

Re-living the Trauma of Partition in Gulzar's *Two*

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Abstract

Gulzar's newly published novel, *Two* redefines the trauma of partition. Even after 70 years of Indian Independence, the frozen unspeakable anguish melted out slowly as he re-lives the pain of Partition. This paper seeks to explore the present state of the refugees who tried to locate a place called 'home' after the horrifying event of partition. This paper examines how the demarcation line failed to subdue the undivided psyche of the people of both the sides of the border and how they continue to exhibit such shared cultural heritage.

Keywords- *Partition, Pain, History, Memory, Home, Border*

Long are the passages of borders
One has lost count of age
Gathering the pieces of fate
Long are the stories of the partition... (*Two* 173)

Introduction

Veteran poet-lyricist, Gulzar known for his short stories 'Khauf', 'Dhuan', 'Ravi Paar', 'Batwara' that throbbled with the lived experiences of Partition, now published his debut novel *Two*, in the year 2017, that brings out the trauma of Partition 'painfully alive' by examining the status of the refugees in the post-partition era. *Two*, originally written in Urdu, depicts the horrors of Partition that he has been living with even after 70 year's of India's independence. Gulzar does not remain a captive of his memory. His creativity moved on with his short stories, films, television series, and now with a novel. Earlier Gulzar wanted to shoot a film on Partition. Preparations were almost made. He borrowed the title from a Bengali movie by Mrinal Sen 'Ek Din Ratre' and named his movie 'Ek Din Raat Ko'. But it was discouraged. This was in his mind. It lingered on and poured out in the form of his novel. Gulzar writes:

It is what I needed to tell the story. When I can say what I have to in a few lines, I do it through my poems. When a few more sentences and paragraphs are needed, I fall back on the short story. The people I encounter in *Two*, the journeys they make, needed a little more elaboration than was possible in a poem or a short story. That is what dictated the form and the length. The rest is all for academics to debate. (*Two* 179)

The novel focuses on the fact that the massacre followed after partition left several people homeless who tried to find another home, a place to belong to. The novel is divided into three sections with an 'Introduction' by Pavan Kumar Varma, where he writes:

Two is about the Partition of 1947, a cataclysmically tragic event that Gulzar lived through. Even as Independence drew nearer, British cartographers worked overtime to draw the boundaries of two nations, one India, the other Pakistan. What was one land became two, separated by an unbridgeable gap that made millions refugees overnight.... men, women, children, young and old were displaced by a destiny that they did not choose.... some two million or more lost their lives in the frenzied bloodbath that accompanied this division. Time erases wounds, but memories remain like smoldering embers below the ash even when the fires of history appear to have died. *Two* is about those memories, those embers, recalled through a story that transports you to the agonies and dilemmas of ordinary people, both Hindus and Muslims, who suffered as a consequence of the Partition. (*Two* xvi-xvii)

On the cover page of the book, Gulzar reasserts : "We were one people. One Parted. Now we are two". Gulzar describes the outset of the partition in the novel as "rumours gradually became news and the news began to ferment. People believed whatever they heard" (*Two* 7). He describes:

Before Pakistan took shape on the map, it started taking shape in the minds of the people. This was true of both Hindus and Muslims. The untouchables had been similarly alienated centuries ago. This time, it was not the wells and the temples but the land itself that was separated. A division that split identities.

As the year 1946 approached its end, the borders of the partition started emerging. As the date of the independence came closer, freedom seemed to move further away. (*Two* 28)

Gulzar recounts how he initiated into writing his novel, *Two*. He delineates that he wanted to bring partition alive through his book. His novel answered many unanswered questions of his life. Gulzar delineates that "freedom arrived all right, but it came drenched in blood, wounded ... the body slashed in different places. Some limbs were amputated, some left hanging, deformed, scarred.... The wounds will take decades to heal, centuries to overcome the trauma (*Two* 111)". He remembers when

he was very young when he witnessed Partition, horrors of bloodshed and riots. Every time there is a riot it reminds him of partition. Those who drew the demarcation line, never thought of the consequences. With Partition gaps have widened. And these gaps were filled up by the blood of the death bodies. The result was that even after so many years he kept on seeing nightmares. Riot was the only dream that used to come to him. That was the only night mare that used to wake him up in the middle of the night and then he used to feel a sort of fear, a terror that if he sleeps that terrible dream will come back. By the time he held command over language, he had started writing on it. To him, the act of writing has worked as a therapy, since it helped him in purging it out. Therefore, when he talks about partition, he talks a little more. Because his suggestion to his people is 'talk it out, purge it out'. In an interview with Sukrita Paul Kumar, Gulzar states one incident of Partition that often haunted his mind:

... Earlier I used to get letters from one Dr. Iqbal Singh. Sometime then my friend Sai Paranjape, the film maker, contacted me from Delhi with an urgency in her voice, "Somebody here wants to meet you. And, by the way, where did you spend your childhood?" I wondered why she conversed with me in English...to dodge something? She blurted out "Somebody who lost his son in Partition has found you...his son?" This was intriguing. I was to come to Delhi anyway, for a film festival. Iqbal Singh turned out to be this gentleman's son, convinced that I was his brother. I went over to see and meet them. The mother, Biji, was there and so was the father whom everybody called Darji. So did I.

The meeting with Darji was intense. His voice choked with emotion, he narrated to me how he'd lost his son and daughter during the partition. The son was seven then. Twenty years later he'd would found his daughter, now settled happily in Pakistan, married and with two children. Surely he would find his son now, the hope rekindled. Why had he given up at all? He was sure, Iqbal Singh, his other son was not wrong when he identified me as his brother. He narrated the story as though it was my story believing totally that I was the son found. (*Indian Literature* 107)

The novel, *Two*, begins in the year 1946, covers 1984 riots against Sikhs and is extended upto Kargil war. Set in the winter of 1946, when the demarcation line was to be drawn, the novel depicts how a truck carrying refugees, leaves the village of Campbellpur. The people in the truck had no idea of their visit, no knowledge of their destination, no cognition of the fact that a line might carve out a separate country called Pakistan from Hindustan. They could not conceive the meaning of the word called 'border'. Once they reached the border they started wandering aimlessly to seek a place called "home". Gulzar describes one incident:

Soni and Moni had crossed the border and reached Amritsar to find the entire city turned into a large refugee camp. Besides the government-run camps, small groups of tents kept cropping up wherever they found space. Leave aside the border of the country, it was difficult to make out the city's boundaries. No one knew where they were. Men and women, young and old, drifted from one camp to another like dry leaves scattered by the wind.

There were many who had managed to reach Hindustan with their families intact, but lost each other in the chaos here. They were too bewildered to realize which way they were going... Some were looking for cities they had read about, heard about or corresponded with. On the way, if they made friends, they would tag along.

From Amritsar, trains set out in different directions.... Soni and Moni too got on one such train.... They spent some days on that platform and then boarded another train. They kept criss-crossing cities the way trains change tracks. Even after reaching Hindustan, they could not find a place to settle down. Days stretched to months. (*Two* 116-117-118)

And then:

Like dry leaves falling from a huge tree in a storm, the refugees kept drifting. At times they would float to the ground, only to be blown away by another strong gust of breeze.

Decades passed, the refugees kept wandering. It was impossible to say who moved where, fell where. Even time wouldn't probably be able to recognize them. The roots of the partition were buried deep, its branches reaching out. (*Two* 137)

The novel reminds the gaping wounds of partition, the nostalgia kept intact, the intensity of rage and despair that it brought to the people of both the countries. At the beginning of the novel, Master Fazal states that:

History is on the rampage, making giant strides. It's happening right in front of us. The Second World War ended and Germany was broken into two pieces - East Germany and West Germany. The country was divided, but then it divided the people too. Earlier they were one people, now they are two.... Another giant step of history is about to fall here - in Hindustan. Some forces are contemplating another partition, of land and people. Hindustan is to be divided into two and a new country named Pakistan to be created. (*Two* 3-4)

Significantly, this similar stark sense of betrayal and loss and the passionate attachment of the people to their shared cultural heritage are being epitomized in the cinema of Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976) specially in his trilogy: *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-Capped Star*, 1960), *Komal*

Gandhar (E-Flat 1961), and *Subarnarakha (The Golden Line, 1962)*. Once in an interview, Ghatak pointed out the significance of reading the lives and times of Partition. He expressed his sentiment by picking up the issue of cultural re-union. To him, the bitterness between two parts of Bengal is the result of a great betrayal, which is often portrayed in his films. Love unites the whole of Bengal. He has shown us every possibilities of re-union through his movies. To him, Partition is being done artificially, and, one should have no right to forgive this act. However, so many years have lapsed after the Partition, but culturally, the Bengalis cannot be changed, since they share a common culture. Ritwik Ghatak states that:

To me it was the division of a culture and I was shocked. During the partition period I hated these pretentious people who clamoured about our independence, our freedom. You kids are finished, you have not seen that Bengal of mine. I just kept on watching what was happening, how the behaviour pattern was changing due to this great betrayal of national liberation. And I probably gave vent to what I felt. Today I am not happy, and whatever I have seen unconsciously or consciously comes out in my films. My films may have been ridden with expressive slogan-mongering or they may be remote. But the cardinal point remains: that I am frustrated with what I see all around me, I am tired of it. (*Cinema and I 80*)

The same kind of mourning is being noticed in Gulzar's novel *Two*, where the demarcation line is like a looking glass border. People can see their place, their homes so near, but they cannot go back since, it has become a foreign land now. There, the country has been severed into two. In Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*, similar idea of 'border' is conceived by Thamma which is "a long blank line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in school atlas" (151). But during her visit to her roots, to her place in Bangladesh after partition, the grandmother is puzzled when she hardly recognizes her home. To her, both sides of the border seems equal, when she asks where is the border? Where is the line? Because a demarcation line can only be drawn physically, can only be imposed geographically and but it cannot fragment the psyche of the people. Therefore, it is as if Dhaka and Kolkata are the inverted image of each other, bonded together. The pain and anguish of partition is evident when Master Fazal in the novel, *Two*, points out:

This arrogant, conceited history strides ahead with her head in the clouds and never looks down. She does not realize how she crushes millions of people beneath her feet. The common people. She doesn't understand that one may cut a mountain in two, but people? It's a hard task, Bhai, to cut one people into two. They bleed. (*Two 4*)

Partition was just the beginning. The rage has reached at its height thereafter. In the post partition era, people were torn apart, fell together, since this kind of breaking was some kind of imposition on them. Still after 70 years of independence, Gulzar says in the novel, *Two*, that people are not able to re-group into two different entities. It has become a deeper, even more violent fragmentation that we live everyday of our lives now. This trauma is largely visible in the poetry of Taslima Nasreen:

India was no discarded paper that you had to tear to bits
I want to erase the word forty-seven
I want to wash away the ink stain of forty-seven with water and soap
Forty-seven, the word pricks like a thorn in my throat
I do not want to swallow it.
I want to vomit it out
I want to regain the undivided soil of my forefathers.
I want Brahmaputra as much as I want Subarnarekha
I want Sitakundo Hills as much as Kanchenjunga
Srimongol as much as Jalpaiguri
And the Sal forest of Bihar as well as Ajanta and Ellora
If Curzon Hall is mine, Fort Willam belongs to me too.
That man who fought seventy-one and one
That man who thrashed away the two nation theory
He can never accept defeat at the hands of forty-seven. ('Ay Kosto Jhepe, Jibon Debo Mepe' 'Pain Come Roaring Down, I'll Measure Out My Life for You' 210)

The terror of partition, after the country had been riven into two, is significantly drawn in Gulzar's novel. And even after 70 years of partition, people feel an almost fierce and secret intimacy.

Gulzar, on being asked in an interview, as to why has he composed a novel after so many years, replied that he has written on Partition because he has seen Partition, read about Partition, but could not write in those days. Gulzar wanted to get rid of his nightmares on the the horrors of partition. He poured out his pent up emotions, his forefathers struggling to survive in the refugee camps in Delhi, and the consequence or the end product being this novel. The trauma of Partition features in another work of Gulzar, published in 2017, called *Footprints on a Zero Line*, where he says in the author's note: "I have witnessed the Partition. I have experienced the Partition. Standing on Zero Line I am still watching the trail of the Partition. Seventy yeas have passed. Time has not been able to blow off the footprints. I don't know how long it will take for them to sink into history and be the past" (1). He questions whether these people have settled properly in the so-called created new countries? He

himself answers in the foreword of his novel *Two*: "...I wished to examine the status of the refugees after the Partition. It took them decades to settle down and come to terms with the haunting memories. In fact, that process of settling down is still going on. Seventy years have passed." (*Two* x)

The autobiographical element is very much visible in the novel. Gulzar looks into the eyes of partition, to face the past squarely, perhaps to exercise it from his mind he travels down his memory lane and often recalls incidents of his early childhood, spent in Dina, Jhelum, now in Pakistan. He remembers how his family reached India and settled in Delhi. It was an area inhabited by Muslim communities. He was in middle school. His school was closed. Riots broke out in Subzi mandi. He remembers things were set ablaze in fire. To reach his place, he had to cross dead bodies, half burnt, half torn apart. Icky smell spread throughout as there was nobody to clean those putrid rotten corpses. All these memories come alive in his novel *Two*, through the events and characters like Fauz- the truck driver, Lakhbeera- the dhaba owner, Soni, Moni, Hameed, the school-teachers- Karam Singh and Master Fazal. Gulzar states that "no work of fiction exists in a vacuum. Mine too is rooted in the world I have seen and experienced" (*Two* 179).

Religious fundamentalism grows out of fear - fear of killing, fear of dying and not out of hatred towards each other, and, partition based on that can never persist. Gulzar writes: "The divisions wrought by religion never lasted. The '60s had just wound down when Pakistan broke up. A part of it became a new nation. Bangladesh (*Two* 158)." The novel ends on a note of sarcasm with silences and gaps yet to be filled up:

What sort of a fall is this? People were still falling like autumn leaves ... Drifting around like dry leaves. That's where he left the caravan and started on a pagdandi alone. Wherever it went. Wherever it took him. Fauji kept walking. Endless days. Infinite nights. He spent fifty long years walking the pagdandis of Kashmir. The Valley too had been divided. Uff! These partitions never end. He did not know which side he was on.

He lives in a graveyard with a gravedigger. Now he knows where he has to go....

History marched on to complete another century. It was 1999. It was Kargil. The night kept resounding with explosions and gunfire.

Lying in his room in the graveyard, Fauji turned over and muttered, 'There they go again, the rascals! They didn't let me sleep all night.'

These wars were not new for him. Nor were the soldiers. They were like schoolboys, scaring each other, wearing borrowed masks. One throws a brick, the other hurls a stone. They keep sharpening their nails to lunge at each other.

‘Fifty years ... in fact, more. God knows when they will grow up’, he muttered. (*Two* 172-173)

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