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# Religion, Riots and Rift: Representations of the Partition of 1947 in English-Language Picture Books

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## Religion, Riots and Rift: Representations of the Partition of 1947 in English-Language Picture Books

India—one of the world’s oldest civilizations—has a rich tradition of folktales, myths, legends and fantasy, one as old as its history itself. These tales, most of which are moralistic, have been passed down orally across generations in a variety of regional languages. Until a few years ago, authors and publishers of Indian children’s literature nurtured the desire to extol the cultures and traditions of the subcontinent in the books that they produced, but they did so in a way that “perpetuated hegemonic value systems, homogenisation, stereotypes, and/or essentialization” (Superle 18). While they did produce texts that were political, and driven by a nationalistic agenda post-independence, they shied away from tackling bold themes and issues. When compared to its Anglo-American counterparts, Indian children’s literature, thus, was “crippled by institutional and psychological handicaps [thereby preventing] it from exploring uncharted domains of contemporary relevance that would appeal to a child/adolescent reader” (Rangachari). Although retellings of Indian folktales and religious narratives continue to circulate in Indian and transnational contexts, and are regarded as eternally relevant, they are neither categorized as contemporary realistic fiction nor as historical fiction. This causes readers to turn to realistic

fiction in order to gain information about the country's past, which is partly remembered by some members of the present society who lived through it, and is partially received by those who were either too young to remember it or others who did not experience it firsthand. While Rangachari suggests that "full-length" historical fiction for children in India is a "small, tangible, and thriving body of work," I argue that this genre continues to remain a less traversed area in Indian children's literature.

In an article published in 1975, Sheoran claimed that many of the existing, contemporary "historical narratives [featured] brave and courageous deeds of well-known Indian historical figures" (129). Little has changed since then, and there continue to be many realms in the vast expanse of Indian history that have not yet been explored. Rangachari observes that "there are huge chronological expanses in Indian history that are left untouched by writers in this genre," and that "[t]he Mauryan period, the Mughal era, the Vijayanagar empire[,] and the freedom struggle are possibly the only aspects covered in this gamut of work." Indeed, there are lacunae that are yet to be filled in Indian historical fiction for children; one such gap is the event that was mutually entwined with the independence of India—the Partition of British India into the nation-states of India and Pakistan.

Singer notes that the history of British India's freedom struggle is inseparable from that concerning the Partition (9). An event that saw one of the largest mass displacements in world history, the Partition of British India in 1947 (henceforth referred to as "the Partition"), has offered tremendous potential for exploration, so much so that it has become a subgenre of the Indian-English novel for adult readers (Roy 31). This leads one to think about this theme in the context of youth literature. Rarely discussed even in school textbooks, the Partition of India and Pakistan is considered a controversial topic for children in both nations (Chhabra 149). In a news article published in August 2017, the author notes that children in both these countries "are taught ... starkly different version[s] of [the] events [relating to the Partition and suggest that this is] the result of a decades-long effort by the ... rival [nations] to shape and control history to their own nationalistic narrative" (AFP). When it comes to publications for children in the West, the Partition is often unaddressed or ignored.

This essay is an attempt to understand how the Partition of colonial India is depicted in English-language picture books for children. It examines how adult authors of narratives about this conflict position the child readers and present information from a complex, multilayered, intersectional and gory past to them. Through this essay, I argue that in an attempt to distance the young audience from

the horrors of the Partition, the authors and illustrators of picture books on this topic compromise on both depth and accuracy in representing a complex event such as this one. Before proceeding with the survey and analysis of these texts, which are primarily written by authors of Indian origin, and published in India and the United States, it is essential to understand the historical background against which these stories are set.

### **A Brief History of the Partition of India and Pakistan**

In August 1947, India gained independence from the British Empire, and this was accompanied by a sudden and violent partition of the subcontinent into the two nation-states of India and Pakistan. The rationale for this division was that the Muslim-majority areas in British India would be separated from those that had a Hindu majority; the former would be deemed Pakistan, while the latter would be considered independent India. Several scholars including Menon and Bhasin, Pandey, Singer, and Khan note that the history of the Partition is murkier and more complex than the popular nationalist and separatist discourses surrounding the event, which blame imperialism as the primary cause for the division of British India. Some of the more contemporary historiographies of the event highlight the interplay of historico-political forces, religio-ethnic awareness, national consciousness and class differences in shaping the events leading up to

the Partition. While the act of splitting the subcontinent itself might have been sudden, the efforts to demand and declare separate electorates for the Hindus and Muslims in colonial India took place even before the 1940s.

One of the reasons for the abrupt execution of the plan for dividing and providing independence to colonial India, as Menon and Bhasin note, was “the pressure on the British to arrive at a negotiated settlement” for the Muslim minority in British India (6). Khan, in *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* shows how the entire process of the transfer of power from the British empire to the Indian subcontinent was hasty and chaotic, and how that, in turn, was detrimental to the sustenance of the two new nation-states. Not only do Khan, Butalia, and Menon and Bhasin discuss the political background of the event, but they also call attention to the people who lived through these times, in particular to their feelings of fear and uncertainty about what free India or Pakistan would look like and where they might end up having to live. Their anxieties were linked to their religion (Hindu, Muslim or Sikh), their nationality (who was Indian and who was Pakistani), their class, and their land (if they owned any).

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1947, the people of British India were notified of the government’s plan to divide up the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. In the

following two months, they learned that the provinces of Punjab (in the northwest of the subcontinent) and Bengal (in the northeast) would be partitioned, and that a portion of these provinces would come to be a separate, self-governed state, while the remaining regions would become part of independent India (Khan 2-3). This information further fuelled civilians' uncertainties and caused panic. While acts of violence—instigated by religious differences and regional patriotism—were being carried out in various parts of undivided India even before June 1947, the severity and brutality of the riots that happened during the summer months of 1947 was like nothing else that the people had witnessed before. During the Partition, “[s]everal hundred thousand people were estimated to have been killed; unaccountable numbers raped and converted [to a different religion]; and many millions uprooted and transformed into official ‘refugees’ as a result of what have been called the partition riots” (Pandey 2). Around sixty million of undivided India’s ninety-five million Muslims suddenly came to be known as Pakistanis, while the rest remained Indians (Menon & Bhasin 4). Many Sikhs and Muslims migrated to the West and started their lives anew in several places including North America and the United Kingdom.

### **The Need for Partition Literature for Children**

Many historians recognize that while historiographies recorded the political histories of the Partition, fiction aimed at adults has acted as a space where writers explored the social histories of the event. Menon and Bhasin note that the larger portion of Partition literature was written immediately after the country was sliced into two, and that this event is unparalleled for the type of literature that it engendered (7). Roy, in *South Asian Partition Fiction in English*, presents her analysis of six Partition novels for adults, and suggests that each of those texts “is an act of remembrance and the product of a quest to understand why a political event caused so much hostility, internecine violence and bloodshed among communities that had peacefully coexisted for almost half a millennium on a common landmass” (137). She refers to the Partition as the “historical legacy handed down unwanted to the children of the three nations [of] India, Pakistan and later Bangladesh” (Roy 29). In such a case, it is expected that the children would be aware of what is being bequeathed to them. Yet as noted in the above section, textbooks do not inform children in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh about the complicated histories that they have inherited from their communities. However, literature on this subject offers hope by acting as a conduit through which young readers can gain knowledge about a vital aspect of their respective nations’ past.



In his essay titled, “Memory, History and Fictional Representations of the Partition,” Bhalla writes about fictional works—English-language as well as those written in regional languages—on the Partition for adults. He suggests that the best narratives about the Partition “do not repeat what the historians already know....[but that] they seek to make connections with the social and cultural life of a community in its entirety within a historically specific period” (3120). The children’s books that have been used as primary sources for this study reaffirm Bhalla’s thoughts regarding the role of literature in highlighting social relationships during the time of the Partition.

Before proceeding to study these primary texts, it must be pointed out that only few children’s titles about the Partition, targeted at young children, have been written in English and published around the world in places including India, the United States and the United Kingdom. Those analyzed in this essay include *Chachaji’s Cup* (2003), *Mukand and Riaz* (2007) and *Stitching Stories* (2011.)<sup>1</sup> It took nearly 30 years post-Partition for publishers in India to bring out a story (*The Peacock Garden*, 1974) about the event for children. This illustrated novella by Anita Desai is the earliest work on the Partition for children. Twenty-five years since, *Hina in the Old City* (2000), now an out-of-print children’s book, was published. Following this, another title on the Partition written by an Indian

author (*Chachaji's Cup*) was brought out by a publishing company based in the United States, for circulation in North America. Two of the primary texts considered for the purpose of this essay—*Mukand and Riaz* and *Stitching Stories*, both written by Nina Sabnani—are based on true stories that have been recounted orally to the author. These books were brought out by Tulika Publishers, a publishing house based in Southern India, in the 2000s. *Chachaji's Cup*, on the other hand, is a fictional narrative.

*Mukand and Riaz* is based on a true story narrated by Mukand Sabnani to his daughter, the author Nina Sabnani. *Stitching Stories* is based on a documentary film, *Tanko Bole Chhe (The Stitches Speak)* made by the author herself. The film features the voices of the narrators, two traditional embroiderers, one of whom migrated to India during the Partition. The picturebook also uses the first-person narratorial voice of Raniben, the migrant embroiderer, to steer the first half of the story. Using Kim Wilson's idea that one of the functions of a picturebook is to serve as a memory of a historical event, it can be observed that Nina Sabnani's books too are records of the memories of her father's and the embroiderer's past (156).

Pandey argues that the writings on Partition violence have not been “primarily concerned with apportioning guilt on the opposing sides,” thereby

differentiating the ideology of Partition historiography from that of Holocaust literature (3). He deems the Partition “even more ‘unhistorical’ and inexplicable than the Holocaust” (45). On the contrary, literature on this topic aimed at adults—works by Bapsi Sidhwa, Saadat Hasan Manto, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie and the like—has successfully recognised and addressed the brutality of the event. It is literature directed towards children that hasn’t done so. This could be due to the over-protective and sensitive parental and institutional attitudes that dictate the reading preferences of children in India, and across the globe (Nodelman 29-31). Even among the primary texts under analysis, while the Partition is the central theme in *Mukand and Riaz*, *Stitching Stories*, and *Chachaji’s Cup*, these stories tend to distance the young reader from the violent aspects of the event, thus sheltering them from the conflict and the atrocities meted out on civilians during that period in history.

### **Representations of the Partition in Picture Books**

Jane Gangi, in her monograph on genocide in children’s literature, suggests that “[u]sing a ‘very limited vocabulary,’ writers for young people must navigate [the] tension between over-simplification and nightmare-inducing intensity” of war and genocide. In this section, I perform content analysis of the three primary texts to reveal the resources that the authors and illustrators of these

narratives employ in an attempt to strike a balance between protecting their child readers from the horrors of the Partition and providing them sufficient information about the event.

*Mukand and Riaz*, a story of friendship between two boys—a Hindu and a Muslim—set against the backdrop of the Partition, is lifted out of place and time for most part. In the tale recounted by an omniscient narrator, Mukand and his family leave Karachi for Bombay, and due to the geographical divide, the two best friends do not get to meet each other again. Even though the verbal text conveys that Mukand and Riaz live in Karachi, Pakistan, the visuals are generalised and decontextualized (Sabnani, *Mukand* 5). Only on pages 8, 9, 20, and 21 does one find visual information about their hometown Karachi being a zone of conflict. The diegetic and mimetic settings in *Mukand and Riaz* are minimal, and they focus on settings that are quotidian and recognizable to the young child reader. The images of palm trees, shops in the market, the bakery (see Figure 1), the *gurdwara* and the classroom reaffirm the idea of familiar settings, which are substantially abridged. This could prove to be both advantageous and disadvantageous since the young reader, who can easily relate to the settings, does not gain additional information about the past or the event through the visual narrative.

The images in *Mukand and Riaz* (illustrated by Nina Sabnani) and *Stitching Stories* (art by artists of Kala Raksha, India; see Figure 2) are those of applique and embroidery work on cloth, which are art-forms “practised on both sides of the India-Pakistan border” (Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* 25). Even though the verbal narratives revolve around the splitting of India and Pakistan, the adopted art form is one that serves as a symbolic representation of a common thread that brings the two countries together, and one that might perhaps unify readers from across the borders too.

While looking at the visuals in *Mukand and Riaz*, it is apparent that the illustrator intended to draw the reader’s attention to Mukand’s bright red cap, which plays an important role in the narrative. The story begins thus: “Mukand has a cricket cap. His best friend, Riaz, loves that cap and wants it. But Mukand will not let Riaz wear it. Mukand feels that when he wears his cap he can do anything” (Sabnani 3). When Mukand and Riaz are forced to part ways due to the Partition, “Mukand takes off his favourite cap and throws it to Riaz” (26). Although the focus lies on Mukand’s red cap throughout the story, it is Riaz’s “kurtas and Jinnah caps” that help Mukand and his family “leave Karachi without being noticed” (23). The red cap serves to divert the reader’s attention from the conflict as a way of distancing them from the horrors associated with the

Partition. Riaz's Jinnah cap, on the other hand, acts as a signifier of one of the major political figures at the time of, and before the Partition of colonial India—Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the head of the Muslim League who argued for a separate electorate for areas in British India where Muslims were a majority. As the leading voice calling for a separate homeland for Muslims, Jinnah was instrumental in the founding of Pakistan.

*Stitching Stories* opens with the reminiscences of the adult narrator, Raniben. As seen in Figure 3, on verso, there is an image of an embroidered map of Raniben's village (now in Pakistan) in a frame, emphatically separated from the text. The map is a patchwork of memories from Raniben's mind. On recto, there is a sudden shift to a less cluttered image of five blue birds and five red arrows heading eastwards, symbolically indicating the move from Pakistan in the west to India in the east. Raniben goes on to tell the reader about her move to India: "We crossed the desert through the night. We had a cart with us and also a camel ... But when we reached the border, they wouldn't let us enter India" (Sabnani 6). All the while, the images enhance and expand the verbal narrative. Along with the camels carrying people, the pictures feature goats and cows, representing the attachment that the Indians have always had with cattle. The images also describe the passage of time through the depiction of night and day in

the background. As seen in Figure 4, the intraiconic text which accompanies the image on page 7 features a dialogue between the guards at the Indian border and the refugees, thereby serving to elaborate on the verbal narrative that is quoted above.

Raniben and her family, along with the other refugees, are taken in trucks to Jurra in India. In an “empty and wild [place], almost like a jungle, [they] beg[i]n to build [their] homes” and live as refugees for eight years in Jurra Camp, all the while struggling to “create a life for [themselves]” (Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* 9-11). In these pages, as suggested by Figure 2, the visuals neither enhance nor contradict the verbal text. The story progresses to describe Raniben’s move out of the camp to Sumrasar, and her subsequent meeting with Meghiben, another embroiderer, who has a story arc of her own. Here, one notices a major deviation from the first part of the book—the one that dealt with the migration. The latter half of the book deals with the description of the embroiderers’ art work and how they “c[an] now tell stories about [themselves], show what [they] thought and felt” (18). The story is no longer about the Partition. It is transformed into a tale of how the two embroiderers from different sides of a partitioned country are brought together by their craft. Along with Raniben, Meghiben gains a voice too. As the new narrator, she recounts: “Raniben knew soof embroidery,

from Sindh, in Pakistan. . . . As we worked together, Raniben and I learnt from each other” (Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* 18). There is an additional note at the end of the picturebook, titled “Looking at the Art of Embroidery” (Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* 24). This does not deal with the Partition history either; it does, with the history of embroidery in India, and its relationship to women.

Both *Mukand and Riaz* and *Stitching Stories* center the themes of friendship and community in the narratives to enable yet another form of distancing from the distress brought upon by the Partition riots and the forced migration. By foregrounding the fact that there are friends and communities to lean on for emotional support, Nina Sabnani suggests to her young readers that they could also seek support from their family and friends if they experienced distress while reading these texts. The author of both the picture books also suggests through these stories that the characters’ shared love for play (in *Mukand and Riaz*) and embroidery (in *Stitching Stories*) stands as a metaphor for the fact that interests of people remain the same, irrespective of which side of the geographical boundary they belong to. These strategies employed by Sabnani in both her picture books bolster Bhalla’s argument about Partition fiction for adults. These stories “assert that identities [of different religio-ethnic groups] can only be



forged in the social relationships established between human beings in the process of living together” (3120).

In *Chachaji's Cup*, the peritext conveys more information about the Partition than does the main narrative. There is a map highlighting the regions of India and Pakistan, and the author Krishnaswami writes a concise note on this major historical event (32). Neel, the young narrator in the main body of the text, enjoys listening to his grand-uncle's (Chachaji's) stories, those from both the present and past. Apart from recounting mythological tales and ones about his days in the Indian army, Chachaji also tells Neel the story of how he migrated to India.

Once Chachaji told me about the time when India was split in two. He was just a boy then. “The country was broken,” he said. “Suddenly we were two countries. Just like that, India and Pakistan. We had to leave our home. We were refugees, millions of us, on both sides of the border” (Krishnaswami 12).

Although the narrative is briefly dual stranded and shuttles between the past and the present, it does not contain any further information about the Partition or the riots.

As the story in *Chachaji's Cup* moves forward, the focus shifts to Chachaji's old china teacup, a metonym for the Partition. Neel observes that Chachaji always drank his spiced tea from his favorite cup, which was passed on to him by his mother (Neel's great-grandmother). While recounting the tale of migration, Chachaji informs Neel that his mother refused to part with the teacup when they had to leave their homeland behind. He tells Neel, "She knew—if this teacup got to India without breaking, she would get to India without breaking" (Krishnaswami 15). This verbal description of the teacup makes the reader aware that the cup is the point of focus in the text. This narrative move shifts the reader's focus to the cup and helps distance the young child from the fear and anxiety that Chachaji's family and friends might have experienced at the time of the Partition.

During the course of the story, Chachaji's cup breaks due to Neel's carelessness. The close-up perspective of the image of the shattered cup suggests the splitting of the Indian subcontinent; the portion to the left of the main body of the cup referring to Pakistan, which is situated to the west of India. The verbal text makes no mention of this visual allusion. The week after the broken-cup incident, Chachaji has trouble with his heart and is admitted in the hospital. Overcome with guilt, Neel glues the cup back together and presents it to Chachaji, who recovers immediately after. This act is represented visually<sup>2</sup> and is not

verbally described in the text. The story thus suggests that breakages, be it relating to tea cups or to national divisions, can be easily mended. As Valerie Krips describes, “history [is] shrinkwrapped, trapped forever in the present in the objects with which we surround ourselves. These objects form a symbolic matrix... We can see the past because we see the objects that are representative of that past” (124). Clearly, in *Chachaji’s Cup*, the cup not only serves as a tool to distance the reader from the perils of the Partition, but it also functions as the object that reminds Chachaji of his and his nation’s past.

The primary objective of the publisher of *Chachaji’s Cup*—Children’s Book Press, now an imprint of Lee and Low Books—was for their books to “focus exclusively on quality multicultural and bilingual literature for children” in the United States (Rohmer). This aim is achieved in *Chachaji’s Cup* through the portrayal of Neel as an Indian American child, born and brought up in the United States. Neel’s best friend is Daniel, a White American boy. The visuals are a blend of both the worlds. The images in *Chachaji’s Cup* are bereft of frames, thereby inviting the reader to be part of the story. The open kitchen with the electric cooker, elephant dolls, and an idol of a Hindu god on the kitchen top, the colours of the characters’ skin (Chachaji is painted brown, and Neel and Daniel, in cream tones), and the deck and the basketball court in the backyard are mimetic

representations of the blend of Asian and American cultures. This characterization bolsters the function of this picture book as a medium that disseminates information about the Partition to a North American audience.

Although the illustrator uses muted pastel colors for most parts of the visual narrative, the scene of the migration is worth a mention because of the use of sepia tones to connote memories from the past. Unlike other characters in the book, the refugees turn away from the reader thereby not divulging their facial expressions to them. This image serves to depict an open visual gap that might be filled in diverse ways by readers. Another interpretation of this image impels one to suggest that this portrayal is an attempt by the illustrator to hide from the child reader, the terror, fear, and sorrow arising from the refugees' distressing situation.

Among the three texts considered, only in *Mukand and Riaz* do we find mention of the British as colonizers: "...[A] military van comes and stops on the street. An English soldier jumps out and tells the boy to go home" (Sabnani, *Mukand and Riaz* 8). Bates states that one of the reasons "for the chaotic manner in which the two independent nations came into being is the hurried nature of the British withdrawal." Contrary to expectation, the essential segment of history that deals with the end of the colonial rule and its impact on the Partition is neglected in all the primary texts.

In representing the Partition, all the picture books shed more light on the migration aspect of the event rather than the riots itself. Moreover, these three texts do not deal with the sensitive issues of communalism and sectarian divide, an integral aspect of the Partition. As discussed earlier, one of the major reasons for the Partition was the idea of dividing a country on the basis of religion. This led to war among the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Muslims, thus fuelling the surge of mass violence and murder. Aimed at a younger audience, *Chachaji's Cup*, *Stitching Stories*, and *Mukand and Riaz* do not acknowledge the complexity of the Partition and nor do they divulge a lot of details about the Partition, as a means to shelter the readers from the gruesomeness of the event. In *Stitching Stories*, Raniben narrates: "Suddenly one day, we had to leave Adigaam. It was when India and Pakistan fought. Why they fought, I don't know" (5). Neel, the narrator in *Chachaji's Cup*, is not given details about the Partition by his grand-uncle either. The reader, however, gets a glimpse of the actual history if they take note of the peritext at the end of this picture book. Riaz, in *Mukand and Riaz*, tells Mukand at school that "he must hurry home. He says the country has been divided in two — India and Pakistan. Mukand's family has to leave and Mukand must go home to pack" (19). As is the case with the reader, Mukand also "does not understand what is happening" (20).

At this juncture, the picture book briefly touches upon the horror of the Partition riots, but does not allow the reader to linger in it for too long. With the turn of the page, the visuals change and the text's focus shifts to migration.

*Mukand and Riaz* does address the atmosphere of atrocity in its visual depiction of the riots (see Figure 5) through use of the red background—a matrix embedded with howling figures. There is an expression of terror and anxiety on Mukand's face, as he looks at a figure that has (presumably) been lynched. This striking image is accompanied by text that, through its limited vocabulary, overtly conveys the gruesomeness of the Partition riots: “On the way home he sees strange things—people chasing each other and shouting. He sees blood on the streets” (Sabnani, *Mukand* 20). The text and the visuals on this particular spread of the picturebook are indicative of the fact that Sabnani, who initially distanced the child reader from the conflict, does not mind bringing them closer to it even if only for the brief duration of a page.

*Chachaji's Cup* features a sequence in which Neel, triggered by guilt, dreams “of people becoming refugees, leaving their homes. In [his] dream they walk for miles, fleeing with only the things they could carry” (Krishnaswami 24). There is a sudden explosion of colours in this double spread; the strokes of red delineate the refugees in the dream from Neel's bedroom space. Although the

refugees' faces can be seen in this image, they wear ambiguous expressions. Even though this spread does not deal with the murderous aspect of the Partition, it still manages to disturb the reader. Unlike other sections in the picture book wherein Krishnaswami and Sitaraman sanitize the flagrancy of the riots, this page provides a glimpse into the dread faced by the refugees in August 1947. *Stitching Stories*, on the other hand, does not in any way describe the unsettling atmosphere during the Partition.

While the picture books considered for this study do not wrestle with the complexity of the Partition, they do begin to address the lack of literature on this subject for children. They are also useful to initiate dialogue about this historical event with young readers. David L. Russell opens his article on Holocaust literature for young people by stating that it is essential for stories about this event to be told and concludes it by noting that “it is not possible for any one book to give children a comprehensive understanding of this human tragedy” (278). Lydia Kokkola suggests that “the expectations or demands of th[e] various fields [in Holocaust literature] cause such tensions that, in responding to one set of requirements, a text may fail to meet the challenges of another” (9). The vast body of scholarship on children’s literature about the Holocaust has provided useful theoretical models for studying depictions of other large-scale trauma in books for

young readers. Kokkola's frame can hence be applicable to our reading of texts about the Partition too. The authors and illustrators of these three picture books do indeed distance the young reader from the horrors and chaos of the Partition by employing various narrative strategies including the use of metonyms, narratorial shifts, and visual gaps. However, some of them also briefly expose the audience to the brutality of the event even if they fail to inform them about the complexity of this conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The study of these texts has aided in enhancing an understanding of the depiction of a vital historical event that shaped the formation of South Asia as we know it today. The very fact that Indian publishers are attempting to bring out books about such sensitive topics indicates progress in the field of children's literature in the subcontinent. As I've described, there is Partition literature for children in other national and regional languages; however the current study has examined only three English-language picture books. There is potential for further research on regional texts either in comparison with contemporary English-language Partition children's literature or on their own.<sup>3</sup> While the primary texts considered for this essay cater to a younger audience, there are middle-grade and young adult novels including Jamila Gavin's *Surya Trilogy*



(1992, 1997 and 2001), Irfan Master's *A Beautiful Lie* (2011), and the more recently published *The Night Diary* (2018) by Veera Hiranandani worth exploring for their representations of the Partition too.

The texts used for this study could serve as entry points into larger conversations about topics such as immigration, forced displacement, and Islamophobia. They could be used in conjunction with materials from websites such as the 1947 Partition Archive—a non-profit oral history organization that also has an office in California—and The History Project—a Pakistani education organization, which aims to challenge textbook narratives about the Partition by providing more nuanced perspectives about the event.

As with any other conflict narrative set in the past, it is essential for us as adults to bear in mind that we need to be sensitive while mediating these texts with children. The Partition should not be reduced to be a thing of the past, since its effects continue to reverberate in the nations of India and Pakistan, and diasporically even today. Even after seventy-one years, four wars, and several instances of communal violence, animosity still persists between these two neighboring countries. It is important to bear in mind that India and Pakistan earned their freedom at a cost, and that speaking about the independence of these

nations without addressing the Partition does a disservice not just to national, but also to global history.

## Figures

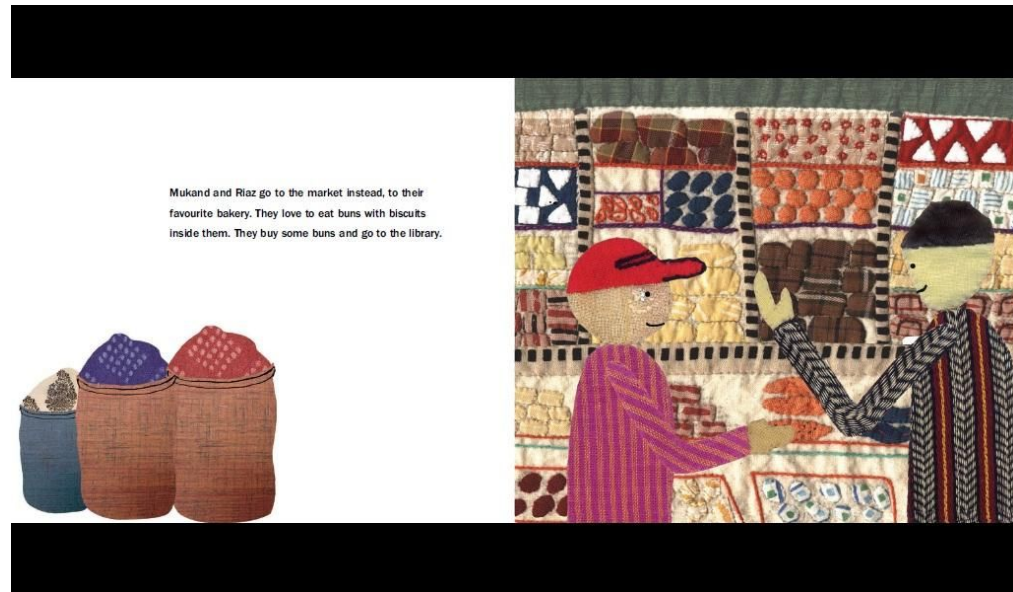


Figure 1: Mukand and Riaz at the Market; Nina Sabnani, *Mukand and Riaz* (Tulika Publishers, 2007); 10-11.

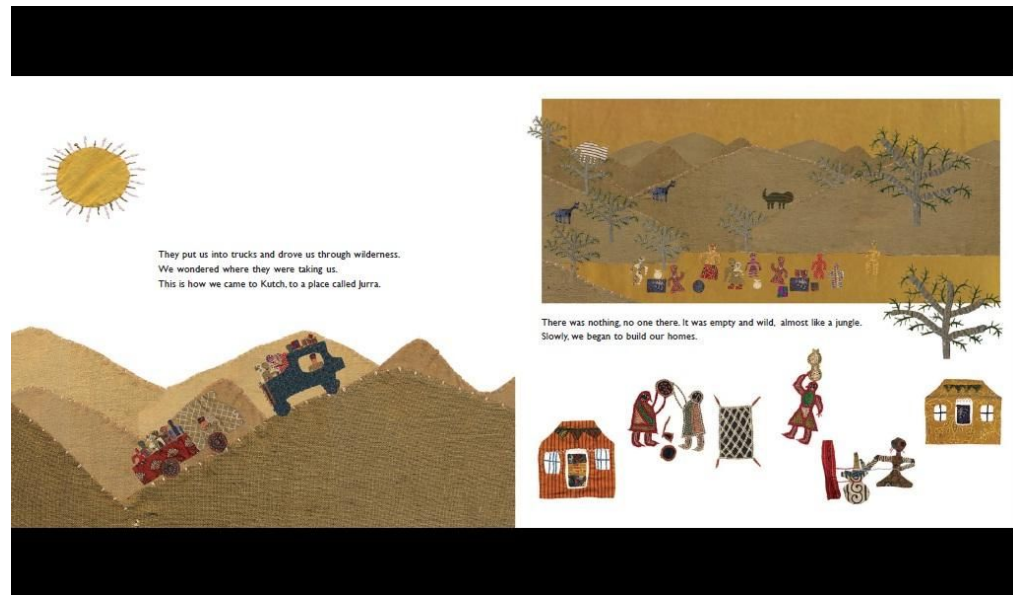


Figure 2: Travelling to Jurra; Nina Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* (Tulika Publishers, 2011); 8-9.

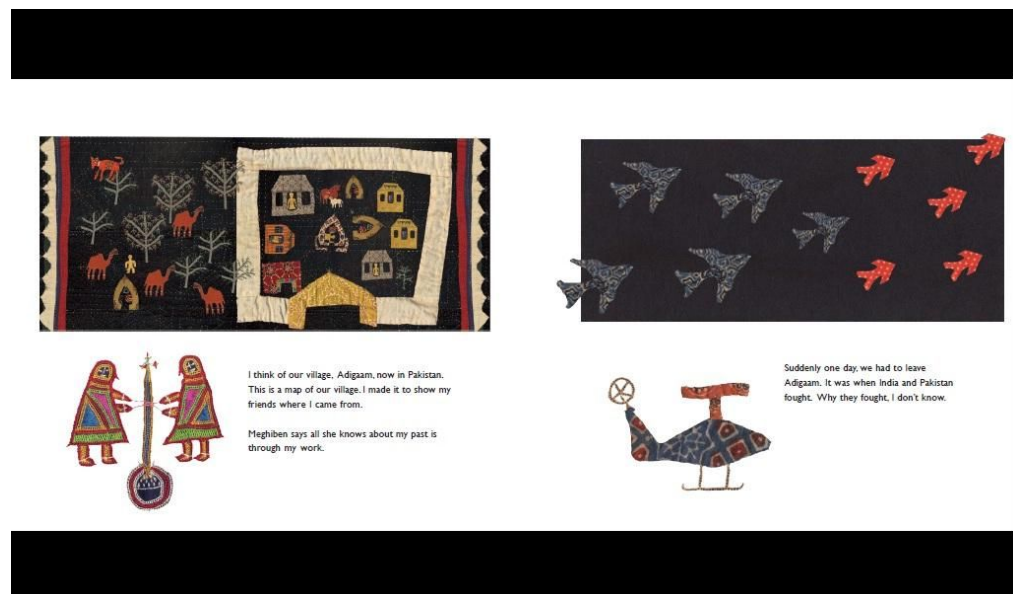


Figure 3: Leaving Adigaam; Nina Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* (Tulika Publishers, 2011); 4-5.

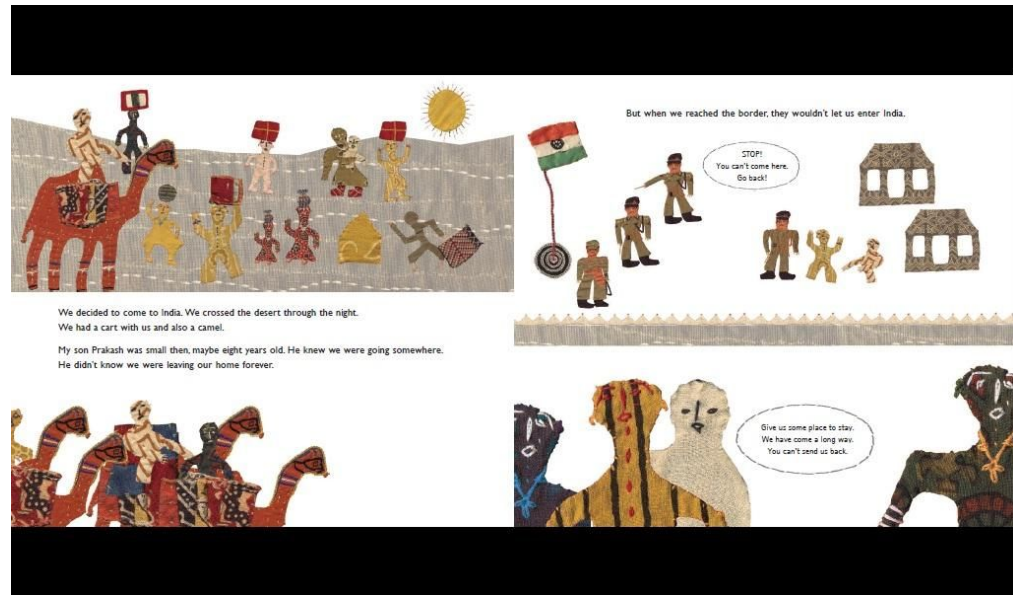


Figure 4: At the Border; Nina Sabnani, *Stitching Stories* (Tulika Publishers, 2011); 6-7.

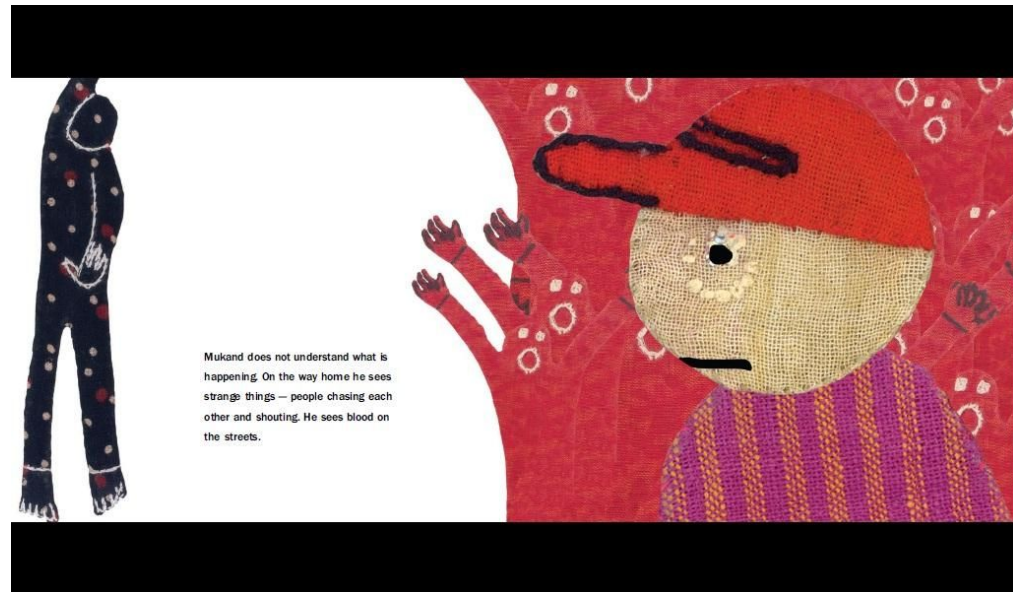


Figure 5: Mukand Sees Strange Things; Nina Sabnani, *Mukand and Riaz* (Tulika Publishers, 2007); 20-21.

### Notes

- 1) I acknowledge that there are Partition narratives for children in languages other than English, including Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, and Punjabi; but my focus for this study is on English-language illustrated texts written by authors of Indian origin only. I would like to point out that during the time this research was conducted, I was unable to find English-language illustrated texts about the Partition written by Pakistani and Bangladeshi authors.
- 2) I haven't included illustrations from *Chachaji's Cup* because I was able to secure permission to use only the cover art of this picture book from the publisher and not the images from inside the text.
- 3) I have analyzed the depiction of the event and the role of a Muslim protagonist in Anita Desai's illustrated novella *The Peacock Garden* in a forthcoming publication (Sivashankar).

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