to Devenderlal, Rafiquddin assures him of safety and security by hiding him in a dark room next to the garage of his friend, Sheikh Ataullah, a clerk in the police department (364). He resists the ongoing persecution of minority in the name of Islam, and protects the potential victim by standing up to the Muslim communalists who threaten to punish him for betraying their religion. By placing human friendship above community and culture, Rafiquddin risks his life to support Devenderlal.

Raising herself above religious communalism, the Sheikh's daughter, Zaibunnisa charitably saves Devenderlal's life in the sinister atmosphere of betrayal and death. As she learns of her father Sheikh Ataullah's plot to kill the Hindu by poisoning his food, Zaibunnisa foils his plan by secretly warning Devenderlal through a scribbled note that says, "Feed the dog, before eating the food yourself," and helps him escape to the safety of his people in Delhi (Vatsayan 373). As she is a selfless being, she expects nothing in return for her merciful work. Later, when Zaibunnisa receives information about his safe arrival in Delhi, she sends Devenderlal another message requesting him to forgive her father, not to "forget this incident," and to help a person in a similar situation in India. She adds, "I make this request, not because that person may be a Muslim, but because you are a human being!" (375-76). The young Zaibunnisa proceeds in a most honorable manner showing concern for the victim at a time of communal wrath when one's own people commit outrageous crimes. By thwarting her father's poisonous plan and saving the Hindu, Zaibunnisa presents an excellent sample of kindness and courage. Her utter selflessness together with that of Rafiquddin at the time of the "monstrosity... of all the communities"¹¹ attests to

⁸ Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsayan 'Ajneya' (1911-1987) is an eminent Hindi poet and story writer who has published about fifteen volumes of poetry and a large body of fiction. A winner of several awards including the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award and the National Academy of Letters Award, his works have been translated into languages such as German, Swedish, and English. His most notable works are *Shekar*, *Nadi ke Dvipa* and *Apne Apne Ajnabi*.

⁹ If Jason Francisco, in "In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly," classifies

“The Refuge” as a text of “betrayal and protest” (244), Alok Bhalla, in his “Introduction” to *Stories about the Partition of India*, includes it in the category of the stories of rage and hopelessness and characterizes it as one of the “terrifying chronicles” of the times of “more madness and crime” (xxxi).

¹⁰ Jason Francisco, in “In the Heat of Fratricide,” rightly remarks that Rafiquddin is “motivated not just by friendship, but by the dictates of universal justice” (244).

¹¹ Alok Bhalla, “Introduction” to *Stories about the Partition of India*, xxxi.

Ghosh’s proclamation on the enduring quality of human goodness.

Likewise, existence of humanitarian ideals during the inimical times of communal mayhem forms an important aspect of “The White Horse” by Ramesh Chandra Sen.¹² Dealing with an old Muslim coachman cum groom and a bunch of mischievous Hindu boys, the text “[highlights] the subtle shift in the power relations of the two communities in the wake of Partition.”¹³ After a period of relative calm during the chaos of Calcutta riots, the group of Hindu boys--Jamuna, Babul, Habul, Goba, Santu, Khokon, and Nontey--come across the Muslim’s lost white horse, named Sohrab. They name it Chand, feed it, take its proper care, and play with it. Without allowing communal or religious sentiments to cloud their sense of righteousness and justice, the boys peacefully hand over the horse to the old owner whom they find to be desperately looking for it.

Before he can cross the Hindu majority area, after a temporary pause, the riots resume forcing the frightened old coachman to turn around “to find reassurance from the boys” (Sen 430). Notwithstanding the fact that the man before them is a Muslim and helping him would mean to invite danger upon them from their own people, the boys decide to undertake the perilous task. Assuring the Muslim that he has “nothing to fear,” the boys “make a cordon round the old man” to protect him from the advancing gang of dreadful rioters (Sen 430). An elderly Hindu, Hrishikesh Babu joins the boys in their mission and asks the rioters not to harm the old groom: “This man is innocent. Don’t beat him up” (430).

However, the rioters hold the coachman responsible for the crime some Muslims have committed on Hindus somewhere else and attempt to torture him in retaliation, stating: “He is not a man, he’s the devil” (Sen 430). Reminding that the Muslims too have saved Hindus in many places, the boys advance to the rescue of the old man with a determined look and willingness to fight with their co-religionists. Addressing him as “uncle,” Nontey stands straight in front of the mob to shield the Muslim coachman from any harm. Jamuna challenges the rioting crowd: “Come on, the lot of you, let’s see who can beat us up, come on” (431). Another boy shouts, “No one can touch the groom, our white horse’s groom” (431). Considering the old Muslim as one of them, their “uncle” and “our white horse’s groom,” the Hindu lads safeguard him unmindful of the brickbats thrown at them.¹⁴ Jamuna, comparatively a bigger boy, saves the old man’s life by carrying and hiding him in Hrishikesh Babu’s house.

The boys including Jamuna, who ironically happens to shout the loudest whenever Muslims attack on a temple, rise above all sectarian issues and present a fine specimen of love in action. Their altruistic activity conveys a clear message that rather than becoming a cause to divide and harm, religion should be the reason to unite and help people, especially during hard times. Their ability to transcend the narrow bounds of community, empathize with the underdogs, and help them in an intimidating environment of intense hatred reinforces the reader’s belief in the nobility of mankind.

Written by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi,¹⁵ an author from Pakistan, “Parmeshwar Singh” too reflects lofty ideals of love and care during the havoc of Partition. The text recounts the tale of the titular Sikh character Parmeshwar Singh and a Muslim boy, Akhtar of about five years who is separated from his mother while on a foot convoy to Pakistan. Parmeshwar, a fierce anti-Muslim Sikh saves Akhtar

¹² Born in Calcutta in 1894, Ramesh Chandra Sen (1894-1962) worked as an Ayurvedic physician all his life. A “sympathetic” writer, he has produced several short stories and novels in Bengali. He rose to fame because of “The White Horse” and his best-known novel *Kajal*.

¹³ Bodh Prakash, “Introduction” to *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature*, 2.

¹⁴ Debjani Sengupta, in *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities*, rightly argues that the text “explores new textures of civility and human experience” (57).

¹⁵ Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (1916-2006) has written stories and poems in Urdu and Punjabi. A prolific writer, his works have been collected in twelve volumes. *Neela Pathar* and *Aas Paas* are his best-known collections of stories. He worked as the Director of the Urdu Academy in Lahore.

when he faces life threats from a group of angry Sikhs. Parmeshwar's "ferocity is tamed and humanized"¹⁶ by his encounter with the innocent little child whom he intends to keep in his house. His own son Kartar has been kidnapped by Muslim rioters and his family displaced from Pakistan recently. His wife who constantly bemoans the loss of her son saying "Kartar is the wound in my heart which will never heal," refuses to accept the boy in the house (Qasmi 205). Similarly, his daughter, Amar Kaur and the Sikh community look at the child with scorn.

The hostility of the family members toward Akhtar, the Muslim child's longing for his mother, and the scene of powerful love he witnesses between a mother and child in his neighbor's house¹⁷ make Parmeshwar soon realize that the unhappy child must be restored to his mother. As he cannot "replace the child's lost world" or "substitute for [his] mother,"¹⁸ he decides to reunite Akhtar with his mother. Prioritizing the welfare of the boy, Parmeshwar comforts him: "I swear by your God that I am your friend" (Qasmi 195). Ironically, Parmeshwar is shot down when he himself escorts Akhtar to the border to save him from harm on the road: "I'll take you to Pakistan myself" (195).

The text contains several moments of generosity, the best one being related to the protagonist, Parmeshwar (meaning highest God) himself. His sobbing and pleading for mercy when one of his fellow Sikhs pulls out his *kirpan* to kill Akhtar is a case in point. The empathetic Sikh sees the image of his own son in the little stranded boy and says: "All children are alike, yaron [friends]" (Qasmi 189). Emphasizing that the same Waheguruji has created both Akhtar and Kartar alike, he appeals to the wild Sikhs to spare the Muslim child.

Showing due respect to the religion of the other community, Parmeshwar allows Akhtar to recite the *Koran* in his house and strongly resists the proposal of his bigoted coreligionists to convert the child to Sikhism. He admonishes an insular Sikh calling for his better sense of reasoning thus: "How can you be so cruel, yaron? You want to make Akhtar, Kartara, but supposing someone were to make Kartara, Akhtar? You'll call him evil, won't you?" (Qasmi 196). Parmeshwar's righteous thoughts make him argue persuasively that conversion of a Sikh child to Islam or a Muslim one to Sikhism are equally objectionable.

The resistance against family and society for the protection of a stranger, the tolerance of other's religious practices, the disapproval of conversion, the loving care of Akhtar, the sincere effort to reunite him with his mother, and the sacrifice he makes for the little stranded boy demonstrate Parmeshwar's exemplary humanity. A victim of Muslim rioters himself, Parmeshwar's sense of justice rooted in the redeeming quality of equality and love illustrate Ghosh's "affirmation of humanity" achieved through astounding courage of ordinary individuals in society.

Similarly, in "I Shall Live," Vishnu Prabhakar¹⁹ provides sufficient space to human charity and love to show the firm grip of goodness in the human psyche. Concerned basically with chaotic and tragic events such as displacement, pain, loss, and death, the story intermingles noble thoughts

¹⁶ Alok Bhalla, "Introduction" to *Stories about the Partition of India*, xxvii.

¹⁷ The mother simply rushes without dupatta hearing the cries of her son and after successfully taking out a long thorn from the boy's foot wildly kisses him (Qasmi 205).

¹⁸ Shashi Joshi, in "The World of Saadat Hasan Manto," rightly remarks that Parmeshwar "cannot replace the child's lost world--the cultural world of his socialization, of the *azan* and the Qur'an. Nor can he substitute for the child's mother, whose memory is not an abstraction for Akhtar but a warm, sensuous memory of a woman who read the *namaz* and gave him a drink of water with a *bismillah*" (143).

¹⁹ Vishnu Prabhakar (1912-2009), a notable writer in Hindi, also worked as a director in All India Radio. He has published more than 80 novels, 59 plays and several collections of short stories and Essays. His famous works include *Awara*, *Masiha*, *Jane Anjane*, *Dhalti Raat*, and *Ardhanarishwar* for which he was awarded Sahitya Akademi in 1993. He received Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan Award in 1995, and the Padma Bhushan (the third highest civilian honor of India) in 2004.

and actions of humane characters.²⁰ Raj and Pran, major characters in the story, who "refuse to give into rage and struggle to discover ways of living which could restore us to sanity and redeem us,"²¹ furnish a high standard of morality rare to find during the wild riots of 1947.

"I Shall Live" primarily recounts the story of Raj, a Hindu woman forced out of Lahore, Pakistan because of communal madness. While fleeing, she loses her own child but encounters a small baby left in a train. Risking her life, she protects the child, names him Dilip, raises him as her own, considering him to be a "gift" of hope sent by God at the most hopeless time in Indian history (Prabhakar 525). When trapped in a difficult situation in India, Raj and Dilip meet Pran, a kindhearted Hindu displaced from Lahore. They start living with him, filling the void of the lonely man's life who has lost his wife and children in the riots. After living peacefully for some days under the loving attention of Pran, Raj is shocked to learn that the anguished mother of Dilip (his original name is Ramesh) has come to claim her child back. At the persuasion of Pran, Raj returns Dilip (Ramesh) to the biological mother and soon joins her penitent husband.

Despite instances where the "sense of humanity" has been "drowned in a river of blood," "I Shall Live" presents an exalting illustration of humanity especially through the kind and loving actions and manners of the main characters (Prabhakar 525). Raj and Pran engage in altruistic work without nurturing the thoughts of retribution because "the experience of evil doesn't so paralyse"²² them. Raj's feelings of love for Dilip and her sacrifice in handing over the child to his birth mother is a case in point. Despite her deep attachment to Dilip, she listens to the influential advice of Pran and acts with a magnanimous heart. Though sad and heart-broken herself, Raj parts with Dilip, and fills with joy the life of a destitute mother by reuniting with her the long-lost son, Ramesh.

Pran's selfless love for Raj and Dilip and his repeated help to Raj--before and after she loses Dilip--serve as one more outstanding model of human kindness actively at work for the upliftment of helpless people. After Dilip's departure, when Raj becomes lonely, Pran tries to find a child for adoption so that she could lose herself "in the innocent play of a child again" and regain some happiness (Prabhakar 527). He becomes instrumental in protecting the maternity of Ramesh's mother and re-uniting two families--that of Raj and Ramesh. Pran never tries to exploit her physically, emotionally, or mentally. His explanation to Raj how protecting motherhood is "even more precious than being a mother," persuading her to return Ramesh to his biological mother to attain "the kind of peace that [she] will never find by doing anything else," and his ability to convince her about her duty to go back to her husband "to heal past wounds,"²³ place him in the category of the adorable souls during the monstrous times of the South Asian holocaust (526).

K. S. Duggal's²⁴ "He Abducted Her" is another story that upholds age-old moral values and human honor in one of the darkest eras of Indian history. As the title suggests, "He Abducted Her" is a story about abduction, one of the commonest

²⁰ Enacted in an atmosphere of fear, along with the painful scenes of parting relatives and struggling refugees, the story also depicts re-union of long separated family members and good deeds of characters aimed to help and protect people from the rival community.

²¹ Alok Bhalla, "Introduction" to *Stories about the Partition of India*, xxxviii.

²² Alok Bhalla, "Introduction" to *Stories about the Partition of India*, xli.

²³ Alok Bhalla, in "Introduction" to *Stories about the Partition of India*, remarks: "Sure that the only way to heal past wounds is in doing one's duty, her second 'husband' [Pran] persuades her, with dignity and respect, to consider returning to her family" (x1-xli).

²⁴ Born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, Kartar Singh Duggal (1917-2012) has served as Director, All India Radio, Director, National Book Trust, India, and Adviser (Information), Planning Commission. He has published short stories, plays and novels. Best known for his fictional works *Twice Born Twice Dead*, *Come Back My Master and Death of a Song*, he is the recipient of prestigious awards such as the National Academy of Letters Award (1965), Ghalib Award (1976) and Soviet Land Nehru Award (1981).

crimes committed during Partition.²⁵ A young and handsome Shahzad Khan while in a spree of riot, loot, and murder, abducts Rajkarni, a beautiful Hindu girl. She is the only daughter of a rich and respectable Hindu Chaudhuri Sohne Shah. Shahzad Khan, a "fierce looking Pathan," dances with joy when he encounters the young and beautiful Rajkarni (Duggal 224). She reminds him of his own Hindu mother and how profoundly his father loved her. Shahzad Khan tries to impress the beautiful Hindu girl by singing a song and waits patiently for her response. However, the song fails to attract the attention of Rajkarni as it is drowned by the "never-ending echo" of the cries of women and children victimized by the terrible Muslims (Duggal 225). With his blood-stained hands, the rich Shahzad Khan who "could buy tens of beauties like Rajkarni" (224), leads her to a lonely spot on the bank of a "bubbling" stream and makes her sit on a soft "grassy mound" (225). He opens the bags of his loot, and spreads in front of her the riches—silk garments, bangles, rings, brooches, and necklaces—to win her heart. However, the emotionally disturbed Rajkarni who accompanies the Pathan "like a lamb being led to the slaughter-house," does not even glance at the valuable ornaments (225).

Rajkarni sits still "like a frightened dove, her eyes glued to the ground, terror-striven, terrified, shrinking" without appreciating his "bounteous" gifts (Duggal 226-227). Otherwise, a cruel man involved in abduction, bloodshed, and robbery, the intimidating Pathan neither wishes nor dares to touch the Hindu girl. Since abducted women were usually raped²⁶ at the time of Partition, readers would expect Shahzad Khan to commit that heinous crime and even to kill Rajkarni. However, he does not quite treat her body as a "territory to be conquered"²⁷ sexually. Rajkarni's silence mortifies Shahzad Khan; her indifference to his "gentleness" and the treasure before her embarrasses him (226). Therefore, instead of harming Rajkarni, the abductor runs away²⁸ from her giving a "blood-curdling scream" (227).

"He Abducted Her" not only makes provision for the honorable treatment of women from other communities as evidenced by Shahzad Khan's appreciation of his Hindu mother and the abducted lady, Rajkarni but also shows the Pathan as quite a decent man. By refraining to pounce upon the helpless girl's body, the "sexually aroused"²⁹ Shahzad Khan behaves like a gentleman and proves that traces of civilization and morality remain in his heart. The existence of the precious moments of love and respect amidst the turmoil of Partition asserts Ghosh's idea of the triumph of humanity over barbarity.

In her dreadful Partition story "Where Is My Mother?", Krishna Sobti³⁰ also places good deeds side by side with evil ones. The story deals with two refugees—a Hindu child and a Muslim man, Yunus Khan. Both are victims of the communal conflagration. The child who has lost her family is looking for her mother while Yunus has recently lost his twelve-year old sister, Nooran whose dead body he himself has buried. Aggrieved by the untimely death of Nooran, when Yunus sets on a mission to create "a new Mughal empire" which involves terror, bloodshed, and sacrifice, he notices a little girl lying "unconscious by the roadside" with her salwar "soaked in blood" (Sobti 435).

²⁵ Urvashi Butalia, in *The Other Side of Silence* (2000), writes: “Nearly 75,000-100,000 women are said to have been abducted” and raped. Some were married by the abductors themselves, some were rehabilitated, and some others ended up in prostitution (197).

²⁶ Ayesha Jalal, in *The Pity of Partition*, quotes Manto musing on the abducted, raped (and pregnant) and recovered women: “When I think of the recovered women, I think only of their bloated bellies--what will happen to those bellies?” (142).

²⁷ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*, 43.

²⁸ D. Anjaneyulu in his review of the story in *Indian Horizons* (1974) rightly observes that the story offers something “very different” at the end because it shows the case of “the abductor it was who ran,” not the one who is abducted (97).

²⁹ Muhammad Umar Memon, “Partition Literature: A Study of Intizār Husain,” 390.

³⁰ Born in West Punjab, Krishna Sobti (1925-2019) was directly affected by the Partition. She became famous after the publication of her first Hindi novel, *Mitro Marjani*, and since then she has produced several great works of fiction. Her historical novel, *Zindginama* has been acclaimed as the most substantial writing on the pre-Partition Punjab. She won several awards for her contribution to literature including the Jnanapith Award which she received in 2017.

Although the Baluch (Yunus) has drenched his hands in the blood of people belonging to the rival community--the *kafirs*--whom he wants to finish, his humanity reveals itself when he encounters the injured Hindu girl. He forgets his *zehad* at the pathetic sight of the innocent girl in whom he sees the image of his own deceased sister, killed in the Partition riots. Yunus feels “shaken, disturbed” by the little girl’s cries of pain and desires to raise her as his own sister to honor the memory of little Nooran as well as to make amends for his homicide (Sobti 436). Therefore, he repeatedly implores her to trust his genuine words and promises to bring her up as his own sister but “no promise of any kind can diminish her agony.”³¹

Yunus’s pledge can neither console her heart nor convince her mind which is influenced by the stereotypical images of Muslims as killers and rapists.³² The Hindu girl sees nothing but a dreadful enemy in Yunus who would finish her at any moment because the “unspeakable horrors imprinted”³³ in her mind prevent her from trusting the Baluch. She keeps crying in agony and suspicion: “You are a Muslim You’ll kill me” and continues to scream for her mother while also expressing a strong desire to go to the refugee camp which she thinks is the safest place for her to live in (Sobti 439).

Despite its strong communal content³⁴ and graphic representation of blood and violence—looting, burning, and killing³⁵—Sobti’s “Where Is My Mother?” integrates humane elements manifested in a most ironic manner through the character of the formidable Yunus. A hardened fanatic seeking blood and vengeance, the Baluchi man “no longer [feels] like a brave, powerful and ruthless soldier. He [feels] miserable, helpless ... weak” (Sobti 438). He takes pity on the stranger—a *kafir* girl from his adversary community, carries her to a Hindu (Sir Ganga Ram) hospital for treatment, and begs the doctor to save her. Love for the unnamed little girl manifested in words and action of the intimidating personality once again prove the presence of humane qualities even in the most disastrous times and the murkiest caverns of human hearts.

The discussion above supports Ghosh’s point in “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” that humanity exists even at the horrendous heart of violence. Admittedly, the stories selected in this paper depict extreme cases of moral depravity; however, each of the texts also shows characters engaged in altruism at the cataclysmic moment of Indian history. Abbas’s “A Debt to Pay,” Vatsayan’s “The Refuge,” Sen’s “The White Horse,” Qasmi’s “Parmeshwar Singh,” Prabhakar’s “I Shall Live,” Duggal’s “He Abducted Her,” and Sobti’s “Where’s My Mother?” make space for resistance against the rampant violence in the surroundings. By judiciously incorporating humanitarian actions in the texts that basically deal with blood and brutality, the stories illustrate the triumph of goodness over evil. Brave and courageous people with righteous thinking, move forward to help their fellow beings. Disregarding the danger looming upon their own life, these people stand against all kinds of violence and injustice inflicted upon the minority community. Their voice of reason, sense of justice, and acts of kindness and compassion contribute to righting the wrong in this world and try to foster friendship and establish harmonious relationship among all communities. Brief analysis of the stories in this paper validates Ghosh’s idea about the risk “perfectly ordinary people” readily “take for one another” toward affirmation of humanity at some degree--big or small (61). Some characters in these stories respond to violence in a most moral and civilized manner while others like Parmeshwar in Qasmi’s “Parmeshwar Singh” and the elderly Sikh in Abbas’s

³¹ Raju J. Patole, *Partition: History and Fictional Ingenuity*, 36.

³² Stereotypes of the Muslim as a violent killer and sexually rapacious figure had been commonly referred to during the times of communal conflict.

³³ Saros Cowasjee, "Introduction," *Orphans of the Storm*, xix.

³⁴ Alok Bhalla, in his "Introduction" to *Stories about the Partition of India*, includes "Where Is My Mother" in the list of "communally charged" stories because it denies "the claims to holiness of all religions" (xxvi).

³⁵ Along with the dreadful scenes of ear-piercing shouts of the blood-thirsty revolutionaries, flaming fire, bodies thrown into the flames: "children roasted like piglets," "men and women burnt alive," and "wailing women and crying children," Sobti's story gives space to values such as helping others and showing honor to the dead (Sobti 335).

"A Debt to Pay" go to the extent of willingly sacrificing their life for the sake of others. Their noble actions prove that indomitable spirit of humanity survives every odd and leaves its indelible marks in the world often torn with the terror of war.

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